

**EUCLID ELEMENTARY  
A DIVERSE LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT**

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**INTRODUCTION**

After observing in a kindergarten class (see Observations in a Kindergarten Class at Euclid Elementary, Appendix B) and conversing with members of the staff at Euclid Elementary, a main concern that resurfaced many times was how to teach in classes where several languages were spoken. This paper will explore ways in which teachers can foster relationships and communicate with their students in a diverse linguistic environment. This paper is written in three major sections.

The first section, “Identifying the Greatest Challenge of Euclid Elementary School,” is an introduction to Euclid Elementary School. It describes the school setting, the ethnic backgrounds of the students, and the staff.

The second section, “Current Methods of Addressing the Challenge,” describes the methods Euclid Elementary currently employs to educate the linguistically diverse population. These methods include bilingual and sheltered classrooms, English as a Second Language instruction, and instructional aides.

The third section, “Suggested Methods to Address the Challenge,” proposes ways to foster relationships and develop communication among the linguistically diverse. It explores the role the teachers and students play in fostering relationships with second-language students as well as the instructional model teachers should employ to develop communication within the classroom.

Appendix C lists the text of the Bible verses cited in this paper.

**IDENTIFYING THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF EUCLID ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Euclid Elementary is located in the eastern portion of the San Diego Unified School District in an older section of the city. Only 3.8% of students are Caucasians. The majority of students are Hispanics (54.5%), with many Indochinese (22.8%), African Americans (17.6%), and Africans (1.3%). Approximately forty languages are spoken in the homes of the student body. Of the forty-nine teachers, nineteen are bilingual (Spanish) teachers and fourteen are sheltered English teachers (A. Armstrong, personal communication, September 20, 1996).

If the staff at Euclid was concerned only with the education of the English-speaking or Spanish-speaking students, the school would not have as much of a challenge. However, Euclid is a school where all children are valued (Psalm 127:3) and where all cultures and people are respected (Leviticus 19:34). The staff is committed to provide an environment where all students can experience the excitement of learning and take pride in their accomplishments (see Euclid Elementary School's Missions and Goals, Appendix A). Therefore, communicating with and educating the Southeast Asian and African students, as well as all other students, is very important to the staff at Euclid.

**CURRENT METHODS OF ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE**

The majority of Spanish-speaking students are involved in a bilingual or sheltered English classroom. In the sheltered English classroom, students have a Spanish-speaking aide for a few hours each day. The teacher also provides an hour of English as a Second Language (ESL) as part of their curriculum and they are taught English phonics using the Reading Mastery Program. This is a method of teaching reading that uses different symbols for different sounds. The symbols generally look similar to the letters they represent. For example, there are two different symbols for the two different sounds g can make.

The librarian also speaks a limited amount of Spanish and often reads to the Spanish-speaking students in Spanish when the students have library time. She also gets Spanish videos to show the children during library time. The library has a fairly extensive number of picture books in Spanish for the students to check out. However, by the time the students are in third grade, the librarian encourages students to choose books written in English. The library does not have any intermediate books in Spanish.

The majority of Southeast Asian and African students are in sheltered English classrooms. They have primary language aides in the room for a few hours; however, they do not have aides for every language that is represented in the classroom. They also receive ESL training and use the Reading Mastery Program. They do not receive any instruction in their primary language. The library does not contain any books in any languages except for Spanish and English, so these students do not have access to books in their primary language at school.

**SUGGESTED METHODS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGE**

Euclid currently offers a fairly comprehensive program and utilizes the resources available effectively. The San Diego Unified School District provides the school with many of the necessary instructional materials teachers need to teach their students effectively. The staff is sensitive to the needs of the students and is committed to educate them to the best of their abilities. The students are eager to learn and show enthusiasm in the activities provided at school. However, there is always room for improvement.

Some or many classrooms may already be implementing the following suggestions, even though they were not observed. These suggestions are made to enhance, not replace, the learning environment the students at Euclid Elementary are already proud to call their school. They focus on improving the communication and relationships between staff and students who speak different languages. The purpose of this paper is not to address second-language acquisition techniques in depth, even though some are introduced.

Shulman and Mesa-Bains (1993) state that “Integrating non-English and LEP (Limited English Proficient) speakers into the classroom is one of the major challenges facing public education today” (p. 27). Having second-language and LEP students in the classroom not only affect teachers and the curriculum, but they affect the other students and the entire classroom atmosphere. The authors encourage educators to reflect and answer three questions. What is the role of the teacher? What is the significance of classmates? What is the instructional model?

### THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Research shows that students receiving the majority of instruction in their native language tend to be more successful (Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993). Nieto (1992) adds that bilingual education is a civil rights issue and that without it “millions of children may be doomed to educational underachievement and limited occupational choices in the future” (p. 162). Some also support the theory that the teacher’s lack of mastery of the students’ primary language, particularly during the early stages of second language development, profoundly affects teacher-student relationships, students’ self-esteem, and their overall psychological well-being (Trueba, 1989).

This research on bilingual education paints a bleak future for teachers who have several languages spoken in their classrooms. They cannot realistically become fluent in each of the languages spoken by their students, and, even if they could, it would take years to become fluent in just one language. However, there are other actions they can take in order to help foster relationships and promote self-esteem in their students that do not require special training.

Nieto (1992) states that the way in which teachers and schools view students’ primary language is more crucial to student achievement than the language itself. Therefore, teachers must honestly examine their biases and feelings about their students’ ethnicity, culture, and language, especially since they are trying to teach their students to be tolerant of and respectful to their classmates (Matthew 7:5). They must put aside any biases or prejudices they may have against the students’ heritages and accept them as people who were wonderfully made by God (Psalm 139:14) and they must provide their students with activities that encourage them to do the same.

A first step in showing that teachers genuinely care for their students and value the ethnic diversity of their students is to learn how to pronounce their students’ names correctly (Jackson, 1996). Names, which are often words that have meaning, define

who students are and are very important to students as well as their families. Teachers can also extend this activity by having students find out what their name means and illustrate the meaning of their name or give a report on its meaning.

To introduce the rest of the class to a new second-language student's culture, teachers can read books or show videos about an aspect of the new student's culture. If it is possible, either through an interpreter or through gestures and simplified English, teachers can also encourage students to bring something special about their culture to class to share with the class. Teachers can also encourage others from the same culture to bring special items from home and they can set up a display for the class and the school to see.

Teachers can also observe their students in non-school settings, such as their homes, churches, or other community events. This helps teachers know what their students' environment is like and what types of interaction they are accustomed to in their home and community. They can take note of how the children are addressed by adults, what types of objects are in the home, and the living conditions the students are in. While visiting with parents, they can also express, through an interpreter if necessary, the importance of students retaining their language and culture. Retaining language and culture is essential if the students are to continue to be contributing members of their families (Trueba, 1989).

Teachers can also encourage parents to get involved in their children's education. They may not be able to help their children with homework that requires reading or writing, but they can help their students complete art or science projects. They can also help in the classroom by getting materials ready for an art project or, if they feel comfortable, tell stories in English or their native language if an interpreter is available. Since many stories and legends are similar in different cultures, students will learn that there are commonalities between people of all ethnic backgrounds.

They can also share cultural holidays and foods with the class by either setting up a display or bringing ethnic foods to share with the class.

Teaching strategies will be discussed more in depth in the section “The Instructional Model.” Briefly, these include arranging the room to facilitate and encourage communication, setting up a list of classroom rules that govern how interaction takes place, modifying language so that students will learn concepts, selecting curriculum materials, and the art of question making.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CLASSMATES**

Students who are members of your class are essential elements in the socialization and education of second-language students. Not only do second-language students need to feel they belong to the group, but there are also more students in a classroom than there are teachers. However, students need to be taught how to interact with or help their second-language learning classmates. They do not naturally know how to be concerned with others.

Students who are bilingual can translate for those who are second-language learners. These students can be from the same class or another class in the school. They can help explain concepts in the language the students understand best. They can also help you develop a relationship with the students. However, it is best for teachers not to rely on other students in their classes to translate for them at all times, especially if one of their goals is for the student to learn English eventually.

Students can be paired off with a “study buddy” (Jackson, 1996). Students often do not know that they can go to each other for information or help, or go to students they know are having difficulty and help them without being prompted by their teachers. Encouraging students to seek help from each other and help students who are struggling can create a family atmosphere where students learn to look out for each other. Students who are paired with second-language or LEP students will need to learn alternate ways of communication, such as body language and pictures, repeat important words and phrases, speak slower, and enunciate words more clearly.

Students can also be organized into small groups, with or without the presence of their teachers. Small groups with teachers are advantageous since teachers can focus on teaching a smaller group of students and meeting their special needs. Students also have more opportunities to interact with their teachers and classmates since there are fewer people talking and shy students may be more willing to share

with a few people rather than the whole class. Second-language learners may feel more comfortable trying to communicate with a smaller number of people rather than in a whole class setting.

Small groups without teachers are also advantageous. Talk that occurs in small groups gives second-language learners greater exposure to the language of their peers and provides more opportunities to build comprehension since students are most likely repeating information and key words they have already heard. The second-language learners may also feel more willing to express themselves in this informal atmosphere, since they may feel there is less risk in speaking in a small group. Also, if students appear to be enjoying working in a small group, this may further encourage the second-language learners to speak out.

Students can be taught to be reporters of progress and problems they see in their classmates, but they will need to be shown how this is different from tattling on someone. Since teachers' attentions are divided between many students, they often do not see these important developments in their students. Since there are many more students than teachers in a classroom, they may see events that their teachers miss. All students can benefit from this activity since they can also learn to be responsible for and monitor their own progress and learning.

Students can also be taught to be tutors. One way students can tutor second-language learners is to play learning games with their classmates. One game which builds vocabulary is called "Total Physical Response" (Trueba, 1989). In this game, a native-speaker says an action (these can be written on index cards) and pantomimes the action. When the native-speaker repeats the phrase, both the native-speaker and the second-language learner do the action together. In the last phase, the native-speaker repeats the phrase and only the second-language learner performs the action.

Another game successfully used to build vocabulary is charades using the cards from Pictionary (K. Glazner, E-mail, September 25, 1996). This game can be between individuals or groups of students and can help build relationships through a fun activity that also teaches vocabulary. This game is more difficult for the second-language learners since it requires them to supply the name of the item if they are guessing, but since it is a game, they probably will not feel as threatened since they will see others making mistakes as well.

### THE INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

The main component of instruction when there are numerous language groups in a student population is some type of ESL program since the school cannot conceivably provide instruction in every language represented. The purpose of an ESL program is to teach language skills in English so that children can learn their content in English (Nieto, 1992). Euclid Elementary already utilizes this instructional method.

Although room arrangement is not often considered in effective instruction, it influences the way students interact with each other as well as with their teacher. It is especially important for second-language learners since they need to hear and use English socially as well as academically to develop proficiency in it. Therefore, teachers need to organize the environment so that second-language students have the opportunity for social interaction with their teachers and their native English-speaking classmates. Teachers need to take into account the spaces they will use for teacher-led whole-class instruction, teacher-led small-group teaching, and teacher-delegated small groupwork in which students work together on their own (Faltis, 1993).

Rules must be made and enforced or chaos will reign in the classroom. However, these rules must encourage and not stifle communication between teachers and students. Rules that Faltis (1993) suggest are as follows: 1. Listen when the teacher or classmates are talking to you. 2. Give your classmates a chance to talk. 3. Ask your classmates for their ideas. 4. Say your own ideas. 5. Try to figure things out for yourself. When you can't, ask the teacher or classmates for help (p. 72).

Students should also be given control over some aspects of the discourse between teachers and students or the classroom will be an autocratic society. However, when students are given partial control over the class, rules made must be

strictly enforced so that all students have equal control. The three areas Faltis (1993) identify are: control of turn-taking, control of topic, and control of talk opportunities. When students have control of turn-taking, students can speak when they wish without asking for permission. The dialogue that occurs resembles normal conversational speech and will model normal conversation for second-language students. Therefore, it is valuable to them, even if they do not actively participate in the discussion. Since they chose what they wanted to learn about, they will more likely be more excited to learn about the topic and will get their classmates excited as well. When students have control of talk opportunities, they can interact with whomever they wish about whatever they wish. Second-language learners probably find this to be the most comfortable setting to attempt to communicate. They are not pressured to talk on a particular subject and they are not the center of attention for the entire class.

Not only are the physical environment and rules governing the classroom important in order to encourage second-language learners to interact and communicate with their teachers and classmates, the language native speakers use to attempt communication with second-language learners is also important.

*Research in second-language acquisition reveals that in every case of successful second-language acquisition, learners had been exposed to regular and substantial amounts of modified language input and modified verbal interaction. Modified language input is more widely known as comprehensible input, language addressed to the learner that has in some way been adjusted to accommodate the learner's needs. According to Krashen, comprehensible input is necessary for second-language acquisition because it supplies meaningful language to the learner. (Faltis, 1993, p. 96)*

Modified language for the newcomer may begin with mainly gestures and pictures. Pointing at objects and naming them could be a first step. Asking a question such as “Do you want this?” and pointing to an object may be the beginning of communication. Facial expressions and gestures can express emotion and other concepts and actions. Teachers need to keep in mind, however, that gestures and expressions may communicate different ideas in other cultures.

Using visual aids such as pictures, movies, or objects can help teachers to communicate with second-language learners. Even though they may not be able to understand much or any of the oral language the teachers and students are involved in, they can infer what the discussion is about and can begin to associate repeated words with the visual aids.

The use of high frequency words and repeating important vocabulary words in simple sentences, making the effort to enunciate and speak slower, can facilitate communication with second-language learners. Although they will not be able to understand everything that is spoken, these are actions that will show that their teachers are genuinely interested in them and want to communicate with them. Simplified speech gives second-language learners the opportunity to hear the rhythm of normal language. Therefore, teachers should attempt to speak in a natural rhythm and volume, even though they are speaking at a slower rate and enunciating words more carefully.

The manner in which teachers ask questions can encourage student participation, including the participation of second-language learners. Teachers must, when they address questions to second-language learners, allow more time to answer. Teachers may accomplish this by repeating or rephrasing the question while students are formulating their answers. If teachers sense that their students may not have the oral language ability to respond to a question, they can rephrase the

question by giving two choices. For example, a question such as “What is the elephant going to do next?” can be rephrased as “Do you think he will take a bath or look for trees?” The rephrased question focuses the student on only two responses and gives the student the necessary vocabulary to answer the question.

Students must also know the rules for answering questions. Second-language learners may not understand rules such as “Raise your hand and wait for the teacher to call on you before you speak.” Since Faltis (1993) encourages teachers to give students more control over how they communicate in the classroom, he also provides teachers with more methods to ask their students questions. They are as follows.

*Ask the question — call on a student.* In this traditional technique, teachers pose a question and then immediately call on a student by name, without asking for student volunteers. If overused or used without discretion, this technique may be ineffective for soliciting talk from second-language learners, who may be too embarrassed to express themselves in English while the whole class listens to them. Second-language learners may learn to be silent and wait for the teacher to call on another student.

*Ask the question — students bid for the floor.* This is another traditional technique where teachers ask a question and the students volunteer to respond by raising their hands or another predetermined sign. This technique works best when all the students understand how to gain access to the floor. If only a few students raise their hands following a question, teachers should consider using a different technique. Also, in this technique, teachers need to keep a mental tally of which students have gained the floor and the kinds of questions that these students have answered.

*Ask a question — any student can answer.* This technique may be appropriate when teachers pose an open-ended question to which anyone in the class might have an individual answer. To be effective, the students must understand that the teacher

wants students to speak up without having to ask for permission to talk. Students also need to practice allowing other students to speak before them and to listen carefully to each thing that is said so they can participate effectively in this more informal type of discussion. The rules for interaction must be strictly enforced by the teacher to insure that all students have the opportunity to contribute without feeling that they might be personally attacked if they speak out.

*Ask a question — the entire class responds.* In this case, the entire class responds chorally to the teachers' request to recite words, phrases, or long stretches of language, such as poems and important documents. Choral repetitions allow second-language students to practice controlled language use safely within the group since the answer has already been provided. Teachers must make sure that students know the signal for response beforehand.

*Ask a question — students take turn responding.* Teachers may want several students to answer the same question, one by one in a patterned sequence. For example, as part of a lesson on constructing a bar graph based on student inputs, teachers may ask the class to respond to the question "What is your favorite ice cream?" In another situation, teachers may ask every fourth student "What do you think will happen in this story?"

Teachers can incorporate literature written by or about the cultures represented in their classrooms. Using literature that encapsulates a portion of students' culture and experiences helps make the curriculum more relevant to the student and shows students that their teachers value different cultures. When Jesus taught using parables, he often used the images and experiences that the people knew well in order to teach about the kingdom of God and it showed the people that He did understand the situation they were in.

Teachers can use literature to show how people of other ethnic backgrounds are similar in the way they show emotions, seek to find companionship, solve problems, and meet challenges. The literature can also show how people are different and that those differences make life exciting. Teachers can address stereotypes to show that these are often incomplete, and often erroneous, pictures of an ethnic group. Through literature, students and teachers alike can begin to examine their own concepts of ethnic groups and modify them when the need arises.

**CONCLUSION**

Communicating with students who do not speak or understand their teachers' language is a difficult, but not impossible, task. In time and with their teachers' guidance and their fellow students' help, second-language students will begin to grasp the language and begin to communicate orally with their teachers and peers. Before that time, however, teachers and students must meet the second-language learners where they are by encouraging the second-language students to share cultural objects or holidays, including literature written by or about the second-language learner's culture, and communicating with second-language students using visuals and simplified speech. Jesus also met the people where they were when He taught the people He interacted with. He did not verbalize God's truth in the complexity that He knew His Father's truth; instead, He used parables which utilized His audience's daily experiences to communicate His message.

Teachers are called, as extensions of the home, to guide and train their students (Ephesians 6:4) and to provide a safe learning environment for their students (II Corinthians 12:14). Second-language students must be given every opportunity to listen to and express themselves in their second language. Teachers must create an environment, physically and socially, that is conducive to communication. Students must feel comfortable, safe, and free to communicate their ideas with teachers and fellow students. Teachers must provide the structure for their students' interaction with one another and enforce classroom rules. Students must also feel that they are their fellow students' teachers and that their teachers are not the only ones who can contribute knowledge to the class.

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**APPENDIX A****EUCLID ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S MISSIONS AND GOALS**

*It is the mission of [our district] to educate all students in an integrated setting to become responsible, literate, thinking, and contributing members of a multicultural society through excellence in teaching and learning.*

This year Euclid continues its commitment to Comer School Development Program. The Comer Process puts children at the center of the educational process. It calls on significant adults in children's lives, at home, in school, and in the community to work together to support and nurture every child's total development so each can reach his or her full potential.

Our school vision is for Euclid to be a school where all children are valued; where there is a celebration of achievement and a respect for all cultures and people; where the staff works cooperatively to create an environment of high expectations and a sense of responsibility toward the students and each other; where all children can experience the excitement of learning and the pride of performance; where the school, parents, and community unite to provide a comfortable and safe environment; and where students feel secure and are able to take risks.

Our goals for this year are to:

- Train teachers and parents in effective teaching strategies to improve student achievement.
- Increase student achievement in Language Arts and Math.
- Create opportunities for staff, parents, students, and the community to recognize and appreciate the individual and varied cultures represented at Euclid School.
- Increase parent and community participation in governance and collaboration.

**APPENDIX B**

**OBSERVATIONS IN A KINDERGARTEN CLASS AT EUCLID ELEMENTARY**

keeping shoes on — safety

getting attention by talking out to teacher — ignored

getting attention by screaming — addressed by teacher — time out

child has stomach ache — didn't have breakfast — probably hungry

directions: when finished, read a book

student speaks Spanish at home — teacher is supportive

no soap until next week

no jellybean for those not following directions (quickly cleaning up and sitting on rug)

play with jellybean — taken away

personal space — sit on bottom, hands and feet to self — ask to stop, then talk to teacher — don't hit

quiet while teacher is reading

no lying down, no yelling out

quiet child at table — non-English speaker — just began class this week

statement: if there's too much talking, I can't teach

**APPENDIX C****BIBLE VERSES CITED IN THIS PAPER (NIV)**

Psalm 127:3	Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.
Leviticus 19:34	The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.
Matthew 7:5	You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.
Psalm 139:14	I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
Ephesians 6:4	Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
II Corinthians 12:14	Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.