Linguistic Diversity and Teaching
Reflective Teaching: An Introduction

Culture and Teaching

Gender and Teaching

Linguistic Diversity and Teaching
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AN ESSENTIAL SERIES INTRODUCTION

Whereas many readers rarely read introductory material, we hope you will continue. The success of this book depends, in large part, on how you use it. In what follows we outline some of our key assumptions and we suggest ways for approaching the material in each book of this series entitled, “Reflective Teaching and the Social Conditions of Schooling.” First we identify some of our reasons for creating this series. We then relate a bit about our dissatisfaction with how teacher education is usually conducted and how it can be changed. Finally we outline suggestions for ways to best utilize the material in this and subsequent texts.

Some years ago we were asked to develop further the ideas outlined in our book Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). It was suggested that we take our basic approach to teacher reflection and our ideas about teacher education curricula and put them into practice. The proposal was attractive and the subsequent endeavor proved to be very challenging. It never seems easy to translate educational “shoulds” and possibilities into schooling “cans” and realities. But we think (and we hope) we have made progress in that effort by designing a series of books intended to help prospective, beginning, and experienced teachers to reflect on their profession, their teaching, and their experiences. We are pleased and delighted to have the opportunity to
share this work with you. We hope you will find these texts to be engaging and useful.

We are two university teacher educators, both former elementary teachers, who have worked in inner-city, small town, and suburban elementary and middle schools. We are committed to public schools as democratic institutions, as places of learning in which people of all walks of life come to learn how to live together in a democratic society. Although we are personally committed to ways of working and living together that are much more collaborative than exist today—we are educators first, realists second, and dreamers third. It is our firm belief that an education that engages prospective and practicing teachers’ heads and hearts, their beliefs and passions, needs to be fair and honest. We have neither written nor encouraged others to write these texts to convince you to see schools and society in a particular light, but rather to engage you in a consideration of crucial issues that all teachers need to address. Once engaged we hope that you will be better able to articulate your views, responses, and responsibilities to students and parents, and come to better understand aspects of your role as a teacher in a democratic society.

IMPACTS OF THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF SCHOOLING

Prospective teachers need to be prepared for the problems and challenges of public schooling. Sometimes the focus in schools (departments and colleges) of education remains strictly on the processes that occur within the classroom and inside the school walls. At times, teacher education programs emphasize instructional methodology and the psychology of the learner in university course work and underscore survival strategies for student teaching. These are certainly important elements in any teacher’s preparation and ones that cannot be ignored. But classrooms and schools are not insulated environments. What goes on inside schools is greatly influenced by what occurs outside of schools. The students who attend and the teachers and administrators who work within those walls bring into the school building all sorts of cultural assumptions, social influences, and contextual dynamics. Unless some concerted attention is given to those assumptions, influences, and dynamics, to the reality of school life and to the social conditions of schooling, our future teachers will be ill prepared.

Over the last 10 years, teacher educators have paid greater attention to the social conditions of schooling. But a consensus of opinion on this issue
does not exist. The professional aspects of teacher education, including attention to the social conditions of schooling, have been criticized by scholars and politicians such as those associated with the Fordham Foundation who believe that content knowledge alone is sufficient to teach. While we recognize the importance of teachers’ content knowledge, this view is, we believe, a gross and politically motivated mistake that will do harm to the students in our public schools and their teachers. Students need teachers who have the professional preparation necessary to teach a greatly diverse student population to achieve high academic standards. We hope that the books in this series will contribute to this end.

We are living in a time of remarkable change, a time of social and political transformation. In an era that is rife with social controversies and political difficulties, in which public schooling has increasingly come under attack, during which we are seeing marked changes in this country’s cultural demographic make-up, in which there are great pressures to transform public schools into private, for-profit enterprises, we must educate well our teaching workforce. Future teachers cannot, on their own, solve the many societal issues confronting the schools, but they should certainly know what those issues are, have a sense of their own beliefs about those issues, and understand the many ways in which those issues will come alive within their school’s walls. Poverty and wealth, our culture of consumerism, what seems to be an increasing amount of violent behavior, and the work pressures of modern life affect the children who attend our public schools. Public attitudes about competition and excellence, race and ethnicity, gender roles and homosexuality, and the environment affect students inside and outside of schools. One can be certain that the issues that affect all of our lives outside of schools will certainly influence students inside their schools.

EXAMINING THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF SCHOOLING

Probably the best way to begin to examine contextual issues such as these is to be “attentive” early on in one’s professional preparation, to experience features of the social conditions of schooling, and then to examine the experience and what we know about the social and cultural context of schooling. We encourage prospective and practicing teachers to do this. But teacher preparation programs often are not organized in a fashion that would encourage the discussion and examination of these sorts of shared
experiences. What traditionally are called social foundations courses are typically not school-based, but set apart from some of the more realistic, practical, and engaged dilemmas of schooling. In schools of education we frequently teach what the sociology or philosophy of education has to say about schools but we tend to teach it as sociologists or philosophers, not as teachers struggling with crucial and highly controversial issues. Thus, in our own work with prospective and practicing teachers we have developed ways to examine contextual issues of schooling and to enable ourselves and students to articulate our ideas, beliefs, theories, and feelings about those issues. The books in this series attempt to utilize some of these insights and to pass along to others the content and the processes we have found useful.

When students and faculty engage in discussions of the social and political conditions of schooling and the effects of these conditions on students and schools, it is likely that the talk will be lively and controversies will emerge. In this arena there are no absolutely “right” or “wrong” answers. There are choices, frequently difficult ones, choices that require considerable discussion, deliberation, and justification. In order for these discussions to occur we need to create classroom settings that are conducive to conversations about difficult and controversial issues. The best format for such discussion is not the debate, the (in)formal argument, or dispassionate and aloof analysis. Instead the most conducive environment is a classroom designed to create dialogue and conversation among participants with differing points of view. There isn’t a recipe or formula that will ensure this type of environment but we think the following suggestions are worth considering.

It is important for individuals using these texts to engage in discussions that are sensitive and respectful toward others, and at the same time challenge each other’s views. This is not an easy task. It requires each participant to come to the class sessions prepared, to listen attentively to other people’s views, and to address one another with a tone and attitude of respect. This means that when disagreements between individuals occur, and they inevitably will occur, each participant should find a way to express that disagreement without diminishing or attacking the other individual. Participants in these professional discussions need to be able to voice their views freely and to be sensitive toward others. Frequently, this is difficult to do. In discussions of controversial issues, ones that strike emotional chords, we are prone to argue in a way that belittles or disregards another person and their point of view. At times, we try to dismiss both the claim and the person. But if the discussions that these books help
to initiate are carried on in that demeaning fashion, the potential power of these works will not be realized. A discussion of this paragraph should occur before discussing the substance raised by this particular text. It is our conviction that when a class keeps both substance and pedagogy in the forefront it has a way of engaging individuals in a much more positive manner. From our own past experiences, we have found that during the course of a class’s use of this material it may be quite helpful to pause and focus on substantive and pedagogical issues in a conscious and forthright manner. Such time is generally well spent.

UNDERSTANDING AND EXAMINING PERSONAL BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING AND SCHOOLING

It is also our belief that many educational issues engage and affect our heads and our hearts. Teaching is work that entails both thinking and feeling; those who can reflectively think and feel will find their work more rewarding and their efforts more successful. Good teachers find ways to listen to and integrate their passions, beliefs, and judgments. And so we encourage not only the type of group deliberation just outlined but also an approach to reading that is attentive to an individual’s felt sense or what some might call “gut” level reactions. In the books in this series that contain case material and written reactions to that material, along with the public arguments that pertain to the issues raised, we believe it is essential that you, the reader, attend to your felt reactions, and attempt to sort out what those reactions tell you. At times it seems we can predict our reactions to the readings and discussions of this material while at other times it can invoke reactions and feelings that surprise us. Attending to those issues in a heartfelt manner, one that is honest and forthright, gives us a better sense of ourselves as teachers and our understandings of the world. Not only do students walk into schools with expectations and assumptions formed as a result of life experiences but so do their teachers. Practicing and prospective teachers can benefit from thinking about their expectations and assumptions. Hopefully, our work will facilitate this sort of reflection.

ABOUT THE BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

The first work in this series, Reflective Teaching, introduces the notion of teacher reflection and develops it in relation to the social conditions of schooling. Building on this concept, the second work in the series, Culture
and Teaching, encourages a reflection on and examination of diverse cultures and schooling. In Gender and Teaching, the third work in the series, Frinde Maher and Janie Ward examine the central role of gender in both teaching and schooling. And in this volume Nancy Commins and Ofelia Miramontes offer both an in-depth and a bird’s eye view of linguistic diversity in today’s schools. These two experts, known nationally for their scholarly and practical contributions to the education of English language learners, enable us to see this complex arena more clearly. Commins and Miramontes convey many of the central issues that attend learning and linguistic diversity in our schools. We are lucky to have these two individuals as our guides.

SERIES ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Two individuals have been essential to the conception and execution of this series. Kathleen Keller, our first editor at St. Martin’s Press (where the series originated), initially suggested that we further develop the ideas outlined in Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Kathleen was very helpful in the initial stages of this effort and we wish to thank her for that. Naomi Silverman, our current and beloved editor at Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, has patiently and skillfully prodded us along attending to both the “big picture” and the small details. She has been remarkably supportive and capably informative. We are very thankful and indebted to Naomi.

—Daniel P. Liston
—Kenneth M. Zeichner
A work focused on linguistic diversity and teaching can evoke strong reactions. Demographics indicate that there has been, and will continue to be, a significant increase in the number of students who come from linguistic backgrounds other than English in our public schools. The increase in linguistic diversity has occurred without a commensurate rise in the number of ethnic minority and bilingual teachers. Monolingual English speaking teachers often find themselves doubtful, apprehensive, and uncertain about their roles and responsibilities with regard to such learners.

Issues surrounding new English learners exist within a highly charged political and social climate. They involve not only language, but also culture, class, ethnicity, and the persistent inequities that characterize our educational system. It is easy to see how the presence of English language learners can make teachers feel inadequate or uncomfortable since most teachers in the United States are native English speakers, who have been prepared to teach native English speakers in English. Because linguistic diversity is also so closely linked with issues of culture, class, race, and even gender there are no simple or easy answers to the questions that arise. The central theme of this text is to raise the questions, and provide a context for reflection regarding these issues. Because there is a tremendous variety in the circumstances of new English learners and of how their presence interfaces with the communities to which they arrive, there are many questions that arise and the answers are far from simple. It is our intention to provide various perspectives on how to address these challenges. We in-
clude our own views, but they are just our version of truth and we invite further reaction and interpretation.

Linguistic diversity receives little, if any, attention in the majority of teacher education programs. To address linguistic diversity is more than just how to teach second language learners. Linguistic diversity includes a full spectrum of language proficiencies including monolingual English speakers, students who are just beginning to learn in two languages, as well as those students who have already made significant progress towards academic proficiency in both. To become prepared to address linguistic diversity is to learn about how to create schools that address the full spectrum of language proficiency and that provide an equitable education to all.

No matter what your beliefs are, it is essential that you enter the teaching profession not only with a set of techniques and strategies, but also with an awareness of the external social conditions of your students and how you are responding to them. Any technique or strategy can only be successful to the extent that it is appropriately situated in the cultural, linguistic, and class reality of the students you are teaching. We believe that teachers can play a significant role in addressing the inequities in the educational system that often characterize the schooling of language minority students.

We hope that the combination of the cases in the book and the discussions that follow will help you to begin to evolve your own practical theories, explore and perhaps modify some of your basic beliefs and assumptions and become acquainted with other points of view. This is not an easy or trivial process. This book is not about the right way to think, but rather about examining how the way we think influences our actions in the classroom and beyond. As the other authors in this series argue, theories and beliefs are grounded in our past experiences, our received knowledge, and our basic values. As we reflect, we can discover things that may confirm our view of the world, others that surprise us, and still others that challenge our assumptions about ourselves. These reflections hopefully will enable you, as an educator, to act with greater clarity.

**CONTENT AND STRUCTURE**

Like the other books in this series *Culture and Teaching* (Liston & Zeichner, 1996) and *Gender and Teaching* (Maher & Ward, 2002) this book is organized into three basic parts. Part I consists of four cases dealing with aspects of linguistic diversity and teaching, along with a range of preser-
vice and practicing teachers’ and administrators’ reactions to each case. Part II is an elaboration of three public arguments pertaining to the issues raised in the cases in Part I. Part III presents our own concluding statement about some of the issues raised throughout the volume, additional exercises for reflection, and a bibliography of resources.

The Case Studies

The cases in Part I explore different aspects of the impacts of the changing demographics of public schools. Four case studies are presented. All of them highlight situations monolingual English speaking, Euro American teachers might face within the context of schools that serve a linguistically diverse student body. One of them also delves a little deeper into a student’s reality outside the school setting. The cases are composites of our own personal experiences in observing students and staff in our roles as teachers, teachers on special assignments, district level administrators and university professors in teacher preparation programs. They also include the experiences shared by practicing teachers, district personnel, as well as pre-service and practicing teachers in districts across the country.

In Case 1 “The Cycle: Frank and Vu” we examine one teacher’s experience in trying to respond to the needs of a second language learner without adequate information or background knowledge about what to do. In Case 2 “Marisa’s Prospects” we focus on a junior high learner and her teacher who makes an extra effort to reach out to the student and her family. In doing so, this teacher revises many of her prior assumptions. In Case 3 “Friendship, Professionalism and Programs” we highlight one teacher’s attempt to make changes to the structure of her school whose student population has changed dramatically over several years. Her struggle over what to do calls into question some of her prior experiences, and also puts her in potential conflict with many of her colleagues. In Case 4 “What is Equal Treatment?” we explore the issue of assessment and how increasing linguistic diversity challenges teachers to find appropriate assessments that meet the needs of students and still fit into the accountability systems districts currently have in place.

Each case study is followed by a set of reactions written by prospective and practicing teachers and administrators whom we asked to read and respond to these stories. They represent only some of the many and diverse ways in which people both inside and outside of school systems react to and deal with these issues. Reading their reactions, we can see not only the
complexities of these problems and of other people’s responses, but we can also perhaps further understand and refine our own positions.

Between each case study and the reactions, and after the set of reactions for each case study, we have left space in the text for you to write your own reactions and reflections. People approach this task differently. Some find it easier to write their reactions after reading the case study; others find it helpful to wait until they have read others’ reactions. We suggest jotting down your reactions in both places. Because the process of learning and reflection is unpredictable and changing, we want to encourage you to make a record of your development over time, as you change your mind, see new perspectives, perhaps change your mind back again, perhaps move in a different direction. We want to encourage you to explore as many different approaches as possible, in response to the case studies, the readers’ responses, and your own initial reactions.

The Public Arguments

In Part II we move from the particular realm of the case studies to the more general arena of public arguments and present three very different views about linguistic diversity, teaching, and education. What we call “public arguments” or “public voices” represent clusters of orientations organized around general values rather than sets of hard and fast principles to which all who speak in that “voice” must adhere. These summaries represent some basic assumptions that guide their proponents’ perspectives on educational polices related to issues of linguistic diversity. We present three views that diverge greatly in how best to teach second language learners of English. They include those who feel English should be the only language of instruction, those who feel all children should receive instruction in both their first language and English, and those who reject some, and accept other, aspects of the each of the two other arguments. We hope that our combination of case studies and public arguments will help our readers explore these ramifications on many different levels as they come to locate themselves and others within these debates.

Our Own Views

Finally, in Part III we offer our own readings of the issues associated with linguistic diversity and teaching and outline a number of ways in which practicing and prospective teachers can continue to explore these
topics. We offer an introduction to our own perspective, one that embraces linguistic diversity as a positive contribution to the nation’s schools. Ultimately we take the position that our schools are places where various forms of inequality flourish. By challenging these inequalities a teacher can build an empowering education for all children. But, again, ours are only two views, and we encourage you to develop your own. At the end of this section we outline some suggestions for further explorations and provide a bibliography of both the sources cited in this book and additional readings that we consider essential for any teacher’s professional library.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are deeply indebted to the teachers, administrators, and students who contributed directly to this book. By sharing their challenges and rewards, their thoughts, analyses, deliberations, experiences and wisdom on a variety of issues relating to linguistic diversity, they have allowed us to broaden our thinking and understanding of these issues.

We have not acknowledged each of them by name for fear of leaving someone out, but have been faithful in presenting their individual voices. We are indebted to them not only for their responses to the cases but also for their encouragement throughout our writing process. We are continually inspired by their excellent work with linguistically diverse students.

We especially want to thank Dan Liston for his unfailing support, gentle reminders, and incisive comments on the cases and the manuscript. Our series editors Dan Liston and Ken Zeichner have a long-standing commitment and understanding of linguistic diversity as a vital issue in teacher education. We very much appreciate their encouragement, support, and inclusion of this book in their series. Our special thanks to Naomi Silverman our editor at LEA, for her constant optimism and her advocacy for this important issue and for our project in particular. We also thank Sue Hopewell and Suzanne Sawyer-Ratliff for their reading and comments on the final draft.

From Nancy: I want to dedicate my work to Ofelia who has profoundly influenced who I am both professionally and personally. I especially thank her for having the confidence in me to see this project through. I would not be who I am today without Ofelia’s friendship and guidance. My gratitude to Ken and Alex Saul who make everything I do possible by their unconditional love and support.
From Ofelia: I want to dedicate my work to the linguistically diverse students and the teachers, administrators and teacher education students who have committed their energies, intelligence, and care to this vital area of education. And, to my friend Nancy with whom I have the wonderful good fortune to work with over the past 20 years. This project would not have been possible without Nancy’s knowledge, commitment, love, and caring. My husband Bill’s constancy and support have provided the foundation for tackling important and challenging projects. My love always.
INTRODUCTION TO CASE 1

This case focuses on the difficulties that arise when teachers are unaware that the needs of linguistically diverse students may differ from those of native speakers of English. When they lack information about what types of instruction students are actually receiving in different settings, teachers can seriously misjudge the academic progress being made by students. Even when teachers are supportive and well intentioned, a lack of knowledge about second language development and appropriate strategies that help second language learners succeed can lead to disappointment, frustration, and anger. You will see the consequences of founding hopes and expectations for student performance on faulty assumptions. Specifically, the case describes what happens when a fourth grade teacher with limited experiences with second language learners acts in ways that to him seem logical when making decisions about what is best for one of his students.

Questions that are raised in this case include: What is the relationship between expectations and appropriate instruction? What understandings do teachers need in order to teach students learning English as a second language effectively? What are the consequences of fragmented instructional programs? What kind of instruction leads to competence over time? How can communication be fostered in a school?
CASE 1: “THE CYCLE: FRANK AND VU”

Frank is a hard working and conscientious fourth grade teacher at Walnut Elementary. He prepares carefully for his students and always tries to take into account students’ individual needs. He feels he gives students choices, supports them in their learning, and provides a caring environment in his classroom. This year for the first time Frank has a student in his class who is an English second language learner, Vu. Vu has been in the United States for a year and a half.

Frank has thought a lot about Vu’s educational needs. What has concerned him lately, however, is why Vu doesn’t always take advantage of the range of activities Frank provides in the classroom. He has noticed that Vu is often alone and doesn’t always seem to know what’s going on. Frank remembers talking to Roger the special education teacher who had told him that given the short time Vu has been in the country he was fairly sure it was an issue of English second language development. He told Frank that the best first step was to talk with Betsy, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher.

Betsy is very helpful. She talks to Frank about the fact that Vu is probably having difficulty understanding all that was being said to him. She gives Frank an example by taking a simple picture book and describing and discussing the contents with him in Spanish. Although Frank had taken 2 years of Spanish in high school, and certainly understands what is going on in the pictures, he eventually tunes out Betsy’s description because he is only picking up a word here and there. When she asks him a question about something on one of the pages he is caught off guard, embarrassed, and frustrated. At that moment he realizes some of what Vu must be experiencing.

Betsy suggests that Frank send Vu to her ESL classes where, she tells him, she uses particular techniques to help second language learners develop proficiency in English. These she says include using lots of pictures and actual objects to make vocabulary explicit, presenting lessons with many visuals and clear language, and giving her students an opportunity to practice their English skills in a safe environment. She offers to work with Frank to help him develop some of these techniques himself so that he can support Vu and other second language learners he might have in the future directly in their classroom activities. She also tells him that because she sees students for only an hour or so per day, these students also need consistent support from their classroom teachers in order to succeed in the other 4 to 5 hours they spend there. That makes sense to Frank.
Frank and Betsy also talk briefly about how the community around the school is changing and how all of the teachers will need some ESL training for the growing number of second language students in the school. Betsy is skeptical that this will happen. Frank fears that if no training is made available to the teachers, it will really limit student learning. But he knows Betsy is right about the lack of attention to this issue and about the resistance within the staff to making changes. Several teachers on the staff don’t feel it’s their job to know about English language development for second language learners. Some of Frank’s colleagues think that going to ESL classes is a waste of time. They believe that if students are simply in an all English environment all day they will learn English. Others feel that it is more important for students to stay in their own classroom rather than being pulled-out for instruction. Still others send students to ESL begrudgingly or leave the choice up to the students. After talking to Betsy and experiencing his own discomfort in another language, he is convinced Vu needs a different approach to learning in English and special attention to English language development. Although his conversation with Betsy did not give him a full picture of what is taught in the ESL curriculum, he has confidence in Betsy and trusts her judgment about its value. He is convinced it is a very important and basic part of Vu’s instruction and makes sure Vu goes regularly.

The ESL program at Walnut Elementary is run on a pullout basis. Students across the school are scheduled into Betsy’s classroom by levels of English proficiency. For example, she has an hour period in which she works with beginning level students across the grades. At a different time of the day she works with more advanced students. Although Betsy knows it is important to coordinate her instruction with the classroom teachers, the number of student she needs to serve has grown yearly and she now finds little time to coordinate services. She has also heard the same comments about ESL that Frank has. She has found that most teachers in the building consider her program an intrusion into their day, and they are not particularly open to meeting with her. She worries that as the second language learner population grows, the necessary teacher training will not be provided and more and more students will begin to have trouble in their classes.

Vu goes to ESL during Frank’s reading and language arts period. This seems reasonable because Vu’s limited English made it difficult for him to understand many of the words he tried to read. But, because Vu is not part of Frank’s reading and language arts instruction, Frank does not know how Vu’s literacy and language skills are developing. Although he has
meant to talk to Betsy and to learn more about second language instruction, in reality he never seems to be able to find the time.

Betsy’s program focuses on oral language development. She feels that it is critical for students to be comfortable and competent in using English orally. She knows that building a strong background in the sounds, syntax, and semantics of English allows students to move into reading with greater ease and real understanding. Her hard work with Vu is paying off. He learns new English vocabulary quickly, is understanding more and more ideas, and because he is a bright, friendly, and outgoing youngster, his oral English has developed quickly. He is now also very interested in looking through English books and figuring out words in the text.

Frank’s communication with Betsy indicates that Vu is making excellent progress. He is now able to understand simple lessons. He can tell because Vu is gaining a great deal of confidence. He can answer basic questions and will even ask for clarification of information that he doesn’t understand. Vu’s vocabulary is increasing steadily and he can now tell a story about something that happened at home or in the community with little hesitation. By the middle of the year Vu is interacting comfortably with other students in his classes and has really opened up. Frank sees how well Vu is able to communicate with his classmates and how they have come to like and accept him. He thinks its time for Vu to spend more time with his class and approaches Betsy about having Vu stay in the classroom rather than going to ESL.

Betsy does not believe Vu is ready. She knows he is only just beginning to read in English with a second language approach that allows her to closely monitor his comprehension. There are still many ideas which are difficult for him to understand because he is unfamiliar with the language. For example, she has organized her curriculum around science units. Recently they had discussed the idea of transformation of matter. Using a very hands-on approach she had demonstrated the transformation of water from solid to liquid to gas. The students enjoyed the activity but when she asked them to describe what had happened and why they thought it had happened, she realized that they were not able to articulate what they had done and seen. She decided then to focus her next few lessons on teaching her students how to express these ideas—that is, how to talk about the ideas and processes themselves rather than simply just listening and nodding their heads. By the end of the next week, her group was able to have a clear and lively discussion about the experiment using words like transformation, solids, liquids, and so on, which had been new to them. They could also ask each other questions about the topic, answer them with con-
idence, and write about their experience and observations with her help. She feels Vu still needs more of these focused experiences on a regular basis.

Betsy tries to explain this to Frank and adds that although she feels Vu has made good progress she knows there are several major areas in which Vu needs instructional support. She places a big emphasis on oral language because it is important that English language learners have a strong listening and speaking background in their second language. They need to become comfortable with English sounds, vocabulary, and oral expression as they work to make meaning from the material they read. For this reason he has not yet received much direct reading instruction. Although he has made great strides, his limited vocabulary and his lack of familiarity with topics in English cause him difficulty in understanding content area material. Literacy skills are critical in fourth grade and Vu will need help in developing those reading skills. In addition, his vocabulary is still pretty basic and he will need help in developing comprehension to a fourth grade level in English reading.

Betsy points out once again that using English as a second language methods to help Vu continue his strong development is very important. She explains that research demonstrates that although English language learners can pick up face-to-face interpersonal communication skills quickly, these skills represent only a surface knowledge of the language and that for Vu to be able to do all his class work without ESL support will be very difficult for him. Frank admits he doesn’t have any experience with ESL methods. He has also never been involved in initial reading instruction and is not sure how to approach a beginning reader, but he has created an inviting classroom environment and he thinks Vu’s enthusiasm for English books will carry them through.

Betsy remains ambivalent. It is true that she has had a couple of students who have made great progress when they returned to their classroom full time, although this is rare. Because Frank is offering to provide Vu some direct one-on-one support, and given how well Vu is fitting in with the other students in his class perhaps it could work. She has an overload of students and perhaps the one-on-one help Frank has promised could benefit Vu. Betsy knows that Frank is a good teacher and that Vu is anxious to be with his class. Frank’s enthusiasm for working with Vu is hard for Betsy to resist. She recognizes that Vu is a very bright and motivated student. Could she be limiting his opportunities as Frank insists? In the end she agrees to have Vu leave ESL classes and sets aside her uneasiness about the difficulties she knows Vu will encounter trying to deal with
fourth grade content, ideas, and reading without support focused directly on his needs as a second language learner.

Frank is excited and looking forward to having Vu back in class. Because he knows Vu has not had extensive English reading instruction, he puts him in one of his lower reading groups. He feels that this way Vu will not have to compete at too high a level at the beginning. His hopes are high. Vu seems happy to be back in the classroom full time. For the first several weeks things go well. The other children in the class are ready to help Vu when he needs it and things seem to be working. Over the next month, however, Vu seems to be more and more frustrated when others try to help him. He is no longer eager for others to help him and seems more and more withdrawn.

Frank also notices that Vu is really struggling with the work in reading. During the reading period he spends a great deal of time getting up, talking to other students, or wandering around the classroom. In the reading group he fidgets, never seems to be in the right place on the page, and has difficulty answering questions put to him about the story. Although Frank tries to explain the ideas reflected in the text to him, Vu doesn’t seem to understand and often answers questions with irrelevant information. He works with Vu individually as often as possible, but it is often only one or two days per week for brief periods of time. At the last parent conference, Vu’s parents expressed some concern that their son was not as enthusiastic about school as he had been, and on some days did not even want to come to school. They were very worried about this change in attitude and wondered if anything had happened at school to cause it. Frank explained the change in Vu’s schedule and how he believed this would benefit Vu in the long run. Vu’s parents had said they trusted Frank’s decision and they would help Vu as much as possible.

As time goes on Vu does not seem to be making any better progress. In fact, he often does not pay attention to what the group is engaged in, and when called on he gets very frustrated. He has begun to distract other students, will sit at his desk just looking at his work, and gets very little accomplished. Frank feels that he has bent over backwards to try to help Vu get ahead. He is particularly disappointed to see Vu’s lack of motivation, and the constant disruptions he initiates in class. Frank knows Vu’s parents are not literate in English and can’t help him with his English homework. Frank knows, however, that they are encouraging him to do his best in school and he is grateful for that. Frank feels guilty that although he has tried to work with Vu individually, he has only been able to do so a couple of times per week. Even in these sessions, Vu does not seem engaged. Maybe he was totally wrong about Vu’s potential. Although he hates to
admit it, Vu’s behavior makes him angry. The students in Frank’s class also seem to have turned against Vu. In picking teams for games, he is almost always the last one chosen. Frank has also heard a couple of students tease Vu about his reading ability.

Now he is trying to decide what he should do next. He had been so confident that the good feelings and the strong classroom environment he had established for students would be enough for Vu to succeed. He wonders if he has ignored some of the basic principles that Betsy had insisted were known to be necessary for second language English learners to succeed? Were methods of presentation really so important? He knows it was unfair to blame to Vu and to question his potential but he can’t help it. He also knows that it is very difficult for him to determine whether Vu’s problems in the classroom come from his frequent academic failures, his treatment by his classmates, or Frank’s own feelings of disappointment that he is sure are probably being communicated to Vu. Could this all be part of the isolation Vu is feeling because of a lack of proficiency in English—not understanding all of the content being read or explained in class or difficulty in expressing ideas? He recalls the frustration and anger on Vu’s face when, in trying to participate with the class, he had launched into an explanation and then got stuck in the middle. That makes Frank remember his own experience with Betsy.

Frank decides he needs to rethink his decision. If he goes to talk with Betsy would she say, “I told you so”? It is hard for him to believe that her classes could really make such a difference. And, given the number of students she is now serving what if she isn’t able to take Vu back into her class? Even if Vu could get back into ESL that would only be for an hour a day. What is he going to do to help Vu for all of the time Vu is in his class? Is he blaming Vu for his own inability to find the time to teach him appropriately? Even with ESL classes, it is his classroom where much of the negativity toward Vu has been created. Can he reestablish his relationship with Vu? Can he regain his trust, undo the negativity that has been created in Vu’s school life? Frank very much wants to be part of Vu’s learning. He is looking for guidance about what to do next.

How would you advise him to proceed with Betsy? How about with Vu?
READER REACTIONS TO FRANK’S SITUATION
REACTIONS TO “THE CYCLE: FRANK AND VU”

The differing perspectives of the respondents to this case reflect the complexity of the issues surrounding linguistic diversity. Some readers focused on Frank’s actions; others commented on what was happening (or wasn’t) in the school as a whole. They touched on the apparent lack of communication among staff members and time for collaboration. There were many opinions about role definitions and the need for formalized structures for collaboration among teachers if students like Vu are to be better served. Some pointed to the absence of the principal and questioned the lack of leadership regarding these issues. In addition, questions were raised about the lack of delineated policies for identification, placement, and criteria for ending second language support (exit criteria).

Another major theme among the responses to the case was how important it is for classroom teachers to understand the nature of second language development. Without these understandings, teachers are likely to overlook students’ need for particular kinds of instruction. Nearly all the respondents felt it was the classroom teachers’ responsibility to acquire the strategies necessary to ensure academic success.

Finally, respondents focused on the relationship between Frank and Vu and how important it would be for Vu’s voice to be heard in the conversation regarding what was best for him. Several suggestions were offered in terms of how to build stronger and safer classroom communities.

Focus on Frank

Responses to Frank’s actions varied. Many applauded him for at least trying to do something. They saw Vu as fortunate that Frank was willing to work with the ESL teacher and use this collaboration as a learning experience for other teachers. Others saw him as a victim of his ego and thought that he should put aside his pride and admit that he made a mistake. This would allow him to continue to collaborate with the ESL teacher to provide for Vu’s individual needs.

I admire his skills for reflection and self-evaluation. Frank is able to see what works in his teaching, and what needs to change. He is willing to change and learn according to the needs of his students, and this is what matters most. It seems that Frank is constantly asking himself what he could
do better and what instruction is in the best interest of his students. Frank is very present with his students and has good intentions.

—Second Year Elementary Bilingual Teacher

Frank did feel like Vu had certain academic shortcomings, but instead of immediately jumping to that conclusion, Frank actually took the time to consult his colleagues, which I found to be refreshing. Many teachers wouldn’t have even taken the time to go through these steps to find out why a child is struggling.

—Prospective Teacher

Vu’s educational opportunities take precedence over any feelings of guilt or awkwardness that Frank may experience. Further, Frank must come to see these events as a valuable learning experience and readily seek ways of improving Vu’s daily schooling experience as soon as possible. The focus at this point should not be on determining fault, but rather on how everyone involved can help Vu to recover his initial feelings of being successful in his English language, social, and academic development.

—Elementary Teacher

I do think that Frank made a bad judgment call by pulling Vu so quickly out of the ESL program. But with the child’s future at stake it is not too late to admit an error and send him back. Frank really needs to figure out what is best for Vu and shouldn’t spend time dreading an “I told you so” from Betsy. Everyone makes mistakes and as professionals they should be able to deal with this issue in an adult manner. Betsy is really as much to blame for she approved the transition in the first place.

—Elementary Teacher

I think that Frank has just suffered from a case of super-teacher syndrome. We have all done it. This is when a teacher feels that he or she can take on a problem student and make huge strides and accomplishments that no one else could in a short period of time. This, of course, rarely happens in the real world.

—Elementary Teacher

I think that Frank’s answer is obvious, and I think Frank already knows what that answer is: He must put his own pride on the shelf and ask Betsy for her help again. For a conscientious, reflective teacher like Frank, the students’ needs must always come first. Frank realizes that he is not able to give Vu the type of support that he needs, and I commend him for being re-
Reflective enough of his own teaching to make that realization. Now he just has to act on his observations and do what is best for Vu, which is to get him back into his ESL class as soon as possible.

Although I disagree with Frank’s initial decision to pull Vu out of his ESL classes, I can understand his feelings. Many teachers are uncomfortable about pullout classes, because they aren’t sure about what goes on in these classes. Frank’s decision to pull Vu out of his ESL class was made out of his desire to become more involved in Vu’s education and I cannot fault him for his enthusiasm. However, I do feel that Frank has let the situation go on too long. He began realizing that he was not meeting Vu’s needs and that Vu was acting poorly because of it fairly soon after he pulled Vu from his ESL class. I know that Frank was hopeful that the situation would improve in time, but I think that he has let his own pride confuse his judgment. As teachers we are often looked to as experts and it can be difficult to admit when we are wrong. But, it is time for Frank to admit his mistake and ask Betsy for her help with Vu.

—Elementary Teacher

Widening the Lens: Focus on the School

It is very difficult for a staff to achieve academic success for all its students without shared beliefs, a common philosophy, and a set of procedures based on them. Many saw Frank’s actions as situated in a larger context where such agreements were lacking. They did not see him as the source of the problem, but rather the problem was caused by the lack of communication and collaboration in the school as a whole.

Faculty members with different backgrounds and training often disagree about what each teacher’s role should be, as well as about what students should be taught in different settings. With the ever-increasing responsibilities being placed on teachers, it can be overwhelming to meet every student’s needs within the time constraints of the school day. Power struggles are often reduced to “Which teacher is best?” rather than “What does the student need?” This conflict is exacerbated by the difficulties inherent in a pullout program, especially one that is not well coordinated with grade level instruction.

Teachers, regardless of background, need to be encouraged to share in the partnership of providing our children with the best educational practice. Consequently, there needs to be open communication and an informed, respectful understanding of the instructional methodologies that occur in each learning environment. To provide the students with learning experiences
that are of the utmost in value, as teachers we need to communicate with
one another and share our goals and focuses for our children.
—Student in Master’s Program

Vu needs the assistance of a professional trained in English language acqui-
sition, AS WELL AS, his classroom. Education is the most effective when
it is a team effort, and everyone involved has an opinion of what a particular
child needs. Frank tried to do it all on his own, and in the end, this
“overachiever-super-teacher” attitude backfired on him.
—Second Year Elementary Bilingual Teacher

ESL teachers have so many children to service per day, limited hours to ac-
complish it all, and only so many battles that they can wage against skeptics
on the merit and importance of ESL. Consequently, Betsy’s superhero
façade gives way to the realistic image of ONE soldier waging a DAILY
battle against opposition.
—Graduate Student

Herein resides the resistance displayed by teachers with regards to truly ad-
dressing the needs of linguistically diverse students. We find that our ability
to change is essential to being effective for our ever-changing student popu-
lation. We question whether or not we are responsible for educating most of
our students or all of our students. We find that we are actually quite parallel
to the role of being a “learner” and rarely can rely upon being an expert in
our profession. We find that asking for help and collaborating with knowl-
edgeable and experienced colleagues is both humbling and transformative
for us and for our students.
—Teacher

I find this case to be a bit disturbing. One thing which I have trouble under-
standing is the animosity that develops between the ESL specialist and
classroom teachers. I’ve witnessed this in my practicum placements. I sin-
crately believe that all teachers should work together to benefit the students.
The most important aspect of being a teacher is to educate students. I find it
offensive that teachers would refuse to further educate themselves in order
to benefit the students. . . . But one thing that I’ve come to recognize is that
different students often succeed with different teaching techniques. . . .
When some teachers send students to ESL begrudgingly or leave the choice
up to the students, this indirectly belittles the importance of learning Eng-
lish and undermines the work of their teammates.
—Prospective Teacher
Leadership

Several respondents questioned the absence of the principal’s voice in these conversations. They wondered why it was left up to Betsy and Frank to solve the problem. Leadership problems at the building level can result from a lack of guidance from the district about policies and procedures, as well as instructional approaches. In a well-run system, individual teachers shouldn’t have been making these kinds of decisions on their own. On the other hand, they also felt that in the absence of such guidance, teachers still must act.

Where is the building leader here? I see a lack of leadership, [a leader who] does not know about the changes that are occurring in school demographics, student needs and staff needs. The case spells out the need to come together as a staff and to create a vision to promote and support students. The need to restructure the school to become an ESL school instead of a small program within a school. This means involving everyone! Does the leader have support from the district to move ahead? Can the leader look at an approach that is not “one size fits all.” What types of staff development might come from knowing where the staff currently is and what needs they have? I believe the more you can engage people from the start, being pro-active versus reactive is the right path to take.

—Program Coordinator–Elementary ESL

But really Frank, Betsy, and Vu are all victims of the shoddy policies of their school district. When it comes to the success of our children, no expense should be spared, for they truly are our future. If one can’t get the support of their school administrators, then it is our job as teachers to find out a way to help children like Vu on our own.

—Second Year Teacher

This school would function much better, and Frank and Betty would feel much less stressed and indecisive if the protocol for ESL students was more spelled out for them and decided upon by the whole staff or district. There are no decisions that should be made on an individual basis in regards to how a teacher feels about a student. Individual factors should be included in a wider set of data collected about the student before decisions like moving students in and out of ESL are made.

—Master’s Candidate
Understanding Second Language Development: Students Need ESL Instruction

Frank’s actions reflect his current understandings of how students learn best. He, like most mainstream teachers, has not received any preparation that could help him respond to the needs of second language learners. As described in the case, many of Frank’s colleagues felt that just being immersed in English all day long should be sufficient. Most respondents, however, called for Frank to put Vu back in ESL where the teacher would build on her understanding of second language development to organize instruction. Those experienced in teaching second language learners maintain that it is necessary for students to be in settings where teachers are focused on making instruction comprehensible.

Frank was well prepared to teach the “average” student. . . . But his methods of instruction are not effective for English language learners. In fact, Frank approached Vu’s language acquisition process as if Vu were in need of REMEDIATION. Frank places him in the lowest reading group and worked with him tutorial style. Vu needed MEDIATION between concepts in content areas and the English used to dialogue about and construct meaning with these concepts.

—Third Grade Teacher

This case represents what is reality for the majority of ESL students and their regular classroom teachers. Teachers may be extraordinary in their content area, but if they lack the training necessary to implement ESL strategies their teaching methods will fall short of effectively preparing lessons and activities that will meet the needs of their students. As is the case with Frank, he felt that he was doing all that was necessary and that his classroom was adapted to meet the learning styles of all students. It may very well have been set up that way, but Vu was not suffering from instruction that did not meet his learning style, but rather from his inability to understand instruction in a second language.

—Elementary Teacher

Frank is an effective mediator between concepts and culturally normative learners. He can bank on a certain amount of shared experiences that his students come to school with. Unfortunately, Frank can not bank on Vu’s shared experiences while trying to mediate content area concepts because communication must also be mediated to insure Vu’s progress.

—Third Grade Teacher
Frank has not been prepared to teach the students he is being asked to educate. He is not being provided the skills he needs to do a good job for these students. Perhaps we could blame him for not taking more initiative to learn about [second language acquisition] and ESL instruction, but with the already heavy workload of teachers, even this is hard to do. I’d like to believe that as a teacher I will never allow a fate such as Vu’s befall any of my students. I guess what scares me most is that despite MY best intentions, and despite the education I have received, and will continue to expand upon as a teacher, I may some day find that I too have failed my students.

—Master’s Program Student

To many, Frank’s actions indicate that he did not understand the distinction between surface oral fluency and academic proficiency. This leads many teachers to overestimate students’ proficiency based on their initial successes at communicating around familiar topics.

Frank doesn’t understand the developmental hierarchy of second language acquisition. L2 students first develop Basic Interpersonal Communicative skills (BICS), allowing them to communicate socially and perform basic tasks, and then later develop CALP, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, which gives them the language to express higher order thinking and academic concepts. When Vu demonstrates proficiency in BICS, Frank incorrectly assesses his readiness to transition full time back into the classroom. Back in the classroom, Vu flounders because he does not have the vocabulary for the academic concepts. Without the content support from ESL, Vu loses academic ground in the classroom.

—Elementary Teacher

I think that Betsy succumbed to some very typical pressures from teachers who don’t understand second language learners, and allowed Vu to be taken out of ESL too early. Many people still believe that ESL is only for basic oral language development and want to move kids out when the student “speaks” English. This ignores the part of the language competence and takes many more years. Many well meaning teachers also push for getting kids into mainstream situations as soon as they are orally proficient so that the students don’t feel “different.” While this is a lofty goal, the second language student still feels different because he or she knows that they can’t compete academically in the environment.

—District Central Office Secondary Program Coordinator

Children and adults alike cannot be expected to acquire proficiency in English within a one to two year period. Repeatedly, data indicates that the time
needed for an individual to become proficient in a second language takes five to seven years. We need to allow our students to achieve success, build a foundation of knowledge, and strengthen the skills in their primary language, so that English acquisition can more readily transfer from the first language to the second. Yet as a society, we have neither the resources nor the inclination to make appropriate changes.

—Master’s Candidate

There are conflicting views over when a student should receive special services and whether immersion in an all-English classroom is preferable to pull-out instruction focused on ESL. Disagreements arise over the best way to deliver ESL services with much of the tension focused on whether a pullout model helps or merely disrupts their instructional program.

I have watched teachers get frustrated with their ESL students. For an hour a day these children are pulled from the classroom for special instruction. They miss math, reading, history, or language arts. Many times they come back to class in the middle of a lesson and are lost. Because they do not know what is going on, they cause disruptions and keep others from learning. The teachers I have spoken to about this issue feel that their ESL students don’t care about school or are lazy. They blame the child much like Frank does toward the end of this piece. I feel it is a combination of the child, the teachers, and the system that cause ESL students to withdraw and become behavior problems.

—Elementary Teacher

The appropriate time for Vu to be in ESL with Betsy would be during Frank’s language arts period. It seems obvious that the remedial reading group with native language students was not an appropriate place for Vu. He is not a native language learner struggling with reading in his first language. His issues have to deal with English being his second language. His interest in figuring out words in text does not mean that he is ready to read in his second language independently.

—Second Grade Teacher—English component of a dual immersion bilingual program

Betsy’s initial focus with Vu relied heavily on oral language development—skills that would be essential for Vu to have in order to succeed. In addition, these skills would eventually help Vu to transfer his linguistic understanding over to those necessary for reading and decoding. However, in
the meantime, he is missing out on direct reading instruction, which will only serve to frustrate him in the long run.

—Master’s Candidate

It is my opinion that Vu needs the focused language instruction that ESL classes provide. I don’t believe that all children can successfully master a new language vicariously. It is not enough for them to simply hear the language, they must also practice the language, preferably in a non-threatening environment. In the classroom, Vu is forced to compete with children who have spent their entire lives speaking and hearing English. I don’t believe that this is an environment that is as conducive to risk-taking as an ESL class, in which all of the children are at a similar level linguistically. I think that Vu would benefit from the comfort and support of the ESL class. It would give him an opportunity to take the risks necessary for him to succeed in learning English. I think that for this reason, Frank should admit that although he had Vu’s best interest in mind, he might not have made the right decision by pulling Vu out of ESL class. Franks should swallow his pride and allow Betsy to do what she was trained to do, teach English as a second language.

—Elementary Teacher

One of the troubling aspects about this case is the school-wide ignorance about the needs of students like Vu. Betsy appears to be one of the only teachers who knows anything about second language acquisition and the school is taking no steps to see that the staff gains this much needed information. It frightens me that this type of situation actually occurs in schools today, but I realize that it does. It makes me feel sick that children are being denied a proper education, and being made to suffer, because of the ignorance about the needs of second language learners. It is also frustrating that there is really no one to blame. It would be much easier if I could point to Frank’s maliciousness, and his wanton disregard for his duty as a teacher as the cause of Vu’s terrible situation. I would like to harangue the ESL teacher for giving in to the whims of the classroom teacher. Unfortunately, the actions they took are all too understandable.

—Prospective Teacher

All Teachers Should Understand Second-Language Acquisition

Other readers maintained that with the increasing numbers of students who speak English as a second language, all teachers need skills and strategies for working with this population. This begins with an understanding
of second language acquisition and the learning of particular instructional techniques. It extends to a commitment not only to utilize appropriate strategies, but to support each teacher’s role in a student’s overall program.

The discussions between Betsy and Frank touched on the need for ALL teachers to receive training in ESL methodologies, and sadly, the potential resentment, and lack of willingness to participate from many staff members. This too represents a disappointing reality: the disconnect between classroom teachers and specialists who many times operate their classrooms as separate domains, rather than interconnected supports for the students.

—Master’s Candidate

The ESL methods of instruction that Betsy mentioned to Frank were not just “good ideas” that might be helpful. ESL methods for language acquisition and concept development are ESSENTIAL pedagogy for English language learners if these students are to be successful in school.

—Fourth Grade Teacher

The entire school community must commit to consistently sending second language students to their daily instruction times, and teachers must realize that language development needs cannot be addressed solely on a one hour a day pullout basis. The entire school day must provide these students with support in the language acquisition process, as well as content reinforcement. Classroom teachers must share the responsibility for these students with ESL teachers; they must also insist that ESL students attend their pull-out instruction times instead of resenting the schedule disruption or refusing to send students altogether. Additionally, the entire staff must agree to work together to coordinate the instruction offered in the ESL classroom and that of the regular classrooms. Instead of not “finding the time” this staff must “make the time” to coordinate with the ESL teacher. All teachers must learn ESL techniques in order to support students in their English acquisition, reinforcing vocabulary and concept development and facilitating their literacy in all areas, content areas as well as Language Arts.

—Graduate Student

The entire staff needs to be supported in learning more about first and second language acquisition and how to work with second language learners in the mainstream setting. Although some will be resistant, the receptive teachers should not be denied access to the information because of a few naysayers. There are people resistant to ANY changes but you reach the
teachers who are ready to be reached and looking for new answers. One way to approach this is to have a teacher study group, which is optional for the people who are ready to really take off on this topic. Mentor teachers who have the experience to share are ideal, but frequently not enough are available. Educational leadership would be an important aspect here—the district and school leaders need to make teaching second language learners as important as any other skills. This is part of the future of U.S. public schools, if current demographic trends continue.

—District Central Office Secondary Program Coordinator

By reflecting on his experience with Vu, Frank should realize several things. He does need special training to effectively teach students like Vu. Frank seemed to think that his enthusiasm would be enough, but it’s not. Neither is the handful of conversations he had with Betsy, the ESL teacher. Frank and the other teachers at his school need to take classes in order to better understand second language acquisition and how it affects students in their classrooms like Vu. Furthermore, ESL is necessary and important for longer than six months. It may seem like an intrusion, but with classroom coordination it could be lessened.

—Graduate Student

It is a mistake to think that ESL programs are not necessary because the student will learn English anyway. For students in this situation, the regular school day can be a long and confusing experience. Often, the only time they receive any meaningful instruction is when they are in their ESL classrooms.

—Elementary Teacher

Many individuals felt that Betsy’s demonstration in Spanish was a very effective strategy to sensitize them to the frustration and embarrassment their ESL students often suffer.

Betsy was wise to give Frank an example by putting him in the student’s place. Unless we know how it feels, it is hard for us to understand, relate, and help these students. Such a thing happened to me when I was in all Spanish speaking kindergarten. Just like Frank, I had to “tune out” a lot of what was going on around me. The situation became frustrating and confusing, since I was only able to understand a small percentage of what was going on. It is important to know what our non-English speaking students are experiencing.

—Elementary Teacher
Reconnect With Vu

A common view was that Frank should reach out directly to Vu to try and get his point of view and reestablish the trust that had been lost. In addition, respondents felt that in each setting, Vu was simply responding to expectations put on him.

Vu probably only sees what he is incapable of doing, not the successes he has made.

—Teacher working on ESL endorsement

Frank has earned Vu’s distrust. The teachers need to explain to Vu that they made a mistake and seek his ideas as to how things could be put right again. Hopefully, they will all come to an agreement to put Vu back in ESL. It would also be helpful for Frank to get some instruction in using sheltering techniques in his classroom so Vu can be more successful during the time that he is with Frank. It could also be useful to find some specific responsibilities for Vu (hopefully his choice) that would help him feel valuable in Frank’s classroom or in the school at large. The teachers need to help him get his self-confidence back.

—Middle School ESL Teacher

Not only does Frank need to examine his teaching practices with Vu, but he also needs to consider how his total learning environment in his classroom may affect Vu and other special learners that he has in class. I get the feeling from the case study that Frank is confident that his classroom environment will help all of his students to succeed. . . . I believe that if Frank seriously investigates the environment he has created, he will then find that other students in the class might also learn better in a slightly different environment. Frank’s classroom may be very effective for more “traditional” learners, but has he taken individual differences into account?

—Graduate Student

The enthusiasm that Frank and Vu have is contagious in the beginning and many classmates are willing to help Vu. However, as time progresses Vu becomes more and more frustrated because he does not understand everything that is going on in class. Frank’s expectations of Vu become blurred and he becomes frustrated as well. Other students in the classroom are no longer willing to help Vu. This is due primarily to the concept of teacher expectation. Often, a teacher’s high expectations of students can lead to a self-
fulfilling prophecy. The teacher shows high levels of positive expectation and the students come to believe that they are able to do well. There are many studies that support this such as Rosenthal and Jacobson’s *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (2003). As Frank’s enthusiasm lessened, Vu’s enthusiasm to learn did as well. Frank needs to find a way to make the classroom a more meaningful experience for Vu and his peers.

—Upper Elementary Teacher

**Build a Classroom Community**

Students who receive ESL instruction usually receive it for just a short time each day. The rest of their day they are in the “regular” classroom where they often feel marginalized from the broader classroom community. A final theme in the reactions to this case was to encourage Frank to examine the entire classroom community. Respondents urged him to take steps that would involve students and teachers working together to build a safe environment and affirm children like Vu’s cultural identity.

There is one last thing to mention. Classmates who were trying to help Vu may have been insensitive outside of the class or when Frank wasn’t able to see. Vu appeared to change quickly and that would lead me to believe that his peers had something to do with that. Maybe they needed sensitivity training, how to help someone in a non-threatening manner. This has happened in my own class before. I had a girl before in my class and she was not able to even write her name. Everyone wanted to help her at first. Then, if I asked someone to work with her it, she seemed to be in the way. They would help her, but seemed to resent it. I had to have a few meetings with them [focused on affect] when she wasn’t around. Then, I started to see progress with the way students treated her. It took many sessions, and help from the special education teacher as well to help run these affective classes for my students. It really did make a difference. With everyone’s help students’, teachers’, and Frank’s, Vu will regain their trust, but it takes a commitment from everyone!

—Elementary Teacher

[I suspect that] I am not providing the right kind of scaffolding for students who communicate less to access concepts and engage in construction of their own knowledge. If some students are constantly engaging with material more than other students and if the “other students” are constantly less engaged with material, I have to ask myself, “Am I satisfied with this class-
room dynamic?” “Can I change my teaching practices to engage all students?”

—Teacher

In order to address the various problems that have come up in his own class regarding Vu, Frank must take actions that will show Vu that he cares about him and is there for him. If I were in Frank’s position, I would start by admitting to Vu that I had made a mistake and ask him for his forgiveness. This may be hard thing for many teachers to do, but I think it is important to let students know that you are human and make mistakes just like everyone else. It is also important to show your students that you are able to admit your mistakes and learn from them, as you expect your students to do. In addition, by apologizing to Vu, Frank will let Vu know that he cares about his well being and is trying to do what is best for him.

—Graduate Student
READER REACTIONS TO
“THE CYCLE: FRANK AND VU”
SUMMARY AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Teachers are more likely than not to begin their careers with little information about linguistic diversity. Usually the focus of their preparation has been on strategies and approaches that are designed for the needs of monolingual English speakers. Until they have to actually teach second language learners, they may be unaware of the special challenges of providing appropriate instruction to this population. What happened to Frank happens to many teachers. One day, with little or no warning, children who do not speak English arrive in their classroom and it is up to them to figure out what to do.

Seemingly the logical first step is to try to fit the new students into the existing routine. In trying to meet any new challenge most people will rely on what has worked for them in the past to determine what to do in the future. If their native English speakers have been progressing well, they will likely continue to teach the way they have been teaching all along. If the second language learners do not succeed, it easy to think the students are not doing their part to learn by not responding to instruction. It takes a while to realize that, in fact, it may be the instruction that is not responsive to the needs of the students. Given a limited knowledge base and experience with second language learners it is understandable why some teachers might blame the student for failing to thrive despite their best efforts. This can lead to frustration on many levels. When teachers eventually recognize that their approaches need to change, as good teachers always will, they will need to ask for help. This can conflict with the sense of autonomy that teachers often feel when they working with one group of students for whom they are completely responsible all day. It is not part of most teachers’ socialization to share responsibility for students or to ask their peers for assistance. They may believe that to ask for help makes them appear less than competent. Well meaning teachers can easily find themselves in Frank’s situation. As you think further about the implications of this case, the following questions are important to consider.

- What are the benefits and drawbacks of providing specialized services to small groups of students outside the grade level classroom? How can the challenges be overcome?
- How can teachers learn to see students’ behaviors as an interaction between their methods and the lives and stresses of the students?
• How can teachers become aware that their instruction might be the problem?
• How can teachers become more confident about seeking help and support?
• What should teachers do when they feel they are more informed than the building leadership about a particular area of instruction or group of students?
• How do teachers’ expectations for students affect their behavior? How are these expectations shaped in relation to students’ cultural and linguistic background?
We have tried to keep this list manageable. The first section contains references cited in this volume, followed by additional books and articles that we believe to be beneficial sources of information. There are many others as well.


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