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AN ESL/BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL
PRE-COLLEGIATE PROGRAM FOR
SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Anne Marie Werner-Smith
Laura B. Smolkin
University of New Mexico

Abstract

This paper describes a unique interagency effort to prepare Southeast Asian immigrant high school students for success in post-secondary educational pursuits, including both two-year associate degrees from technical institutions and four-year degrees from colleges and universities. The historical perspective on the development of the "English for College Precollegiate Program" is followed by an evaluation of the first year's curriculum. Given that analysis, a second year curriculum, more focused on the cultural storytelling aptitude of the students, was developed. Narrating these culturally familiar stories provided a bridge between the self and the new academic setting. Another key component of the program was the use of peer counselors who, as native speakers of Southeast Asian languages, provided the bilingual support for the high school students. Critical aspects of each year's efforts are noted, and the paper concludes with some thoughts on enhancing a multicultural focus in the program.

Introduction

Refugees fleeing persecution at the conclusion of the Vietnam War resettled in large numbers in particular states, such as California, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Substantially supported by the Lutheran and

Catholic Refugee Services, the refugee presence in the state of Wisconsin steadily increased from the end of the late 1970's. By 1993, for example, over 13% of the total school population of Wausau, WI, a small town 30 miles north of Stevens Point in the center of the state, was Southeast Asian refugee, predominantly Hmong. Wisconsin had the second highest Hmong and Laos population (18,130) in the United States in 1989. By the April 1993 census, this number reached 28,700 Hmong and 3,860 Laos. With such numbers, Wisconsinites could not ignore the differences between accepted mainstream culture and the values and beliefs of their new agrarian third world neighbors. Conflicts arose in areas such as legal matters, schooling, medical practices, and family ties. The need to understand differences and similarities in culture became urgent for both refugees and Wisconsinites.

As regards schooling, a great majority of this immigrant population speaks no English at home and, in many cases, at least one of the parents knows no English at all. As a result, there is little or no support for English during school-aged children's summer vacations. This, quite understandably, causes a regression in English skills, negatively affecting students' abilities to function in school.

Consequently, precollegiate programs have been devised to meet the needs of minority students, and are founded on the belief that early intervention in education is needed to assist students in conceptualizing alternatives to dropping out of high school. Specifically, these programs offer academic and social support for minority students in considering higher education as an option.

This article presents information from the first three years (1989 to 1991) of "English for College," a precollegiate program under the umbrella of the Cultural Diversity Unit at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. The program was designed to meet the aforementioned goals in its own distinctive way by bridging linguistic and cultural differences. Unique to this program design was the ability of many funding agencies to work together cohesively and effectively. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) of the state of Wisconsin provided scholarships for individual students, while the Cultural Diversity Unit supplied peer counselors and additional funds. The English Language Institute (ELI), a private language school with some connection to the University, supplied the program coordinator and the

expertise for implementation of second language acquisition programs. The Private Industry Council of Wisconsin allocated Jobs Partnership Training Act funds for students who had found summer jobs, but had not passed an academic proficiency test. Finally, a private foundation that wishes to remain anonymous also provided scholarships for students who had completed high school, and were thus unable to qualify for the state-funded scholarships.

History

The May 1984 report of the joint University of Wisconsin System/Department of Public Instruction Committee on Minority Affairs, "The Education of Minorities in Wisconsin: A Joint Enterprise" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1984), suggested that many minority students in Wisconsin did not go on to college after high school, and that for those who did, the attrition rate was very high. The study provided major support for the proposed pre-college scholarship fund presented to the state legislature. In a later follow-up study (June 1989) of students participating in the Department of Public Instruction Minority Pre-College Scholarship Program, 58% of the participants enrolled in post-secondary institutions. Over 95% of the minority scholars received high school diplomas. Students attributed much of their success to pre-college academic and enrichment programs (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1989).

Funding from the Wisconsin legislature directly related to the pre-college initiative supports two types of programs, both operated by Department of Public Instruction. The first is an Early Identification Program which recruits students in the eighth grade. Referrals come mainly from teachers or guidance counselors who identify gifted and talented, low socioeconomic minority children seen as having the potential for college. Throughout the high school years, students are channeled into Early Identification Program. The second initiative funded by the state established a series of pre-college summer programs for Early Identification Program students on campuses throughout the state, and provided a system of grants enabling interested students to attend. Department of Public Instruction officers worked with Private Industry Council grants to locate additional monies, as noted earlier.

Additionally, the University of Wisconsin System budgeted monies through the Cultural Diversity Unit for precollegiate programs.

In 1986, the first Southeast Asian refugee high school students, funded by scholarships from the state, attended the existing English Language Institute at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. This intensive English language program, provided by the Institute and designed to meet the needs of international students, failed to support the newly immigrated population. International students were schooled and literate in their first languages; they tended to come from middle- and upper-class families, and were socialized into the school culture of industrialized societies. The newly immigrated student, however, came from an oral language tradition of a third world agrarian society with war-experienced traumas that included loss of country and citizenship. For them, completing college in the United States would in no way enable them to return home. What they needed was an environment that would support their efforts to become bicultural and biliterate in their new country.

Following the summer session of 1988, the director of the Cultural Diversity Unit, along with Department of Public Instruction officers and the director of the English Language Institute decided to create a more appropriate program. This new approach offered a four-week, pre-collegiate program, "English for College", for language minority high school refugee students (mainly Hmong) from around the state. The goal was to prepare them for the academic demands of higher education by providing a college environment in classrooms and dormitories at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. Since its inception in 1989, the program has served over 150 minority high school sophomores, juniors and seniors, supplying not only college preparatory English as a second language instruction, but also sheltered environments in which to explore the social aspects of American academic culture.

Program Management

The following people were essential for the implementation of the program: the English Language Institute director, the program coordinator, peer counselors, activities coordinator, and teachers. Their

duties and connections are discussed in the section that follows (see Appendix).

English Language Institute Director: This individual was the program contact person on campus and supervised the program, selecting the coordinator and organizing activities among the Cultural Diversity Unit, Department of Public Instruction and other university units.

Program Coordinator: This person was responsible for hiring, training and supervising instructors, peer counselors, and the activities coordinator. Additional responsibilities included screening and selecting program participants. Admitted applicants were administered a pre- and post- Michigan Proficiency Test. The program coordinator also collaborated with the teachers in developing curriculum, which included scheduling specific educational tasks and trips to meet the purpose of the program. Finally, evaluations of students and the program itself were also the responsibility of the program coordinator. This work was completed in cooperation with the teachers.

Teachers: The teaching staff was chosen from a local elementary school, high school, and technical college. They were responsible for six hours of instruction daily covering all four areas of language acquisition. Mornings concentrated on academic studies, while the two hour afternoon sessions focused on activities such as tours and guest speakers, who addressed different aspects of college life and careers. As a unit, the teachers, creating content language models that supported language needed to engage in the special activities, facilitated students' development of a magazine of student writing and a logo contest for the program T-shirt.

Activities Coordinator: An activities coordinator was hired to plan and supervise after class activities which included sport tournaments, picnics, and weekend trips to various educational sites in Wisconsin. The coordinator lived in the dormitory with the students and was responsible for introducing students to campus life and University facilities.

Peer Counselors: Two peer counselors were work/study students at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. They assisted the activities coordinator and tutored students when necessary.

Bilingual/Bicultural Aspects of the Original ESL Program Design

Philosophical Stance of Program

The underlying philosophy of the program reflected the now common notions (see Zeichner, 1993) that literacy could be built upon the cultural knowledge, linguistic skills and cognitive abilities which language minority students bring with them. Still, the goal of the program was students' acquisition of college English. Socialization into the academic discourse community meant a focus on the Eurocentric curriculum and values of the university classroom setting, and explicit teaching of aspects of the university's hidden curriculum such as professors' expectations of students' performance. As Delpit (1988) suggests, students must master the discourse of the dominant society in order for their voices to be heard by the larger society.

Peer Counselors

The two peer counselors hired each year for the program were bilingual speakers of Hmong and English. In year two, a Cambodian student was hired as a peer counselor; he understood both Thai and Laos, languages with which many Hmong students had at least some working knowledge. The bilingual peer counselors played important roles in the success of the program in several ways. Their academic accomplishments and adjustment to the social and linguistic demands of higher education served as an invaluable model for the younger high school students. Although their university summer schedules did not allow them to be in the actual classroom with the program participants, part of the peer counselor's job description was to serve as tutor for those who needed extra academic support. Peer counselors also lived in the dormitories with the participants in a capacity parallel to that of traditional resident assistants. They were intimately involved with the day to day social lives of the high school students; they attended meals at the cafeteria, organized sports and social events on a daily basis, and accompanied the group on all field trips, including camping. The counselors never pressured the students to speak one language or another during their social time. They often played sports in both languages, and the counselors were there to talk, in the preferred language of the student, about any difficulty or confusion, were it social,

cultural, academic or personal. The relaxed use of both languages in the social life of the participants helped them become more confident and comfortable, knowing that they would be understood and supported culturally in their endeavor to acquire college level English skills. Additionally, it established and confirmed the value and respect the university organizers conferred on the bilingual/bicultural ability of both the work study students and the program participants. This was an invaluable bridge between the two cultures.

Analysis of Curriculum and Program Design: Year One

The first year of the program was modeled after an Intensive English Program normally designed to meet the needs of international university students. Accordingly, teachers stressed reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in a non-integrated, isolated skills approach to second language acquisition. For example, in the traditional Intensive English Program, writing was taught from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.; Academic Reading was taught from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., and so on, with little coordination of curriculum and tasks, other than a mere consideration of level of language proficiency.

Noteworthy within that year's program, however, was the approach to oral language. Because of students' great reluctance to speak, oral language instruction found form through drama. Students were told to select and prepare a performance of a typical cultural script (Schank & Abelson, 1977), such as marriage arrangements, family scenes, or conflicts and resolutions. These dramatic enactments were organized and rehearsed in Hmong or Laos so that all Southeast Asian students could follow the plays. While many plays were presented in the native language, certain students felt comfortable to switch into English during the performance of their works. Another oral language strategy was impromptu speaking, in which students were given single word topics (pencils, water, earth, etc.) on slips of paper, and asked to speak spontaneously for two minutes. A third oral language strategy was performance from written scripts, either student-produced or selected from various sources. One class, for example, wrote 30-second commercials, and performed a murder mystery; both activities were video-taped. All writing instruction led to a portfolio of student work

from which students selected and perfected pieces that then later were published in the program's literary magazine entitled "Ancient Trees Growing in a New Land."

Curriculum Revision: Year Two

Analysis of written and oral language work from the first year suggested that students needed a curriculum that would build upon their specific strengths. Closely linked to the oral tradition of their native language, drama and storytelling appeared to have been most beneficial for students. As an art form, storytelling illuminates and enhances cultural, and thus, individual identity. As a teaching strategy, storytelling was seen as a way of building transitional bridges between the thought patterns and cognitive processes of the first language experiences of the students and those of the new culture in which they found themselves. Implicitly, the storytelling strategy involved bilingual/biliterate development, as the examples which follow show.

Drama: Short impromptu enactments of stories were first delivered in the students' native language before attempting them in English, unless the students expressed the desire to do otherwise. Often these stories were reconstructed collaboratively, as individual students could recall only fragments of the entire tale.

Storytelling: The storytelling curriculum grew from the drama enactments described above. This effort became a tell-a-story/write-a-story bridge. Students knew the stories to tell, knew the rhythms of the stories and sometimes were even able to produce the stories in English as well as in their first language. With continued practice and encouragement, the students learned to clearly articulate the language, as the speech teacher expressed, "in all its aliveness that a story needs."

This approach became the backbone of the class work. Initially, teachers elicited stories that students had heard in their childhood. The students were asked to tell their stories orally in class, and were given the option of which language to use. At first the students were reluctant; they seemed to have difficulty recalling the tales of their homeland. Perhaps such recollections entailed painful memories. Teachers accommodated by introducing a strategy that asked for traditional stories that the students could tell as a group. As they began to recall and

identify with the actions and themes of these class-told traditional tales, students seemed less inhibited, and there was a noted increase in interaction with, and discussions about, the stories.

Next, teachers introduced techniques of storytelling (e.g., Morgan & Rinvoluceri, 1983). Modeling for the students, teachers demonstrated concentration on areas of conflict, resolution, main character, hero, heroic behavior, opposing forces, motif, and moral.

The oral storytelling was enhanced with the reading of stories such as Aesop's Fables, Greek myths, and various legends. Additionally, mystery stories were examined, as they too included heroes and conflicts to be resolved. When possible, teachers supplemented the readings with videos of the classical stories, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Clash of the Titans*, etc.

Students were then asked to write original stories, using one of the "read" stories as a model. The advanced class did research on other writers of the heroic mode from other times and cultures; they read works such as *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Arthurian Legends*, and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Students shared their discoveries orally in class through formal presentations. Throughout the four weeks, students wrote, read, and told stories from their own backgrounds. There was a constant weaving of stories, from the old to the new, from the oral to the written. The word processor was used at all levels. Some stories and poems later appeared in the student magazine transliterated from the original language, while others reached publication through a visual production. Through formal videotaping instruction supplied by a professor from the Communications Department, students prepared storyboards, extracting scenes to be taped, and then they wrote scripts, which they memorized and dramatized. All elements of language were repeatedly reinforced in an integrated fashion.

The culmination of the storytelling unit was the group's attendance at a three-act play in the Fine Arts Center. The final graduation celebration continued the bilingual/bicultural focus of the program, including the singing of the Laos national anthem, and the performances of songs and dances in the original language and costumes, accompanied by traditional musical instruments.

Analysis of Storytelling Strategies in Curriculum: Year Two

Eliciting traditional oral stories from students: Because of shyness and memory lapses, students were unable to produce individual storytellings initially. Moving to a group recollection clearly eased the effort. Students' self-identities were enhanced as they saw themselves part of their cultural group once again, this time acknowledged within a school setting.

Presentation of storytelling techniques: The study of storytelling as an art form allowed students to re-examine their stories. They could select aspects of the traditional tale to highlight as each prepared tellings for the class. They explored not only the use of voice, making themselves audible, but also the presentation of ideas, which would become increasingly important as they moved into writing.

Reading of cross-cultural stories and legends: Encountering the written tales of other cultures aided the students in multiple ways. First, and most obviously, their reading skills were enhanced. Second, they engaged in critical thinking as they analyzed the written tales according to criteria that had been explained as part of the storytelling art form. Third, they could see the transformation of an oral story into various visual forms. Told stories could become written stories, accessible in library collections. Or they could become visual feasts in the form of films. Finally, for the more advanced students, the library research and oral presentations allowed them increased access to the academic modes of performance.

Videos: Use of videos, both during the reading of cross-cultural tales and during the students' own taping experiences, enabled them to analyze cross-cultural similarities and differences. They could discuss such details as varieties of body language, hero models, family functions, and family role playing. The major benefits from using video came from the story board (the production charting applied to all stories), from the recording of voices at an audible level, and from the cognitive work of turning cultural as well as original stories into on-camera work. Additionally, students became quite adept with the equipment as well as telling stories from a camera's eye.

Critical Comments and Recommendations

School, as a massive cultural agent in Western society, selects materials, skills and ideas, carefully excluding a great deal of the cultural process that teachers, parents, and students know or should know about themselves. A Cultural Therapy curriculum, as presented in Spindler and Spindler's (1994) book, *Pathways to Cultural Awareness*, is a way of moving the focus of the program away from the idea of "intervention" in the schooling of recent immigrants to one which recognizes, includes, and builds upon two important issues. First, culture must be seen as a process in which everyone is involved at all times; it is crucial to raise the consciousness of both students and teachers about how biases in the classroom affect learners. Second, students and teachers must be empowered by making both the power structure of schooling and the ways to access the "cultural capital" necessary to compete for equal knowledge and resources more explicit. The hope is that if students understand themselves and their situations better, they can learn with less rancor and resistance.

Unquestionably, then, a more profound multicultural focus could be incorporated into this program. If multicultural means multiperspectival, then an element lacking in the curriculum is this explicit teaching about, and the presenting of, various cultural world views. In considering this, looking at James Banks' (1993) levels of multicultural awareness is useful. Banks' first level of holidays, food and the like is important, but far more important for students whose lives have been lived outside the mainstream United States' culture is the study of attitudes and beliefs, so that they may understand when their personal positions conflict with those of the dominant culture. Examples of areas of conflict include, but are not limited to, the teaching of science, religion, social expectations of the classroom, leadership qualities, and gender roles. Too often students are left stranded in the middle of the bridge between cultures without the explicit teaching in the classroom that would help them to understand the nature of the conflict that is often thrust upon them by circumstances.

A specific approach in attaining this goal might be a two-way bicultural program established on the model of the classic two-way bilingual programs once found in Canada. Fifty percent of the student

population would be Anglo-American and fifty percent would be representatives of a minority group, in this case Southeast Asian, in particular Hmong. The objective would be to establish an environment where differences would be learned as curriculum content and expressed in program activities; conflict resolution would be realized as future leaders of different cultures moved toward understanding and working together in a supportive, healthy and democratic education.

The leadership of a precollegiate program is therefore of great importance. The coordinator needs to be a person well-versed in multicultural and bilingual principles in the education of linguistically and culturally diverse populations. Whether the teachers are certified specifically in secondary or elementary education or have ESL or bilingual training or are social studies or language arts people is much less important. What is crucial is that these people, who have the role of teacher, also have the understanding that authentic cross-cultural teaching is much more than "catch-up" with grade level content and English proficiency.

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Appendix

Flow Chart of Supervision and Cooperative Effort

