

TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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PHAP DAM, Ph.D.
Texas Woman's University
Series Editor

MELINDA T. COWART, Ed.D.
Texas Woman's University
Managing Editor

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Literature in the ELL Classroom: Wise Investments in Learning

**Janelle B. Mathis
Ragina Shearer
University of North Texas**

Excellence in teaching for English language learners (ELLs) can be described in many different ways and represents as wide a range of approaches as the diversity of learners and languages being taught. Previous monographs in this series have used the same range of considerations as a way of inviting ideas and dialogue that support the creation of an extensive knowledge base of strategies and resources for all teachers of ELLs. Ultimately, excellence in teaching for ELLs reflects the ability of teachers to best use the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) learners bring to their classrooms. In some ways, teachers might well parallel an investment broker since the classroom context he or she creates and the invitations for participation determine whether or not students can and desire to share their life experiences—their language and literacy stories. Such an “investment” by the student can open the way for greater comprehension and language use as the teacher scaffolds new learning experiences on these funds of knowledge. As an ongoing contributor to previous monographs, the first author has shared children’s literature as a valuable resource that offers many potential benefits in classrooms: facilitating personal connections to and comprehension of content, nurturing learners as they

become active members of the classroom community, supporting an awareness of language—its challenges, usefulness, and sometimes idiosyncratic nature, and acknowledging immigration as a resource that brings the global community into the classroom community. Scholarly voices support each of these reasons for using literature as well as the strategies that teachers, often through dedicated experiences, have discovered to “work.” As teachers strive to ensure that ELLs have worthy classroom experiences in which to invest their personal cultural connections, literature becomes a significant asset.

This chapter provides yet another window to the continuously published literature that facilitates and enhances ELL instruction. As a way of framing prospective titles that teachers might readily seek out and adapt in their pedagogical quest for excellence, the voice of a teacher, the second author here, who has spent eight years working with ELLs, reflects on actual scenarios in which she has found literature to be a gateway to the insights and stories of students—stories that reflect the knowledge and cultural experiences her students have brought to the classroom in past years. These reflections reveal her role as one who invests students’ funds of knowledge to build language equity in the new community in which they live. Focusing on three approaches to teaching ELLs, the following scenarios look at the role of children’s and adolescent literature in teaching with the heritage language, in reading aloud, and in inviting artistic response to literature. From a literature perspective, the first author, an expert in the field of multicultural children’s literature, responds to each section with a statement of support for these strategies and with recent literature, to include titles that reflect the global society that further extends student engagement.

Heritage language: A precious commodity

All children need to be able to understand what they are learning as well as to have a meaningful purpose for the learning. Imagine sitting with a group of peers who are listening to a book being read. They laugh, cry, ooh, and aah. They anxiously talk with the teacher about parts of the book but you cannot understand what either the teachers or the other students are saying. This would be frustrating, sad and even lonely to be missing out on whatever it is they are enjoying. When ELLs come to school before they have learned to read in their own language, they may not have the concept of words having meaning, print telling a story, and other beginning reading skills. Therefore, non-English speakers are expected virtually to skip this foundational step while struggling with the acquisition of a new language, yet end up with the same comprehensive accomplishments as English-speaking students. If allowed to read and listen to books in one's own language as they learn the concepts of print, reading and understanding, the transfer of reading into a new language is simply an acquisition of language since the skill of reading is already understood (Krashen, 1998).

A 3rd grade Hispanic student, Alexia (all names are pseudonyms), shied away from everyone and sat obediently beside the teacher with a blank stare after several attempts to engage her in books. Upon listening to books read by the teacher in Spanish, she came alive. The transfer was so much easier as she continued to grow in her reading comprehension skills while reading Spanish books. She began transferring those abilities to reading in English. Eventually, more and more books were read aloud in English with her, but books were sent home for her to read in Spanish. A few

years later Alexia's mother came to offer thanks for including her in "Alexia's English school" by sending books home and encouraging her to read with her daughter in Spanish. Cho & Krashen (1998) contend "ensuring strong parent-child communication is an excellent investment for both the individual and the society" (p. 38). Through encouraging Alexia and her mother to continue to read books in Spanish, Alexia's reading skills and self-esteem flourished and her heritage culture and language maintained a prominent part of their home literacy. "School validation of the students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds" (Tse, 1998, p. 67) developed a bond between the mother, Alexia, and the teacher. This relationship greatly influenced Alexia's ambition and fortitude to become an avid dual language reader.

Each day after reading one of the Spanish books at home she would come to class eager to tell about the book she had read. Even though the teacher (second author) speaks Spanish, Alexia was capable of dialoguing with her in English about the character, the plot, summarizing, sequencing, inferencing and predicting about books she had read in Spanish. Many times she read familiar books in Spanish. Her favorite was *La gallita roja* / *The Little Red Hen* (Jones, 2006) as well as others such as *Scuffy el remolcador y sus aventuras abajo el río* / *Scuffy the Tugboat and His Adventures Down the River* (Crampton, 2002), *El hombre feliz y su camión de volteo* / *The Happy Man and His Dump Truck* (Miryam, 1978), and *El libro de bomberos* / *The Fire Engine Book* (Gergely, 2001). As she was able to continue developing her reading skills in her heritage language while being exposed to more and more comprehensible English language, she soon became an efficient reader of books in her second language, English.

Three Hispanic boys, Juan, Edward, and Antonio, entered kindergarten unable to speak English. The rest of their classmates all spoke fluent English and no Spanish. Their pull-out ESL teacher used physical response and tours around the campus to familiarize and label people and places in English. An observation of the reading circle in their classroom revealed three sullen little boys looking at the teacher and others with blank stares as they sat silently. During their time together with the pull-out ESL teacher, they were exposed to picture books in Spanish such as *El ratón de la ciudad y el ratón del campo / City Mouse and Country Mouse* (Wheeler, 2003), *Así vamos a la escuela: Un libro sobre los niños del mundo / This is the way we go to school: A book about children around the world* (Baer, 1990). They listened to the teacher's think-alouds in English as much as possible until the boys grasped the basic concepts of words in print and words telling stories. Gradually, the teacher read aloud more bilingual books such as *Mi familia: My Family* (Ancona, 2004), *The Piñata Maker: El piñatero* (Ancona, 1994), and *La casa que Jack construyó / The House that Jack Built* (Falconer, 1991). The boys soon began to compare the way in which the story was told in each language, noticing the similarities and differences. Juan said one day as a story was read in English, "I used to not understand that the book was telling me a story in English, but now I get it."

Ae-chi, a Korean fifth grade girl, and her brother, a second grader named Chin-ho, were perfect examples of the tremendous advantages of learning to read in a heritage language, compared to the disadvantages of learning to read, for the first time in a second language. Ae-chi was an excellent reader in both English and Korean. She read novels such as *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1999) at a fifth grade level in each language

daily and was able to converse and write about books written in either language. None of the teachers at Ae-chi's school could read or speak Korean, but it was obvious to all, through her abilities to interpret and explain the books, that she was using the same reading skills in both languages. Her brother Chin-ho was not as fortunate; he struggled every day with reading, even though what he attempted was well below his grade level. During reading conferences, at the beginning of the year, with his teacher, parents, and Ae-chi (as translator) the parents expressed concern about his lack of progress in reading. They explained they could not help at all due to their own lack of ability to read in English. When they were asked if they ever read or told stories to him in Korean, the answer was an absolute "no," but they granted permission for the teacher to try this strategy. The teacher found books to read along with a tape at the public library such as *Greedy Princess; The Rabbit and the Tiger* (Vorhees, 1990), *Seven Brothers and the Big Dipper; Hungbu, Nolbu and the Magic Gourds* (Vorhees, 1990), *Brave Hong Kil-Dong, The Man Who Bought the Shade of a Tree* (Kim, 1990), *Faithful Daughter Shim Ch'ong, The Little Frog Who Never Listened* (Vorhees, 1990). Each of these books was bilingual Korean and English, and occasionally the ESL teacher would have Ae-chi read a book of her own to him in Korean. After these readings the teacher would ask Chin-ho to tell her about the book, as she asked him sequential questions as well as higher order thinking questions. His responses were representative of increasing reading skills. As Chin-ho's parents and the ESL teacher continued conversing, they saw Chin-ho's attitude and motivation positively rising along with his reading ability. The parents decided to enroll him in a Korean Saturday school where he would learn to read and write in Korean. This happened about

the middle of the school year. As the teacher continued working on his reading, Chin-ho brought Korean books to share with his teacher and the two of them continued reading books in English in the ESL classroom. Throughout the spring Chin-ho became an adamant reader. By the end of that school year he was reading at and above his grade level and comprehending what he read.

In a later academic year, the ESL teacher returned to middle school where she had a classroom filled with both sixth and eighth graders. This was the third year in an English-speaking school for these students. Their English was fairly fluent, but, of course, Spanish still came much more naturally. The ESL teacher was their language arts teacher and their second reading teacher. By the time they came to her classroom at the end of the day their minds were tired from trying to understand the foreign language of English all day. Communicating all day in a foreign language is taxing, and these students not only had to communicate but also had to read and grasp new concepts and skills in various content areas. The hollow, tired look in their eyes each day as they entered the ESL classroom reinforced the teacher's belief of needing comprehensible input in one's own language.

Beginning the second semester the ESL teacher decided she needed to allow these students opportunities to read in their native language as well as in English. She brought out magazines and later books in Spanish and allowed them to read freely at the beginning of each class period. The ESL teacher could see that this created a more comfortable environment for their reading. They read independently and wanted more; they discussed articles and books with their peers and with the teacher in English revealing their comprehension. They soon realized the teacher valued their heritage language and their need to continue to read in that

language. Ultimately, they became more open to valuing what the teacher brought to their reading context in English. Often they found and shared similarities between articles and books read in Spanish to those read in English. Allowing them to continue learning and enjoying books in their heritage language increased their desires to read more, often including books written in English.

Literature to support the use of heritage language

Realization that the heritage language of students is a precious commodity and a most significant aspect of the funds of knowledge an ELL brings to his new environment will send a caring teacher on the search for books written in that heritage language. While ELLs represent a diversity of languages, Spanish is the language most represented among ELL students, and books containing the Spanish language are those most easily located.

When one searches for the Spanish language in books whether with scattered words and phrases throughout the text or with bilingual text, many possibilities are available. *Playing Lotería/El juego de la lotería* (Lainez, 2005) not only shares many Spanish words within the story of a young boy going to his grandmother's home to visit, but it is also the story of a young man learning Spanish through the grandmother's tradition of calling the Lotería game. "The boy learns through his visit to value his linguistic heritage as he gains knowledge and confidence in the speaking of Spanish. The family's experience with the erosion of home language ability across generations rings true, as the assimilation into a new country is often accompanied by a loss of the native language" (Schall, 2009). In *Grandma, Me and the Flea* (Herrera,

2002), the author tells of a young boy's experience with his grandmother at the flea market. Based on the author's childhood memories, this book is full of traditions, everyday objects, language, and close family ties that both Mexican and Mexican-American students will find familiar. The language flows fluidly throughout and invites much discussion from personal experiences. *Book Fiesta!: Celebrate Children's Day/Book Day: Celebremos El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Mora, 2009) shares in Spanish and English the joy of reading in celebration of El día de los niños/El día de los libros and is a book to be enjoyed by younger readers.

Tales Our Abuelitas Told: A Hispanic Folktale Collection (Campoy & Ada, 2006) is a rich collection of tales that span the origins of twelve stories. These go back to Spanish, Arabian and Jewish roots. The process of oral storytelling and the changes over time are shared. Students' connections to the Spanish language, including traditional Spanish language story beginnings and endings, provide informative historical insights. Young listeners will learn much about the heritage of their language and stories. Of course, many other titles inclusive of not only the Spanish language but the significance of language learning continue to be published.

While the heritage language of many students is not always readily available in children's or adolescent literature, there are some resources to which one might turn, such as the International Children's Digital Library online (<http://en.childrenslibrary.org/>) where students and teachers can download actual texts in many languages. A small number of titles published in English do have languages besides Spanish that appear in words and phrases. *Silent Music* (Rumford, 2008) tells the story of a young boy in Baghdad

who loves calligraphy and as he writes to deal with an ongoing war in his city, the calligraphy shares both cultural insights and words from Arabic written in calligraphy. *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow* (Lee-Tai, 2005), describing one child's experiences in a Japanese internment camp, also has text in Japanese. While this event describes an experience that is not a pleasant memory for Americans, it is a well-told story that is sensitive as well as authentically written by authors whose families experienced this event. Yet another book that speaks to diverse heritage languages is *Mama Says: A Book of Love for Mothers and Sons* (Walker, 2009). This is a series of poems representing diverse cultures through typical sayings a mother might give her son in different languages. Supported with rich illustrations by Leo and Diane Dillon that reflect each culture, a variety of languages points to the different ways a mother expresses her love and wisdom. Reading in the heritage language "may also help promote a healthy sense of multiculturalism, an acceptance not only of both the majority and heritage culture but a deeper understanding of the human condition" (Krashen, 1998, p. 9).

Reading aloud: Inviting students to invest in the classroom community

Teachers reading aloud in English language learners' classrooms expose ELLs to text they may not be able to read on their own, thus opening doors to new adventures and interests as well as creating community through shared literary experiences. Sentence structure, rhythm, and flow of the language are modeled during read alouds and students are able to hear the text read with intonation and emotion. As ELLs listen to stories, the teacher will

be able to explain vocabulary as needed, lead on-going comprehensive discussions to ensure comprehension, and guide the students through questioning and personal examples to make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections.

Often it may take the guided questions and directions to help students see reflections of themselves or familiar topics, but occasionally students will notice a connection on their own. In a "newcomers" classroom, a girl from Nigeria, Kensa sat in the library quietly in the back row of the other fifth grade children. She had been placed in the fifth grade, but this was only her second year in the United States and her second year in school anywhere. She had arrived as a refugee a year earlier and was placed in the fourth grade to coordinate with her age. She was the only one who spoke her native tribal language which was solely an oral language and had no written form. She listened quietly to stories while always sitting at the back of the group and never becoming involved in book discussions. This particular day the librarian was reading *Anansi, the Spider: A tale from the Ashanti* (McDermott, 1986). She had explained this was a book from Africa and asked Kensa to sit in the front near her, but Kensa had declined. While the story was being read Kensa crept closer and closer. She listened intently, and near the end of the story she burst out with joy, "I know this story, they in my country, well, it's not in a book, but they tell it and we listen." She had listened to this story being read in English and realized it was the same story she had heard in her native language. She continued in the dialogue about *Anansi* and proudly told and re-told the story. As the class was returning to their room Kensa told her teacher she had not realized words in a book could tell stories like the men in Liberia. After this experience Kensa began listening as stories were being read and

joined in discussions. During think-alouds she began making connections with the text, her life, and the world.

How could she suddenly be able to tell the story in English? Many teachers were amazed. The ESL teacher talked with Kensa after this incident on different occasions, and she would re-tell the story as it was told in her homeland—very similar in form and content to the text she heard read. This is a reminder of the “silent period” where students listen but do not speak though they eventually share the connections they are making. While the tribal language was oral, she also came to the US fluent in French. By this second year she spoke playground and classroom Spanish and some English, having been taught some English in the refugee camp. Her strengths were the ability to flow between languages with the students, the teacher, and her mother as she translated for her. She actually was very intelligent linguistically, just unschooled in the reading process. Reading aloud gave her the ability to use her linguistic funds of knowledge in comprehending text and making the connections between reading and speaking.

ELLs may not realize that they have personal background knowledge necessary to enable them to connect and reach the deep and sometimes hidden levels of understanding within text. In a sixth grade classroom of twenty-two Spanish-speaking students, the ESL teacher read *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989). As she began to read the book she asked the students if anyone knew where Denmark or Sweden was located, or what they could tell her about World War II. This was a very bright group of students, but they had no experiences with this area of the world or any historical knowledge of that time period. The teacher and the students located these places on the map and looked at several photos of people during this time period as they began the book.

The students were filled with questions throughout the reading of the book. Ricardo could not understand why the Jews were afraid of and hid from Hitler, which led to an explanation of Hitler's intentions and the results of his actions. Some students connected this corrupt government official with the "policia" in Mexico who looked the other way when drugs were sold on the streets. Felipe stated that when his uncle's "tienda" was robbed the police just told him to pay on time next time and that was the reason his family had come to Texas. When the teacher read about Annemarie, the main character, learning that her uncle and other fishermen were hiding Jews in their boats to smuggle them across to Sweden, Ricardo stated, "So the Jews hid to get away from their home they liked, and Mexicans like us hide to get to a home that we want." Jose confided that his uncle has a fishing boat where he hides people to bring them to the United States.

During an analysis of the characters in *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989) the students were asked to think of themselves in the place of Annemarie or her Jewish friend Ellen and write diary entries from either point of view. The teacher noticed in reading these entries and listening to them as students shared them with one another that their feelings from personal experiences were embedded in their writings. Many of the students who remembered their entry into the United States wrote descriptively with words full of emotions from Ellen's point of view. One girl, Maria wrote about the fears and distress of Ellen's separation from her parents. As Maria shared her diary entry with her teacher, she explained this was the way she had felt while she was separated from her parents during the time they moved to the United States. The students that chose to write from Annemarie's point of view were predominantly the ones who were born in the United States and

whose immediate family or relatives had helped others to come to the United States from Mexico. *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989) was set in a time period and in a country that was new to these sixth grade students; yet, through reading and thinking aloud they were able to make connections to the characters and the event. These connections lead to insights and understanding.

Literature to read aloud while creating a classroom community

Reading aloud offers many opportunities for teachers to invite students to interact with books. Such books need to be ones that involve people and events that have potential value to the listeners, even if those listening have never heard of the particular people or context of a story. The books need to be ones where readers can imagine the situation as described by text and teacher as they bring their own life experiences to the text. With this in mind, contemporary biographies and memoirs are a genre that tell the stories of real people who face challenges with determination and decision making that result in satisfying, hopeful conclusions for the reader/listener. Such books point to possibilities for young people who are reconfirming their identities in a new cultural context. *Tasting the Sky, A Palestinian Childhood* (2007) is a chapter book memoir by Ibsitam Barakat. It shares the memories of a young girl, now a grown woman who lives in the US, whose family faced displacement in Palestine during the Six-Day War of 1967. As Ibsitam passionately shares her memories of her homeland and feelings at this time, listeners are drawn into this personal account of daily life disrupted and families torn apart. At the same time, her love of letters and language and her actions as a

young girl reflect the personal traits that one finds today in the adult who strives to advocate for others through her writing.

In a like manner, readers/listeners can also make connections to *La linea* (Jaramillo, 2006), the story of a boy who must cross the Mexico-US border illegally. As a read-aloud, this book offers many poignant moments, such as when a young man is cheated out of the money he has saved to cross the border with a “coyote” and must resort to joining family in the United States through dangerous illegal means. Yet another story in which the main character provides a model of courage in conflict is *The Story of My Life* (Ahmedi, 2005). Losing limbs to a land mine in Afghanistan, Farah’s childhood is much different than her adolescence where she lives in the United States after immigrating at the age of 13. Here she not only must regain mobility but she also must re-establish her identity in a new culture. Her true story won a contest sponsored by ABC’s Good Morning America and was published with the help of another writer.

Katherine Patterson has written numerous books to which students can connect, such as *The Same Stuff as Stars* (2002). Angel is left at her Grandmother’s house with her younger brother by her mother and ends up being the person responsible to care for both her grandmother and younger brother. Throughout all that happens to her, she maintains a resilient, positive, loving attitude and is the type of person who is admirable in facing life’s challenges. Katherine Patterson offers many young characters in seemingly tragic circumstances able to make wise decisions and transform themselves.

Picture books also offer an array of stories about determined people in many parts of the world, sometimes taking social action or celebrating life’s successes. In *That's Not Fair! / No Es Justo!:*

Emma Tenayuca's *Struggle for Justice/La lucha de Emma Tenayuca por la justicia*, Carmen Tafolla and Sharyll Teneyuca (2009) tell the story of the pecan shellers in San Antonio, Texas, during the 1920s and 1930s and the young activist who decided to fight for their rights and led a strike against the injustice of poor wages. Jailed several times, she eventually worked her way through college and returned later to San Francisco as a reading teacher for migrant children. This book can also serve as a strong resource for using heritage language as described in the previous section. *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai* (Nivola, 2008) is one of several books that recently shared the story of this 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner. Founder of the Green Belt Movement, Wangari received the Nobel award for environmental achievements as she works to help people repair their economy and land by planting more trees and returning the environment to its original condition. *Paths to Peace, People Who Changed the World* (Zalben, 2006), is a collection of stories of international figures whose lives have focused on nurturing peace. Each short vignette is supported by art that reflects quotes or the culture of the people included in this book. Readers can realize the universal ideals suggested here and add those individuals from their own cultures and communities.

In thinking about books that look across cultures, one might also read recent titles by David Smith: *If the World Were a Village* (2002) and *If America Were a Village* (2009) that compare traditions, resources, and universal experiences around the world and within the United States. This invites readers to experience the vocabulary describing aspects of life by which they can place their own traditions, religion, language into perspective in this an imaginary village of 100 people. Smith gives insights into both the

world and the U.S., making the information interesting for students who are new to this country while acknowledging the diversity within both the world and their new country. Another interesting book that looks across cultures is *Glass Slipper, Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella* (Fleischman, 2007). While Cinderella variants are not new to classroom experiences, this book uses a different culture on each page as it tells the Cinderella story according to a variety of cultural perspectives. An interesting read-aloud, the illustrations offer insight to cultures and invite one's own version of this tale as does the text. *Wishing Traditions Around the World* (Thong, 2008) provides another glimpse across cultures as different occasions and ways to make a wish are shared in poetic text with illustrations indicative of a variety of traditional practices.

Once interest is sparked around a particular topic, such as with *Number the Stars* as described previously, other books can be used to extend the interest in this historical event, especially in light of this being a topic that is covered during middle school in most districts. Many Holocaust stories have been published in recent years—stories of individuals facing challenges with fortitude, a theme that returns to the biographical suggestions shared. Found in both picture books and chapter books, Holocaust stories are symbolic of bravery in the face of tragedy—stories that hopefully will help keep such an event from reoccurring. *Daniel, Half Human: And the Good Nazi* (Chotjewitz, 2004), *Hitler's Canary* (Toksvig, 2006), *Emil and Karl* (Glatshetyn, 2006), and *The Boy Who Dared* (Bartoletti, 2008) are chapter books that offer intriguing read-aloud experiences with young people at the forefront. Books with added visual story elements are found in genre representing biography, information, and historical fiction.

These include *The Cat with the Yellow Star* (Rubin & Weissberger, 2006), *The Cats in Krazinski Square* (Hesse, 2004), *Memories of Survival* (Krinitz & Steinhardt, 2005), and *Willy and Max: A Holocaust Story* (Littlesugar, 2006). Each adds new information to the global Holocaust understandings that these young ELLs are creating. "Reading aloud to all students--ESL or native born--beginning as early in their lives as possible and continuing through the grades will expose them to a rich, organized, and interesting language model as an alternative to the tongue-tied language of their peers" (Trelease, 2009, p. 41).

Diversifying the way ELLs invest their funds of knowledge

English language learners (ELLs) tend to enjoy drawing. This is a method in which they can be comfortable expressing themselves and allow their understanding of a text to shine without the fear of not knowing the correct English words. After listening to *Immigrant Girl Becky on Eldridge Street* (1987) read aloud, a multi-level ELL class illustrated their own immigration experiences. One sixth grade boy who had not spoken at all worked diligently on the details of his illustrations. As the ESL teacher came to admire his pictures he eagerly explained to her what was happening in each picture. He made excellent comparisons to Becky's experiences throughout his drawings of his own experiences. These sixth and eighth grade students wrote a story to go along with each picture, as they placed their stories in sequential order and compiled booklets to share with the class. Later that same school year these students had the opportunity to enter a Journey Poster Contest held by the Immigration Center at the University of North Texas. The students re-illustrated their

actual journey to the United States while they recalled Becky's similar events from the story that had been previously read (Mathis & Shearer, 2009).

ELLs may not be able to enter immediately into a discussion about the book, but in a detailed drawing can be free to release their inner thoughts and connections with the text. The teacher can ask the students to simply reflect on the story through artwork; she might specifically ask for a drawing about how the character is feeling during a particular scene or for an interpretation of a particular scene from their own point of view. Allowing ELLs to reflect through art about the books they read allows them time to process their thoughts about the story without the interference of finding the exact words to say. This allows for comprehensible input in book discussions while the student may still be uncomfortable expressing himself or herself orally. As the students are drawing the teacher may walk around and engage students individually in dialogue, allowing them to expound upon various concepts of the story found within their visual descriptions. As they explain the details and concepts of their drawings to their teacher and English-speaking classmates, they are able to acquire and practice new English vocabulary as they focus on familiar concepts within their own drawings. Drawing is an emotional release in which students can reveal their inner thoughts without the fear of incorrect word choices, grammatical, or pronunciation errors.

Of course, the use of drawing is not limited to older students or those specifically connected to the events of a book. In a previous year, the ESL teacher's classroom of new immigrants, grades three, four, and five, looked silently at her, their new European American teacher with looks of fear and doubt. Just as

she was sure they were curious as to how they were supposed to learn anything from her, the teacher worried she might not be able to meet their vast array of needs. This small class consisted of two third-grade girls--one from Chile and one from Guatemala, one third grade boy from Somalia, one fourth grade boy and one fourth grade girl both from Mexico but from different cities, two fifth grade boys--one from Nicaragua, the other from El Salvador, and three fifth grade girls--one from Liberia, one from Cuba, and the third from Honduras. The ten children from different countries, except two, ranged in ages that covered three grade levels. What did these children possibly have in common? At least eight of them spoke the same native language, Spanish, although each country offered unique differences in form and usage. But then there were the two from Africa from countries on completely opposite sides of the continent. These two students did not even speak the same tribal language.

The ESL teacher knew she must find a common ground so they could all communicate and begin to learn from one another. She read the book *This Is the Way We Go to School: A Book about Children around the World* (Baer, 1992) engaging the students in dialogue as much as possible. She gave each child a piece of drawing paper, a pencil, and some crayons, and instructed them to draw how they came to school using the book to support the teacher's explanation. They all began to draw with great intensity and detail. As the students drew, the teacher moved from student to student inquiring about each of their drawings, listening and responding to their comments. In this instance they had succeeded in finding a powerful and meaningful way to communicate across language barriers.

Throughout the year the ESL teacher read from various genres of picture books and chapter books. Students drew their interpretations, predictions, conclusions, and personal connections for each. They used many mediums such as pencils, chalk, crayons, and paint as they found ways of expressing their new knowledge. English vocabulary, syntax, and sentence structure increased while the students explored and revealed their understandings through art. Jorge kept a list of the new words he learned that was read each day, he carried them home and he and his father would draw pictures of the words. Jorge explained to his teacher this was the way he was teaching his father English. In the early spring his father came to school with him one day and in broken English he thanked the ESL teacher for teaching his son to read English with pictures.

Kensa, the fifth grade girl from Liberia, found great comfort in her art interpretations of the books read together. She first dictated her stories, and then copied them in her own writing. One morning she entered class with a beautiful drawing of a mountain and children. As she waved the drawing for all to see she said, "Kensa drew, now find book and teach about mountains and children." The children scrambled and found a book titled *Africa* (Fowler, 2001) which the teacher read. It was about the climate and crops of an area near a mountain in Africa. Afterwards each of the students illustrated a concept from the book. These pictures were displayed in the hall and the students explained concepts from the African story that was read to other teachers and students as they passed about the weather, agriculture and people of the area, always directing the onlookers to read the book *Africa* for further information.

Literature that invites response through the arts

In the story above, it was important for Kensa to share her story through dictation and through art. One book that could have been quite a useful resource at that time to support her work is a recently published book, *14 Cows for America* (Deedy, 2009). This post 9-11 story has beautiful illustrations of the African landscape that is home to the Masai—a tribe who gave a most precious possession, 14 cows, to America to offer hope. Besides offering superb illustrations to support a student's desire to share her homeland, this story tells of America's tragedy through the story of another country's generosity and caring. Known for its strength, this positions the U.S. as part of the global community in which members of a strong nation also have need of other caring people and nations. Many other images of Africa can be found in children's literature, such as *One Hen - How One Small Loan Made a Big Difference* (Milway, 2008) that takes place in Ghana or *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Mathaii* (Nivola, 2008) mentioned earlier. Having books that artistically reflect the background of ELLs can be a means of extending their communication with others. Both photographic essays and other artistic techniques offer images to which students can identify and share their cultures and homeland, such as the work of George Ancona as seen in *Murals, Walls that Sing* (2003) or *Carnaval* (1999). The realistic and inviting pictures can motivate ELLs to use language as they have the illustrations to get across the depth of what they want to express. Such illustrations also provide a springboard for teachers to bring new words into students' growing authentic vocabulary.

Besides offering a pleasurable experience, response strategies using the arts have cognitive benefits as readers engage their imagination to explore and notice the world as well as introspectively explore their own lives and feelings (Wolf, 2008). Just as students might tell of a Cinderella story as they have heard it when reading *Glass Slipper, Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella* (Fleischman, 2008) or a wishing experience that their family practices after hearing *Wishing Traditions around the World* (Thong, 2008), they also can create images of their response to these books. The unique ways in which the illustrators have focused on the variety of cultures mentioned is a great model for young artists to use as they think of the detail they wish to share. Other books that share similar concepts around the globe can also invite personal artistic response, such as *My Librarian Is a Camel: How Books are Brought to Children around the World* (Ruirs, 2006) or *What the World Eats* (D'Aluisio, 2008).

Response through the arts is not only a product of picture books. Novels offer many pictures in one's mind and comprehension can be communicated through drawings. Following the reading aloud of a novel, using the titles shared in the previous section or others, teachers can find pivotal points in the story where they request students to draw their response, prediction, emotions, or understanding—a way to share comprehension, excitement, and involvement. The field of semiotics has been tapped as a significant means for readers to communicate their understandings and connections to literature (Siegal, 1995).

Concluding thoughts

Using and acknowledging the heritage language, reading aloud,

and responding through art are all engagements that can be individualized, contextualized, and diversified in the hands of a teacher who is aware of his/her critical role as the broker of ELL funds of knowledge. How these cultural funds are used and if they are used, can determine the success of both students and teachers. While the stories and suggested literature offered here hold many ideas that can be adapted by such teachers, the following recommendations are ones that are at the heart of this chapter:

- Regard and implement the knowledge, cultural heritage, and language expertise that children bring to the classroom as the most valuable resource a teacher has. Create strategies to reach them where they are and nurture a sense of personal identity and respect in ELLs. This is facilitated as they realize that their teacher respects and values who they are and the knowledge they offer to the classroom community. Literature can become an exceptional tool for discovering more about ELLs.

- Use ELLs' heritage language as needed individually to promote literacy growth by building on the areas of language use where they seem comfortable. Perhaps this is developing confidence in reading their heritage language and gradually introducing and discussing story concepts in English. Provide easy access to literature for frequent pleasure reading in their heritage language. This will build a relationship between teacher and student, show value to their culture and who they are as a person, and allow them time to focus on the story or theme without the focus on interpretation. Both bilingual texts and texts with heritage language words and phrases provide easily accessed content with continuous connections to English. Additionally, books that speak to the history and cultural significance of language can nurture authentic insights as to the importance of diverse languages.

- Read aloud and interact with the students before, during, and after reading in order to ensure comprehension and invite their use of English in more focused, specific contexts. When choosing books, select titles that have the potential to offer personal connections to the character, events, or social context. Seek books that speak to universal characteristics such as strength of character in facing challenges, problem solving, or developing personal and cultural identity. Such books offer students from all backgrounds points of connection and models of dealing with life events.

- When asking students to write in response to literature, do so in a structured yet personally inviting way. ELLs need structure; however, this can be accomplished through questioning that is open-ended enough to invite their use of personal experiences. Questions such as “How would you feel in this situation?”, “Have you ever....?”, and “Can you think of a time when you ...?” are appropriate. This might be followed by individual writing conferences. Talk to students about their writing and invite greater development of story, detail, and personal response.

- Use art as a way to allow students to express themselves and to respond to literature, but then talk to them about the details of their own art and encourage their explanations and stories about the drawings. Additionally, discussions around illustrators’ use of specific art elements and format can encourage personal response, comprehension, and language use.

Individuals often bestow a broker with the critical task and challenge of helping to create their futures through wise investments. And, so, the teacher is potentially determining the future of students as he/she elicits and invests student cultural funds in wise, strategic engagements. Today’s literature field offers many resources which can be used in empowering ways as mirrors

and windows, terms aptly used by Rudine Bishop (Smith, 1997). Such mirrors and windows offer endless possible dividends as students make personal connections to global people, places, and events through enhanced comprehension and critical literacy abilities.

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