

Focus on Teacher Education

..... A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

From the Editors

In this issue of *Focus on Teacher Education*, we present three articles. The first article, by Eugene Geist and David Matthews, deals with classroom environments and how teacher educators can encourage pre-service candidates to prepare learning ecologies for active student learning. The second piece, by Martin Scanlan, considers how to teach English language learners from an asset-based perspective instead of a deficit model. The last article, by Raholanda White, is a short summary of university grading policies drawn from her research at colleges and universities in Tennessee.

We would like to thank Kelly A. Russell, adjunct faculty at Athens State University, for her assistance in preparing this edition. Her editorial assistance and comments were invaluable.

We are grateful that we continue to receive a large volume of manuscripts for consideration. The variety of submissions and the quality of manuscripts are amazing to us. We encourage the readership to continue to consider *Focus on Teacher Education* as an avenue for publishing your research and work.

—Jerry Aldridge and
Janice Patterson

Opening DORRS: Five Principles for Helping Future Teachers Prepare the Classroom Environment for Active Learning

*Eugene Geist and David Matthews,
Ohio University*

Future teachers need to understand how to design learning environments. As teacher educators, we must make sure this information is part of their teacher preparation program. Whether that environment is outdoors or indoors, natural or created by people, the environment influences how we perceive the experience. People also display different emotional and physical responses to different environments (Kopek, 2006).

In this article, we describe the DORRS principles. These principles are designed to help teachers and teacher candidates analyze classroom and other learning environments. These principles include **defensibility, ownership, relevance, responsiveness, and significance (DORRS)**, and are designed to guide classroom practitioners in this task.

Defensibility

This aspect of DORRS is often the hardest to understand. If we think about porches and patios, why would someone prefer to sit on a porch or patio than in the middle of an open yard? People tend to like congregating near objects and structures like buildings, trees, rocks, and rivers (Alexander, 1977). This makes us feel safe and secure and comfortable. There is something “familiar” about a small cozy space.

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It provides a barrier to the outside world or a shield from unwanted light and noise, and it allows the child to be mentally in control of the space.

In a classroom, this concept is also true. Lots of open spaces are not conducive to children's psychological comfort. So we have to create nice defensible spaces in the classroom where children can work alone or in groups.

Ownership

Children must feel some ownership of the environment. After all, this is a place where they will spend a good portion of their day, five days a week. They need to have some degree of control over what is in the space and what it looks like. Having some control over the environment allows a child to develop self-identity and express relationships to the greater classroom community.

In the classroom, children should have some say in the look and feel of the classroom environment (Chase & Doan, 1996). Teachers are not honoring ownership when they set up a classroom alone or with little input from the children. This leads to classrooms that do not reflect the characters or the cultures of the children who are in them. By involving children in the process and giving them some choices and guidance in making the environment a comfortable place, the teacher ensures that the space can better meet everyone's educational needs (Helm & Katz, 2001; Helm, Katz, & Scranton, 2000; Katz & Chard, 2000).

Relevance

The classroom environment has to be relevant to children's lives and needs as learners. The question that needs to be asked to determine if the space is relevant is, "Does the space reflect the

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The idea of relevance includes concepts of cultural diversity, age appropriateness, and individual appropriateness, along with community and parental involvement and links to the "real world." The goal is to make the classroom, and ultimately the curriculum, relevant to the children's lives outside the classroom (Helm & Katz, 2001; Helm et al., 2000; Katz & Chard, 2000).

Responsiveness

Classroom space must respond to the needs of the situation or curriculum quickly and efficiently (Curtis & Carter, 2003). A responsive environment will support situations in which the environment needs to be quickly restructured to allow for different activities. Your students may also think of responsiveness as the flexibility to carry out great ideas quickly and effectively (Armstrong & Miami University, 1985; Mitchell, 1973).

In a static classroom, the desks never move and, for that matter, the children rarely move either. Much of this is the fault of the desk design. They are often heavy and bulky and difficult to move out of the way. Some classrooms use tables, but these are usually found in the lower grades and while they can help create a more responsive classroom, they are still heavy and difficult to move.

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An Asset-based Approach to Linguistic Diversity

*Martin Scanlan,
Marquette University*

The lenses through which we view the world impact our understandings. As Scheurich (1997) puts it, “How I see shapes, frames, determines, and even creates what I see” (p. 29). As educators, how we see the diversity of students in our schools impacts how we craft the teaching and learning environment. This article argues that by conceptualizing linguistic diversity from an asset-based lens, teachers are better prepared to successfully engage linguistically diverse students and families.

Conceptualizing Linguistic Diversity

The population of students who are English language learners (ELL) is rapidly rising (Crawford, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Although many schools in the United States have a rich history of embracing students who are ELL, others have erected barriers (Olnek, 2004). A fundamental reason for these barriers is service delivery models that are deficit-oriented. Valencia (1997) explains that from a deficit-based perspective, “a student who fails in school does so because of internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral behavior” (p. 2).

Approached from a deficit perspective, students who are English language learners (ELL) are often defined as fundamentally lacking. By contrast, an asset-based perspective builds on the home language of students and recognizes this as a fundamental strength. Schools have a spectrum of options for providing educational services to students who are ELL, ranging from promoting monolingualism through English immersion strategies to promoting bilingualism through dual immersion strategies. All methods along this spectrum seek to teach English to students (Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

Approaches to developing this second language at the expense of the first language are sometimes referred to as “subtractive,” and those that foster developing both the second and the native language are referred to as “additive” (Ovando, 2003). Putting it in Valencia’s (1999) terms, English immersion approaches tend toward deficit-based perspectives, and bilingual approaches tend toward asset-based perspectives.

Raising the Capacity of Teachers To Serve Students Who Are ELL

A fundamental barrier to conceptualizing linguistic diversity from an asset-based perspective is the capacity of teachers to teach students who are ELL. Raising the capacity of all educators to approach students who are ELL from an asset-based perspective entails specialists with expertise in working with students who are ELL collaborating with general education teachers. These specialists, including bilingual teachers, ESL teachers, and bilingual resource specialists, are key resources to helping all educators better serve students who are ELL and their families.

To begin, all educators working with students who are ELL need strong literacy skills. Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000) make clear that “educators must know enough about language learning and language itself to evaluate the appropriateness of various methods, materials, and approaches for helping students make progress in learning English” (p. 25).

Educators must have knowledge of the basic units of language and of issues associated with these units. Educators must have an understanding of how a lexicon is acquired and structured, as well as a grasp of language behavior across cultures,

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including vernacular dialects. Educators must recognize how oral and written language compare and contrast if they are to assist students in building proficiency in English. A core component of written language is narrative and expository writing. Wong Fillmore and Snow explain that students, especially those who are ELL, often come to school with culturally rooted text-structures that contrast with the school's text-structures. When educators understand how concepts are culturally rooted, they are less apt to mistakenly attribute "language or cognitive disorders to students who have transferred a native language rhetorical style to English" (p. 29).

A thread that is woven through these dimensions of oral and written language development is the concept of academic English. The American Educational Research Association (2004) reports that academic English is the competence "to speak with confidence and comprehension in the classroom on academic subjects . . . includ[ing] the ability to read, write, and engage in substantive conversations about math, science, history, and other school subjects" (p. 2), and that students only develop this competence over several years.

Integrate, Don't Segregate, Students Who Are ELL

To develop academic English, students who are ELL "must interact directly and frequently with people who know the language well enough to reveal how it works and how it can be used" (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 24). When schools cluster students who are ELL to more efficiently provide support, they are artificially imposing barriers on these students. Instead, schools should ensure that these students are naturally distributed across classroom settings and are receiving targeted, direct instruction and support in English. As educators

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throughout the school understand oral and written language development along with academic English, they are better prepared to integrate students who are ELL into their classrooms. Service delivery models that reflect this approach will emphasize the integration, not the segregation, of students who are ELL (Scanlan, Frattura, & Capper, 2007).

Purposefully grouping students who are ELL within the context of heterogeneous classes can be an effective approach to educating them (Ovando, 2003). Heterogeneous groupings facilitate building bridges between students who are ELL and native English-speakers (Brisk, 1998). Such groupings should be targeted instructionally, based on criteria directly related to the instructional targets, and should be flexible (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

Rothenberg and Fisher (2007) provide an overview of skills necessary to differentiate instruction for students who are ELL. They illustrate how providing language support across the curriculum will create a stronger learning environment for students who are ELL. Staff requires ongoing and targeted professional growth opportunities so that they are able to provide this language support comprehensively. A core place for this professional growth to start is in oral and written language acquisition and

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in academic English. In short, raising the capacity of the staff in educational linguistics will promote the success of students who are ELL in heterogeneous groupings (Brisk, 1998).

Conclusion

In summary, best practices encourage schools to view students who are ELL from an asset-based perspective and to craft service delivery to these students in a comprehensive manner. By building the capacity of all teachers to teach all students, schools are better able to embrace linguistically diverse populations. This article has articulated specific strategies for schools to use to develop as-

set-based approaches to linguistic diversity by helping all educators understand how to better serve students who are ELL.

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Significance

What we teach children should be important and significant to their later life and development. A lack of significance can lead to the "cute curriculum," in which activities are engaged in because they are "cute" but lack true educational objectives (Aldridge, Calhoun, & Aman, 2000). In classrooms that lack relevance, we hear children ask, "Why do I need to know this?" or "When will I ever use this?"

Teachers must learn to integrate what the children *need* to know and what they *want* to know. This needs to be balanced with local, state, and national standards and developed into curriculum. A significant classroom is one that mirrors and integrates life outside the classroom into the learning that takes place in the classroom. A classroom should not be a foreign space that is radically different from any other space where children live, play, and work. It should be comfortable and familiar to them (Curtis & Carter, 2003).

Using the DORRS principles requires an investment of time, but time spent preparing is never wasted. The above steps provide a strategy, not an answer. Making good decisions is

at the heart of good classroom design. Professional designers know that good design is, at best, a thoughtful extension of their imagination. The imagination is at the center of the classroom environment.

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Focus on Teacher Education is published on a quarterly basis for those committed to teacher education. Our purpose is to disseminate best practices along the teacher education continuum from preservice to inservice at the school and university levels. We go beyond advocating standard practice to explore emerging ideas and conflicting opinions supported, when possible, with research. To meet the needs of those involved in teacher education, we actively encourage the involvement of ACEI members in communicating needs and contributing to the publication. We welcome the participation and diverse perspectives of the following professionals:

- Classroom teachers serving as supervisors of preservice teachers or mentors of inservice teachers, including those involved in new teacher induction
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- Administrators engaged in school-university partnerships and collaborations to improve teaching effectiveness at the preservice and inservice levels
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- Education professors who work with students at the bachelor's, master's, or doctoral levels.

Content

The Editors invite articles that develop special topics or themes in teacher education. Unsolicited manuscripts on relevant topics are encouraged. We hope to include descriptions of innovative practices in teacher education, reviews of research, statements by leaders in education and allied fields, discussion of timely issues, and descriptions of programs and practices beyond United States borders. We're even open to human interest stories and bits of humor or satire.

Form and Length

Style (particularly references) should be consistent with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4th ed.). Manuscripts (including references) should be typewritten, double-spaced. Authors must submit three copies (with identifying information on only 1 copy) and the Copyright Transfer Agreement below (or a facsimile). Preferred length is 2 to 6 pages (1,400-4,200 words). International authors are asked to include International Postage Coupons, unless the manuscript is submitted electronically.

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Focus on Teacher Education is a refereed publication. Unsolicited manuscripts are anonymously reviewed by at least three readers. The final decision rests with the Editors, who are guided by the reviewers' comments and such considerations as space, timeliness, and projected plans. Rejected manuscripts are returned only to those authors who provide a stamped, self-addressed manuscript envelope when submitting their hard copy. The Editors cannot consider proposals or outlines. Send completed manuscripts only.

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Authors are requested to submit accepted material on a 3.5" diskette (Microsoft Word 6.0 or ASCII/text only). Camera-ready diagrams, tables, charts, or figures are often desirable.

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Send all manuscripts to the editors (Please indicate "Manuscript for FTE" in the subject line):
Dr. Jerry Aldridge (jta@uab.edu) & Dr. Janice Patterson (janpat@uab.edu)

University Grading Policies

Raholanda White,
Middle Tennessee State University

A study of grading policies at institutions of higher learning in Tennessee found similarities in practices. The analysis of grading policies project covered six universities and 13 two-year colleges in the Tennessee Board of Regents system. The following similarities were found in grading policies:

Repeating Courses:

- Colleges and universities have similar policies regarding repeating courses and calculating the GPA.
- Most institutions allow students to repeat any grade earned.
- If students repeat a course, most institutions calculate failing grades into the GPA.
- Students may repeat courses to retain or

regain the minimum GPA scholarship requirements; however, credit hours generated from repeating courses may exceed the scholarship limits of 120 or 136 hours.

Incompletes:

- Occasionally, students have extenuating circumstances that may require additional time to complete course requirements. Colleges and universities regard incomplete ("I") grades in a similar manner with the certain variations.
- Students who do not complete course requirements to remove an "incomplete" receive a failing grade ("F") and must therefore repeat the course. This becomes an issue of accumulating excessive credit hours that may exceed scholarship limits.

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