Parent-teacher home response learning journals to foster collaboration in children's literacy development

Marie Vargas Piel

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PARENT-TEACHER HOME RESPONSE LEARNING JOURNALS TO FOSTER
COLLABORATION IN CHILDREN’S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Bilingual Cross-Cultural Option

by
Marie Vargas Piel

September 2000
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Approved by:

Dr. Barbara M. Flores, First Reader 8/16/00

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The purpose of this study was to connect English language learning (ELL) student's school life with their home life. Proposition 227, which prohibited the use of Spanish in classrooms has made it difficult to make the home-school connection. Research shows that parents play a vital role in the education of their children but Proposition 227 severely restricted Spanish speaking parents' participation in their child's education. This study demonstrates how the use of home response learning journals empowered parents to participate in their child's literacy and biliteracy development.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all I want to thank Jehovah God for blessing me with so many wonderful people in my life, without my family none of this could be possible (Proverbs 10:22 states that The Blessing of Jehovah—that is what makes rich, and adds no pain with it). I dedicate this project to my parents Betty and the late Robert Vargas, and my siblings, Jesse, Victoria, Donna and the late Robert S. Vargas. Thank you for your continuous love and friendship. I am also grateful for having such a kind, loving and supportive husband. Thank you Philip. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Barbara Flores and Dr. Esteban Diaz for their guidance and encouragement throughout the entire process of this project. I would especially like to thank Barbara Flores for evoking in me a passion for teaching from the heart. It was your passion for teaching that helped me empower my students, their parents and myself.

"Good teachers do not just happen they are a product of the highest personal motivation."

- Dwight D. Eisenhower
To my family, with love.

Para mi Familia, con mucho cariño.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The passage of Proposition 227 (see appendix C) has placed an excessive amount of pressure on bilingual elementary school teachers and students whose first language is Spanish. This new law mandates that schools use only English to teach academic subjects to English language learners (ELL). These students will be placed in mainstream English language classrooms and taught English through Structured English Immersion (SEI) and expected to learn English in one year.

This law limits the options of educators and places barriers in the path of providing native language instruction, although evidence from most linguists shows that it takes four to seven years to become sufficiently fluent in English and to participate fully in an English taught school curriculum (Olsen, 1997).

It will permit native language instruction (bilingual education) only through a complicated process where 20 or more parents at each grade level would have to request waivers from the law. If the waivers are fewer than 20, the school can send those students to another school site where bilingual education is available.

English language learners are expected to learn English in one year, then be transferred into regular mainstream classrooms where they are expected to keep up
with their English counterparts. This new law holds teachers, administrators, and other elected officials who refuse to implement the terms of this law personally liable.

Fontana Unified School District has implemented a Structured English Immersion Program (SEI), defined as an English language acquisition process for children in which nearly all classroom instruction is in English. The curriculum and its presentation are designed for children who are learning English as a second language. The plan is to place students in English language classrooms or SEI. They are expected to acquire academic English in one year. These changes have included removal of all Spanish books, and materials from classrooms and libraries.

Teachers were told they could no longer teach their students by using the Spanish language. However, they would be able to speak to parents in Spanish and also send parent notices and homework in Spanish. In spite of this law, we know that children's earliest language learning is influenced by their home environment. Parents are children's first teachers because they assist in the acquisition of oral language and help their child in learning about the world.

Most parents of English language learners are not literate in English, but they are in Spanish. Not knowing English will make it virtually impossible for them to be
active participants in the development of their child’s literacy in English.

It is imperative that Spanish speaking parents feel competent enough with school work and see themselves as vital contributors in their child’s literacy learning. By modifying teaching strategies and innovating, I believe teachers can empower parents to participate in their child’s literacy and biliteracy development:

After all, parents see children reading and writing in many literacy contexts in the world outside of school. Because parents usually know their children better than anyone else, they can also supply important clues to help teachers adjust the literacy environment and instruction so their children can better succeed in school (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993, p.23).

Schools and communities need to work together in order for teachers to become more aware of and compassionate to the cultural diversity of their students and students’ families. Kruger and Mahon (1990) point out, “parental involvement in literacy learning has much greater value than as an add-on to what teachers do”(p.4). Parents and teachers can become partners in connecting the child’s home and school environment, which empowers the parents to be involved in their child’s literacy development:

The purpose in breaking down the barriers between home and school is not to coerce, or even persuade, parents to take on the literacy definitions held by teachers. Rather, it is to enable both teachers and parents to understand the way each defines, values, and uses literacy
as part of cultural practices. In this way schooling can be adjusted to meet the needs of families. Parents, in turn can observe and understand the definitions of literacy that schools support, which ultimately empowers individuals to take their place in society (Cairney & Munsie, 1995).

As stated above, parents play a vital role in the education of their children. This study will demonstrate how the use of home response learning journals will foster parent-teacher collaboration so that the parent can continue to contribute to his/her child’s literacy development. Parents and teachers can become partners by connecting the child’s home and school lives. An important assumption underlying this home-school connection includes: viewing the student’s parents as partners which implies a reciprocal relationship, with each partner coming to a better understanding of the other.

By using home response journals, the teacher can share beliefs about literacy learning and also learn strategies, beliefs and insights from parents. One of the goals is to count on parents as co-teachers and know that each child has a one-to-one time with "a more capable peer" (Vygotsky, 1978). Another goal is for parents to use literacy in an organized (fashion) social context. In addition, the journals are expected to help develop "funds of knowledge for teaching" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).
That is, as the teacher, the parents will be sharing their "funds of knowledge" that in turn, informs the teacher’s teaching.

"Knowledge" does not have real existence, it is a mental state where understanding is achieved by learning through continuing development in "coming to know" (Forman, Minick & Stone, 1993). Each learner comes to their own structure of personal knowing which they arrive at through a specific social account of each learner’s life. There are different types of knowledge:

- Propositional knowledge- knowledge which is tied to specific domains; knowledge about a specific topic.

- Procedural knowledge- knowledge about how to do something; how to ride a bicycle; how to write a report.

- Metacognition- is knowledge about one’s own mental processes and the control of these processes to achieve one’s intended goals; metacognition is constructed by the individual, it arises from reflection on how one engages in these activities and in particular, on the procedures used (Forman, Minick & Stone, 1993).

Knowledge is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1978), it is not simply transmitted from the teacher to the student (Freire, 1970). A teacher should not only present propositional knowledge through talk or text but should also present new information and allow extended
opportunities for discussion and problem-solving through shared activities.

Vygotskian theory states that the zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development suggests that important learning and understanding require social interaction and conversation. Students need to deal with problems in their zone of proximal development and they need the social interaction provided by other students, other adults, and/or parents.

The Problem
With continual socio-historical changes in education, such as the Proposition 227, it is extremely important for teachers to continue to view the student's culture, home and family as an important foundation to children's literacy development. It is assumed that parent-teacher communication can help children who have difficulty achieving success in school. Also, those parents of English language learners need to be involved in helping their child develop literacy. The sole use of oral or written English to communicate with Spanish speaking parents will make them feel inferior and insecure in
participating in their children's learning. However, it is my belief that using home response learning journals with kindergarten English language learners in English and with their parents in Spanish, may help to create parent-teacher collaboration that assists in the literacy and biliteracy development of these students.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The question to be explored in this study is: Does extending the opportunity for written communication between the teacher and parent encourage the parents of kindergarten English language learners to participate in and contribute to their child’s literacy development?

Writing has been considered primarily a school-related activity while children learn to speak in the context of meaningful interaction with a great deal of assistance; writing has been considered a solitary activity, occurring without communicative support (Peyton, 1988).

Learning a language is natural and social; learning occurs in social contexts and is mediated by others in the same way that language is learned (Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991). Research shows that children learning a second language in school need to learn the words, pronunciation and sequence them to express meaning to serve a variety of communication goals (Peregoy & Boyle, 1993). This makes it difficult for English language learners to express meaning.

The specifically human capacity for language enables children to provide for auxiliary tools in the solution of difficult tasks, to overcome impulsive action, to plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution, and to master their own behavior. Signs and words serve children, first and foremost, as a means of social contact with other people. The cognitive and communicative function of language then become the basis of a

Educational researchers have long stressed the importance of home-school connections and have suggested that these connections may be critical for lower socioeconomic status (SES) students (Allen & Mason, 1989). Home environments are the site of children’s earliest language learning and are recognized as significant factors in children’s language development.

Research by Hanson (1994), Lazar & Weisberg (1996), and Shockley (1994), shows that parents need to feel empowered by participating in the development of their child’s literacy. Thus, it was surmised that parent-teacher collaboration may be fostered through the use of home response journals. Additionally, by communicating in written Spanish, both the children and the parents would experience not only the use of their common language, but would also see it as valued. A recent study viewed home response journals as a valuable to build a partnership between parent and teacher.

One model of home response journals in a kindergarten classroom demonstrates how parents became more aware of ideas and actions that assist in literacy learning. The primary focus of this model (communication between parent and teacher) was to help the teacher adjust literacy needs for each individual student (Morningstar, 1999). Another
model of response journals in a kindergarten classroom were used solely while at school (Hannon, 1999). This model allowed students to write about a topic of their choice. They were encouraged to ask their teacher questions. The students that asked questions had them answered (while the students watched) in writing by the teacher. Both of these models were utilized with English speaking students, parents and teacher.

Definition of Terms

English Language Learner (ELL)- label used by school districts for second language learning student; formerly labeled as LEP (Limited English Proficient).

Learning Journals (Diario de Aprendizaje)- home response journals. Students write about their activities in English and take home daily to share with parents. At school in front of each student the teacher writes (while vocalizing each word) a message to the parents in Spanish. This message usually is a translation of what the student has written in English. At home the parents have been instructed is to read what the teacher has written in Spanish (out loud, in front of their child) and ask the student what they wrote in English. The parent also responds
in writing to teacher’s communiqué (also in front of the child) as he/she says it.

Presyllabic Writing System- period of interpretation the children focus on using symbols to represent their meaning.

Syllabic Writing System- period of interpretation the children begin to represent the oral parts that we call syllables with one letter per syllable that they hear. Initially there is no sound/letter correspondence, but then there is a one-to-one correspondence.

Syllabic/Alphabetic Writing System- period of interpretation the children now hear and represent more sound/letter correspondences, but still there are some syllabic representations.

Alphabetic Writing System- period the children now can represent every sound that they hear with the corresponding letter.
CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive in nature. A descriptive case study, according to Merriam (1988), is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study, it is a historical case study that chronicles a sequence of events. Descriptive case studies are entirely descriptive and useful in presenting information about areas of education where little research has been conducted (Merriam, 1988). Case study analysis, consisting of data collected, observation and documentary analysis was used to examine the four students in the study.

Data Needed

The data collected consisted of writing samples in the form of home response learning journal entries that began as modeled writing in English and later independent writing. Learning journals from twenty ELL kindergarten students were collected; four journals for each student were collected quarterly over a nine-month period. Four of those twenty students "Learning Journals" were analyzed. The four student's journals that were chosen to observe represent twenty percent of the classroom population. This kindergarten classroom is made up of five boys and fifteen girls; one male and three female student's journals were
collected and analyzed. At the beginning of the school year the parents were sent home a letter that explained how to use the journal at home (see appendix A-Journal Instructions). They were to ask their child what they learned (what they wrote): next the parent was to read out loud the teacher’s entry and then respond to the teacher out loud as they wrote their message in front of their child.

At the beginning of the year parents were reminded and asked daily if they had read and responded to the journal in the presence of their child. During the first three-quarters the students first observed the teacher finishing the sentence (modeled writing) “I learned...” The student then finished their sentences by modeling (copying) what the teacher wrote. By the fourth quarter students were asked to finish the sentence “I learned...” on their own. First, the student’s drawing and journal entry will be analyzed, then the teacher’s entry to the parents, and lastly the parent’s entry.
CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF DATA

A case study approach was used to understand how teacher knowledge, ethical choices and bilingualism enabled Spanish speaking parents to participate in their child’s literacy and biliteracy development. The data from the learning journals was analyzed to see if written communication between teacher and parent encouraged the parents of kindergarten English language learners to participate and contribute to their child’s literacy development.

In order to analyze the data that was gathered, it was necessary to organize the data of the four students in the following manner:

4. Maribel - Student A.
2. Zayra - Student B.
3. Ricardo - Student C.
4. Jazmine - Student D.

Journal illustrations 1, were taken from the journals that were recorded August 1, - September 1, 1999.
Journal illustrations 2, were taken from the journals that were recorded September 27, - November 18, 1999.
Journal illustrations 3, were taken from the journals that were recorded January 10, - February 29, 2000.
Journal illustrations 4, were taken from the journals that were recorded March 28, - May 31, 2000.
The following includes a detailed analysis of the four students' journals entries accompanied by the parents' and teacher responses.
Case Studies
Student A.

Maribel aprendió la letra "P"
Mumío

Maribel's Journal Illustration 1
Entry #1 - August 23, 1999 - Student drew twelve letter "P"s, and copied the letter "P." Teacher wrote in Spanish "Maribel aprendió la letra P" (Maribel learned the letter "P"), and signed. Maribel's mother signed the journal but did not respond to the teacher's entry. At
this time Maribel is just writing letters and is considered to be using the presyllabic writing system.
Maribel aprendió que tiene mano izquierda y derecha.

Por favor de repasar esto en la casa.

Maribel me dijo que tiene una mano izquierda y una derecha.

Aprendí / I learned hands.

Firma de los padres

Maribels Journal Illustration 2
Entry #2 - October 14, 1999 - Student drew a picture of her hand and copied the word "hand". Teacher wrote in Spanish "Maribel aprendió que tiene mano izquierda y derecha. Por favor de repasar esto en la casa" (Maribel learned that she has a left and right hand, please review
this with her at home), and signed. Maribel’s mother signed and responded to the teacher in Spanish. She wrote, “Maribel me dijo que tiene una mano izquierda y una derecha” (Maribel told me that she has a left and a right hand). Maribel is now copying from the board as evidenced by her writing, “hands.” She knows this word and can read it.
Maribel aprendió a trazar figuras.
Como un trapezio, triangulo, cuadro.
Repasa los nombres de las figuras con Maribel.
Sra. Vargas Piel.

Maribel sabe cual es triangulo y cuadro.

Firma de los padres: [Signature]

Maribel’s Journal Illustration 3

Entry #3 - January 26, 2000 - Student drew a picture of seven different shapes and copied “to trace shapes”. Teacher wrote in Spanish, “Maribel aprendió a trazar figuras como un trapezio, triángulo, cuadro. Repasa los nombres de las figuras con Maribel” (Maribel learned to
trace shapes, like a trapezoid, triangle, square. Review the names of the shapes with Maribel), and signed. Maribel’s mother signed and responded in Spanish, “Maribel sabe cual es triángulo y cuadro, ya los estudió (Maribel knows which one is the triangle and square, she studied them).” Her mother makes sure that the teacher knows that she studied them.
Maribel’s Journal Illustration 4

Entry #4 - April 12, 2000 - Student drew a picture of the sequential order of the life cycle of a ladybug and wrote on her own, “to make a Dlif lfs ladybug.” Teacher wrote in Spanish, “Maribel dice que aprendió “to make the life of a ladybug.” Preguntale lo que escribió.”
Gracias, (Maribel says that she learned to make the life of a ladybug. Ask her what she wrote, Thank you, and signed). Maribel's mother signed and responded in Spanish, "Maribel aprendió como crece una ladybug y me enseñó su libro que hico, y me explicó como cresen (Maribel learned how a ladybug grows and she showed me her book that she made and explained to me how they grow)." The mother continues to write and is unaffected by her misspellings of "hico" for "hizo," "cresen" for "crecen," and "espicó" for "explicó." The use of unconventional spelling does not inhibit the mother from communicating with the teacher, which is the goal.
Entry #1 - August 16, 2000 - Student drew a picture of different shapes using different colors, she did not finish the sentence "I learned...," teacher finished the sentence for her (by writing "pattern of shapes"). Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Zayra hizo un patrón." Mother signed journal but
did not respond to the teacher's entry. I, as the teacher forgot to write in my message to ask Zayra to tell her mother what she learned. That is probably why she didn't respond.
Zayra's Journal Illustration 2

Entry #2 - November 08, 1999 - Student drew a picture of a fish tank and copied "to paint fish." Note that she used a period at the end of the sentence. Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Zayra pintó un "fish" con los dedos (fingers)." "Fish" empieza con la letra "F." (Zayra painted a fish
with her fingers. Fish begins with the letter "F," teacher
signed). Zayra’s father signed and responded in Spanish.
"Zayra estuvo muy contenta porque me dijo que pintó un
pescado, por eso traía su mano pintada de rojo y aprendió
que pescado en inglés comienza con la letra "F" (Zayra was
very happy because she told me that she painted a fish,
that is why her hand was painted red and she learned that
fish in English begins with the letter "F")." Both
Zayra’s mother and father take turns in responding. As one
can tell, the father was very pleased that his daughter had
learned the letter "f" because Zayra was happy.
Zayra's Journal Illustration 3

Entry #3 - February 09, 2000 - Student drew a picture of a dinosaur and copied "to make a dinosaur." Zayra continues to copy and also continues to end her sentences with a period. Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Zayra hizo un dinosaurio. Preguntale cuales otras palabras empiezan con..."
la letra Dd." (Zayra made a dinosaur ask her what other words begin with the letter Dd. Mrs. Vargas Piel). Father signed and responded in Spanish. "Zayrita hoy me está diciendo que aprendió a hacer un dinosaurio, y me está diciendo palabras que comienzan con la letra d como, dog, dolphin, duck, dollars y dinosaur (Zayrita is telling me that today she learned to make a dinosaur, and she is telling me words that begin with the letter d like dog, dolphin, duck, dollars and dinosaur)." It is obvious that the father followed directions because Zayra told him other words in English and the father wrote them in English!
Zayra’s Journal Illustration 4

Entry #4 - April 10, 2000 - Student drew a picture of three bugs and wrote on her own, "to mek a bugs."

Zayra’s entry demonstrates a move away from just copying to her generating text in her second language. She is now using the alphabetic writing system in English as evidenced
by the word "mek" for "make." Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Zayra dice que aprendió "to make bugs." Pregúntale cuantas patas tiene el "bee." Gracias, Sra. Vargas Piel (Zayra said that she learned to make bugs. Ask her how many feet a bee has. Thank you Mrs. Vargas Piel)." Mother signed and responded in English and Spanish, "Zayra counted the feet of the "bee." There are 10 feet. Mrs. Vargas Piel yo escribí en English, como ella me lo dicta y estoy aprendiendo con mi hija. Por eso si tengo errores. Disculpe me Gracias (I am writing in English the way she dictates it to me and I am learning with my daughter. That is why there are errors. Forgive me Thank you)." In this entry the mother takes major risks by attempting to write partially in English. This shows the parents feel free to take risks.
Ricardo's Journal Illustration 1

Entry #1 - August 17, 1999 - Student drew a picture of a colored pattern and did not finish the sentence, "I learned..." Ricardo was instructed to copy the word "patterns" from the board however, he did not feel confident enough to take the risk, so the teacher finished
the sentence by writing the word "patterns," while reiterating to Ricardo what he learned. Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Ricky necesita ayuda en conocer patrones. Como...^0^0^0 otro patron... 0@0@0@." (signed) MVPiel (Ricky need help in recognizing patterns. Like... ^0^0 another pattern 0@0@0@, MVPiel). Mother signed journal but did not respond to the teacher’s entry. It is apparent that mother did not feel comfortable enough to write in Ricardo’s journal.
Ricardo’s Journal Illustration 2
Entry #2 - November 18, 1999 - Student drew a picture of fly and flower in a repeating pattern and copied “how to make a pattern.” Ricardo is demonstrating that he feels comfortable in taking the risk of copying text. Teacher wrote in Spanish, “Ricardo hizo un patron usando cosas que empiezan con la letra F. Ayuda a Ricardo encontrar cosas que empiezan con la letra F.”
en la casa que empiezan con la letra F (Ricardo made a pattern using things that begin with the letter F. Help Ricardo find items at home that begin with the letter F).”

Mother signed and responded in Spanish, “Ricardo me dijo q’ el hizo dibujos q’ empiezan con la letra F. Y en casa encontro la palabra fan, funel, famaly, y empiezan con la letra F (Ricardo told me that he made pictures that begin with the letter F. And at home found the word, fan, funel, famaly and they begin with the letter F).” It is obvious that the mother followed directions because she lists three words that begin with the letter “f.” The mother is unaffected by her misspelling of the word “funel” for “funnel,” and “famaly” for “family.” The use of unconventional spelling does not inhibit the mother from communicating with the teacher.
Ricardo’s Journal Illustration 3

Entry #3 - March 28, 2000 - Student drew a picture of three dinosaurs and copied “to add dinosaurs.” In comparison to Ricardo’s journal entry #2, the boldness and formation of his printing shows he is developing more confidence as a writer. Teacher wrote in Spanish, “Ricardo
no termino con tiempo. Ayudale con las sumas por favor. Gracias, Sra. Vargas Piel (Ricardo did not finish on time. Please help him with adding).” Mother signed and responded in Spanish, “Ricardo me dijo q’ no pudo sumar y en casa lo estoy ayudando para q’ así él pueda hacerlo en la escuela (Ricardo told me that he could not add and I am helping him at home so he will be able to do it at school).” By reading the mother’s journal entry the teacher knows that mother is aware of Ricardo’s difficulties with understanding the concept of addition. Also, the mother’s entry informs the teacher that she is willing to help her son at home so he will be able to transfer this concept to the classroom.
Ricardo dice que aprendió "butterfly" pero el aprendió "the life of a butterfly."

Ricky told me that he learned the life of a butterfly. First is an egg, then it turns into a little worm. Butter fly.
evidenced by the sound/letter correspondence to his written text. The teacher told him that he learned “the life of a butterfly.” Ricardo wrote the letter “b,” probably to represent the word butterfly and “AFA,” for the words “of a,” and “FD” for bu(D)tter(F)ly. Teacher wrote in Spanish, “Ricardo dice que aprendió “butterfly” pero él aprendió “the life of a butterfly.” MVPiel (Ricardo says that he learned butterfly, but he learned the life of a butterfly. MVPiel). Father signed and responded in English, “Ricky told me that he learned the life of a Butterfly. First is an egg then it turns into a little worm and then it turns into a Beutiful Butterfly”. In this entry father takes a major risk by attempting to write in English. He is unaffected by his use of grammar and the misspelling of “beutiful,” for “beautiful.” The use of unconventional spelling does not inhibit the father from communicating with the teacher.
Jazmine’s Journal Illustration 1

Entry #1 - August 24, 1999 - Student drew a picture of a pig and copied the letter "P." Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Jazmine aprendió la letra "P," P is for pig (Jazmine learned the letter "P")." Teacher signed, MVPiel. Mother signed but did not respond to teacher’s entry. At this
time Jazmine is just writing letters and is considered to be using the presyllabic writing system.
Entry #2 - November 04, 1999 - Student drew a picture of a seed in six different growing stages and copied "to order." Jazmine is now copying from the board as evidenced by her writing, "to order." Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Jazmine aprendió que una calabaza crece de una semilla."
Ayudale buscar otra frutas que crecen de semilla. Gracias, MVPiel (Jazmine learned that a pumpkin grows from a seed. Help her find other fruits that grow from a seed. Thank you MVPiel)." Mother signed and responded in Spanish, "Jazmine aprendió que la sandía, tomate crece también de una semilla (Jazmine learned that a watermelon and tomato also grow from a seed)." Mother’s entry demonstrates that she read the teacher’s entry while sharing it with her daughter.
Jazmine's Journal Illustration 3

Entry #3 - February 08, 2000 - Student drew a picture of a triceratops hat and copied "to make a dinosaur hat."

Note that she used a period at the end of her sentence. Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Jazmine hizo un sombrero de dinosaurio. Pregúntale cuál dinosaurio es. Sra. Vargas"
Piel (Jazmine made a dinosaur hat. Ask her which dinosaur it is. Mrs. Vargas Piel).” Mother signed and responded in Spanish, “Jazmine trató de pronunciar la palabra pero tuvo dificultades, pero practicamos (Jazmine tried to pronounce the word but had difficulty, but we practiced).” Mother’s entry shows that both parent and child are interacting by reading the teacher’s entry. Mother was made aware that Jazmine had difficulty pronouncing the word “triceratops,” however they both practiced pronouncing the word.
Jazmine’s Journal Illustration 4

Entry #4 - April 10, 2000 - Student drew a picture of a bee and wrote on her own, “to m a bee.” Jazmine’s entry demonstrates a move away from just copying to her generating text in her second language. She is now using the alphabetic writing system in English as evidenced by
the word "to," "a" and "bee." She used the first letter "m" to represent the word "make." Teacher wrote in Spanish, "Jazmine dice que aprendió "to make a bee." Preguntale cuantas alas tiene el "bee." Gracias, Sra. Vargas Piel" (Jazmine says that she learned to make a bee. Ask her how many wings the bee has. Thank you, Mrs. Vargas Piel). Mother signed and responded in English, "Jazmine said that the bee has two wings also I told her that she needs to practice how to write "to make a bee" she keeps forgetting how to write it!"
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF STATEMENTS AND CONCLUSION

In this study home response learning journals were utilized with students and parents at the beginning of the school year (July 1999) until the end of the year (June 2000). The lack of parent journal entries during the first month confirmed that parents were not accustomed to having a teacher collaborate with them regarding the development of their child’s literacy. By the second month of school, parents were beginning to communicate with the teacher in writing about what they were noticing about their child’s literacy development; parents were answering the questions asked by the teacher. Teacher and parents were forming a common bond; they shared an interest in the literacy development of their student.

Teacher, parent and child were all taking an active part in their roles as “teacher” and “learner.” The role of learner was appropriated not only by the child, but also by both teacher and parent. I began to see the parents’ entries grow, questions were not only being made to the parents by the teacher but the parents felt comfortable enough to also ask questions of the teacher.

Throughout history these students (ELL) have been labeled by our school system and other teachers with deficit myths, such as “learning disabled”, “culturally
deprived", "limited-English speaking", and "at risk" for failure just because they are from non-mainstream backgrounds (Flores, 1982). The learning journals confirm that these students are proficient language users just like their parents, and bring many experiences into the classroom (Flores, 1982). By the third quarter of school the students were no longer relying on modeled writing, they were generating their own text in their second language. In addition to generating their own text, many of the students' pictures developed into beautiful art work which displayed pride and ownership in their journal entries. Parents began looking forward to the next days picture and journal entry, reading the journals at home became part of the students daily lives. It is obvious that knowledge of their first language supported their learning in a second language. Using home response learning journals gave these children the opportunities to learn language in a rich integrated setting that became a regular classroom activity.

In addition to the myths about these children, some teachers believe the parents are unconcerned about the academic progress of their children. Contrary to negative beliefs by many teachers, it is evident that the parents see the learning journal activity as a meaningful literacy engagement that not only motivates them but also supports
their interest in school. With continued use of the journals, I began to see the students' literacy flourish along with parents input and concern. They began to take an active role in their child's literacy and biliteracy learning.

The parents' journal entries also began to grow along with the teachers. Questions from the teacher were now being consistently answered. Other unintended but pleasant consequences also occurred. For example, I became familiar with affectionate names that the parents used when writing about their child. As parents and I continued to interact (using written dialogue) about language experiences with the student, the students' school and home lives became more connected. This connection can't help but have a significant impact on academic achievement.

Conclusion

The constant socio-historical changes in education, like Proposition 227 confronted me with a dilemma that compelled me to adapt the use of interactive journals with kindergarten English language learners. I envisioned the learning journals as a communication tool with Spanish speaking parents, making them more aware of their child's development and learning capabilities. A custom of many Spanish-speaking parents is to have the utmost respect towards their child's teachers and they demonstrate this by
remaining silent during parent-teacher conferences. These parents feel it would be disrespectful to question the teacher’s authority, teachers who are not culturally aware will take their silence as a sign of illiteracy or having no interest or concern in their child’s learning. I saw the learning journals as a straightforward plan of action that would cut through any communication barriers. The idea of the home response learning journals is to connect the student’s school life with their home life by making their parents an active participant in their literacy and biliteracy development.

I did not want to compromise ethics and pedagogical knowledge, therefore this adaptation was a more acceptable solution and support system for children and parents. Teacher and child, parent and child, parent and teacher, together organized a worthy literacy engagement and a powerful socio-cultural communication activity (see appendix B-Questionnaire Parent Responses). Not only did the students gain from this experience but also the teacher and parents. Parents better understood their student’s actual developmental level and helped them reach their potential level without even realizing it. The home response learning journals helped students recognize the power of language and the importance of having a voice. It showed them how written language is used to communicate and the specific rules that accompany the written language such
as, sentences beginning with capital letters and ending with a period (in both English and Spanish). Students began using the presyllabic writing system and then developed as writers by using the alphabetic writing system in their second language.

Moreover, the use of the learning journals and the relationships that developed between students and teacher, and parent and teacher has ignited a deep sense of pride within me. I grew up attending public school in California and was aware, even as a small child, of the negative attitudes towards minority students. Unlike the writers of Proposition 227, I did not feel justified in restricting or denying parents and students participation in education. Through these journals I wanted to make a significant difference to say with great pride and satisfaction that I am proud to be biliterate, bilingual and bicultural. I can only hope that all my students and their parents feel the same. Most importantly, the home response learning journals enabled parents to voice their concerns and participate in their child’s schooling, despite unethical laws like Proposition 227.
APPENDIX A

JOURNAL INSTRUCTIONS

"Learning Journals"

Outside cover of the students learning journal.

Inside of the journal.

The teacher uses the communication page to inform the parent what the student worked on that day (learned). Teacher informs parent on how the child progressed and makes suggestions or questions regarding the student. Parent answers teacher's questions or responds to teacher with information which may be helpful to the students literacy learning.

Student draws a picture of what s/he worked on (learned). Student then writes sentence about what s/he learned (modeled writing in English, later independent). Student takes journal home everyday and shares with parents what s/he learned. Parents are to sign, read notes from teacher, and respond in writing as child watches.
Estimada Familia,

Cada día su estudiante va a escribir lo que a aprendido en la clase. Yo les voy a escribir un mensaje del progreso de su estudiante y también les voy a ofrecer ideas de cómo puede ayudar a su hija/o. Es muy importante que nos estemos comunicando sobre el aprendizaje del estudiante. Por favor lea lo que les escribo en voz alta para que su hija/o escuche. Escribame un mensaje y léalo en voz alta para que su hija/o sepa que nosotros estamos en comunicación continua.

Gracias

LearningJournal@MVargasPie1
Dear Family,

Your child will be using his/her journal to write about what they have learned in class. I will be writing a message to you regarding your child's progress, and I will also include ideas that will help with your child's learning. It is very important for us to communicate about your child's progress in school. Please read what I have written out loud so your child can hear my message.

Please write back to me and read the message you have written so your child can also hear your message, this way your child knows that we are both aware of his/her progress.

Thank you.

1999 © M Vargas Piel
Aprendí / I learned

Firma de los padres

Estimada familia,
Es el tiempo de preguntarles si los diarios de aprendizaje les ha ayudado
con el desarrollo literario de su hijo/a.

¿Leyeron el diario en voz alta con su estudiante?

__________________________________________________________________________________

¿Quién leyó el diario (mamá o papá)?

__________________________________________________________________________________

¿Otras personas de la familia participaron cuando estaban leyendo el
diario?

__________________________________________________________________________________

¿Les gusto leer el diario? Sí / No? Porqué?

__________________________________________________________________________________

Por favor de regresar.
Gracias,

Sra. Marie Vargas Piel
QUESTIONNAIRE TO PARENTS (ENGLISH)

Dear family,

It is time to find out if the Learning Journals have helped with your child’s literacy development.

Question #1. Did you read the journal out loud with your student?

Question #2. Who read the journal (mom or dad)?

Question #3. Did other family members participate while the journal was being read?

Question #4. Did you enjoy reading the journal?
   Yes /No? Why?
QUESTIONNAIRE PARENT RESPONSES

PARENT #1

Question #1. Together we learned to add, count draw and make patterns and distinguish colors.

Question #2. Mom

Question #3. My son, the older one, whose name is Jorge.

Question #4. Yes, because it is beautiful to know the learning process of our son and his capabilities and also because together we have learned things.
PARENT #2

Question #1. Yes, all the time.

Question #2. Dad

Question #3. Yes, Mom

Question #4. Yes, because it is a way of being aware of our children's progress in their daily learning and it also make us aware of what they are learning.
PARENT #3

Question #1. Yes, every afternoon Noel asks us to sign and read it for him.

Question #2. Both Mom and Dad.

Question #3. On some occasions Noel’s older brothers participate in reading.

Question #4. Certainly, aside from us liking it, it helps to motivate Noel and all children to become interested in reading in the afternoons when they are outside of school.
PARENT #4

Question #1. Yes, every afternoon, we read the journal after school.

Question #2. Sometimes mom and other times dad.

Question #3. Jazmine, Mom and Dad.

Question #4. Yes, because it gives us an idea to know what our daughter is learning and Jazmine also explains what she did.
PARENT #5

Question #1. Yes, we read the journal everyday so we can know what was done at school and what they are learning.

Question #2. The both of us because we want her to know that we are both interested in her learning.

Question #3. Yes, the ones that are at home.

Question #4. Yes, because she feels very happy because she is learning and she likes to read it so she can learn more. And it is like everyday homework that she needs to practice and that is good.
APPENDIX C

PROPOSITION 227

English Language in Public Schools Initiative Statute

Proposition 227 - Full Text of the Proposed Law

This initiative measure is submitted to the people in accordance with the provisions of Article II, Section 8 of the Constitution.

This initiative measure adds sections to the Education Code; therefore new provisions proposed to be added are printed in italic type to indicate that they are new.

PROPOSED LAW

SECTION 1. Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 300) is added to Part 1 of the Education Code, to read:

Chapter 3. English Language Education for Immigrant Children

Article 1. Findings and Declarations

300. The People of California find and declare as follows:

(a) Whereas, The English language is the national public language of the United States of America and of the State of California, is spoken by the vast majority of California residents, and is also the leading world language for science, technology, and international business, thereby being the language of economic opportunity; and

(b) Whereas, Immigrant parents are eager to have
their children acquire a good knowledge of English, thereby allowing them to fully participate in the American Dream of economic and social advancement; and

(c) Whereas, The government and public schools of California have a moral obligation and constitutional duty to provide all of California’s children, regardless of their ethnicity or national origins, with the skills necessary to become productive members of our society, and of these skills, literacy in the English language is among the most important; and

(d) Whereas, The public schools of California currently do a poor job of educating immigrant children, wasting financial resources on costly experimental language programs whose failure over the past two decades is demonstrated by the current high drop-out rates and low English literacy levels of many immigrant children; and

(e) Whereas, Young immigrant children can easily acquire full fluency in a new language, such as English, if they are heavily exposed to that language in the classroom at an early age.

(f) Therefore, It is resolved that: all children in California public schools shall be taught English as rapidly and effectively as possible.
Article 2. English Language Education

305. Subject to the exceptions provided in Article 3 (commencing with Section 310), all children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English. In particular, this shall require that all children be placed in English language classrooms. Children who are English learners shall be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one year. Local schools shall be permitted to place in the same classroom English learners of different ages but whose degree of English proficiency is similar.

Local schools shall be encourage to mix together in the same classroom English learners from different native-language groups but with the same degree of English fluency. Once English learners have acquired a good working knowledge of English, they shall be transferred to English language mainstream classrooms. As much as possible, current supplemental funding for English learners shall be maintained, subject to possible modification under Article 8 (commencing with Section 335) below.

306. The definitions of the terms used in this article and in Article 3 (commencing with Section 310) are as follows:

(a) "English learner" means a child who does not speak English or whose native language is not English and who is
not currently able to perform ordinary classroom work in English, also known as a Limited English Proficiency of LEP child.

(b) “English language classroom” means a classroom in which the language of instruction used by the teaching personnel is overwhelmingly the English language, and in which such teaching personnel possess a good knowledge of the English language.

(c) “English language mainstream classroom” means a classroom in which the pupils either are native English language speakers or already have acquired reasonable fluency in English.

(d) “Sheltered English immersion” or “structured English immersion” means an English language acquisition process for young children in which nearly all classroom instruction is in English but with the curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language.

(e) “Bilingual education/native language instruction” means a language acquisition process for pupils in which much or all instruction, textbooks, and teaching materials are in the child’s native language.
Article 3. Parental Exceptions

310. The requirements of Section 305 may be waived with the prior written informed consent, to be provided annually, of the child’s parents or legal guardian under the circumstances specified below and in Section 311. Such informed consent shall require that said parents or legal guardian personally visit the school to apply for the waiver and that they there be provided a full description of the educational materials to be used in the different educational program choices and all the educational opportunities available to the child. Under such parental waiver conditions, children may be transferred to classes where they are taught English and other subjects through bilingual education techniques or other generally recognized educational methodologies permitted by law. Individual schools in which 20 pupils or more of a given grade level receive a waiver shall be required to offer such class: otherwise they must allow the pupils to transfer to a public school in which such a class is offered.

311. The circumstances in which a parental exception waiver may be granted under Section 310 are as follows:

(a) Children who already know English: the child already possesses good English language skills, as measured by standardized tests of English vocabulary comprehension, reading, and writing, in which the child scores at or above
the state average for his or her grade level or at or above the 5th grade average, whichever is lower; or

(b) Older children: the child is age 10 years or older, and it is the informed belief of the school principal and educational staff that an alternate course of educational study would be better suited to the child's rapid acquisition of basic English language skills; or

(c) Children with special needs: the child already has been placed for a period of not less than thirty days during that school year in an English language classroom and it is subsequently the informed belief of the school principal and educational staff that the child has such special physical, emotional, psychological, or educational needs that an alternate course of educational study would be better suited to the child's overall educational development. A written description of these special needs must be provided and any such decision is to be made subject to the examination and approval of the local school superintendent, under guidelines established by and subject to the review of the local Board of Education and ultimately the State Board of Education. The existence of such special needs shall not compel issuance of a waiver, and the parents shall be fully informed of their right to refuse to agree to a waiver.
Article 4. Community-Based English Tutoring

315. In furtherance of its constitutional and legal requirement to offer special language assistance to children coming from backgrounds of limited English proficiency, the state shall encourage family members and others to provide personal English language tutoring to such children, and support these efforts by raising the general level of English language knowledge in the community. Commencing with the fiscal year in which this initiative is enacted and for each of the nine fiscal years following thereafter, a sum of fifty million dollars ($50,000,000) per year is hereby appropriated from the General Fund for the purpose of providing additional funding for free or subsidized programs of adult English language instruction to parents of other members of the community who pledge to provide personal English language tutoring to California school children with limited English proficiency.

316. Programs funded pursuant to this section shall be provided through schools or community organizations. Funding for these programs shall be administered by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and shall be disbursed at the discretion of the local school boards, under reasonable guidelines established by, and subject to the review of, the State Board of Education.
Article 5. Legal Standing and Parental Enforcement

320. As detailed in Article 2 (commencing with Section 305) and Article 3 (commencing with Section 310), all California school children have the right to be provided with an English language public education. If a California school child has been denied the option of an English language instructional curriculum in public school, the child's parent or legal guardian shall have legal standing to sue for enforcement of the provisions of this statute, and if successful shall be awarded normal and customary attorney's fees and actual damages, but not punitive of consequential damages. Any school board member or other elected official or public school teacher or administrator who willfully and repeatedly refuses to implement the terms of this statute by providing such an English language educational option at an available public school to a California school child may be held personally liable for fees and actual damages by the child's parents or legal guardian.

Article 6. Severability

325. If any part or parts of this statute are found to be in conflict with federal law or the United States of the California State Constitution, the statute shall be implemented to the maximum extent that federal law, and the United Stated and the California State Constitution permit.
Any provision held invalid shall be severed from the remaining portions of this statute.

Article 7. Operative Date
330. This initiative shall become operative for all school terms which begin more than sixty days following the date on which it becomes effective.

Article 8. Amendment
335. The provisions of this act may be amended by a statute that becomes effective upon approval by the electorate of by a statute to further the act’s purpose passed by a two-thirds vote of each house of the Legislature and signed by the Governor.

Article 9. Interpretation
340. Under circumstances in which portions of this statute are subject to conflicting interpretations. Section 300 shall be assumed to contain the governing intent of the statute.
REFERENCES


Flores, B. (1982). *Naming, Interrogating, And Transforming Deficit Myths In Education*. California State University, San Bernardino.


