

Linguistic Access and Participation: English Language Learners in an English-Dominant Community of Practice

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Abstract

This investigation explored the ways in which English language learners (ELLs) included in an English-dominant, mainstream second-grade classroom gained access to classroom activities and to the language that conveyed them, and the ways in which these students came to participate in the classroom context. These questions were investigated through the lens of the theoretical construct of community of practice, which emphasizes learning as participation in social practices. Qualitative methodologies such as observations, interviews with students and teachers, field notes, and videotaping and audiotaping of student–student and student–teacher interactions were employed. The findings of this study suggest that for ELLs in the English-dominant environment, their linguistic access to classroom activities and their progression toward meaningful participation were in many ways complicated by: (a) unequal participation in the classroom activities, (b) ambiguities in the purposes of instruction, and (c) vagueness in communication by teachers (i.e., lack of clarity when giving directions, poor word choices, and incomplete explanations). Consequentially, the general divide of shared knowledge among members of the class gave way to subcommunities that were parallel to one another, creating a disconnection between the participants of the classroom community.

Introduction and Literature Review

“What is it to learn?” I asked Marisa, a second-grade, native speaker of English in an English-dominant classroom. Promptly she answered, “To learn is when you read, you talk to the people, and you find out stuff.” I then asked

the same question (in English) of Sabrina, an English language learner (ELL) and native speaker of Spanish, a student in the same classroom as Marisa. She promptly answered, "Learning is when you spell C-A-T. Then [you] say: 'The cat is going to the lake. The duck is going for a walk. The dog is playing.' And you practice it over and over until you get it right."

This excerpt from the data collected for the current study serves to illustrate the fact that ELLs and native speakers of English included in the same classroom may participate differently in the educational context. In many districts across the United States, including the one selected for this investigation, the most recent trend has been to include ELLs in classrooms where English is the dominant language and also the medium of instruction. However, the actual circumstances of these students and how they come to participate as learners in these classroom contexts have largely remained unclear.

In this study I was most interested in the role of sociocultural elements in relation to beginning-level ELLs as they interacted with each other, with native speakers of English, and with the classroom teachers while participating in learning activities in the classroom context. Drawing primarily from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), as well as Lave's (2004) more recent reconceptualizations of learning within communities of practice, that is, learning involving participation in the practices of a given community, I set out to closely examine the learning trajectories of beginning-level ELLs in relation to native speakers of English in a second-grade, English-dominant classroom, and also to ascertain how these students gained access to the practices of the classroom community.

Communities of Practice

From a community of practice perspective, learning is fundamentally situated in activity, context, and culture (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, learning is regarded as a process of being and becoming socialized in a particular community as it involves picking up the jargon, behavior, and norms of a new social group as well as adopting the group's belief systems to become a member of the culture (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). In addition, Lave (2004), in her most recent discussions of communities of practice, emphasized the notions of internalization and change. That is, by engaging in the practices of a community, human beings not only learn new concepts, but also transform themselves, fashioning new identities for themselves within that context (see also Pavlenko, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

More specifically, from this perspective, learning is viewed as a trajectory of development leading to competence through a process of guided participation in which newcomers participate in attenuated ways in the practices of a particular community, or legitimate peripheral participation, to use Lave and Wenger's (1991) term. Legitimate peripheral participation is used to

describe participants' engagement in the practices of a community where participants have different degrees of familiarity with these practices. Participants may be experts or novices, or what Lave and Wenger call *newcomers* and *old timers*. It may be noteworthy, however, that the notion of socialization into a particular community in this conception does not imply homogeneity or assimilation. Instead, Lave and Wenger recognized that old timers and newcomers have different opportunities for access to participation and to community resources. Also, they are differently empowered, are variously involved in negotiating legitimate activities for the community, and are simultaneously in conflict and affiliation with one another.

English Language Learning in English-Dominant Classrooms

In the last few decades there has been a welcomed shift in the educational literature from viewing cultural and linguistic diversity as a deficit, to addressing multilingualism and multiculturalism in a positive light: as something to celebrate, or at least to capitalize upon. However, in actual classroom practices, such a shift may not have been realized beyond the rhetorical levels of the literature from the field. Some research commentaries contend that the upbeat rhetoric surrounding multilingual and multicultural educational communities is exaggerated (Lubienski, 2003). Euphemized views of institutional settings where native and non-native speakers of English meet may serve to mask the historical, structural, and ideological conditions that continue to favor dominant groups, and to gloss over inherently unjust circumstances that typically undermine linguistic, ethnic, and/or racial minority students in our educational system.

Recent studies have shown that ELLs, when included in English-dominant environments, continue to be segregated from native English speakers through limitations in their access to the kinds of interactions and activities that would permit them to develop the body of knowledge necessary for academic success (Gebhard, 2003; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2001; Manyak, 2002). During his recent keynote address at the 2002 Ethnography in Education Research Forum, Luis Moll asserted that when ELLs enter an English-dominant school environment, there is a strong likelihood that they will

engage in low level academic curriculum befitting [their] low social class status that will limit [their] chances for academic achievement; suffer the indignity of psychological violence having Spanish, [their] home language banned; spend hours every week doing language drills on nonsense phonemes with little time devoted to understanding what [they] mean; face a strong likelihood of being labeled retarded or learning disabled for the rest of [their] school career; flunk or not pass a test of highly questionable validity but that is politically expedient; and, risk being taught by a teacher with limited or no qualifications. (p. 11)

Focusing specifically on language as a community resource, Gutiérrez and Larson (1994) described how the privileging of the English language in school relegates Latino children to “contexts for learning that limit participation in and access to the forms or practices of literacy that are central to language development and successful membership in academic communities” (p. 23). Shannon (1995) and Norton (2001) have suggested that, as a result of the hegemonic nature of English in the educational system, minority-language speakers, when included in English-dominant environments, take on the burden of an inferior status and are treated as inferiors by their English-monolingual peers. Toohey (2000) proposed that the dominance of English as a mediating tool for learning, and the casting of an inferior status if one does not know English well enough to understand classroom content, are factors that restrict the advancement of ELLs toward meaningful participation in the practices of classroom communities.

Even though the reviewed research on second language acquisition consistently demonstrated that the academic difficulties ELLs face may result from the ideological privileges given to English, activism for English-only endeavors to restrict the public use of minority languages continues to gain strength and to be widely reflected in policies that guide current educational standards-based reforms (see Cummins, 2000; Crawford, 2000). Close examinations of how such policies actually play out in daily classroom practices continue to be needed.

The Study

Participants and Setting

The school where I conducted this investigation is located in the Southwest region of the United States, in one of the fastest growing communities in the country. The most recent census performed by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000 showed that for this area, a total population growth of 85% occurred since 1990, bringing the number of residents to almost a million and a half. Within this growing community, the Latino population had increased by 264% in the 10 years prior to the study.

The school district for this community has become one of the largest in the country, and the population of language-minority students represented in the school district, reflective of the larger community, had more than tripled in the decade prior to the 2000 census and now makes up over 42% of the student population. This rapid growth of ELLs has posed considerable strain on educators and on the quality of education that ELLs receive.

At the onset of the study, the school, Woodside Elementary (pseudonym), had recently eliminated its bilingual program because school administrators, based on results from standardized tests, judged it to be ineffective. Therefore,

all ELLs had been placed in mainstream classrooms. Approximately 60% of the student body at Woodside is Hispanic. The faculty was composed of mostly non-Hispanic White, middle-class, female teachers. Most teachers in the school, including the teachers who participated in the study, did not hold Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) certification or endorsements. The principal reported that the overall lack of material resources and trained teachers to support multilingual classroom communities posed great challenges for teachers, administrators, and parents alike. Aided by support staff and by reading specialists, teachers made do with the pedagogical knowledge and skills that were available to them. Indeed, the high levels of concern regarding ELLs expressed by the community at large (including parents and administrators) served as one impetus for this study.

I selected a second-grade classroom (Room 14) for this investigation based on my prior observations of several classrooms in the school and on the principal's recommendation regarding my request to view a student-centered, largely participatory approach to teaching and learning in order to help me understand how ELLs were gaining access to the practices of the community. In fact, the organization of the classroom was such that students sat in teams of four, and they were usually engaged in interactions with each other doing group work. They spent most of their day in these teams, working on teacher-assigned tasks, participating in guided reading lessons, or working at independent learning centers. The reading groups were formed according to ability levels (based on informal reading inventory scores), but other groups were formed by affinities, such as common interests.

The participants in this study (see Table 1) were the students of Room 14 (10 English monolingual students and 6 ELLs); Ms. A., the classroom teacher; Ms. B., the special education teacher aide; and Mr. P., a student teacher. The ELLs were all native speakers of Spanish. Five of the 6 ELL students in this study had been classified as limited English proficient (LEP), due to their scores on the Language Assessment Scales (LAS), an English-language proficiency test students took upon entering the school and then again when they entered second grade. The exception, Maya, had not yet been tested but had been classified by the school as a non-English speaker because she had recently emigrated from Guatemala and spoke virtually no English. (All names given to students in this study are pseudonyms.)

In relation to the classroom teachers, it is important to further explain that Ms. A. was a veteran of 20 years and had recently received an award from the State Department of Education for her ability to work with diverse student populations. Her training was mostly in special education, teaching multi-age classes, and literacy. However, she had expressed many worries about being able to meet the needs of ELLs.

Table 1

English Language Learner (ELL) Students in Ms. A.'s Second-Grade Class

Name	Age	Country of origin	Language Assessment Scales (LAS)–Oral score/level (beginning of year)	Time in United States at onset of study
Edson	10	Mexico	43/1 (preproduction)	4 years
Eduardo	8	Mexico	64/2 (early production)	8 years
Lucia	8	Mexico	41/1 (preproduction)	3 years
Luis	8	Mexico	38/1 (preproduction)	5 years
Maya	7	Guatemala	Not tested	4 months
Sabrina	7	Cuba	46/1 (preproduction)	2 years

Note. The assigned grade levels for immigrant students as they entered the school was based on the discretion of the principal. Edson had also been retained for a couple of years. The LAS is a commercially produced assessment instrument adopted by the school district of this investigation. Scores of 0–60 were interpreted by the testing administrators as *preproduction*, Level 1; 61–120 as *early production*, Level 2; and 121–180 as *speech emergent*, Level 3.

Ms. B. was a special education teacher aide who frequently came to Room 14 to assist some of the students with special needs in Ms. A.'s class, and also gave assistance with the ELLs. Since the bilingual education program had recently been dismantled at Woodside, there were no specialized programs for ELLs. However, because of their LEP classification, these students were entitled by law (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974)¹ to receive additional services in the school such as English-language instruction and curricular modifications. Thus, on a daily basis they received remedial instruction from Ms. B, following the tradition of the cooperative/consultative (CC) model, more commonly known as the Inclusion Model.² Lastly, it is worth noting that Mr. P. was a student teacher placed in Ms. A.'s class during the final 2 months of this study and taught the class for about 50% of the instructional day. I chose to include data from Mr. P.'s instruction because he had been receiving training in a TESL endorsement program. The methods of instruction he used to address ELLs were influenced by the education he was receiving at the local university. All the teachers participating in this study were English monolinguals, and English was the medium of instruction.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study lasted for 5 months, and for most of that time I visited the classroom four times a week as a participant observer. About 30 hours of videotapes were recorded during various activities at different times during the typical school day. About 8 hours of audiotapes were recorded during interviews, and these, as well as my anecdotal records of students' interactions, formed the data record and allowed for close examination of complex relationships among students, activity, and context, both moment to moment and over time. In addition, I collected student artifacts (e.g., journals, drawings, work samples, etc.) at the end of every week. My rationale for drawing from so many different forms of data was to provide a multifaceted view of ELLs' interactions with each other, their interactions with the other members of the class, and the classroom context over time. In addition, I conducted one-on-one informal interviews with the teachers in the study throughout the process of the investigation to make explicit their pedagogical beliefs regarding ELLs. I also conducted informal interviews with all participating students (ELLs and native English speakers) throughout the course of this investigation in both English and Spanish. In-process analyses took place after each visit to the classroom, when I reviewed the data gathered through the lens of the theoretical constructs that guided this study.

It may be worth mentioning that, as a qualitative researcher, I realized that the analysis of the data was embedded in my own biographical experiences and perspectives. Of possible relevance to my analysis of the data is the fact that I am a native speaker of Portuguese and an immigrant from Brazil who arrived in the United States as an adult and who went through the process of learning English and then, later, Spanish. This fact may have influenced my conceptions of language learning and of cultural understandings. In addition, I was able to speak in Spanish to the focal students for this research and find out information that was not readily available to the teacher, who was a monolingual speaker of English. Also, my many years of experience as a former elementary school teacher, both in Brazil and the United States, have shaped my views of classroom settings. Trustworthiness of findings was ensured through the use of prolonged engagement (i.e., long-term observation in the field), purposive sampling (i.e., a class in which native English speakers and ELLs with beginning levels of English proficiency participated together in classroom activities), triangulation of sources (i.e., teachers, students, and student artifacts), and triangulation of methods (i.e., observations, interviews, field notes, videotaping, and audiotaping).

Analysis

English Language Learners: Accessing Community Practices

At Woodside, one of the rationales for terminating the bilingual program and instead placing ELLs in English-dominant classrooms, as stated by the principal, was to provide ample opportunities for interactions between native and non-native speakers of English. From a community of practice perspective, this new arrangement for ELLs was meant to establish a trajectory toward meaningful participation in the classroom community through the interactions between the novices (ELLs) and old timers (native speakers of English). For the ELLs in Room 14, this trajectory seemed to be in many ways complicated by differential participation in the classroom language activities, by ambiguities in the general purposes of instruction, and by implicit forms of communication, giving way to the development of a parallel community of practice, as the following examples illustrate.

Example 1: Differential participation in the classroom language activities

During reading instruction and activities, Luis, Sabrina, Lucia, Eduardo, and Edson were placed in the same group and led by the special education teacher aide, Ms. B. (Maya did not participate because she had been classified as a non-English speaker; however, she often sat with the group to observe along with Eduardo, who served as her translator.) This reading group met daily (each group did its reading activities at different times daily), and instruction revolved around the development of basic skills such as tracking print, matching words with pictures, circling letters, and so forth, as illustrated by the following passage captured on videotape:

Luis: (turning to Ms. B, looking for permission) My turn [to read]?

Ms. B.: (to Luis) Yes.

Luis: (resisting) I don't know [how to] read.

Ms. B.: Just point to the words and repeat after me.

Luis: (surprised) Oh! That's all?

Ms. B.: Yes, to get powerbucks [a token reward] you have to be tracking the print.

Luis then began to track the words and repeat after the teacher. The book the group was reading, *Max the Builder* (Rigby Guided Readers, 1999), was at a pre-primer level and had illustrations that matched the text, which was composed of 43 words. It read:

I can be Max the builder. I can be Max the fisherman. I can be Max the king. I can be Max the cook. I can be Max the painter. I can be Max the astronaut. I can be Max in a box!

After all the children in the group read the book, they went to work on sight word activity sheets. These activity sheets asked the students to trace the letters in the words *can*, *girl*, *boy*, *read*, and *all* (of these, only the word *can* was found in the book that they had just read). Other activities in the sight word package included matching capitalized words to words written in lower case, a cutting and pasting of letters to form the sight words written on the page, a missing letters activity, and a sentence completion activity using the sight words. The tasks in each package provided opportunities for the students to practice the same sight words many times over. All the packages formed a unit, which always followed the same sequence of activities. The units differed only in the sight words. That is, each unit had tasks that promoted the memorization of five different sight words. The classroom teacher, Ms. A., believed that such activities were beneficial for developing reading skills, especially for ELLs, as evidenced by her comment: “This is an old series [referring to the Dolch sight word activities], but we still use it because it has been very effective with low learners, particularly with English language learners. Many teachers come here to borrow my package because they don’t make these anymore.”

There were three other reading groups in the class for the native speakers of English. During guided reading instruction, two of those groups read chapter books (e.g., *Charlotte’s Web*, by E. B. White) and held discussion sessions after they were done taking turns reading consecutive passages. The other group read basal readers, and the teacher would ask comprehension questions and questions that related the children’s experiences to the content of the book.

However, the ELLs, as in the example above, were requested to focus primarily on procedural aspects of reading and on discrete aspects of language (such as phonemes) during the majority of reading instruction; thus, language was used largely in isolation from the children’s daily life experiences. In contrast, the other students in the class were participating in reading activities that emphasized connections with their life experiences and engagement in discussions; that is, they were able to use language in ways that reflected, validated, and furthered their existences. From a community of practice perspective, because of the difference in the ways language was being used during reading instruction as well as the difference in linguistic content in the assigned readings and subsequent discussions, native speakers of English and ELLs were essentially not engaged in similar community practices in relation to literacy activities. Moreover, it was not just literacy activities that were linguistically impoverished elements for ELLs. Many of the language arts-related tasks in the content areas were linguistically reduced as well, as

the following examples illustrate. This reduction in the language that conveyed content often yielded ambiguities in the purposes of instruction and the learning that ELLs experienced.

Examples 2 and 3: Ambiguities in the purposes of instruction

During my observations of a lesson on Native Americans, the teacher began by reading the story “The Rough Face Girl,” about the Algonquin tribe. Following the story, some of the native English-speaking students went to a discussion group and then set out to write about it. In contrast, Luis, Sabrina, Edson, and Eduardo’s task had been modified to a fill-in-the-blank activity about the book, using a word bank from which the students chose the correct words. (Lucia was absent on that particular day.) They were given a passage that read:

Fill in the blanks using the following words: first, Indians, Native.

The Algonquin people are _____ Americans. Native Americans were the _____ people to live in America. Native Americans are sometimes called _____.

Essentially, for the group of ELLs, the content of the story became reduced to three words (*first*, *Indians*, and *Native*), which were not necessarily related to the meaning of the story itself. In this activity, Maya participated only peripherally in the group of ELLs, as she had been told to observe how the rest of the group did its work. The pronounced difference in the purposes of instruction yielded different understandings about the story for the ELLs and the native English speakers. When I asked the ELLs what they had gathered from the story, Edson answered: “Indians.” The other members of that group agreed with Edson’s response. When I asked the same question to a group of native speakers of English who were participating in a discussion about the story, Mark answered: “About this girl who had an ugly scar on her face but was beautiful inside.” For the ELLs, the reduction of opportunities to linguistically engage with the content of the story halted their access to all but the most basic, literal components of the story. The story itself and its meanings were never actually engaged in.

Some methods of instructional delivery taught to prospective teachers in their university classes as a viable way to promote language proficiency for ELLs paradoxically contributed to creating a disconnection between the general purposes of instruction and the actual learning ELLs experienced. For example, on one occasion, during a unit about the solar system, Mr. P., considering curricular accommodations for the ELLs in the class, designed a lesson specifically for these students, based on the audiolingual method.³ While other students in the class researched nonfiction books on the solar system, Mr. P. had written a few sentences on the board for the ELLs to practice by reciting aloud and then copying. These sentences were:

The sun is our closest star.

The sun is much bigger than the Earth.

The sun is very far away from the Earth.

It is much farther from us than the moon. The moon is near compared to the sun.

The underlined words had been written with a different color marker on the board for emphasis. Mr. P. read the sentences aloud and asked the students to repeat after him several times in chorus. Then the students were asked to copy from the board. The focus of the lesson was the comparative–superlative grammatical structure in the English language. However, when I asked Luis why he thought those words had been written in a different color, he answered, “*Esta bonito* [It looks nice]!” I also asked him what the sentences were about, and he offered, “*Las cosas que estan lejos y las cosas que estan cerca* [About far things and things that are near].” Luis’s answers indicated that he had not made a connection between the lesson on the solar system and what was written on the board; furthermore, he had not made sense of the structural aspects of the language being emphasized for him. Therefore, while some students in the class were researching the solar system and discussing the moons of Jupiter, Venus’s veil, and the canals of Mars, the ELLs’ lesson had been reduced to the recitation of the words *closest*, *bigger*, *far*, *farther*, and *near*: words that do not necessarily bear much relationship to the solar system per se.

Furthermore, Luis’s participation in that lesson had been reduced to copying words from the board since he did not understand why those words were even emphasized. This can be largely attributable to the fact that the emphasis on grammatical aspects of the English language (comparatives and superlatives) obfuscated the content of instruction (the solar system), which by then had become too implicit for the student to grasp.

These examples are representative of many observed instances when the purposes of instruction differed from the learning ELLs experienced. Over time, this dissonance accentuated a general disjunction in patterns of participation of ELLs in community practices while key understandings were forming, and also served as major constraints for ELLs as they attempted to gain access to and become more centrally involved in the practices of the community of Room 14.

Example 4: Vagueness in communication

The recurrence of vague communication was another factor that over time seemed to hamper the ELLs’ access to the practices of the community. That is, while native speakers of English had more access to contextual cues and thus could comprehend abbreviated messages, ELLs were often confused by vagueness, as can be further exemplified in the following excerpt from an interaction between Mr. P. and Edson:

Edson: (raising his hand) Mr. P.!

Mr. P.: (placing his index finger over his lips to signify “Quiet!”) Yes.

Edson: [Are there] black holes?

Mr. P.: Yes.

Edson: What inside?

Mr. P.: (seemingly annoyed) If you want to ask a question, it needs to be a good question [grammatically correct]. You know what a good question is.

(Edson, looking puzzled, was silenced.)

From this interaction it seemed clear that Edson did not know what Mr. P. meant by his comment on questions. The notion of what a “good question” is was too implicit for Edson to understand.

Mr. P. was a student teacher in the class and thus in the early stages of learning how to teach. However, it is important to note that the methods he employed were in accordance with guidance from his university professor and student teaching supervisor. In addition, throughout this investigation there were also many instances when Ms. A.’s teaching points for a particular lesson, or expected outcomes of assignments, were too implicit, thus not fully understood by the ELLs. For example, on various occasions, I interviewed students from the two language groups to compare their general understandings of the subject matter. As demonstrated in this paper, most often the students’ accounts greatly differed in depth, in the amount of detail given in their explanations, and even in the understanding of overall content of the lessons, with the English monolingual students more closely approximating the teacher’s intentions.

The Emergence of a Parallel Community of Practice

The discrepancies in participatory levels, as well as the variations in the understandings formed through differential participation in the linguistic practices of the community, contributed to the development of differential identities of competence between the ELLs and the native English speakers, greatly favoring the native English speakers in that context. However, when interacting with each other, the ELLs were developing identities of competence among themselves, as well as a sense of complicity and solidarity toward each other (see Gee, 1996), as the following examples illustrate.

Example 5: Developing identities of competence

Eduardo seemed to have a natural knack for mentoring other ELLs and seemed to have taken to heart the responsibility to socialize them into the class. Out of the six ELLs, he was the most proficient in English, although he was in the beginning levels of proficiency. Ms. A. often gave him the task of translating directions for the various activities to the other ELLs, particularly to Maya. He seemed to enjoy this role, as his interview revealed:

A mí me gusta ayudar a la gente. ¡Mi “favorite” es enseñar a mi hermana con la tarea en la casa [I like helping people. My favorite thing to do at home is to teach my sister how to do the homework]!

Indeed, Eduardo was often seen as an expert within the group of ELLs. They liked working with him and participating in group work where he was present. He often and spontaneously sat by Maya to serve as an interpreter for her. Also, he often was very didactic in helping other ELLs to understand tasks given by the teacher. The following is an excerpt from an activity in which Luis and Eduardo worked with base-10 blocks to form the number 34.

Eduardo: No, you don't do like this (moving one of the blocks over from the tens to the ones on a place-value mat).

Luis: No?

Eduardo: No, if you do like this you don't get the powerbucks.

Luis: Oh! *¡Me ayuda* [Will you help me]?

Eduardo: Here's how you do it, three sticks and four of these [small cubes] (placing his hand on top of Luis's and moving all the blocks in the correct way to represent the number 34).

Luis: OK.

Luis went on to doing other numbers with Eduardo's help. Other ELLs also looked up to Eduardo and liked working with him. Early in the study, during an interview, Lucia mentioned that she thought Eduardo was the smartest student in the class. She elaborated:

¡Él sabe todo! Él sabe contar hasta 200, él sabe los meses y los días de la semana, y cantar las canciones de “math.” Él nos dice lo que manda la maestra. . . Él nos ayuda porque a veces no sabemos como hacer la tarea [He knows everything! He can count to 200, he knows the months of the year and the days of the week. He can sing the math songs. He tells us what the teacher wants us to do. He helps us because sometimes we don't know how to do homework].

As Eduardo took on the role of the expert within the group of ELLs, the others took on the roles of apprentices. Indeed, for the ELLs, Eduardo seemed to embody the criteria for their success. They watched him closely and seemed to want to learn from him. Through watching and being helped by Eduardo, the ELLs were gaining access, coming to participate meaningfully in the learning activities that were available to them, and gradually gaining a sense of competence as students in that parallel community. In addition, as they participated in many activities together, they were developing a sense of solidarity and complicity as well as forming cohesive friendships.

Examples 6 and 7: Developing solidarity and complicity

The native English speakers in the class were aware of this sense of solidarity and complicity among ELLs. They often encouraged the ELLs to help each other. Since the ELLs shared Spanish as a common language, that seemed to be an efficient way for them to help each other, and furthermore, it gave them a natural common bond. The following passage depicts an interaction between Karen (a native speaker of English), Luis, and Eduardo as the children were working on their individual projects. In this project, the students had to do a worksheet involving the cutting and pasting of pictures of objects in the story of Cinderella, according to the sequence in which they appeared. Then they were to write the correct word to label the object. There was a list of objects on the board from which the students had to pick the correct one to match the picture:

Karen: (to Eduardo, looking over at Luis) Luis doesn't know what to do.

Eduardo: (walking over to Luis) What [are you] looking for?

Luis: (to Eduardo, looking for the word *shoe* on the board to write underneath the picture of a shoe) I no know . . . *shoe*?

Luis: (to Eduardo) I no know how [to do the assignment].

Eduardo: (showing his paper to Luis and pointing to each word-picture match) OK. *Mira, tienes que combinar: ese es un "shoe"* (pointing to the picture, then the blank underneath the picture), *aquí va [la palabra] "shoe"* [Look, you have to match: This is a shoe, (and) here you write (the word) *shoe*].

Once Luis understood the directions for the task in Spanish, he proceeded to do the assignment independently, thereby participating in the classroom activity.

ELLs often seemed to use their sense of solidarity strategically and to make use of their common language to facilitate access to classroom activities in which they participated together with native English speakers, as exemplified by this next episode. In the task given by the teacher, the children were to assemble the words *build*, *built*, and *building*, using magnetic letters on a magnet board. Luis and Maya, not fully understanding what was being said in relation to the activity they had set out to do, conspired in Spanish to get Mark (a native speaker of English) to repeat what he had said many times over.

Luis: (whispering into the ear of Maya, who was sitting next to him)
Haz de cuenta que tú no entendistes todo lo que él te dice para que él lo repita [Pretend you didn't understand whatever Mark says so he will repeat it].

Maya: (nodding) OK!

Mark: I have B, G, and U. . . .

Luis (to Maya): *¿Qué?* . . . What?

Mark: B, G, and U. . . .

Maya (laughing, looking at Luis, shrugging).

Mark: (repeating patiently) I have B, G, and U. What letters do you
` have?

Maya: (laughing) *No te entiendo* [I don't understand you].

Mark: (repeating once again) B, G, and U.

Although noticeably wanting to have fun with each other, the ELLs seemed deliberate in evoking a sense of complicity. This sense of complicity continuously grew among the ELL group of students, and it ultimately contributed to the development of certain levels of interdependence, which over time served to create additional possibilities to maximize their combined linguistic resources, and to gain greater access to the language that comprised the practices of the entire classroom. For example, by the end of the study, the ELLs, just like Eduardo, could count to 200, could recite the months of the year, and could sing the days of the week, the multiplication raps, and the fraction rock (according to Ms. A., Maya was well on her way to performing satisfactorily in those activities also). They all seemed to have understood the general classroom rules and procedures, even some that were implicit but salient through everyday repetition (e.g., when the bell rings, it is time to line up).

Discussion

As Luis, Edson, Sabrina, Lucia, Maya, and Eduardo participated in many activities together, and as they shared cultural and linguistic histories, they were developing mutual dependency among themselves and a shared classroom repertoire, which was at best tangential to the rest of the class. As time progressed, these students formed a parallel community of practice in which they created conditions that were facilitative of increased linguistic access to, and participation in, the proposed learning activities, thus transforming their circumstances and, to some degree, those of the overall community. Luis, Sabrina, Lucia, Edson, Maya, and Eduardo were quickly learning what was available to them through their participation in joint activities.

However, because ELLs did not have the same access to the information, discussions, and general levels of conversation in which the rest of the class was engaged, they began to lack the shared knowledge and the language used to convey it that their native English-speaking counterparts were developing. Over time, this general disjointedness of communities of practice within the same classroom yielded continuously higher levels of implicitness

in what was said, in what was meant, and in how language became enacted in the interactions within each subcommunity. It is important to notice that this split in the course of ELLs' learning trajectory within the classroom community in many ways mirrored processes of marginalization and oppression (see Freire, 1970) found in the larger U.S. society, which may be rooted in the difficulty of access by language and/or ethnic and racial minority groups to the language and activities reserved for dominant groups.

It is fair to point out that Woodside administration held high standards for its faculty and students, and had genuine concern for the well-being of all students. I would also like to reiterate that Ms. A. had been formally recognized as an outstanding teacher by a state agency. However, she felt that she did not have adequate training or the political autonomy to counteract the political exigencies to impel ELLs to achieve predetermined grade-level standards set for English-monolingual students. Thus, for the ELLs in the classroom, a greater focus was placed on marginal functions of language, such as procedural elements, discrete skill development, and rote repetition of isolated words.

After the closing of the study, numerous conversations with the classroom teacher and the administrator of the school were held to share the findings of this investigation. Partly as a result of those conversations, various staff development sessions were held to inform the entire faculty about how to improve circumstances for the ELLs in English-dominant classrooms. The faculty went on to form teacher study groups to discuss concerns related to ELLs.

Conclusion

Through the analysis and discussion of the data collected for this investigation, it became evident that for the ELLs observed, the use of remedial pedagogy, the strong focus on English proficiency, and implicit aspects of classroom communication placed them at a serious educational disadvantage in relation to the native speakers of English. In those ways, the findings of this study, then, offer support to other literature (Gabhard, 2003; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2001; Gutiérrez & Larson, 1994; Manyak, 2002; Moll, 2002; Norton, 2001; Shannon, 1995; Toohy, 2000) in that they confirm that the use of reductive pedagogy and the hegemonizing of English as a mediational tool are limiting factors to the academic development of ELLs included in English-dominant classrooms. Furthermore, this study suggested that, even though the recent trend to include ELLs (often in smaller numbers than their English-speaking counterparts) in the mainstream classroom seems to stem from civil rights and democratic ideals that reject segregationist practices, in fact, subtle forms of segregation may continue to occur through the differential uses of language in classrooms that include ELL populations along with native English speakers.

In addition, this study illuminated the fact that although the differential participation of students in the practices of the community yielded different conditions for the development of identities of competence, each of the students in the two distinct language groups did learn to be competent in that which became respectively meaningful to them. Moreover, the ELLs developed a strong sense of solidarity and friendship and learned to adapt to the demands of the classroom by combining each other's linguistic resources in order to perform the assigned tasks. However, it was evident that in the urgency to get ELLs to achieve academic proficiency in English, little value was placed on the identities of competence they did gain as students. Thus, it became abundantly clear that without a thorough understanding of the sociocultural and linguistic elements that influenced the ELLs' personal and academic development, teachers were severely underestimating these students, as reflected in one teacher's quote about ELLs being "low learners," and the fact that the type of work ELLs were asked to do was in many ways below their capability in their native language; in many ways, such phenomena precluded ELLs from becoming legitimate participants in the classroom context, and ultimately from achieving their full potential.

Therefore, in light of the recently launched federal educational agenda of No Child Left Behind (2002) and of governmental mandates that endorse English-only movements, it seems necessary that we recognize that by continuously placing ELL students in educational circumstances where they are not fully understood as individuals and as learners, we may be leaving not just one child, but entire communities, behind.

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Endnotes

¹ “The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the San Francisco school system violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by denying non-English-speaking students of Chinese ancestry a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program. The decision stated that providing students the same desks, books, teachers, and curriculum did not ensure that they received an equal educational opportunity, particularly if the students did not speak English. If English is the mainstream language of instruction, then measures have to be taken to ensure that English is taught to students who do not speak English or are classified as limited English proficient in order to provide equal access to educational opportunities” (see http://www.helpforschools.com/ELLKBase/legal/Court_Cases_Federal_Equa_Educ_Opp.shtml).

² The cooperative/consultative (CC) model generally refers to providing opportunities for students with various disabilities to be included in mainstream classrooms and to partake in learning in the least restrictive environment. In this model the regular education teacher and the special education teacher collaborate to assist the included child. Inclusion practices were part of the general philosophy of Woodside, where faculty and administrators vowed to provide service to all students in desegregated environments and to integrate all students into their school community.

³ Audiolingual method is a method of language teaching based on behaviorism that emphasizes repetition and rote memorization of words and sentences. According to Richards and Rodgers (1997), the procedures for this method could typically be observed as the following steps:

1. Students first hear a model dialogue (usually read by the teacher) containing key structures that are the focus of the language lesson.
2. Certain key structures from the dialogue are selected and used as the basis for pattern drills of different kinds. These are practiced in chorus and then individually. Some grammatical explanation may be offered at this point, but this is usually kept to a minimum.
3. At the beginning level, writing is purely imitative and consists of little more than copying out sentences that have been practiced.

