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The Reading Motivation of Bilingual Learners in a Grade 6 Classroom

An Action Research Case Study by Kathryn Contini

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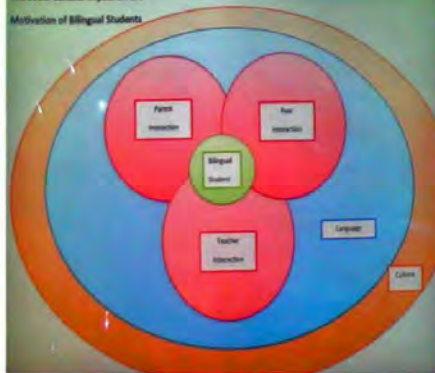
Conceptual Framework

The demographics of the American public schools are changing. Many statistics and researchers report (Protacio, 2012) that "teachers now find more immigrant students in their classrooms as the number of English learners has risen dramatically in the past decade". In addition, classroom diversity also includes many American born students who are English learners as well as those who are bilingual or even multilingual. With the changes in classroom population and dynamics, there is a call for educators to be culturally responsive in their teaching (Bartolome, 1994).

In order to do so Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) suggested decades ago that educators consider students' background experiences as a fund of knowledge that they bring to the classroom. Their socio-cultural framework is a seminal concept that remains relevant today. More recently, Jimenez, Smith, and Teague (2009) explored how to engage and motivate students by bridging the gap between home literacies and school literacy. Cummins (2011) proffered educational suggestions for how to improve the learning of these students as well. With this rich background literature in mind, the question remained how to transfer this information into the classroom.

Concept Map

The Socio-Cultural Impact on the Motivation of Bilingual Students



Research Question

What contributes to the reading motivation among bilingual and multilingual sixth grade students?

Methods

Mixed methods approach including:

- Motivation to Read Profile Survey
- Self-Concept Scale Survey
- Family Impact on Reading Survey
- Language Use Survey
- One on one semi-structured interviews
- Drawing
- Classroom observation

Participants

Participant	Country of Origin	Home Language(s)	Proficiency (Native Use)	Proficiency in the US	2012 6th GRADE	ELL Level
Participant A	China	Mandarin	High	High	Writing	Level 3 (Beginning)
Participant B	China	Korean	None	Prof. 6	Advanced	Not Applicable
Participant C	Spain	Catalan Spanish	Prof. 6	High	Proficient	Level 5 (Advanced)



Factors impacting Reading Motivation

- High impact of the socio-cultural environment
- Family role models reinforce value of reading
- Peers serve as means to socialize around literacy
- Teacher acts as access point – source for suggestions
- Instrumental motivation higher than integrative motivation
- Valuing cultural background increases engagement
- Choice of high interest text
- Social opportunities around reading inside and outside of school
- Access to a variety of texts and literacy experiences
- Digital tools for reading – Kindle, iPad, www.youtube.com

SURVEY RESULTS

Survey Tool	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C
Knowledge of Book	Full Score = 66/66 (High) Spring Score = 65/66 (High)	Full Score = 66/66 (High) Spring Score = 67/66 (High)	Full Score = 66/66 (High) Spring Score = 65/66 (High)
Reading Self-Concept Profile	Progress = 42/42 (High) Social Feedback = 34/36 (High) Family (3/15) Peer (3/15) Teacher (3/15)	Progress = 39/43 (Low) Social Feedback = 32/36 (Low) Family (3/15) Peer (3/15) Teacher (3/15)	Progress = 35/43 (Low) Social Feedback = 27/36 (Low) Family (3/15) Peer (3/15) Teacher (3/15)
Family Impact on Reading Survey	• High • Medium family impact	• High • High family impact	• High • High family impact
Language Use Survey	• Uses mostly Spanish to communicate outside of school. • Uses both languages in literacy practices.	• Uses mostly English outside of school. • Speaks Spanish with parents.	• Uses mostly English for speaking. • Literacy practices in both languages.

Discussion

In general, the findings of this case study project thus far have been mainly consistent with research currently in the field. Many of Cummins (2011) suggestions and Protacio's (2012) findings appeared in discussion with these three participants as well.

Socio-Cultural Thoughts

All three participants spoke of the impact of their teachers, friends and family on their reading. While all three were influential in a variety of ways, family seemed to have the biggest impact on their reading, especially their moms.

"They buy me books. We have Kindle but we don't use that much. We buy Chinese books online. My mom buys book but I don't know where she buys it." – Student A

"My mom takes out books that I have to read from the library. They are mainly nonfiction books." – Student B

"My mom and dad read a lot. My mom always says 'Reading is the best. You should read,' so they I started to read more." – Student C

Friendship and reading was another common thread across all three participants. As seen in their surveys and in their interviews, their friends have a clear impact on what they read.

"About books I talk to Emma or Bella I think. And Grace because they are my best friends." – Student A

"Annie and I talk about characters and books that are good and suspenseful." – Student B

"We usually talk about – if we are reading the same books – and Maura also – especially now that we are all reading the Battle of the Books. We talk about how some of them are very bad – I'm sorry – and we're like how did they win the Massachusetts for best award?" – Student C

All three had examples of classroom activities and resources that motivate them to read including reader's theater activities, Battle of the Books, and a large classroom library. Two also included how teachers can impact their reading with a good book suggestion.

"A teacher has helped me pick out a good book by recommending one to me, telling me what books are popular... or by telling me that they personally liked the book." – Student B

"Because she gives me good suggestion, since she knows about so many books and has read some of them or heard about it. Which then if it sounds good I get excited and want to read it." – Student C

In contrast, the research indicates a causal relationship between reading self-concept and reading motivation. The better the reader feels about themselves, the more motivated they are to read. Interestingly, these three participants had the exact opposite effect. The student with the lowest self-concept survey scores averages a book a night and has the highest academic performance as well. The student with the middle score on self-concept reads two to three books a month and is a Level Five on the English language learner progress report. The student with the highest self-concept does not read as often and is struggling the most in the classroom. Perhaps all three are outliers, but it is interesting to note.

Reading in the Classroom



Conclusion

While Bartolome (1994) and Moll and colleagues (1992) certainly made a strong case for the need to be culturally aware and responsive in the classroom, the socio-cultural impact of family, teachers, and peers is clearly strong. More research is needed to fully understand the full impact of these socio-cultural factors. However, since no family, classroom, teacher, or peer experience is the same for all students, nor should their classroom experience be. As Bartolome (1994) and Cummins (2011) both explain, there cannot be a one size fits all approach to students in the classroom.

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