

CULTIVATING PASSION IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:  
A CRITICAL ANALYTICAL INQUIRY

by

VICTORIA VAZQUEZ WEBBERT

(Under the Direction of Delores Liston)

ABSTRACT

In this theoretical dissertation my aim is to research the academic literature in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), compare it to the life experiences of past and/or present students, colleagues, children and myself to reflect and summarize my learning in the form of a conceptual framework that I have named, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*. The ever increasing number of diverse students in US schools along with the demand for standardized learning and assessments has created a range of challenges for educators that I seek to attend to with the writing of this dissertation. I use the terms second language learners (L2), English Language Learners (ELLs), diverse learners and linguistically and culturally diverse students interchangeably to conform to the terms appearing in the larger academic field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and to vary the academic discourse. These labels refer to students who know a language other than English at varied levels of proficiency; have prior knowledge dissimilar to that of the mainstream population and share differing cultural worldviews. My inquiry revolves around the question: How does *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*, reflect current findings in SLA research to assist educators in making effectual instructional decisions when planning and delivering teaching for ELLs? I selected critical pedagogy for my

theoretical framework and critical analytical inquiry for my methodology. The literature review helps me to formulate my philosophical stance and critical claims within the field of Curriculum Studies, synthesize my critical reading, point at the perceived gap and justify my contributions to the academic field. The results and conclusions surge from the synthesis of documents that are reflected and confirmed in the auto/biographical anecdotes, the school portraiture and the researcher's participation in the educational setting for over thirty years.

**INDEX WORDS:** Second language acquisition (SLA), Second language learners (L2), English Language Learners (ELLs), Diverse learners, Linguistically and culturally diverse students, Critical pedagogy, Critical analytical inquiry, School portraiture.

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By

Victoria Vázquez Webbert

B. A. ED. University of Puerto Rico – Puerto Rico, 1986

M. ED. University of Miami, 1989

ED. S. Georgia State University, 2000

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in  
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VICTORIA VAZQUEZ WEBBERT

Major Professor: Delores Liston

Committee Members: Ming Fang He

Fayth Parks

David Alley

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## DEDICATION

To my husband Dennis, my children Mitziel Victoria and Guillermo José, and my devoted friends for their love, support and encouragement during the long and arduous process of writing this doctoral dissertation.

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## CHAPTER I

## AN INTROSPECTIVE VISION - INTRODUCTION

*An Auto/biographical Quandary*

“You Puerto Ricans can’t speak enough English to even carry a decent conversation”

(Stanley, Summer 1967).

My encounter with Stanley, that summer of 1967, fueled a silent rage and the determination to learn English, the tongue of my tormentor. Stanley, my friend of years past, could not comprehend why the rest of the world would speak a language other than English and would often rebuff me for my limited proficiency in the English language. One of my early strategies to overcome this stigma was to try to read the English newspaper every day. “Fortunately my father has an on-going subscription to this newspaper these days”... I deliberated at the time.

The English newspaper in circulation in Puerto Rico those years, (1970s – 1980s), was, *The San Juan Star*. Reading the newspaper was arduous in the beginning. I had to look up every other word in the dictionary; I did not understand most of what I read and fundamentally it was a dreadfully frustrating activity. Yet, before long, I realized that if I looked at the pictures and headings and tried to relate them to stories I had read in the Spanish newspaper, or heard about in the local media, my understanding of the passages improved and my reading became more proficient. A thought formed in my mind .... “If I learn something in Spanish I will be able to *cheat* in English!” Not knowing why at the time, using my native language to learn always felt like cheating to some degree. This insight led my efforts to learn English in the many years to come. My arsenal of

strategies for learning English and my awareness in reference to what learning a second language entails was set in motion then, roughly forty years ago. Eventually, I had an epiphany... not only was I going to learn English, *I was going to teach it!*

### *Dissertation Problem*

Much has changed since my young years in Puerto Rico and my resolution to move to the United States mainland but the challenge and my commitment to teach English to second language learners has just intensified. The increasing numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse students, in schools in the United States, and the recurring requisites for standardized learning and assessment have created the challenges that educators (i.e., classroom teachers, policy makers, and school administrators) contend with today. It has been my life mission to decipher the process of learning a second language, and academic content in that language, to share it with my peers.

Surrounded by a climate of diversity and despite inequality, teachers are expected to provide instruction that meets the needs of second language learners (L2). Teachers of ELLs assist their students in developing English language proficiency and academic knowledge as measured by state and federal requirements and as a means for obtaining a postsecondary education or accessing employment opportunities. The systematic study of how people acquire a second language (L2), “referring to any language learned after the mother tongue” (Ellis, 1985, p. 5) is a phenomenon belonging to a time in which a global village increases the need for communication between people from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. “These communication patterns go further than the local communities to include patterns of contact beyond the local speech community as a conduit to postsecondary education or employment” (Ellis, 1997, p. 3). Applying this

understanding to my decision to teach English meant that I needed to unravel the mysteries behind the process of learning a second language and also grasp how students learn *school* in a recently acquired second language.

*Some Recent Statistics – Growth of ELL Population in Georgia and in the United States*

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) through the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) and The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), there has been a growing trend in the population of English language learners (ELLs) of about 400% in the last five years in classrooms across the United States, mostly in classrooms in the east and southeast. Based on state-reported data, it is estimated that **5,112,081** ELLs were enrolled in public schools (Pre-K through Grade 12) across the United States for the 2003-2004 school year. This number represents approximately **10.3%** of the total public school student enrollment, and a **43.9%** increase over the reported 1993–94 public school ELL enrollment in the nation, a decade before.

Between 1989-1990 and 2004-2005, ELL enrollment has more than doubled, going from 2,030,451 students to 5,119,561. According to state-reported data for the most recent years, the number of ELLs in U.S. schools has exponentially increased over the past fifteen years. Within this same time frame, ELL enrollment has grown at nearly seven times the rate of the total student population enrollment. The table and figure that follow illustrate the estimated year-by-year increases in total student body and ELL enrollment in schools of the United States during the alluded time (OELA's NCELA, December 2006, Section, ¶ Intro).

Table 1.1

Elementary and Secondary Enrollment of ELL Students in U.S. 1989-90 to 2004-2005								
School Year	Total Enrollment	Growth from 1998-99	Growth from 1993-94	Growth from 1989-90	ELL Enrollment	Growth from 1998-99	Growth from 1993-94	Growth from 1989-90
1989-1990	40,608,842			--	2,030,451			--
1990-1991	42,553,764			4.8%	2,198,778			8.3%
1991-1992	42,790,993			5.4%	2,429,815			19.7%
1992-1993	44,444,939			9.4%	2,735,952			34.7%
1993-1994	45,443,389		--	11.9%	3,037,922		--	49.6%
1994-1995	47,745,835		5.1%	17.6%	3,184,696 <sup>1</sup>		4.8%	56.9%
1995-1996	47,582,665		4.7%	17.2%	3,228,799		6.3%	59.0%
1996-1997	46,375,422		2.8%	15.0%	3,452,073		13.6%	70.0%
1997-1998	46,023,969		1.3%	13.3%	3,470,268		14.2%	70.9%
1998-1999	46,153,266	--	1.6%	13.7%	3,540,673	--	16.5%	74.4%
1999-2000	47,356,089	2.6%	4.2%	16.6%	4,416,580	24.7%	45.4%	117.5%
2000-2001	47,665,483	3.3%	4.9%	17.4%	4,584,947	29.5%	50.9%	125.8%
2001-2002	48,296,777	4.6%	6.3%	18.9%	4,750,920	34.2%	56.4%	134.0%
2002-2003	49,478,583	7.2%	8.9%	21.8%	5,044,361	42.5%	66.0%	148.4%
2003-2004	49,619,090	7.5%	9.1%	22.2%	5,013,539	41.6%	65.0%	146.9%
2004-2005	<b>48,982,898</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>20.6%</b>	<b>5,119,561</b>	<b>44.6%</b>	<b>68.5%</b>	<b>152.1%</b>

(OELA's NCELA, December 2006, How has the English language learner (ELL) population changed in recent years? section ¶ 1) (Public domain)

In Georgia there was a marked increase in the ELL population in 2003 – 2004 that continues to spiral in the 2006 – 2007 school year. Before 1995, about three-fourths of the nation's immigrants settled in just six states: California, Texas, Illinois, Florida, New York, and New Jersey. In the decade since, however, immigrants increasingly have bypassed those traditional *gateway states* (Anrig & Wang, 2006, section 1) in favor of new frontiers; twenty-two other states have experienced exceptionally rapid growth in their immigrant populations. Georgia ranks third in the list of preferred new destinations. Georgia's need for cheap labor for industries such as poultry, meat processing, carpet manufacturing, construction, and agriculture fostered the active recruiting of laborers from Mexico which in turn has resulted in difficulties serving the needs of this new immigrant student body (Anrig & Wang, 2006, section 2).

Table 1.2 Georgia Data and Demographics

Jurisdiction	ELL Enrollment 2003-2004	Total Enrollment 2003-2004	Percent ELL 2003- 2004	ELL Enrollment 1993-1994	% Change from 1993- 1994
Georgia	59,126	1,513,521	3.9%	11,877	397.8%

(OELA's NCELA, December 2006, Georgia Data and Demographics section, ¶ 1)

### *ELLs' Academic Difficulties in School – Initial Thoughts*

ELLs endure academic hardships in school for a mixture of reasons. Primarily, ELLs may be academically unsuccessful because they do not have access to the language and content instruction that would better suit their intellectual and emotional needs. For ELLs from lower socioeconomic backgrounds instruction that takes for granted middle-class values becomes insurmountable and meaningless. Still some other ELLs may find themselves in a quagmire learning English and content due to native linguistic or cultural divergence. Still, a number of ELLs may have difficulties learning English and content due to prior schooling incompatible with the basics necessary for success within the mainstream curriculum or ELLs simply may have had limited prior schooling (Ariza, 2006).

Thinking back to my encounters with my friend Stanley, I ponder how fruitlessly I struggled to understand what made us different. *I felt that difference*. Culture refers to the cumulative deposits of knowledge, experiences, communication patterns, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group interactions; in a sense it is “behavior through social learning” (Culture, Some definitions, 1994, ¶ 1). Culture's

byproducts translate into acceptable/unacceptable “multicultural manners” (Dresser, 1996, p. xvii) that foster or impede multicultural encounters including those that occur in classroom transactions. In the words of Guadalupe Valdés, “[culture] is the ordinary, hard-working, inner world of families” (Valdés, 1996, pp. xi & 17). As we are socialized into groups, “we learn much of our behavior unconsciously;” (Banks & Banks, 1997, p. 40) but cultural behaviors have a powerful effect on human learning and learning to be. I bashfully smile at the thought of the surprise I would feel, not too many years ago, when total strangers would ask me what Hispanic country I was from. My usual reaction was to ask myself how they could possibly know. Utterly unaware of it, I carried a bold heritage on my sleeve that was totally invisible to me!

The qualitative understanding of the households in which English Language Learners grow up, with its rich socio-historical context, allows the researcher and the teacher to gather information from the learner’s “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992, p. 133) to improve the teaching and learning process. The term *funds of knowledge* was originally proposed by James B. Greenberg (1989), a social ecologist from University of Arizona during the annual conference for the Society for Applied Anthropology to refer to the richness of the experiences, versus the lack thereof, of immigrants in classrooms in the United States. Moll et al framed their discussion concerning *funds of knowledge* on the significance of the students’ prior knowledge and experiences when acquiring new knowledge and skills for academic success (Moll et al, 2005). Now it is evident to me that my strong educational background in Spanish, allowed me to intellectually succeed in English. This argument will be one of relevance for my dissertation. In the interim, I fondly remember my early commitment to reading that English newspaper!

In time, I came to realize that the *stages of English language proficiency, the components of culture which form the value system and beliefs of the native culture and the prior learning experiences of ELLs* have major implications for the academic knowledge teachers need to teach and students need to learn. In this theoretical dissertation my aim is to research the academic literature in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), compare it to the life experiences of past and/or present students, colleagues, children and myself to reflect and summarize my learning in the form of a conceptual framework that I have named, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*.

The components depicted in the conceptual framework form a lens through which educators and ELLs can filter their schooling demands, departing from the wealth of experiences that come with all students, to form a coherent view of the teaching and learning process. Informed teachers and students *make sense of the instructional process as an arena for educated decision making* in order to move towards more effectual academic execution. The roots of this form of thinking originate in my existential belief which takes for granted that “every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity” (Sartre, 1985, p. 10). “Subjectivity must be the starting point” (p. 13). My experiences learning English and learning in English reassure me of the legitimacy of these thoughts and add substantiation to my thesis.

Like kaleidoscopic images, each component in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*, is multi-dynamic and multi-faceted. Each aspect interacts in multiple ways within and among each area to create descriptions of an academic learning that varies from ELL to ELL; this learning cannot



be prescribed. Teaching and learning become insightful and personal. For my part, the possibility of making a contribution to the Curriculum Studies field becomes a powerful magnet for intense reflection and analysis to optimistically in the end inform the process of teaching and learning for all students. “I ought to choose whichever pushes me in one direction” (Sartre, 1985, p. 26). Today, the option of teaching only a certain kind of student, following a standard and unilateral methodology is not viable any longer in light of the changes in student population in the United States. I hope that educating ELLs becomes the finest response to Freire’s urgent call for “*praxis*” (Freire, 1993, p. 85).

#### *Audience*

This is a time of newly acknowledged diversity in U.S. culture. Voices are becoming audible; faces are becoming visible; and we are realizing, some of us for the first time, how many silences there have been in the past, how many blank spaces in our history. We are discovering the range of perspectives that must be taken into account as we work to remake community, as we strive to achieve common ground (Greene, 1995, pp. 1-2).

The academic literature pertaining to the education of English language learners (ELLs) has consistently been directed towards teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). As a result of their specialized training, ESOL teachers have practical knowledge of the stages of second language acquisition, are adept in the evaluation of prior knowledge and are sensitive to the cultural mores of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. ESOL teachers routinely grapple with the encroachment of language, prior knowledge and culture on the teaching and learning

process of ELLs. With their growing experience, ESOL teachers become responsive to the needs of students who speak a language other than English and thus hold values and beliefs dissimilar to what is presumed to be the typical student population.

Consequently, the ESOL teacher becomes by default the expert classroom teachers consult when teaching students they were never trained to teach. Yet, in my experience, ESOL teachers, remain mostly unaware of the manifold domains inherent to teaching a second language and academic knowledge through a second language or the interconnectedness of these domains in the process. Mainstream teachers' call for assistance from the ESOL professional is often limited to the request of *some strategies* to work with the ELLs in their classrooms. In this manner, the teaching and learning of ELLs becomes the haphazard process of trial and error of scripted strategies. This stilted form of teaching further disadvantages students already in danger of failing academically.

Thinking back, my teachers did not really understand the process of teaching and learning a second language for academic achievement. They also taught us by trial and error! A strong personal motivation and flashbacks of my disgruntled friend Stanley have prodded me to continue unraveling this enigma. Most appropriately then, this study has been conducted with mainstream classroom teachers in mind; teachers who strive to teach ELLs without the essential knowledge about the process. Well intentioned professionals often feel perplexed and anxious in the face of the awesome duty that teaching students they do not understand, linguistically or culturally, represents (Ariza, 2006).

English language learners as a rule have immigrated to the United States in search of a better life. Teaching these students presents a challenge to committed educators who are not aware of the intricacies of teaching a second language for academic achievement

in the United States. “Teaching through English to native speakers of the language has no relation to teaching through English to those who are learning English .... We cannot compare ELLs with native English speakers” (Ariza, 2006, p. xiii). My study provides a visual framework of the learning process of ELLs to provide educators the initial knowledge necessary to engage in educated decision making processes when teaching diverse students. *Knowledgeable educators do not leave the learning process to chance.*

### *Context of the Study*

The context of my study goes back to the years of my youth and to my experiences teaching ELLs in Florida, Georgia and Puerto Rico. My contextual knowledge covers the stories of many peoples: my children, students, teachers, administrators; counselors and community advocacy groups, who have at some point asked me what to do with the English language learners in their schools, classrooms, communities and churches. *In their search, I found my research.*

Comparing my personal experience, as an English language learner, to that of my students helped me develop what Mary C. Bateson terms “peripheral vision” or learning along the way (Bateson, 1994). Our stories provided me with the courage to proceed with the project of explaining our common journeys learning English and succeeding in the academic mainstream of the United States. I have made every effort to make sense of my lived experience in the process of helping my students acquire English and academic knowledge and in helping my colleagues make sense of the process as well.

My students have been for the most part *involuntary immigrants* experiencing the pain that accompanies a relocation not of their choosing and the subsequent placement in the lower social echelon of their new setting as described in the work of Schmid (2001),

McPherson (1995), and Ogbu (1998). The term, *involuntary immigrants*, was initially coined by John Ogbu to refer to the forced immigrants of slavery times, who regardless of their numbers would remain subjugated to the ideology of the dominant group and forever considered minority groups (Ogbu, 1998). Today many ELLs find themselves in the midst of an opportunity they did not choose. Their parents decided their destinies in that mystical search for a better life. For some contemporary authors and for me, these involuntary immigrants parallel the emotional condition of the forced immigrants of McPherson, Schmid and Ogbu's work. Forced immigration bears importance on the students' disposition to learn English and academic content. Hayes (1992) correlates minority school failure with whether or not immigrants came to the United States voluntarily or involuntarily. Valenzuela refers to these new immigrants as "immigrant and involuntary minorities" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 17) directly paralleling Ogbu's work.

Esperanza Santiago's mournful immigrant voice captures this feeling of powerlessness and rage when she narrates the events of an agonizing childhood split between two countries and torn by two incipient but rivaling identities:

Muchas veces siento el dolor de haber dejado a mi islita.... Y a veces el dolor se convierte en rabia porque yo no seleccioné venir a los Estados Unidos. A mi me trajeron (Santiago, 1994, Introduction).

*Many times I feel the pain of having left my tiny island.... And sometimes this pain becomes rage because I did not choose to come to the United States. I was brought here (Translation).*

The pain and resentment of relocation remains with many involuntary immigrant children even beyond their school years. To further compound the problem, these

children are often subject to hostile attitudes of people in their communities who urge them to learn English or *go home*, like in the case of my friend Stanley. Partly because of their nostalgia, my students thrived when I built classroom instruction around their unique beings. I learned that beliefs (culture) and former education (prior academic history) have an impact on the learning of ELLs that is more significant than the student's English language proficiency or the student's theoretical ability to learn. My students flourished when I was able to look at their unique beings and construct meaningful classroom instruction around observations about them. "Children develop through concentric worlds, gradually able to move further from home but always seeing each larger sphere through the lens of the previous stage" (Bateson, 1994, p. 170).

My study is the passionate result of academic exploration and a response to those who have triggered my thoughts regarding the education of ELLs in one form or another. Their questions and observations are etched in my narratives and analysis. I try bringing justice to their contributions through the recollection of events which find confirmation in narratives, theory and practice. I have become ardent in my desire to foster change in the educational process of ELLs. The teaching and learning of students must focus on *who* we are teaching as an effective path to *what* we are to teach and *how* we are to teach it, *otherwise, we are not really teaching.*

#### *Research Questions*

As the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) increases in classrooms across the United States, language and content area teachers search for information, knowledge, strategies and skills to make instruction more successful when teaching an increasingly diverse student population. The voluminous information on the subject of

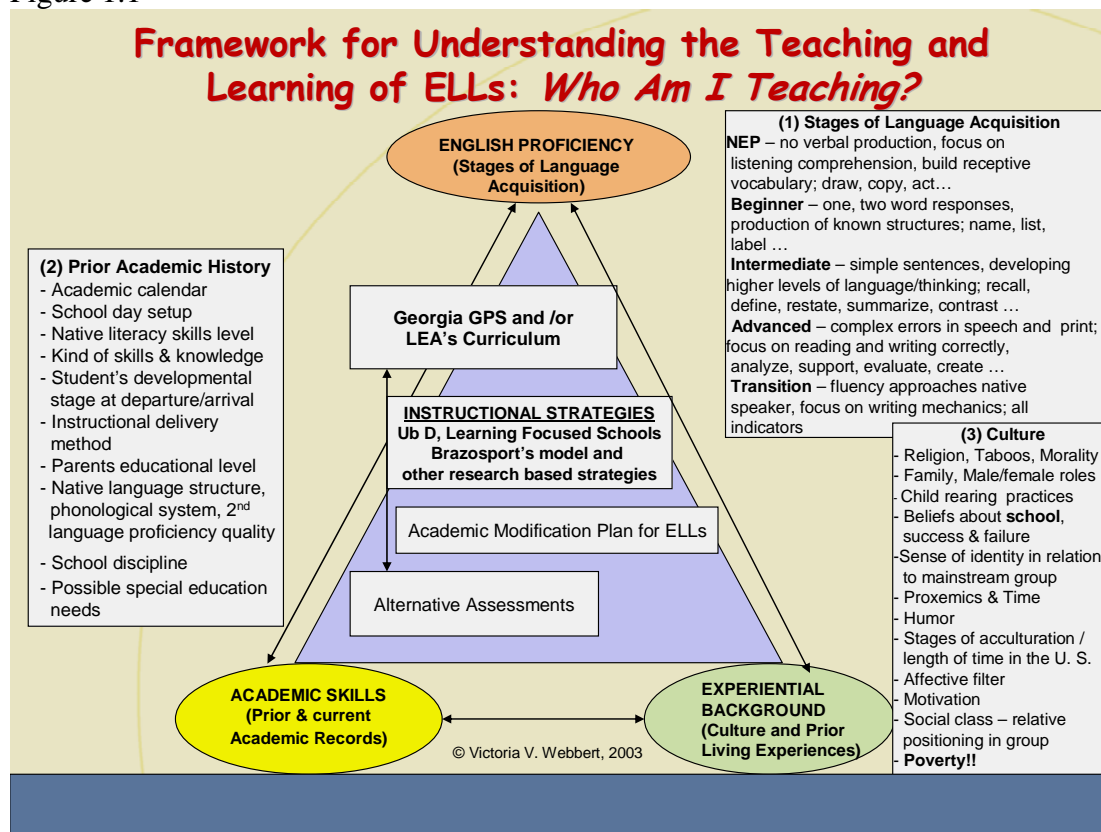
teaching English language learners found in publications and the electronic media is mind boggling for educators faced with the daunting task of researching and tailoring information for immediate use in their classrooms. For educators overburdened by busy schedules and artificially imposed deadlines, the only alternative seems to be to accept the glossy, pre-packaged programs that promise to be the panacea to their instructional woes when followed precisely and in their entirety. This prescribed approach to teaching often fails to meet the educational needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. My many conversations with colleagues who have invariably asked what to do with their ELLs indicate to me the need for a more organized and focused approach in the field of second language acquisition and *L2 academic learning*. Educators and students yearn for a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the process embedded in learning a second language and academic content through a newly acquired language.

In my experience, a large amount of educators reinvent the wheel every time they work with ELLs; this reinvention of curriculum and instruction follows a sporadic, nearly random scattergun approach to teaching that to me is absolutely unacceptable. Through my work with teachers, students, parents, school administrators and policy makers plus the critical analysis of the academic literature available in the field of second language acquisition, I have developed a conceptual framework to assist educators in thinking about and deciding on the strategies for learning that better fit the uniqueness of their students. My research interests are reflected in my research questions and my everlasting commitment to this field of study. My study aims at providing some answers.

*Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

My dissertation explores the functionality of this conceptual framework in the hopes of strengthening and broadening its potential use among educators.

Figure 1.1



The presentation and arguments for the framework are interlaced through the study using a spiraling approach for the discussion. The process of creating this instrument spans the last forty years of my life and is woven from theory, experience and practice in a thirty-year professional career. From the instant when I resolved I was going *to teach English*, my personal quest has been to answer the question: *How do you teach English to English language learners?* My doctoral dissertation focuses on the thoughts, anecdotes, queries and theories that have molded the creation of this instrument.

*Overarching Research Question*

How does *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*, reflect current findings in SLA research to assist educators in making effectual instructional decisions when planning and delivering teaching for ELLs?

*Specific Research Questions*

1. According to SLA research what is the impact of the stages of English language acquisition on the teaching and learning of ELLs as mirrored on *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*?
2. According to SLA research what is the impact of prior knowledge on the teaching and learning of ELLs as mirrored on *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*?
3. According to SLA research what is the impact of culture on the teaching and learning of ELLs as mirrored on *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*?
4. Does the *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* portray the information that teachers and students need to *know and perform* to make the teaching and learning of ELLs the result of decision making instead of a process of haphazard trial and error initiatives?

*Premises Grounding My Study*

- A. The teaching and learning of second language learners has mostly occurred through a process of trial and error in classrooms across the United States.



- B. Teaching is a decision making process that ought to examine *who is being taught* when determining *what to teach* and *how to teach it*.
- C. The massive resources addressing the education of students from linguistic and cultural diverse backgrounds impairs educators' ability to engage in educated decision making to optimize the opportunities of learning for ELLs.
- D. Feelings of inadequacy lay at the core of the indifference or hostility some educators may evidence towards linguistically and culturally diverse students. "Teachers punished the children who often did not understand what was required of them" (Tse, 2001, p. 67).
- E. A conceptual framework for the education of diverse students allows teachers to operationalize the teaching and learning of ELLs competently and promptly for increased success in the teaching and learning process.

*Personal Justification - Auto/biographical Roots of My Study*

I was born in New York during the mid 1950s to parents from Hispanic descent who immigrated to the mainland United States in search of a better life. My birth occurred during a time when segregation was a vigorous reality, in the lives of Blacks and Whites, creating difficult spaces for those who did not fully fit either category. My parents decided to return to Puerto Rico, in part, to evade these controversies. I grew up speaking Spanish but fully conscious that English was the language of opportunities and status. "English fluency is a badge of prestige, a membership card for entry into the mainstream" (Tse, 2001, p. 19). My feelings of subordination and inferiority were the intentional result of a system of colonial bilingualism and schooling directed at fostering dual identities. "The native tongue and ways of living of the colonized people of Puerto

Rico were relegated to a perennially inferior status to foster blind obedience to the United States” (Walsh, 1991, p. 3). My school years provided limited opportunities to learn English. Teachers, “barely proficient in English themselves” (p. 99), taught the basics about the English language. *I learned about English but did not learn to speak English.*

In my late elementary school years, I began to spend the summers with an aunt who lived on an American military base in Puerto Rico. The children I befriended there spoke English only and often rebuffed me due to my limited proficiency in the language. Reminiscing about those years, I realize that my English proficiency at the time was as good as the teaching of English I had received so far. My English teachers, in the colonized island of Puerto Rico, had mostly used the grammar-translation method to complement direct instruction of grammatical structures and boring drills to *practice English*. I knew all the personal pronouns in English, their counterparts in Spanish and in the same manner I knew the numbers, the colors, the days of the week, the months of the year and common, everyday words. The English language was a subject I learned about, not a communicative tool for interactions with speakers of the language. In that summer of 1967, I felt inadequate among my newly found friends.

Stanley, my friend of years past, could not comprehend why the rest of the world would speak a language other than English. On this particular summer day, out of sheer aggravation Stanley yelled at me: “You Puerto Ricans can’t speak enough English to even carry a decent conversation.” Stanley was utterly frustrated at my inability to understand his instructions for the game he wanted to play. Only in time did I come to understand that you are not supposed to follow a playmate when you play hide and seek!

Following his verbal outburst, Stanley left the playground where we had been playing, stomping on his way out. Stanley's words were etched in my young consciousness.

Stanley's remark meant that we [Puerto Ricans] were not smart enough... that we were limited beings... that we were inferior. But how could that be, I pondered? I had been born in the United States... just like him. Our birthplace was the same! At the tender age of twelve, I had been left behind in the middle of the manicured American military playground, speechless and utterly embarrassed, preoccupied with the unfolding events. At that young age, I did not understand the pervasiveness that one's appearance or cultural background had in dictating one's worth. My visits to my aunt, at the American Military Base and my initial experiences trying to communicate with friends in English had been so disheartening that my efforts to learn the language stalled and my learning of English virtually *fossilized* (Brice, 2002); my learning of the cherished target language was halted (Ellis, 1985, Krashen, 1982 & Gaas & Selinker 2001).

*"I am not playing with you anymore!"* Stanley, my skinny, freckled, blue-eyed friend of decades past, does not know that his temper tantrum that early, summer morning would become the catalytic force behind my educational research. Being a researcher in the making has allowed me to critically analyze the process of teaching and learning of second language learners against the backdrop of theory and experience. It has become obvious to me that teaching is a decision making process in which *who I am teaching* informs *what to teach* and *how to teach* it. Furthermore, "The lesson that life can be led as a work of art, and that in doing so the maker himself [sic] is remade, and that in this remaking in this re-creation we find the heart of the process of education" (Eisner, 2002, p. 56) becomes the inspirational force behind my research. I must continue learning,

researching, doing and sharing to be able to continue existing, continue being, continue having a voice. This is the sum of me as a person, educator and a researcher in the making and provides the personal justification for my study.

*Teaching and Learning as a Monolithic Unit*

According to Noddings, *teaching implies learning*, and compares the teaching process to selling. “No one can sell unless someone is buying” (Noddings, 1995, p.49). In this sense, teaching would consist of guiding students through inquiries of their own choosing, to awareness of possibilities in relation to what they had already learned. If learning had not occurred at the end of the inquiry then the teacher would have *tried* to teach. Other lines of thought establish that *teaching does not imply learning*; “rather it consists of the teacher’s intention to bring about learning, be reasonable and be done in a rational manner” (pp. 46-51). In this differing point of view, teaching would not require students since a teacher who were presenting a lesson through a television program during an unknown power failure would still be teaching (Noddings, 1995).

Questions about the teaching act and questions about the connections between teaching and learning are at the roots of philosophical considerations that try to respond to the question: “If your students do not learn when you are teaching, are you really teaching” (Noddings, 1998, p. 45)? These discussions have evolved into various philosophical positions from the time when Dewey stated that learning must occur as a result of teaching in the 1930s to the times when some believed that “teaching does not imply learning” (Noddings, 1995, p. 46). Philosophically, the answer to the question requires a full understanding of what is teaching; what is learning and what is knowledge, “a challenge even Noddings postponed for later consideration” (p. 45).

For me and for this study, teaching *only* occurs when students learn. This learning may be defined as becoming skilled at the curriculum, or learning something worthwhile that allows them access to their humanity more fully. This learning must be evidenced through their academic achievement in a variety of assessment measures or through other deeds in the search for social justice. In my study, I use the phrase *Teaching and Learning* to stand for a *monolithic entity* representing a process that is indivisible and interdependent in its parts and further justifies my quest to ensure that teaching results in learning for ELLs.

#### *Social Justification*

My ample readings through the course of this degree have made evident to me that that the otherwise thought of as *benevolent* motivation for the inception of the “*American*” public school is fraught with ongoing conflicts over cultural domination, beliefs about racial superiority, deculturalization patterns and haunted by the specter of genocide. The obliteration of peoples deemed inferior - those non-whites - has been legitimized by religious zealotry from the inception of the United States (Takaki, 1993). Whether newly arrived or already settled, students from diverse backgrounds have constituted a “colonized segment of the American society” (Spring, 2004, p. 11). Their participation in the educational system of the United States has been impeded by the misinterpreted attempt to protect the nation’s hegemony by inculcating predetermined values embedded in the schooling process. Jim Cummins (2000) refers to these open and authoritarian forms of power as “societal macro-interactions,” (p. 47) and defines them as frames of reference that influence the collective assumptions, expectations and goals of

individuals in a social process that delimits the kind of interactions possible among people in the group (Cummings, 2000).

In the United States, effective teaching has been downgraded to the ranking of scores students attain in numerous standardized tests. These assessments are generally not responsive to the dimensions that affect the teaching and learning of diverse students. As a result of blind faith on these assessments, educators engage on the faulty reading of their students' academic strengths and weaknesses further eroding the foundations for consequential teaching and learning. "Parity with English speakers on standardized tests is a badly constructed method for determining fluency in English for ELLs .... half of all *native* English speakers cannot achieve the average standardized test score for native English speakers" (How Long Does It Take English Learners to Attain Proficiency?, June 2000, ¶ 9). The stages of English language proficiency, prior academic knowledge and socio-cultural differences of diverse students are dimensions of high impact for English language learners and their teachers. Schools desperately try to find answers while many of their diverse students fall further behind academically; in this climate the teaching and learning process proves to be flawed from its inception.

The commoditization of the schooling system in the United States props itself as the proverbial carrot dangling in front of the horse for the growing number of students who belong to a minority culture and language background. No matter how hard they try, the dangling carrot is systematically kept out of their reach. As a student in the mainstream program of years past, I recall *making it* academically but still feeling that insidious inferiority. I was never equal. I had never done enough; I was not yet equal to

the image of students in the mainland United States I had ingrained in my unconscious mind. I continued to try harder but it was never enough.

Nowadays the educational picture for ELLs is even of poorer quality and it is more complicated. The current emphasis on standardized curriculums and assessment indiscriminately exchanges good teaching for test preparation further divorced from the students' realities, experiences and needs. "If there is no agreement about what is included in language proficiency, then any explanation that attempts to probe some of the more profound mysteries of language will be incomplete" (Bialystok, 2001, p. 14). The schooling process then becomes irrelevant to the many students who abandon their education to enlarge the already swollen ranks of laborers in support of a free market economy and thus closing the circle of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The crisis in the educational and social institutions of the United States is not an accident. "Failure to learn from the part of the student should be investigated as a failure of an educational system that can't be critical about the student's needs" (Giroux, 2001, pp. 3 & 4). Giroux and Aronowitz (2001) denounced the processes of "*social reproduction*" (p. 47) instilled in a "*hidden curriculum*" (pp. 57 – 59) which legitimize the system of class structures developed by the dominant oppressive larger group, preponderantly, "school's role in reproducing social values" (pp. 47, 57 – 59). This hidden, value laden curriculum serves the interests of capitalism and results in the disadvantaging of minorities, primarily Blacks, Hispanics and women who face the worsening of their employment and social conditions.

The lives of minority families and the new immigrants to the United States increasingly paint a bleaker picture in multiple reports available from the Office of the

Census Bureau. The latest issue of *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005* cites differences of up to twenty percent in the income, homeownership and access to health insurance between minority groups and the higher indices of their White counterparts (DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette, Proctor, and Hill, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In light of these obvious disadvantages and the forces that mold the curriculum in schools of the United States, educators face mounting demands to conform to the dictates that shape the schooling process in the United States. Caring education professionals consider how to comply with these demands and still provide students with the education that would afford them the opportunity to overcome their underprivileged status. Against all odds many of these caring educators succeed in making a difference for their students.

#### *The Present Political Undercurrent*

Under the *Civil Rights Act* by “Merely providing ELLs the same curriculum, the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum available for native speakers of English is not enough, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” (Ovando, *Bilingual Education in the United States, Policy – History* [2003] retrieved June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, ¶ 3). The existence of a language barrier, differing prior academic knowledge and cultural norms that deviate from the norm effectively bars ELLs from “equal access to an education” (Ovando, *Bilingual Education in the United States, Policy – History* [2003] retrieved June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, ¶ 3).

To approach the task of schooling ELLs, educators must have knowledge of second language acquisition (SLA), understanding of the impact of prior schooling on the



teaching and learning of ELLs and an perceptive appreciation of how socio-cultural factors shape the learning of ELLs. The unplanned mission to educate immigrant children is a pressing socio-political debt that continuously grows in its proportions along with the United States. The number of immigrants to the United States has changed and will continue to transform the dominant racial composite of the nation in as little as fifteen more years (The New Demography of America's Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act, Children of Immigrants Increase to One in Five School-Age Children, 2005, ¶ 5). Social justice, *equity and equality transpire in the midst of an educational realm that is the outcome of educated decision making and not the product of haphazard trial-and-error initiatives*. My study participates and shares in the invitation for the concerned researchers of Ming Fang He and JoAnn Phillion work who call for researchers who:

Are not detached observers, nor putatively objective recorders, but active participants in schools, families, and communities to become immersed in lives and take the concerns of the people they work with, to continuously search for ways to act upon those concerns and the known demands to fulfill their explicit research agenda focused on equity, equality, and social justice (He & Phillion, in press with Teachers College Press).

*The Educational Challenge for English Language Learners*

As the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) expands in classrooms across the United States, language and regular content area teachers search for information, knowledge, strategies and skills that would make education more effective when teaching an increasingly diverse student population of ELLs. Information on

teaching English language learners found in publications and electronic media is mind boggling. Educators find themselves faced with the daunting task of researching and tailoring information for use in their classrooms. For busy educators, the only alternative seems to be to accept glossy, pre-packaged curriculum programs that promise to be the panacea for their instructional concerns when followed precisely and in their entirety.

More often than not, these alienated instructional programs fail to meet the educational needs of diverse students and their teachers who in the end find themselves subject to a process of trial and error when deciding what instructional approach to pursue in their classrooms to serve the needs of ELLs and mainstream students at the same time. Nowhere in the literature is this cry for help more audible than in Tse's (2001) rhetorical question "Why don't they learn English?" (p. 9). For many educators it is difficult to sift through the multitude of strategies and methods offered to teachers of ELLs and determine which strategies would fit better the needs of their students.

*"Teaching is a decision making process"* (Victoria Webbert, 2003, personal commentary). Educating ELLs effectively is not only about teaching and learning English. Teaching ELLs inherently requires that teachers and students engage in the continuous diagnostic-prescriptive decision making process that is incessantly reexamined, updated and reevaluated for effectiveness along with a persistent commitment to social justice. To be successful ELLs need to master content knowledge, in a language they minimally understand, and demonstrate progress as measured by state mandated standardized assessments. The task of educating ELLs becomes an overwhelming process for both educators and students alike. To further compound the problem, there is too much information available to educators and limited guidance as to

how to evaluate this information for applicability in their particular classrooms. Which high impact facets need to be taken in consideration when deciding on a sound pedagogical approach to teach ELLs? For mainstream educational programs the NCLB Act of 2002 was an attempt to answer the obvious:

Most educators and policy makers felt that it was up to the language-minority students, not the schools, to make the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive adjustments necessary to achieve assimilation into American society. When many of these students did not prosper academically, their home cultures and languages were frequently singled out as the culprit. Blaming language-minority students for their academic failure became fashionable among social scientists. Hence, school administrators and teachers generally did not assume responsibility for developing culturally and linguistically compatible classroom practices (Ovando, 2003, p. 6).

After all, the sense of culpability triggered by believing in one's own inferiority promotes the domination of the status quo with the consent of those dominated by it, clever indeed!

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 has integrated an element of accountability, previously missing from the educational formulas for minority student populations in the United States. Changes in the policy arena may be examined with Garcia's (2005) optimism or cynically rejected in light of the counterproductive outcomes of current and former educational policy in the United States.

If we can attend to policy that counts then one could predict that as more bilingual students enter the right kind of schools, barriers to their academic, social and academic success will fall .... In that policy arena

language distinctions will blend with other features of our society .... This is of course a highly optimistic scenario (Garcia, 2005, p. 98).

Under the new regulations of the NCLB, educators scramble to meet predetermined levels of academic achievement for their diverse students in order to meet federal mandates. However, understanding the high impact dimensions that influence the teaching and learning of ELLs in isolation is not enough. Systematic discernment of all the components embedded in the teaching and learning progression of ELLs is necessary to create the analytical, reflective lens through which educators confidently answer the question: Who am I teaching? Armed with this information, educators begin to make knowledgeable decisions in the design and delivery of instruction for ELLs. When instruction is meaningful and effective; trial and error initiatives are not necessary.

#### *Summary, Significance and Limitations of the Study*

A theoretical dissertation involves the development of a new perspective for a particular topic. The researcher provides a critical account of the research in the field and develops a particular line of thought or theoretical position on the chosen topic. My theoretical dissertation primarily aims at describing the development of the conceptual framework I created, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*, as it is justified within relevant SLA and cultural psychology literature. I selected critical pedagogy as my theoretical framework and critical analytical inquiry for my methodology.

In this study, the first part of the literature reviews my philosophical perspective and critical claims within the field of Curriculum Studies. In the second part, I scrutinize the academic work related to the dimensions of SLA, prior academic knowledge and

cultural worldviews to synthesize my critical reading of the field, point at the perceived gaps and justify my contributions to the educational field. My contribution is represented in the creation of the graphic organizer which summarizes the process of teaching and learning for ELLs, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*. The significance of this study reveals that neither SLA theory, or ELLs' prior knowledge nor socio-cultural theory alone provide a comprehensive structure for understanding the teaching and learning of diverse students, justifies the conceptual framework and extends and invitation to future researchers in the field.

*Future Directions, Limitations and Implications of the Study*

While *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*, I consider, is a missing component for the effective teaching and learning of students from diverse language and culture backgrounds, I deem the implications of this work to be more far reaching. Mainstream students also bring into the teaching and learning process a language, that even when it is English, deviates to some extent from the Standard English required for academic achievement. All students bring into their teaching and learning their own culture that may deviate to some degree from the WASP, middle class *hidden curriculum*. This hidden curriculum is embedded in the ideologies and decisions about the kind of knowledge that should be taught in schools put into practice in schools across the United States by the rightist, neo-liberals committed to markets and individualistic choice and to an ideology of management and accountability that benefits the interests of the dominant majority (Apple, 2001).

All students bring into the equation of teaching and learning a socio-cultural background which determines the manner in which each student *learned to learn*. In my

judgment, the implications of this framework pertain to all students in schools of the United States. I leave to potential researchers *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* as an instructional tool and a departing point for future research involving the academic achievement of ALL students.

The limitations of this study are related to the theoretical nature of my research which is intrinsically an acknowledgement of the existence of personal bias inherent in the discussion of the topic (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Acknowledging my potential preconceived notions compels me to select the auto/biographical backdrop as a preferred medium for the dialogue in my study balanced against intense research of theory in the SLA field. Ethically, it would be impossible to provide faulty education to a group of students to compare their performance with students whose education was provided on the basis of optimum methods. The qualitative nature of this study, the absence of a comparison group, or the call for more empirical data, may be pointed as limitations of this study. I propose that the empirical data necessary to enhance the analysis in this research may be the vital component of a post-doctoral longitudinal study. In a follow up study, researchers would aim at measuring the changes in pedagogical practices of teachers who internalize and implement the premises espoused in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* then also measure the long range rate of academic success for the students in the study.

The positioning of my study within the historical progression of curriculum studies and the possibility that it may represent a turning point for future research and practice requires that readers remember that “earlier historical moments still operate in the present, allowing researchers to attach a project to any canonical text or historical

moment” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, pp. 29 – 30). “The processes of qualitative research are multiple; they are linked and interactive, to each other and to the human being who is the research instrument” (Meloy, 2002, p. 145). My study becomes fusion and elucidation of theories, experience, people and places that can be generalized to the learning of second language learners and their teachers.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERSONAL INQUIRY – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### PART I

##### *Procedural Deliberations*

My literature review has a dual purpose. In the first, I share with my audience the philosophical considerations and the deliberation process that compelled my research in the field of second language acquisition. In part two, I share with my readers the theoretical foundations in SLA grounding my analysis and thesis.

Theory is the foundational portion of the thinking process essential to the practice of education. “There is nothing so practical as good theory” (Lewin, 1951, p. 5). The practice of theorizing recognizes the common elements and the uniqueness of the human situation within the larger issue of teaching, learning and teacher professionalism (Muus, 1996). In my study I present a continuum of research which closely mirrors the anecdotal vignettes that enhance my narrative to provide educators with examples of inquiry in practice for discussion and reflection. “Theories must seek connections – the patterns of causality, relatedness, and dependency that exist among its components” (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, p. 6). My initiative stems from the conviction that much of the knowledge necessary for better teaching and learning in classrooms with widely diverse student populations is not yet part of the preparation of pre-service and/or in-service educators. My study heralds my firm belief that educators “need to become students of their students – their cultural metaphors, languages and linguistic understandings, learning styles – to recognize them as resources for learning” (Holmes Group, 1990, p. 41).



“A research field does not just *happen* .... A field evolves over time and involves the labor of many participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 69). The research traditions observed in the past were an acknowledgement of temporal socio-cultural phenomena and as such provided a schema for the inquiries and dilemmas educational researchers and practitioners encountered and/or fostered in the educational practices of the time. “The problem of learning becomes how the social and the individual can come to tolerate ethically the demands of the self and the demands of the social” (Britzman, 1998, p. 8). As a researcher in the making, I feel a responsibility, to observe, analyze, synthesize and disseminate the feast of ideas, observations and thoughts emerging from my study to critically respond to my reality and that of my peers, students, teachers and colleagues. The theoretical resources for my study exist within the global and digital village which inquires: Who am I? .... Who am I teaching? My responses to these questions mark the path for my *passionate pursuit of teaching as decision making*.

Hence who I am as a researcher responds to my understanding of what other educational researchers preceding me did as a response to their distinctive set of circumstances of place, time and people and to the expectations educational researchers and practitioners entrenched in the present, “post-experimental” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 29), multicultural United States expect from me. In the mid 1980s to 1990s, the writings of Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) established crossroads between the work of auto/biographical researchers and curriculum to lend the field of curriculum studies its qualitative momentum. Educational researchers recognized that auto/biography is a more appropriate medium for the integration of qualitative approaches to classroom research when trying to “understand teacher thinking and the curriculum” (pp. 554 –

555). Qualitative studies take upon themselves the task of disclosing the qualities of events, objects and places as these relate to the people enmeshed in the thick plot of life (556). “Qualitative inquiry practices endeavor not to measure but to describe” (p. 581).

*Personal Philosophical Considerations*

I acquiesce with a personal definition of the word *power*. Freedom of choice is power. “Truth and reality are linked to the inherently human ability to make choices” (Sartre, 1998, p. 41). These choices are not bred in the epistemological arrogance of *Truth* but embedded in the on-going possibility of learning, being and choosing to be; “*quietism*” (p. 20) ceases to be an option. Through my learning in Curriculum Studies, I gained a label for this way of thinking: *Existentialism*. Existentialists emphasize the freedom of being of human beings. “People are not thrown into the world with a nature ...by planning, reflecting, choosing and acting people make themselves” (Noddings, 1995, p. 59). By making life happen, I learn a personal truth/reality based on my lived experience as I relate to others. As I read, live and learn, I encounter other voices that reverberate with this thought. “What more interesting topic is there than who are we” (Liston, 2001, p. 218). This proactive stance engenders the “optimistic toughness” of Sartre’s discourse (Sartre, 1985, p. 32) present in my pursue of a very personal quest.

*“To live your life in your own way ... To reach for the goals you have set for yourself ... To be the you that you want to be ... That is Success (author unknown)!*

Words have always had a powerful draw for me. As a young woman browsing the knick knacks of a local bookstore in Puerto Rico, I encountered these words imprinted on the face of a magnet shaped in the form of a rustic, old document. This magnet, now a fixture on my refrigerator’s door, is a means to revisit these inspirational words over and over

again in search of the encouragement to plow ahead. These thoughts have stirred my reflections and sense of being for roughly four decades. Even now, these words ground a personal axiology that reorients my learning and being in the unending process of becoming. As I further my learning, I realize that this consciousness about life and choices, that I once thought alienated, resonates in unison with other like minds, and I crave for more. I learn to dismantle socially entrenched arguments and find direction in the lives and words of *others* who resolved to live life in their own terms. I confirm a personal philosophy: *Creating my own existence is the most pervasive form of revolution.*

This existentialist epistemology has encouraged my avid study of archetypal *texts* with the stubborn determination to live life as a personal experience and not as the dictum of other people's elucidations. My parents did not instill in me this form of thinking; this kind of insight was nurtured by the reading of countless books and driven by a will of steel and my motivation to choose to be me in tandem with my existentialist thought (Sartre, 1985, p. 15). It has been fascinating to encounter a sister soul that in similar ways describes a childhood lived within and unidentified but incipient Existentialist pose. "At a very early age I had a strong sense of who I was and what I was about and what was fair .... I would pass many hours studying, reading, painting, writing" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 38). As an echo of Anzaldúa's remarks, I still hush my mother's voice claiming that I would go insane as a result of too many hours of study, even now when she is gone....

Reading Greene, Lorde, Anzaldúa, Liston and the narratives of other feminists helps me realize that my education is still incomplete. I am continuously thrown back to the beginning of my learning in a "circular rather than linear exploration in which there is no clearly marked beginning or end" (Liston, 2001, p. 17). Living and learning mesh

together in an ever fluid personal epistemology which molds my ethics for being. I struggle to learn more at a feverish pace as if to outrun the unexpected. I live through this new learning; *fully aware now that when one stops learning; one begins dying.*

This is my search for the *Joy* that enlightens the spirit and “empowers us to create our own worlds” (Liston, 2001, p. 21) and bears my vibrant awareness of the human duty to foster collective critical consciousness. It is an eager concern with submissive-subversive ideas to ameliorate tyranny in the midst of institutions that emblazon themselves with the aura of freedom. It is a persistent disposition to ameliorate the oppression of many, or maybe of only a few. It is the joyous confirmation of who I am and a need to proclaim that *I am an Existentialist*; it is paying homage to those who have by and large inspired me, like in the poem below.

*Maxine Greene, a Philosopher in Metaphor*

*If we were to paint with color the work of philosopher Maxine Greene, we would need the extreme colors of an imaginary, fiery palette...*

*Maxine Greene’s work would bear the shades of the crimsons to convey the passion with which she confronts her existence in relation to so many others...*

*It would take the hues of azure to depict the limitless sky of her doing and being...*

*It would take the blazing brilliance of the diamond to capture her essence, always in a state of luminous flux...*

*And it would require the earthly emerald greens, the teals and the tans to represent her quest to remain her authentic self, forever grounded in the now, in the here, in New York and in the world.*

*These colors would be plastered upon a never ending canvas, always incomplete, always a work in progress, always willing to change course at the discovery of yet something new...*

*Victoria Vázquez Webbert*

*September, 2005*

*Why Must I do This?*

I imagine that my allegiance to a clear philosophical thought should be unquestionably delineated and aligned with those thinkers, who I would concede have particularly shaped my personal philosophy. *Yet, I cannot do this in a definite or final way.* The anonymous and orphaned thoughts, I had as a young person about society and my foreboding fate, reverberate with the wisdom of many thinkers. Thinkers, who I just encountered and those I keep meeting in my short lived scholar life, are all fascinating to me; I have difficulties selecting some thinkers over others. I want to keep their thoughts forefront and alive, vibrant and shifting and free to become or not as I continue to learn to be. Yet, the theoretical framework of my dissertation claims deep roots in the work of the philosophers that follow below.

*Social responsibility*, I am awed by Freire's call to praxis; *praxis* is what my teachers did for us students of the island of Puerto Rico in the early 1970s, and what probably prevented that many of my classmates and I were part of the pessimistic statistics that qualify minority groups. My theoretical framework resides in the folds of a *praxis* that is knowledgeable, uplifting and life altering. Many times as an educator and

learner I have heard the question: “Why do I have to learn *this*? How is *this* going to make a difference in my career and my life?” Such questions lead me to reflect on the premise that knowledge should make a difference in a person’s life. As I ponder about this premise and reflect on my philosophy of education, I often ask myself: As educators, what kind of knowledge and skills do we want to share with our students? How are these knowledge and skills going to affect their lives and their social environment? And as a learner, what are the skills, values and principles I want to develop to advance my quest of being? Freire’s social responsibility is the epistemological response to the question “what knowledge is of most worth” (Pinar, 2004, p. 19). In order to instruct our diverse students; we must draw on students’ interests, connect students’ lived experience with academic knowledge and promote critical thinking and intellectual development to ultimately encourage change of a stifling status quo.

*Agency*, I am awestruck by Greene’s call to proactive doing and the urge for incessant change while responding to and at the same time challenging the status quo. My theoretical framework honors the decision making process that should be happening in the classrooms of the United States and the world at large. Agency is entrenched in the kind of teaching that promotes empowerment for “people to change their worlds in light of their desires and reflections, making sense of their own situations, not to change it for them” (Greene, 1973, p. 21). In opposition of the dogmatic and stale pedagogical practices of conformist pedagogies, agency enables learners to “see through old stereotypes and understand how they became central to our discourse” (Biklen, 1995, p. vii). In this spirit, I attempt to describe the teaching and learning of second language

learners as an extension of my own learning, ethics and being and as the existentialist quest of becoming forever on.

Maxine Greene, the extraordinary philosopher in the contemporaneous field of education, becomes the source of immitigable convictions, a prod for my incessant *why* and the larger than life reflection upon which I measure my dedication to the Curriculum Studies field. “Teaching is an existentialist project – you choose yourself as a teacher .... it is a job of empowering people to change their worlds in light of their desires and reflections, making sense of their own situations, not to change it for them” (Greene, 1973, p. 21). This assertion finds its zenith in the life and work of Maxine Greene. Already in her late eighties, Greene continues working in her “project of becoming” (Ayers & Miller, 1998, p. 11) *the project of learning life as it is and as it can be*.

It is fundamental that learning has the power to make the doer (teacher) and the receiver (student) more human by always asking ‘why’ in the constant quest to resist meaninglessness and the weariness that rouses from a mechanical life. “In some fashion the everyday must be rendered problematic so that questions must be posed” (Greene, 1973, p. 11). “For Greene, the educated individual is one who possesses critical questions about the worlds we inhabit, engaged with others in dialogue about their shared worlds and how to improve them, and one who seeks and scrutinizes the explanations of the human condition offered by others” (Reed & Johnson, 2000, p. 126). I endlessly realize that again, I have made the choice: to ‘speak with authority’ for those who are oppressed fired up by the aesthetic experience that generates actions conducive to freedom. Maxine Greene’s life and philosophy epitomizes this agency as a way of learning and a way of being ethically and humanely; who wants to join me?

*Still Many Other Voices Clamor at Me*

Still, I am fascinated by thinkers like Britzman (1998) with her insistence that “the most pervasive form of revolution is yet the most indirect” (p. 6). My theoretical framework resides within the limits imposed by the schoolhouse using the dictated curriculum to foster critical teaching and learning. I am also captivated by Pinar’s (2004) call to remain a practitioner in the corporate school system providing assistance and advice to foster school reform. And, I am painfully aware of Purpel and Anzaldua’s admonition that intelligence is not enough, that we must proactively seek good deeds.

David E. Purpel’s thoughts in *Moral Outrage in Education*, reminds me that “intelligence is not enough; intelligence in its purest form can be used to spin out good or evil” (Purpel, 2001, p.18). “Intelligent people are very capable of inscrutable acts of evil the same way that intelligent people can produce an inordinate amount of good deeds” (p. 162). Purpel’s message points at the need for intelligence that bears fruit, intelligence that ameliorates human suffering and transcends the world of pure theories to mitigate the status quo. A status quo that discounts those who do not fit the mold based on concerns of race, gender, class, ethnicity sexuality and other socially constructed labels. I have the power to make a difference in the stereotypical way of thinking of one human being at a time; those who change socio-critical positions co-author philosophical revolutions for a more just civilization. What do I have to gain? Human dignity, I can’t stay quiet in this matter of convictions; it is not an option for me, “silence is consent” (p. 21).

An appraisal of this newly invigorated consciousness reminds me that, “knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious ... knowing is painful because after it happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable ... I am no



longer the same person I was before” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 70). I recognize now the inherent responsibility to promote a collective critical thinking consciousness in those I am able to reach. It is my charge to promote the kind of knowledge that can make education the bridge for those who suffer oppression so they “can enter the world by way of education and career and become self-autonomous” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 39). It is my duty to adhere to the admonition for proactive stances in the words of Phillion, He & Connelly: “Their work describes experience and transforms the ensuing understandings into significant social and educational reforms” (Phillion, He & Connelly, 2005, p. 1). The existential underpinnings of my personal philosophy lay behind the aim of this qualitative research to suggest how teachers of second language learners along with their students engage in educated decision making in the active process of learning.

#### *Literature Review - Summary for Part I*

What are the options? There is only life and death, not willing to choose death; I make every effort to reconcile the status quo with an incipient critical consciousness.

Pinar’s language (2004) sheds light on how I choose to go about it:

Being a theorist does not mean being a celibate in terms of everyday practice. It does not mean one cannot function successfully in the corporate school, providing advice and assistance. Being a theorist does mean that the contemporary curriculum organization and the modes of cognition it requires must be bracketed, situated in history, politics and our own life histories. Such understanding might allow us to participate in school reform in ways that do not hypostatize the present, but rather, allow

our labor to function as do those in psychoanalysis, to enlarge the understanding and deepen the intelligence of the participants (p. 31).

Critically linking the stories of my life and that of my students within my existentialist philosophy provides a theoretical framework and methodology for my research. My theorizing and conceptualizations bear fruit through the development of a conceptual framework that takes the shape of a graphic organizer. *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* visually illustrates the teaching and learning for ELLs as informed decision making in the classroom, dissimilar to the implementation of haphazard trial-and-error initiatives prevalent in schools today.

## CHAPTER III

## THE INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY – REVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE

## PART II

*My encounter with Stanley, that summer of 1967, fueled a silent rage and a determination to learn English. But not only I was going to learn it; I was going to teach it!*

(Victoria Vázquez – 1970)

I was determined to teach English, *but how exactly do you teach English to English language learners?* What else does this kind of teaching entail? For a long time, I have asked myself what is language acquisition and learning? What would be the most effective method for learning a second language? How would English language learners learn a second language and academic content through a newly acquired language? And, I am not alone in this concern. “If there is no agreement about what is included in language proficiency, then any explanation that attempts to probe some of the more profound mysteries of language will be incomplete” (Bialystok, 2001, p. 14). In my case, and in the cases of the students and parents I have worked with, the proverbial *silver bullet* never materialized to facilitate the process of teaching and/or learning a second language. Unquestionably, then *school learning* for ELLs cannot be left to chance.

*It is unfeasible to theorize in isolation.* I appraise academic research related to the dimensions of second language acquisition (SLA), prior academic knowledge and the cultural worldview of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to explain the process of teaching and learning for this student population. “I stand on the shoulders of giants” (The Very Highest Quality Information, Standing on the Shoulders

of Giants, 2006, ¶ 2) in my quest for analysis and synthesis of theory that effectively describes the progression of teaching and learning for English Language Learners (ELLs). My contribution is represented in the creation of a graphic organizer which summarizes the process of teaching and learning for ELLs, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*.

*Consequently, the purpose of part two in my literature review is to focus on the theoretical considerations that have molded the study of second language acquisition (SLA) in the United States over the last half of the twentieth century and on to the present. In the United States, the study of language acquisition is recent and has been profoundly influenced by the fields of psychology and linguistics.*

The field of second language acquisition (SLA) is a relatively new field of inquiry that takes theories and methodologies from a number of disciplines (psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, social psychology and neuro-linguistics) and uses them to understand the process of second and foreign language acquisition in instructional and non-instructional settings (Valdés, 2001, p. 19).

My emphasis in this section is on SLA theory and its implications with regard to the pursuits of my study. Generally speaking linguistics, the study of language and psycholinguistics and the study of language and cognition, are well populated with numerous texts that range in density and purpose. The presentation of the topic of language learning has been primarily academic with “the intent of providing a detailed initiation into the discipline of linguistics; they tend to be lengthy, technical and daunting” (Ellis, 1997, p. vii).

The positioning of my study within the historical progression of Curriculum Studies and the possibility that it may represent a turning point for future research and practice requires that one remember that earlier historical moments still operate in the present, allowing researchers to attach a project to any of the canonical texts or historical moments (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). To recognize and acknowledge the academic rigor of my study implies that we recognize the periods of qualitative research as they resurface in my narration of events and my passion for theory and analysis grounded on semiotics, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. My examination becomes fusion and elucidation of theories, people and places that can be generalized to the learning of other second language learners.

Typological categories are interrelated and overlapping, not mutually exclusive. A typology is rarely able to encompass the total universe of existing or future cases. Consequently, some cases can be described only by using several of the categories (Banks & Banks, 2004, p. 6).

The progression I follow in this section aims at summarizing the theories and methods that have been of more impact for the current field of second language acquisition theory as I perceive them being in traditional and more recent second language acquisition (SLA) theory and for the development of my conceptual framework, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*. My objective is to provide novice educators in the SLA field transitional content designed to ease them into the complex field of educating second language learners. *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language*

*Learners* provides essential knowledge to assist educators in lesson planning and provide instructional support for ELLs.

*Historical Overview of Second Language Acquisition Theory*

*Classic Approach – The Grammar-Translation Method*

The grammar-translation method for foreign language teaching is the most traditional method for learning a second language. It originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to teach classic languages and literature such as Latin and Greek (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). The method emphasizes the written work to the implicit exclusion of oral production. As Omaggio (1986) comments, this approach reflected “the view of faculty psychologists that mental discipline was essential for strengthening the powers of the mind” (p. 89). In this method, the emphasis is on achieving *correct* grammar with little concern for the application and production of the oral form.

The major characteristic of the grammar-translation method is its focus on learning the rules of the grammar of the target language in order for students to be able to translate passages from one language into the other. Vocabulary in the target language is learned through translation from the native tongue. Classes are taught in the student’s mother tongue, with little use of the target language. “Traditionally, listening was not taught in language classes” (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 4). Vocabulary is taught in the form of isolated word lists. Elaborate explanations of grammar are always provided. Grammar instruction provides the rules for putting words together; instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words. Reading of difficult texts is begun early in the course of study. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis. Often the only drills are exercises in translating

disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue, and vice versa. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation (Omaggio, 1986). *This approach was historically used in teaching Greek and Latin. Unfortunately, the approach has been generalized to teaching modern languages.*

*Early Language Acquisition Theories (1940s – 1960s)*

Early studies of the learning of humans favored the behaviorist theories of B. F. Skinner in which any kind of learning was the product of a stimulus - response scheme (Skinner, 1974) within a natural selection process and “strengthened by its consequences or reinforcements” (pp. 44 & 50). For Skinner even feelings occur to serve as a causal for behavior which then becomes habitual, predictable and thus controllable (pp. 11 & 13). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continuing in some cases into the 21<sup>st</sup>, behaviorism has been the preferred theory and method to explain the inception and progression of language in humans. Language acquisition was qualified as an operant behavior by Skinner who professed that “when a behavior has the kind of consequence called positive reinforcement; such behavior is more likely to occur again” (p. 52). Skinner’s theories gave way to the audio-lingual teaching method prevalent in classrooms across the United States early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but not absent from language classrooms even these days.

The audio-lingual method was based on the principles of behavior psychology. New material language was presented in the form of a dialogue or repetitive language drills. Based on the principle that language learning is habit formation, the method fosters dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases and over-learning. Structures were sequenced and taught one at a time. Structural patterns were taught using repetitive

drills. Skills were sequenced: Listening, speaking, reading and writing were developed in order. Vocabulary was strictly limited. Teaching points were determined by contrastive analysis between L1 and L2. There was abundant use of language laboratories, tapes and visual aids. Great importance was given to precise native-like pronunciation. Successful responses were reinforced; great care was taken to prevent learner errors. There was a tendency to focus on manipulation of the target language and to disregard content and meaning (Principles of L2 Teaching Methods and Approaches, 2002, ¶ 4).

The audio-lingual method may be familiar to many of us who attempted learning a second language following this unsuccessful approach. I began learning English in this fashion in my native Puerto Rico. My mind conjures the image of Mrs. Amato, my English teacher in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Mrs. Amato was a petite, young, perky, strawberry-blonde-haired woman married to a Puerto Rican military man. Mrs. Amato insisted on the daily repetition of the English phrases etched on her blackboard from the beginning of the school year. The board was never erased once the practice drills and dialogues were imprinted early in September. For Mrs. Amato, her students' English had to become automatic, habitual, perfect and fast. Mrs. Amato's English language possessed the correct inflections and pronunciation of the cherished native speaker which none of her students would be successful at imitating.

My memory of a personally uncomfortable incident in my 8<sup>th</sup> grade class with Mrs. Amato, which is now amusing only in retrospect, portrays the extent to which the audio-lingual method was pervasive to classrooms of that time. Mrs. Amato was keen on



the choral reading method and insisted on a number of endless and boring repetitions characteristic of the Audio-Lingual Method. On that fateful day, she insisted that I pronounced the word *dog* (dɔ̃g) according to her perception of the faultless pronunciation of this morpheme. Mrs. Amato resorted to all kinds of antics to help me generate the perfect phonemes for the word. I pronounced the word; it seemed like, several hundred times while Mrs. Amato gripped my lips trying to make them form the sounds my ears were unable to hear, (Bialystok, 2001) even if my life had depended on it, which it possibly did as I reflect on this incident! I was mortified, profoundly embarrassed and became the target of innumerable jokes that horrible school year. For the rest of that ill-fated year, I avoided using the word *dog* around anybody. Can you imagine how the whole incident felt to a teenager in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade?

Human speech sounds area subset of the potentially infinite range of possible sound forms. The limitation of range is determined in part by the limits of what our auditory system can hear and what our articulatory system can produce. The sound differences that turn out to matter in a language because they change meaning are phonemes. Languages are built out of different phonemes (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, p. 14).

The naked specificity of the scientist mind would reduce the meaning of a phoneme to the simple *making of noises* found in Pinker's (1994) well-known book: *The Language Instinct: How the mind Works*. In Pinker's definition phonemes are simply noises made with our mouths to reliably cause ideas in each other's minds. Ideas would be tough to transmit for anyone who is unable to hear a specific sound, like the ɔ̃ in *dog*!

Mrs. Amato's students of the class of 1971, in that tiny suburban area of Puerto Rico, were never able to meet Mrs. Amato's pronunciation expectations, even when we practiced language drills like the one below... over and over again. The *cartoonish* quality of the drill below may be somewhat a distortion of the audio-lingual drills, but it is faithful to the truth of learning language those days.

Table 3.1

**Activity 2 – An Activity Illustrating the Audio-Lingual Approach**

*Practice the following sentences. Remember that the tongue does not contact or vibrate against the tooth ridge or palate when you pronounce [r] correctly. (Lado & Fries, 1954 in Flowerdew & Miller, 2006, pp. 8, 15).*

What is he reading?	He's reading a book.
What is she reading?	She's reading a book.
What are they reading?	They're reading a book.
What are you reading?	I'm reading a book.
What is he writing?	He's writing some letters.
What is she writing?	She's writing some letters.
What are they writing?	They're writing some letters.

Many of you reading this dissertation are probably able to relate to your own experiences learning Spanish and/or French in the high schools of your time, regrettably; we can find this teaching style in language classrooms anywhere between the 1950s and now. The resulting production of the English language, by the students in Mrs. Amato's class and in many more classrooms across the United States, was incompetent in English communication but very adept at the memorization of the boring drills. Unquestionably, like parrots, language students could recite the many language exercises but when trying to convey a message, dumbfounded and mute, students stared at the communicative situation with great dismay. No wonder my childhood friend, Stanley, left the park,

stomping on his way out, that doomed summer morning. Trying to communicate with a parrot is not pleasant for either the parrot ....or the person occupied with it.

I do not imagine being an expert in psychology, linguistics or brain research. I know what I know because I have observed, read abundantly and engaged in thinking about language development and academic learning for a good part of my life. Yet, reading Skinner's well known book, *About Behaviorism*, (1974) leads me to understand that even Skinner recognized the influence of the cognitive and social domains in the development of language proficiency. In Skinner's now controversial doctrine, the famed psychologist admits that language, operant behavior or not, is social at inception. "How a person speaks depends upon the practices of the verbal community of which he is a member" (p. 99). In Skinner's behaviorism, language is special because it is reinforced by its effects on people, self and others (p. 101). Skinner's observations in 1974 were the catalytic force for a novel movement which proposed that language and cognition operated in concert.

*Cognition and Language – Noam Chomsky (1970s – 1980s)*

The methods based upon a behaviorist theory of learning were soon disputed by the theories of language and cognition of Avram Noam Chomsky, the leading figure in the "cognitive revolution" of the 1970s through 1980s (Smith cited in Chomsky, 2000, p. vi). "It is only about twenty-five years since psychology shed the shackles of behaviorism and allowed researchers to indulge in speculations and theories that included constructs such as mind" (Bialystok, 1991, p.5). Chomsky argued that it was impossible for people to acquire a language by simple repetition and reinforcement. Children, he said, do not learn a language this way, for they do not, in fact, repeat what adults say, but produce

their own sentences, and create phrases which they have never heard before (Chomsky and the Critique of Behaviourism, [1954] ¶.1). They also make systematic errors, and no amount of correct input or of error- correction will stop them from doing so. Humans do not so much *learn* a language; they create it over again. The essence of generative grammar is the belief that: “The normal use of language is, in this sense, a creative activity” (Chomsky, 1986, p. 100).

“The set of rules that specifies the sound meaning relation for a given language can be called the generative grammar of this language – the grammar of a language generates an infinite set of structural descriptions of abstract objects defined by a particular sound and a particular meaning” (p. 104). For Chomsky the unlimited ability of humans to produce language never heard before is evidence of a thinking process that makes language as opposed to one that merely imitates language. “Repetition of sentences is a rarity; innovation in accordance with the grammar of a language is the rule in the ordinary day-to-day performance” (p. 118).

Chomsky caused a revolution in 1965 with his theory that humans are biologically programmed and have a special LAD- *Language Acquisition Device*, an automatic and mechanical predisposition to understand the grammatical system of language which enables him to learn a language. Children learn more about the structure of the language than we can expect of them from the sample of language they hear, they discover language for themselves. Children make sense of what people say and do; this happens because of the child's ability to interpret situations and actively process hypothesis and inference to arrive at knowledge of

language. Interestingly enough the child has to first understand the non-verbal context, and then apply that knowledge to help with the verbal part.

This ability is influenced and controlled by cognitive and emotional growth (Nahir, 1979, pp. 423 – 429).

Chomsky contributed an important concept to the theory of language development and learning: the famed Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Chomsky claimed children were born with a hard-wired language acquisition device (LAD) in their brains which predisposed them to developing language and a notion that language is infinitely generated from the internalized set of rules the LAD facilitates. Researchers invoke the function of such brain device, the LAD, either to redefine its existence or elaborate in the discussion, the consensus seems to be that “one cannot hope to explain the patterns of language processing unless various mechanisms of language processing are also taken into account” (Bialystok, 2001, p. 68).

Researchers in linguistics and psycholinguistics have reconceptualized the innate ability to learn language in humans as the function of an innate universal grammar system [UG] congenital to humans which facilitates language acquisition (Bialystok, 2001, p. 68). Chomsky argues that the underlying logic, or deep structure, of all languages is the same and that human mastery of language is generative, not learned (Chomsky, 2000, pp. 6 – 7, 61 – 62, 65, 101, & 186). Thinking about language and cognition shifted the focus of the on-going language acquisition discussions. One of the areas at stake was the impact of language one [L1] on language two [L2] and how the learning process can be of assistance, or not, through schooling. As of more recent research, theories of positive or negative interference between L1 and L2 have been discredited as “the faulty

conclusion of laboratory contrived experimentation during the behaviorist era” (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p.68). Theoreticians and researchers consider questions regarding the relationship between first and second language acquisition and even theorize that native language acquisition may be highlighted by the observations derived in studies of second language acquisition (Bialystok, 2001, p. 7).

All along, I have been confident that to learn a second language one would need to engage in thinking. Thinking about what one heard other people say in the target language, thinking about how the native language functions influence the acquisition of new language functions, thinking about what one wanted or needed to say, thinking about what worked better to learn in the target language and other related thinking situations framed my own learning and molded my teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Cognition appeared at every juncture in the process of acquiring, learning or teaching a second language. Krashen & Terrell (1983) provided the original distinction between the acquisition and learning process (p. 10). Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) seem to also refer to this cognitive process when they define the function of a *monitor* present in the cautious communication patterns of second language learners: “Conscious processing may also underlie a learner’s use of his or her first language structure to formulate second language sentences in particular situations” (p. 59).

Cognitive progression in the acquisition of a second language is central to my discussion in this study; I try to analyze and depict the critical processes that take place in the heads of learners and ultimately result in the acquisition of a target language (Bialystok, 2001) and how these processes/dimensions impact an informed decision making process in the classroom. Language acquisition and/or learning is a multifaceted

process that cannot be explained or predicted without consideration of the complex interactions among the several factors that are involved in language development. These foundational pieces in SLA theory helped me lay a primary scaffold for analyzing second language acquisition. Along with Bialystok (2001), my interest in learning about second language acquisition can be traced to my interest in human cognition and knowledge development.

*Second Language Acquisition Theory – 1980s to the Present*

“Learning a second language can be exciting and productive ... or painful and useless .... the difference often lies in how one goes about learning the new language and how a teacher goes about teaching it” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 3). The job of every language educator is to ensure the latter does not overpower the former.

The focal point of this section in my literature review is SLA theory. Prominent researchers in the field of language acquisition and/or second language acquisition pay close attention to the observable stages of language proficiency. “Language development is usually marked by linguistic behaviors of increased complexity” (Kottler & Kottler, 2002, p. 47). “Researchers have found that most people, whether their first language is Hindi or French, acquire a working knowledge of certain structures in English in a fairly set order” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 5). More importantly researchers agree that the progression of language acquisition in the native language also follows a generally predictable order ... “children who are learning their first language during early childhood use similar kinds of verbal constructions and make the same kinds of grammatical mistakes .... Second language researchers need to catch up with first language research” (pp. 7 & 8). Observing the proficiency levels of students acquiring a

second language allows educators to visualize and internalize the developmental characteristics of the process of language acquisition to mold instruction to the progression and needs of the second language learner.

The common wisdom among researchers of second language acquisition grants that the progression of a second language is developmentally similar to that of the native language acquisition process, thus my efforts turn to trying to find a visual representation of this process. Stephen Krashen (University of Southern California) is an authority in the field of linguistics, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development. Krashen's widely known and well accepted theory of second language acquisition, has had a large impact in all areas of second language research and teaching since the 1980s. Krashen's theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses:

- the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis,
- the Monitor hypothesis,
- the Natural Order hypothesis,
- the Input hypothesis,
- the Affective Filter hypothesis.

(Krashen & Terrell, 1983, pp. 27 – 47)

Although all of Krashen's hypotheses are pillars in the research surrounding second language acquisition, and no other SLA researcher has discredited these principles, for the purpose of my research I am going to concern myself with Krashen and Terrell's Natural Order Hypothesis. Krashen & Terrell were pioneers of the proposal that learners of a second language engage in same developmental milestones as the learners of a native language. Many researchers and theorists in linguistics have supported Krashen and Terrell's stands concerning the processes ingrained in acquiring a



language after one's native language. "The field of second language acquisition has in large part been dependent on the research conducted in the field of child language acquisition" (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 92). "There is a unity of process that characterizes all language acquisition, whether of a first or second language, at all ages" (McLaughlin, 1978, p. 202). "Second language acquisition is a complex phenomenon, a lifelong process, with many parallels with first language acquisition.... Whatever age we use some of the same innate processes that are used to acquire our first language" (Collier, 1997, p. 7).

Krashen and Terrell's Natural Order hypothesis was based on research findings which suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures and morphemes follows a *natural order* which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures and morphemes tend to be acquired early while others late (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Ellis, 1985, Krashen, 1987). In his early studies, Krashen and Terrell (1983), categorically affirmed that as students acquire a new language, they go through five of stages of language probably in a natural procession that needs to be fueled by comprehensible input as represented in the formula  $i + 1$  in which  $i$  = input and  $1$  represents the challenging comprehensible input a teacher provides (pp. 20 – 29). This conceptual representation can best be explained by referring to Krashen's input hypothesis ( $i + 1$ ), which builds upon the scaffolding approach described above ( $i$  = actual level and  $i + 1$  = potential level of language development; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Krashen's hypothesis states that a speaker will move to the next level of acquisition when the experience of the target language (the input) includes some of the structures that are part of the next stage of acquisition, and the speaker is encouraged to use language that reflects that more

advanced stage. Krashen and Terrel identified the stages students pass through as pre-production, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency and near proficiency. These five stages have been represented in a multitude of charts, tables and frameworks that intend to delineate the progression of acquiring a second language and will be a centerpiece in my discussion of the stages of second language acquisition.

Current theories about learning and second language acquisition have been profoundly influenced by the works and thoughts of Lev Vygotsky and Stephen Krashen. Vygotsky developed and advocated the notion that learning consists of the merged processes of thought and language. These interdependent functions are achievable and effect new learning when learners perform activities that lie in their particular “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). This *zone* pertains to knowledge and skills the learner can accomplish with the support of others, tasks that lie just beyond the capacity of the ELLs’ actual developmental stage. Parallel to Vygotsky’s argument (1978), Krashen (1988) developed his well-known concept of “comprehensible input,” also known as  $(i + 1)$ . This theory proposes that learners at stage ‘i’ achieve maximum growth in language acquisition when they receive input at the  $i+1$  level.

The latest reinvention of the stages of language acquisition is represented in the assignment of proficiency levels by a consortium of states investigating assessment within the second language acquisition classroom. World-Class Instruction Design and Assessment (WIDA), assigns the levels Entering, Beginning, Developing, Expanding and Bridging to the stages of second language acquisition in the classroom (WIDA, ELP Standards ¶ 1); these labels and their descriptors precisely correspond to Krashen & Terrell’s Natural Order Acquisition hypothesis

In his latter research Krashen refers to only two general stages of second language acquisition, the Beginning level (Krashen, 2003, p. 7) which includes the pre-productive stages or the “silent period”, (Brice, 2002, p. 40) and (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, pp. 13-14, 17, 22-23, 108-109) and the Intermediate level (Krashen, 2003, p. 13). Igoa (1995) refers to this silent period when she speaks about Dennis and the year he had spent without saying a word in the classroom (p. 13). For Krashen after having acquired the basic structures of the language, the student is modestly ready to learn content knowledge through the newly acquired target language. This natural acquisition order seemed to be independent of the learners' age, L1 background, types of exposure, and although the agreement between individual acquirers was not always 100% in the studies, there were statistically significant similarities that reinforced the existence of a Natural Order of language acquisition (Krashen, 2003, pp. 1-2 & 4). It is irrefutable that the natural order provides educators with information we need to address the needs of second language learners. “While some variation exists among second language learners, we have a good idea of what is acquired *early* and what is acquired *late* for some structures (p. 116).

The stages of second language learner language development have been a focus of interest for H. Douglas Brown, (M.A. in Linguistics and Ph.D. in Educational Psychology). Brown has published a large number of articles and books on second language acquisition and pedagogy. In his professional reference book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (4th ed., 2000); Brown alludes to the stages of learner language development to describe the progression of learners linguistic development as their attempts at production approximates the target language system (p. 227). Brown refers to a first stage or *presystematic* stage characterized by a lack of awareness about

the target language, followed by an *emergent* stage in which the learner grows in linguistic production and discernment about the target language, a third stage or *systematic* stage in which the learner is able to manifest more consistency in oral production and target language rule awareness to a final stage, or *stabilization/postsystematic* stage in which the learner evidences mastery of the target language to the point that fluency and meaning are not problematic (pp. 226 – 229).

The effect of bilingualism on children's language and cognitive development has been researched by Ellen Bialystok, Ph.D. (Professor of Psychology at York University). Much of her research has focused on bilingualism as the incipient source for the accelerated mastery of specific cognitive processes in bilingual children. Bialystok does not dwell on any particular description of defined stages of language acquisition in second language learners but does refer to such notion when she discusses *learning latency* (Bialystok, 2001, p. 230). In her characteristically inquisitive style Bialystok asks: "How long should it take children to acquire a level of proficiency that allows them to function and thrive in an academic environment" (p. 230)? Bialystok refers us to the large scale study by Hakuta, Butler and Witt (2000) as a study that provides insight about the length of time it took children to reach levels of English comparable to that of native speakers (p. 231). Bialystok's general conclusions from the study is that it takes time for children learning a second language to reach both age and peer referenced norms for English .... "Being that the first two or three years are a time of rapid growth with the curve rising at a slower pace from there on" (Bialystok, 2001, p. 232).

The visual depiction of the stages of second language learners could take a number of representations. I prefer the table that follows for its concise and to the point

information that unmistakably follows the theoretical position that Krashen and Terrell suggested in 1983 and latter SLA researchers have supported in their work. The summary chart is attributed to Stephen Cary, a second language learner specialist, who has worked as a teacher, resource teacher, and administrator for his series Action Sequence Stories Program) and the San Mateo County Office of Education ESL Academy Teacher Training Manuals. Cary currently consults in schools throughout the U.S. and abroad and serves as adjunct faculty in the University of San Francisco's teacher education and international/multicultural education programs (Stenhouse Publishers, Second Language Learners, 1998, ¶7, Retrieved, September 23, 2006).

Table 3.2

Identifying and Instructing the Potentially English Proficient Student <sup>1</sup> (English to Speakers of Other Languages)						
Levels of Proficiency	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV	Transition	
ESOL Categories	Pre-Production Stage	Early Production Stage	Speech Emergence Stage	Intermediate Fluency Stage	Near Proficiency	
	Beginning		Intermediate	Near Proficient		
Language Characteristics	- minimal comprehension - no verbal production - communicates with actions and gestures	- increased comprehension - one two word responses - short phrases	- increased comprehension - simple sentences - some errors in speech	- very good comprehension - more complex sentences - complex errors in speech - engages in conversation and produces connected narrative	- near proficient orally * very good comprehension * vocabulary approaches that of native speaker of same age * few, if any, errors in speech * understands and produces complex sentences expected of native speaker of same age * scores at or above 40th percentile on state approved achievement test	
Performance Indicators	listen draw copy point select match move choos circle mime e act	name list label categorize group tell say respond answer (with one two words)	recall summarize retell describe define role-play explain restate compare contrast	analyze evaluate create justify defend support debate	All performance indicators	
Instructional Focus	- Lesson focuses on listening comprehension - Lesson builds receptive vocabulary  Simple language experience activities are introduced  Writing activities are introduced	- Lesson expands receptive vocabulary - Activities are designed to motivate students to produce vocabulary and structures they already understand  Simple language experience activities are introduced  Writing activities are introduced	- Lesson continues to expand receptive vocabulary - Activities are designed to develop higher levels of language use  Language experience activities are expanded	- Lesson continues to expand receptive vocabulary - Activities are designed to develop higher levels of language use in the content areas - Reading and writing activities are incorporated into lessons	- Lessons continued to expand receptive vocabulary. - Activities are designed to develop higher levels of language use - Reading and writing are incorporated into lessons Address writing mechanics that differ between the two languages Slightly below grade level in reading - Teacher and peer support (e.g. cooperative learning)	

<sup>1</sup> by C.O. Williams for Action Sequence Stories

*Highlight Points for the Language Proficiency Chart*

Krashen and Terrell’s work (1983) discusses the approximate duration of the stages for second language acquisition. The stages of language acquisition refer to periods of language development that are typically used in discussion of language ability instead of ages to refer to a child’s language acquisition process. The duration of each stage is roughly twelve months and corresponds to the stages of language acquisition of the native language. In my experience, *each stage of second language proficiency is marked by observable language behaviors that signal transitional stages in the maturation of a second language for the instructor and the student who are observant of the most salient characteristic for each stage.* By observing these characteristics, teachers and second language learners can engage in classroom activities aligned with the student’s current stage of language proficiency to ensure that teachers and students do not expect utterances from ELLs that are ahead of or lower than their stages of acquisition.

Attentiveness to the markers for each language stage enables teachers and second language learners to engage in language acquisition activities that foster comprehensible input. This can best be explained by Krashen's input hypothesis ( $i + 1$ ), which builds upon the scaffolding approach described above ( $i$  = actual level and  $i + 1$  = potential level of language development; (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Krashen's hypothesis states that a speaker will move to the next level of acquisition when the experience of the target language (the input) includes some of the structures that are part of the next stage of acquisition, and the speaker is encouraged to use language that reflects that more advanced stage.

Level I – Pre-production	0 -12 months	“no verbal production”
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Level II – Early production	12 to 24 months	“telegraphic speech”
Level III – Speech emergence	24 to 36 months	“some errors in speech”
Level IV – Intermediate fluency	36 to 48 months	“produces connected narrative”
Level V – Near proficiency	48 to 60 months	“close to native proficiency”

The detailed explanation that follows for the language proficiency chart is included for the benefit of secondary audiences of this dissertation. Educators unfamiliar with the stages of language acquisition will benefit from the thorough explanation of the stages of second language acquisition along with a highlight of the markers that indicate each phase. In the end, it is the purpose of this researcher to provide the information that educators need to engage in an educated decision making in classrooms where ELLs receive instruction and learn the English language.

*Detail for the Language Proficiency Chart*

Level I – Pre-production	0 -12 months	“marker - no verbal production”
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The observed language characteristics of this stage correspond to the linguistic behaviors of an infant, ages 0 – 12 months. The most salient characteristic is the presence of a silent period (Krashen, 1983, pp. 26 – 27, 71 – 72 & 171). The Preproduction stage may last from zero to twelve months but the production of individual words may begin almost immediately for students who already have a native language. This stage is also known as the silent period, (p. 58), a period when English language learners are learning to comprehend the English language. During this stage language learners communicate mostly by actions and gestures. In my observations of students, parents and myself learning English, I grasped that differences in the length of time a second language

learner stays in the silent period depends on the richness of the language experiences in the native language, prior to attempting learning an L2, and closely related to the literacy levels at home. Compare for example the experiential and developmental differences in the child of a diplomat, who travels all over the world, with those of a child that stays at home with an overworked relative. The child with richer experiences generally will begin the production of second language utterances sooner and more efficiently.

The instructional focus at this stage of language proficiency is on *listening comprehension* and learners evidence their command of the language and the academic content mostly through *performance indicators that are silent*. English language learners may point, move, mime, draw, select, match, copy, circle, choose and in general show understanding of the second language through actions rather than through words. For example, a learner in the third grade functioning at a level 1, may very well illustrate the water cycle on a poster board, or use flash cards to show understanding of it by correctly ordering the steps in the cycle, while still being unable to orally provide the information or respond to questions about the cycle on a written test. A high school student may show understanding of timelines or science concepts that are presented in a concrete manner if the teacher understands this stage of language proficiency and teaches and assesses the student accordingly. Krashen and Terrell's early work linked classroom activities with the stages to ensure that teachers did not expect utterances from ELLs that were beyond or beneath their stages of acquisition.

Level II – Early production                      12 to 24 months                      “marker - telegraphic speech”

In the field of psychology, *telegraphic speech* is defined as a form of communication consisting of simple two-word, sometimes noun-verb sentences and on



other occasions noun-noun constructions, in which the noun for the caregiver is inserted before the noun that expresses a need, that adhere to the grammatical standards of the culture's language. For example, an English-speaking child would say "give cupcake" to express that they would like a cupcake rather than "cupcake give." In my observation of second language learners, I frequently heard phrases like "teacher pencil" to indicate the need for a pencil more than the phrase "give pencil" during the telegraphic speech stage of language proficiency. Researchers have noted that this period of language acquisition occurs some time between the ages of 18-36 months and is present not just in English-speaking cultures, but can be found in languages world-wide (Bloom, 1970) .

At approximately age 2, or during the second year of learning a language for second language learners, children enter the two-word stage of language development (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). During this stage they exhibit telegraphic speech, which sounds very much like a telegram, has words arranged in an order that makes sense, and contains mostly nouns and verbs. This stage roughly corresponds to what an English language learner would be able to express during the same period of time after learning a second language. The learner's increased comprehension would be evidenced in phrases like: "teacher (bathroom, pencil, book) to convey many meanings. Telegraphic speech is speech that is laconic and efficient and presents itself in the language acquisition process of native language learners and second language learners alike.

The instructional focus at this stage of language proficiency is on *expanding receptive vocabulary and the production of language structures students already understand*. Learners evidence their command of the language and the academic content mostly through oral *performance in the form of one-two words utterances*. English

language learners at this stage may name, list, label, group, respond, answer and in general show understanding of the second language through one/two word utterances. For example, a learner in the third grade functioning at a level II, may illustrate the water cycle on a poster board and then orally present the steps in the water cycle using one/two words phrases or use flash cards to show understanding of it by correctly ordering the steps in the cycle and then reading these to the teacher while still being unable to orally provide complex explanations or respond to questions about the cycle on a written test. A high school student may learn timelines and other science concepts that are presented in a concrete manner and in simple written text if the teacher understands this stage of language proficiency and teaches and assesses the student accordingly. Krashen and Terrell's early work linked classroom activities with the stages to ensure that teachers did not expect utterances from ELLs that were beyond or beneath their stages of acquisition.

Level III – Speech emergence 24 to 36 months “marker - some errors in speech”

In my experience with second language learners this is the one stage that can in fact last up to one year. Students have usually developed a fairly extensive vocabulary and can use short phrases and *simple* sentences to communicate. The key indicator is the increasing ability students have to use dialogue and ask *simple* questions, such as “I go to the bathroom?” and are also able to answer simple questions. Students may generate longer sentences, but often with grammatical errors that can interfere with their communication. Both the native language speaker and the English language learner are able to produce similar language during the same period of time. In my observations of a three-year-old child for a linguistic class, during my Masters level degree for TESOL, (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), I remember Charlie producing

language with “some errors in speech.” Charlie wore leg braces and would often say “my foots hurt.” Charlie’s mother reacted by repeating and modeling the correct application of the language but was never concerned with issues related to a learning disability.

Teachers unaware of the stages of language acquisition may rush to refer students to the Student Study Team (SST) for possible *speech/learning problems* for English language learners who are at same stage of language development in their second language but happen to be older than three years old.

The instructional focus at this stage of language proficiency is on *developing higher levels of language use*. English language learners in this stage are beginning to think in their second language. They show understanding and use of the second language through the use of *thinking verbs*. English language learners may recall, retell, define, summarize, describe, role-play, compare, contrast, restate and use simpler thinking processes to evidence mastery of the second language. For example, a learner in the third grade functioning at a level III, may illustrate the water cycle on a poster board and then orally present the steps in the water cycle using simple sentences to show understanding of the process. The student may be able to orally provide basic information about the water cycle or respond to questions about it on a written test. A high school student may learn timelines and other science concepts that are presented in a simplified manner or in simple written text if the teacher understands this stage of language proficiency and teaches and assesses the student accordingly. Krashen and Terrell’s early work linked classroom activities with the stages to ensure that teachers did not expect utterances from ELLs that were beyond or beneath their stages of acquisition.

Level IV – Intermediate fluency      36 to 48 months      “marker - produces connected narrative”

Intermediate proficiency may take up to another year after speech emergence. At this stage of language development, students have typically developed extensive vocabularies and are beginning to make complex statements, state opinions, ask for clarification, share their thoughts, and speak at greater length. A native English language learner should be able to produce language in this manner during this same period of time. Amusingly, the most salient characteristic is that *connected narrative*. A four-year-old native speaker has an incredible ability to talk endlessly; children this age seem to begin speaking before they are fully awake and beyond the time when they fall asleep.

Much to their teachers' chagrin, English language learners evidence this same predisposition towards profuse language use while in their classrooms. If you ever ask teachers of English language learners at this stage of proficiency how their ELLs are doing, they are prone to sing their praises in terms of their language expansion while at the same time lamenting their *copious connected narrative*; English language learners at this stage, .... just talk, talk, and talk. The reasons for the abundance of language being that the floodgates of communication have been opened; ELLs at this stage have discovered that they can control their world with the power of language. Kim Yoon a Korean student in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade I taught in 1997 summed it up this stage well for his teachers; when one of his teachers asked him to be more careful with his extensive and somewhat convoluted speech during a class report. Kim stared at the teacher impassively and asked: you understand? In other words: if you get it, “who cares?”

The instructional focus at this stage of language proficiency is on *developing higher levels of language use in the content areas*. English language learners in this stage are beginning to think in their second language and use this thinking language to learn purposefully. They show understanding and use of the second language through the use of *advanced thinking verbs*. English language learners may analyze, create, defend, debate, justify, support, evaluate and use more complex thinking processes to evidence mastery of the second language. For example, a learner in the third grade functioning at a level IV, may illustrate the water cycle on a poster board and then orally present the steps in the water cycle using more complex sentences to show understanding of the process and compare the weather characteristics of the native country with those of the United States. The student may be able to orally provide information about the water cycle or respond to questions about it on a written test almost at the same level of the native speaker providing comparisons and inferences about the effects of weather on the water cycle. Even when grammar mistakes may be present in the language production of an ELL at level IV; it usually does not disrupt communication in the target language. A high school student may learn timelines and other science concepts that are presented in the mainstream science classroom context in written text. The teacher still needs to understand this stage of language proficiency and teach and assess the student accordingly. Krashen and Terrell's early work linked classroom activities with the stages to ensure that teachers did not expect utterances from ELLs that were beyond or beneath their stages of acquisition.

Level V – Near proficiency      48 to 60 months      “close to native proficiency”

In my experience and in the SLA literature (Cummins, 1983 & 2000), gaining advanced proficiency in a second language can typically take anywhere from four to seven years. The learner at this stage is not yet fully bilingual; full bilingualism may take up to ten years. Nonetheless, at the near proficiency stage students have developed some specialized content-area vocabulary and can participate fully in grade-level classroom activities with occasional extra support. Students can speak English using grammar and vocabulary comparable to that of same-age native speakers. A native English language learner should be able to produce language in this manner during the same period of time.

In native language proficiency patterns, a kindergartner's language is ready for school with few errors if any. ELLs exit language assistance programs at about this time but their cognitive language maturation process may not be fully developed to handle advanced content knowledge without extra work from their part or support from their teachers. This is especially true if they are in high school where they need to master sophisticated content knowledge in a short period of time. It is easier to understand this logic if you ask yourself: would you teach to a kindergartner science at the 6th grade level, or math at the 3rd grade level, or biology at the 9th grade level, or social studies at the 8th grade level? No. There are two kinds of language necessary for academic success, Basic Interpersonal Communicative Language (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The English language learner has BICS in place when they exit English assistance language programs; usually, CALP still needs additional development (Cummins, 1986 & 2000).

The instructional focus at this stage of language proficiency is on *developing higher levels of language use in the content areas utilizing reading and writing to*

*minimize the differences in the student command of the native and the second language.*

English language learners in this stage are increasingly thinking in their second language and use this thinking language to learn complex concepts. They show understanding and use of the second language through the use of *all language indicators*. English language learners use a variety of meta-cognitive skills and more complex thinking processes to evidence mastery of the second language. A learner in the third grade functioning at a level V, may illustrate the water cycle on a poster board and then orally present the steps in the water cycle using sentences equal in complexity to those of the native speaker to show understanding of the process and compare the weather characteristics of the native country with those of the United States to infer similarities and differences in weather patterns. At this stage, the student is typically able to discuss the water cycle at the same level of the native speaker. Grammar mistakes are seldom present in the language of an ELL at level V; communication in English is usually smooth and high level. A high school student may learn timelines and other science concepts that are presented in the regular classroom context in written text. Understanding of the stages of language proficiency is still necessary especially when the student still evidences a foreign accent.

#### *Summary for the Language Proficiency Chart*

All students acquiring a second language will pass through these stages of language acquisition at their own rate; *the stages of language proficiency are not fixed in time, they are evidenced by linguistic behaviors.* The *Language Proficiency Chart* provides an approximate time frame for each stage, the length of time students spend at each level will be as varied as the students themselves. Krashen and Terrell's early work

linked classroom activities with the stages to ensure that teachers did not expect utterances from ELLs that were beyond or beneath their stages of acquisition.

Imagine how unproductive it would be to ask a student in the Preproduction stage “how” or “why” questions or to ask a student in the Intermediate Fluency stage to perform a Preproduction-stage task, such as pointing to an object. Knowing their students’ English language proficiency allows educators to work within the student’s “zone of proximal development”—that area between what the student is capable of at the moment and the point you want the student to reach next (Vygotsky, 1986). According to Vygotsky, an educator can work in a student’s zone of proximal development by “scaffolding” (Chamot & O’Malley, 1994, p. 65 – 69) language development, or providing the support a student needs as she progresses. Understanding that students are going through a predictable and sequential series of developmental stages helps teachers predict and accept a student’s current stage, while modifying their instruction to encourage progression to the next stage.

Recognizing the level of language acquisition is also a factor when setting language objectives. This can best be explained by Krashen’s input hypothesis ( $i + 1$ ), which builds upon the scaffolding approach described above ( $i$  = actual level and  $i + 1$  = potential level of language development (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Krashen’s hypothesis states that a speaker will move to the next level of acquisition when the experience of the target language (the input) includes some of the structures that are part of the next stage of acquisition, and the speaker is encouraged to use language that reflects that more advanced stage. Paying attention to teacher prompts that accompany the levels is one way for a student to move to the next level of English proficiency.



A basic knowledge of language acquisition theories is extremely useful for mainstream classroom teachers and their students and directly influences teachers' ability to provide appropriate content-area instruction to ELLs. Developing this professional knowledge is especially important in those schools or districts where limited resources result in little or no instructional support for English language learners. In these sink-or-swim situations, a committed mainstream teacher with a clear perception of language acquisition can make all the difference. With appropriate prompts, students learn and respond according to both their current stage of language proficiency and just beyond.

I learned most of what I know about theory and principles of second language acquisition during a Masters Degree in TESOL at University of Miami in 1988. Learning about the stages of second language acquisition seemed then the answer I had been looking for when structuring classroom instruction for ELLs that made sense and enhanced their academic achievement. I remember feeling more certain about my classroom practice those years and purposefully created diagnostic/prescriptive instruction for my students that constantly addressed their current stage of English language proficiency and that challenged their language and academic development. My students, by the most part, rose to grade level academic expectations expeditiously. I learned that my students developed their language proficiency individually and following unpredictable patterns of learning. Pondering about my learning at that point in time led me to proclaim the maxim below years later when finally a picture of the process of learning English as a second language learner emerged.

*The stages of English Language Proficiency are not fixed in time; they are evidenced by linguistic behaviors.*

*(Victoria Vázquez Webbert, personal commentary, 2003)*

This conceptualization helped me become a better teacher for ELLs, but it was not all; I suspected it then and I know it now. The answers to my question about *how do you teach language and academics to English language learners* was still a work in progress. My search for answers based on theory and practice had to be continued.

#### *Prior Academic Knowledge*

Social justice resides in the folds of academic achievement (Webbert, personal commentary, 2007). For English language learners to “claim an education” (Claiming an Education [n.d.] Retrieved October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004) education for self-empowerment, means that students must stop being passive receptacles of knowledge and take rightful ownership of their lives through being active participants in their education. Accordingly, the second section in the literature review examined theories about the effects of prior schooling on the instructional process of English language learners immersed in the English speaking educational system of the United States.

I examined the possible source of difficulties for students who have received academic knowledge formulated in other countries of the world. Their learning prior to arriving in this country may be in contrast with the mainstream curriculum of the United States. I am concerned with understanding how prior knowledge affects new learning. My first concern was with defining, what is prior knowledge? What are the components of the student’s prior experiences that teachers and students need to observe to plan more effectual teaching and learning? I wanted to expound the

components of what educators commonly call *prior knowledge* and delve into its details. Particular attention was paid to Cummins's theory of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) as dissimilar from Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (1986 & 2004).

*Experiences with my Son Lead to further Conceptualizations*

A singular experience with my son convinced me that students learn from the point of view of who they are and what they already know. These are other factors that influence the learning of English and the learning of academics through English in addition to the stages of second language acquisition.

Guillermo (William in English), my five-year-old son at the time, came with me to the United States ready for kindergarten. I thought his academic adaptation would be uncomplicated since he would be *learning from scratch*; no previous native education *polluting* his pristine mind. Behaviorists would have identified his educational condition as one with no L-1 interference (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p. 98). But, William struggled, *almost* failed kindergarten, struggled again and *almost* failed first grade, *almost* failed second grade and was finally *demoted* from third grade to second grade when his teachers realized he was not academically ready for third grade in spite of my support of his English learning. During the holiday break of Williams' second time in second grade, (1989) William's teachers cautioned me that he could fail second grade one more time. By then, I was certain that William had a learning disability even though he seemed fully proficient in English those days. Out of desperation, I resolved that if William could not learn in English he would learn in Spanish. It would serve him well, I thought, when we

returned to Puerto Rico. I would have to find a way to lure him into Spanish lessons during the holiday break after all the struggles of that year.

William adores his grandmother; I convinced him of learning to read and write Spanish as a means of communication with his grandmother, “Lela,” who is literate in Spanish only. We agreed on daily lessons for about a week to then attempt to write his first letter. After about three or four days learning Spanish and reading short stories in the “La Cartilla Fonética,” a classic elementary textbook to learn Spanish reading & writing (<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=La+Cartilla+Fonetica&safe=active>). As William began to learn and understand the learning process; William began to smile. Everything made so much sense! My son and I wrote that first letter to his grandmother for Christmas of that year. It was so comforting to notice how content and capable he seemed learning in Spanish. We would surely have to return to Puerto Rico, I thought.

Amazingly, when we went back to school January of that year, William started to do well in school and made the honor roll the end of the school year! I had no idea what had happened; my only explanation was that he had cognitively matured just on the nick of time. Those days, the impact of native literacy on the instructional process was not understood (Gass & Selinker, 1994, pp. 68 – 72). William did well in school the following years and in due course graduated high school in the year 2000 from DeKalb County Public Schools in Georgia. Only later, during my studies for a Masters Degree in TESOL at University of Miami would I become aware that the minimal Spanish lessons I gave my son that holiday break had created a bridge from his Spanish mapped brain to the task of learning through English in all its linguistic and cognitive complexity.

In 2001, Researchers in second language acquisition would assert that “primary language literacy is the strongest predictor of second language student achievement” (A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students’ Long-Term Academic Achievement, 2001, Analyses, ¶ 1) The Ramirez, Yuen and Ramey (1991) large scale longitudinal study that reported that students who had received at least forty per cent of their education through their native language in elementary school appeared to have better prospects of catching up with English-speaking-peers. This study summarizes a 4-year longitudinal study of over 2,000 elementary students and compares three instructional programs for Spanish-speaking, limited-English-proficient (LEP) students: structured English-immersion strategy; early exit bilingual programs; and late-exit bilingual programs. Primary language instruction seems to benefit LEP students more than English immersion. These findings, I would later learn were an explanation for my experience with my son and clarified why my daughter, who entered third grade at her arrival in Florida, had not had academic difficulties in the new learning setting.

William’s experience made me become more vigilant about the individuality of my students’ needs and the impact of those needs on their learning. As I faced more demanding classroom situations, I always made the effort to “learn” each of my students and relate my teaching to their uniqueness. I acquired a keen ability to learn my students by “watching and listening” by “being with them rather than by asking questions” (Phillion, 1994, p. 7) and like Phillion herself, I learned to become part of the class from within this connected silence. I learned that being a participant in my students’ lives was unlike being a spectator of their lives.

All students, regardless of their proficiency in English, come to school with valuable background experience and knowledge on which teachers ought to capitalize. Cummins's book, *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society* quotes a powerful statement from students he worked at the time that further frames the discussion for this part of my study. "Our classroom was full of human knowledge. We had a teacher who believed in us ... he did not hide our power; he advertised it" (Adriana and Rosalba Jasso, 1995, in Cummins, Cover Page).

Prior knowledge can be explained as a combination of a learner's preexisting academic *knowledge, attitudes, and experiences regarding the schooling process*. Teachers capitalize on prior knowledge when they teach a new concept after brainstorming with their students about what they already know on the subject. Creating visual support, such as "semantic webs," with the topic in the center and students' knowledge surrounding it, is a good way to engage students in the topic and to find out what they already know *if they are at a stage of language proficiency where they can understand some written text*. Another simple technique is to ask them what they want to learn about a topic .... *if they already speak some English*. As Savaria-Shore and Garcia (1995) note: "Students are more likely to be interested in researching a topic when they begin with their own real questions" (p. 55). Students learn more effectively when they already know something about a content area and when concepts in that area mean something to them and to their particular background or culture.

When teachers link new information to the student's prior knowledge, they activate the student's interest and curiosity, and infuse instruction with a sense of purpose. This is another example of a strategy that works equally well with native

English speakers as well as with English language learners. Prior knowledge acts as a lens through which learners observe and absorb new understandings based on the knowledge they have acquired before. It is a combination of who we are, based on what we have learned from both our academic and everyday experiences in the past and in the present. For a foreign student, new content (CALP) can be overpowering. There are new vocabulary words, ideas, and concepts that other students seem to understand easily or have experienced before while the same concepts appear totally foreign to second language learners. For the largest immigrant group to the United States, Mexican students, Valenzuela confirms (1999) that “entering cognitive skills often acquired from their previous schooling experiences in Mexico are important for their academic achievement” (p. 11) within the curriculum of schools in the United States.

Teachers can help their students make the transition from the unknown to the knowledge necessary for academic achievement by tapping on students’ prior knowledge. Research shows that we can jump-start learning by accessing preexisting attitudes, experiences, and knowledge and bridge the gap between what is being taught and what is already known (Kujawa and Huske, 1995). Students learn and remember new information best when it is linked to relevant prior knowledge. Teachers who link classroom activities and instruction to prior knowledge build on their students’ familiarity with a topic and enable students to connect the curriculum content to their own culture and experience (Beyer, 1991).

At this point in my experience I felt comfortable that I had solved the enigma of teaching language and academic content to my students. However the invisible bounds of culture were hidden from my cognition at that time since my students and I all belonged

to the same culture. Years later and in a totally different setting I would discover the pervasive effects of culture on the teaching and learning process of ELLs.

### *Some Examples of CALP*

The selection and examples below portray CALP in the enormity of its impact on teaching and learning.

#### *Point Dose Function*

A less computationally demanding approach to the prediction of dose distributions from extended source geometries is the use of determinations of dose distributions of point sources. These distributions, called point kernels or point dose functions, can be calculated by Monte Carlo techniques or constructed from the results of measurements. By integrating (summing) the functions over the extended source volume, one can predict the dose distribution (Waksman, 1999, p. 161).

The passage refers to a prediction of dose distribution of radiation by using Monte Carlos Technique to treat restenosis (clogging of arteries) by irradiating the site of angioplasting with ionizing radiation. In regular terms, it addresses how appropriate amounts of radiation can be determined (re: probability distribution) to prevent the arteries from clogging back up. An English-proficient speaker's inability to comprehend the passage is directly related to the speaker's *lack of CALP in biochemistry*. The passage is full of common words embedded in specialized meanings. The problem is compounded for ELLs who learn the meaning of common words in everyday, social communication (BICS) and then encounter them in content specific situations in school.



CALP also includes *register*. Linguists, lead by the efforts of Thomas Bertram Reid (1956), began using the term *register* to identify the patterns of communication used in particular settings and for specific purposes. The focus is on the way language is used in particular situations, such as legalese, the technical language used by law practitioners. English language learners are faced with academic registers that impede their academic achievement unless scaffold activities to support their linguistic proficiency, prior academic knowledge and cultural learning styles are provided to facilitate comprehensible input in the classroom.

Another example of CALP may be appreciated in the response to the simple question: Is the world map one and the same for all inhabitants of Planet Earth?

Figure 3.1

*What is wrong with this World Map?*



(Japan External Trade Organization (Jetro), February, 2004, Global Network, introduction).

What is wrong with this world map? Nothing. From the representation of planet Earth in the Japanese version of the world, it is easy to perceive that the eastern perspective of the world is localized and ethnocentric but it is not incorrect. Taking a photograph of the planet we inhabit from the eastern hemisphere as opposed to the perspective from the western side results in a different but accurate view of the world!

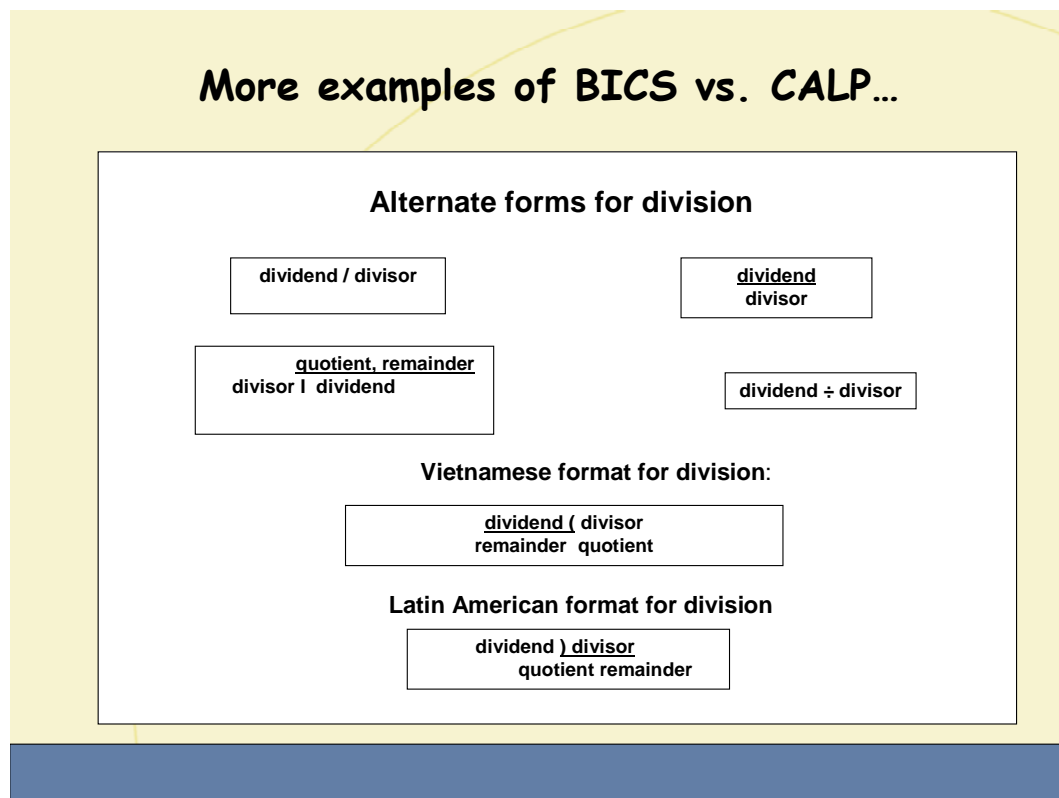
### *Some Examples of CALP in the area of Mathematics*

Are all math computation problems solved in the same manner across the world?

The answer is *No* when it is observed that solving a simple division problem may be approached utilizing diverse operational procedures in different countries of the world.

Once students, from diverse cultural backgrounds reach the correct answer and evidence their work, educators may presume that the student has mastered the computational skills even if not yet the English language.

Figure 3.2



This section is comprehensive enough to illustrate the fact that English language learners, in more cases than not, have difficulties mastering academic content due to prior knowledge incompatible with the mainstream curriculum, as opposed to the lack of it. There is much commotion in the educational system about English language learners with limited or no prior academic knowledge. In my experience, a large portion of the English-language-learners' prior knowledge cannot be evidenced or measured by standardized assessment tools used in the United States with their hidden, value laden, conceptual

knowledge and their embedded cultural bias, ethnocentric sentiments and geographically bound information.

Clues to English language learners' prior knowledge can be found in information contained in their native school's records and more efficiently gathered during interviews with the students. Differences in native educational experiences and current instructional situations in the United States can be found in the areas of academic calendars, school day setup, scope and sequence of native literacy skills, instructional delivery method, native language grammatical and phonological systems, school discipline methods, second language proficiency prior to arrival, native school discipline and possible special education needs.

Overrepresentation of English language learners in special education is problematic because students without disabilities who have been referred to special education suffer negative consequences i.e. lower expectations for performance and reduced potential for academic, social, and economic advancement. *Under-representation* is equally troublesome because some students with disabilities are not receiving the special services that they are legally entitled to and that could help them reach their potential (Artiles, 2002, p. p. 21 – 22).

Teachers and students who wish to understand the areas in which prior knowledge may cause difficulties should examine the student's prior academic history. By scrutinizing the similarities and differences between the native educational system in comparison to requirements of the educational system in the United States, students and teachers can isolate the areas of difficulty in the new learning environment.

For example, the school calendar for students from Brazil provide for summer vacations during the months of December and January. Students immigrating to the United States from Brazil, early in the calendar year, may be forced to restart school after only a short break and may appear unusually subdued during the initial months of adaptation due to their body's biological clock telling them the period is one for rest (Flaitz, 2006).

Some students from Mexico maintain very close relationships with peers since usually students attend school with the same group of students throughout their schooling years. These students expect that their familiarity with peers is respected and recognized as a valid social institution (p. 85). Sometimes, students from Mexico prefer a high degree of structure in the classroom and learn by memorization rather than by application of knowledge. Public schools in Mexico largely are seldom equipped with computers, which makes it difficult to access information, and thus the need to memorize facts. Students who may have had this kind of academic background would find it difficult to employ inferential skills or engage in problem solving. More often than not instructional assessments in the native country mostly probe their ability to recall facts (p. 86).

A number of students from Vietnam traditionally work individually in the classroom and it is typically rare for a student to ask questions during class. Most students spend hours practicing handwriting; good penmanship is a sign of a solid education and a socioeconomic indicator. The smaller the handwriting, the less affluent the student is (p. 155). A full description of all the possible areas of academic conflict for students from other countries who integrate to the public school in the United States is beyond the span of this study and redundant. It also lends itself to stereotypical

conceptualizations that cloud the individuality of students within a given culture.

Educators need to research these areas of academic difficulties in regards to their own students in light of specific achievement concerns.

In my years of experience as an educator and an English language learner, I noticed that when English language learners experience difficulties with new learning, it usually relates to an incompatibility between the native prior knowledge and the curriculum of schools in the United States. Students have difficulties with the type of knowledge they have received and the foundational information necessary to master the American curriculum. Other academic difficulties may stem from culture bound learning styles, *how they learned to learn*. “English academic proficiency requires a mastery of a more extensive range of features than everyday English” (Garcia, 2005, p. 53).

Teachers who engage in educated decision making in their classrooms are savvy enough to research information regarding the attributes of the prior academic knowledge of students who are facing difficulties in their classrooms if they are informed of the variables that impact the teaching and learning process of ELLs. Many immigrant students experience success in spite of enormous disadvantaging in the educational process. One only needs to read the foreign names of the numerous valedictorians and salutatorians of contemporary graduating classes in high schools of the United States. For those students and their teachers, teaching and learning, is business as usual. “Despite reports to the contrary, immigrant children have been very successful” (Tse, 2001, p. 17).

*Language proficiency rides on the heels of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency  
in the Native and/or the Target Language*

(Victoria Vázquez Webbert, 2003, personal commentary).

As an educator I was feeling confident that the discovery of the importance of prior knowledge in the acquisition of a second language and academic success would finally inform the decision making process of educators teaching diverse students. During my teaching years in Dade County, Florida, the matter of culture and its impact on teaching and learning was imperceptible to me since my students and I belonged to the same cultural background. At that time the language proficiency in English and the prior knowledge my students brought into the classroom were the only areas of concern for me when planning and executing effective instructional lessons. My educational practice was fairly successful until my encounter with culturally, *exceedingly different* students during my professional career.

*Auto/biographical Encounters Inform Conceptualizations*

During the terms of Fall 1999 to Fall 2001, I was an adjunct professor for Georgia State University, Department of Applied Linguistics, ESL Training Program for Egyptian English Supervisors under the direction of Gayle Nelson and Pat Byrd. The initiative was the outcome of a multi-national grant allocated to Georgia State University from the Ministry of Education in Egypt to instruct Egyptian English supervisors in strategies that would modify the grammar translation methods used in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in favor of more communicative approaches for students learning English in Cairo. Egyptian school leaders were concerned with the English language instruction in their classrooms; their students were learning *about* English but not learning to *speak* English. The educational leaders in Egypt knew that English is the perceived language of opportunities and status at an international scale.

Their plight had familiar undertones for me. The English teachers of my early educational years, barely proficient in English themselves, had mostly used the grammar translation method to complement the direct instruction of grammatical structures and boring drills to *practice English*. Like the Egyptian students, in my middle and high school years, I had learned the grammar of English with the counterparts in my native language; I learned the syntax of the language and common usage lexicon. The English language was a subject I learned about, not a communicative tool I could have used for interactions with native speakers of English. Armed with a Masters Degree in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL) and my own experiences learning English, I felt utterly prepared to tackle the teaching project and willingly signed a contract for the duration of the program. The teaching project proved to be more challenging than I ever anticipated.

In preparation for the arrival of the Egyptian English supervisors, professors and directors held planning sessions at Georgia State University. Professors were exposed to geographical, political and anthropological information about Egypt and the Egyptian educational system. We dedicated a long time to the analysis of the *erroneous* methodology used in the Egyptian schools to teach English to their students. We discussed Egyptian history, geography, religion, holidays, cultural mores, native food, treated to Mediterranean menu, and lectured about heroes of the nation. Our preparation was characterized by accounts similar to those of a “foreign other by alienated authors who wrote objective accounts” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 19) about life in Egypt, a reflection of the positivist scientist paradigm of a *Traditional* inquiry mode of the early twentieth century ethnographic studies.



Our training included a discussion of the objectives the participants would master as recipients of our Westernized *privileged* knowledge. The training sessions became a manifestation of *American exceptionalism*; “Americans have an immensely high opinion of themselves and are not far from believing that they form a species apart from the rest of the human race ... American exceptionalism has been the root of much evil, the enslavement of blacks, the selling and whipping of slaves ... were signs of savagery, not civilization” (Takaki, 1983, p. 106).

Bright and early on the first day, I was ready for my class with teaching props that included texts defining what communicative competence in a foreign language entails, VHS clips of *American* teachers implementing communicative approaches and multiple wall charts for our students, the Egyptian English Supervisors, to demonstrate their learning. They were to summarize in bulleted lists all the *mistaken* approaches they had previously implemented in their classrooms in Egypt along with a summary of the new and *more enlightened strategies* they would put into practice at their return to Egypt. My *students*, six males with an average age of sixty years of age, Jack Hamid El Sayed Kadous, Ahmed Mohammed Minan Selim, Sarma Abdel Ayiz El Kadiff, Nellanf Nasir Morcos Sayed, Mohammed Mammouth Tariff Elsayed and Nasir Mohammed Selimn Kadous (the names have been changed to ensure anonymity) sat impassively and indifferent to the lesson. I tried harder; enthusiastically and feverishly urging them to review the lesson *I had presented* and to confer among themselves to complete the assigned task.

For the next hour and to my further dismay, the Egyptian English supervisors met and spoke in Arabic while enduring my constant interruptions reminding them of the

short time available to learn the objectives. With only a few minutes before our class was to be dismissed, we reviewed the teaching clips one more time. This time, in response to my anxious questioning, the group responded with a laconic statement about the impracticality of the grouping activities portrayed in the video clips for their schools since *students' desks and chairs are permanently bolted to the floor in Egyptian classrooms*. Defeated, I dismissed the class and promised myself to be better prepared next time. Exhausted and dumfounded, I could not comprehend why my conscientiously planned lesson had failed so miserably. The email below is a reflection of the growing concern of the directors and professors of the Egyptian program. This email exacerbated my concerns.

Date: Fri, 29 Sep 2000 19:47:22 -0500

>To: "Victoria Webbert"

>Subject: Re: Saturday's session/ team leaders alert

> Forgive me for using this list to send this message although it may be useful for all the team leaders.

>>After Sharon returned from her session yesterday (visual aids), she told me that some of the teams were preparing workshops that were wrongly geared towards what they would do for teaching students instead of teachers.

>>My suggestion to the team leaders is to guide them away from this angle and focus their workshop on elements for teachers. Although I have stressed this, I am worried that they have not paid attention to this (Teams 1, 3, 4).

>>Also, a special warning to Victoria, team 4 leader: they chose grammar as their skill to use for teaching interactive techniques, but after Sharon met with them yesterday I have a feeling they are duplicating the work done regularly--teaching as in the grammar translation method. I tried to guide them Wednesday when I met them, but I may have failed.

>>Please let me know if you have any questions and good luck!!!!

>>Debra – Egyptian Project Facilitator

For the next few days I was relentlessly preoccupied with thoughts striving to understand what had happened and trying to make our next class a more engaged experience. What had gone wrong? Why were my participants so unresponsive? What did I do wrong?

Like a bolt of lightning, a swift awareness materialized... My *students* were all males from a male dominated society; I was a female of Hispanic descent who did not even represent the *American* mainstream group to which they may have felt more deferential, but I was their teacher ...how disrespectful!! Agonizingly, I realized that the planning and implementation process had been flawed from the beginning and decided to take extreme measures to remediate my shortsightedness and Georgia State University's lack of forethought. The experience brought new insights for my understanding of the pervasive effects of culture on the process of learning. *My understanding of what teachers and students from diverse backgrounds need to know and do for a successful classroom experience came full circle. The missing piece of the puzzle fell in place!*

The following Saturday, not so bright and early – allowing some time for the men to engage in their private conversations and deciding to begin class when their behavior cued me they were ready; I quietly sat and waited to begin class. My dress that day was

simple and demure having chosen conservative colors and style in accordance to the traditional dress code for females in the Egyptian society (Dresser, 1996). Gradually, without saying a word, I had the attention of all the participants in my class. While still seated, no more standing in the center of the classroom to effusively articulate my thoughts, I began to speak:

Gentlemen, I want to apologize to you for the difficult situation Georgia State University has put us all in. I recognize that I am a woman [sudden interruption from a participant with the observation – and *younger*]; yes, a woman and younger than you, but with qualifications [brought in my *vitae*] and experience that can facilitate *our* learning in this project. Now, if you would allow me to *share* [careful avoidance of the word *teach*] with you my professional knowledge and experiences and you share with me yours; we *may* be able to productively finalize this project and as a result *you may* become acquainted with methods that could help *you* improve the English strategies of *your* English teachers at home (Victoria Vázquez Webbert, personal commentary, 2000).

As I had hoped more than expected, these words were the beginning of a remarkable turnaround in the group's dynamics and the consequential attainment of our goals. Our group showed the most gains and presented a culturally compelling lesson intended for their teachers in Egypt for our final project. I gained the respect of my participants and a beautiful papyrus of Queen Nefertiti with a simple dedication: "To our group leader Victoria" (personal commentary – September 2000), a meaningful gesture from my newly found Egyptian friends and a testament to the bridging of our mutual

cultural differences. The experience taught me that a person's "assumptive world" (Frank & Frank, 1991, p. 26), the social conditions a group agrees on and shares and for which cultural beliefs supply many ready-made categories, needs to be validated by *important others* [the teacher in educational practice] to maximize the chances of success and diminish failure in human interactions by predicting other's responses to their acts.

Do I believe that women are inferior to men and thus necessarily need to be deferential to them when placed in positions of authority over them? My response is a categorical 'No,' but the experience with the Egyptian English Supervisors made me aware that *compelling multicultural education* engages students in practices that are grounded on their cultural beliefs and values at a level higher than the surface plane and from there moves to levels of mutual understanding with progressive encounters. *It* acknowledges cultural beliefs and acts upon them beyond the flags, food, fiesta, folklore, and famous people typical of stilted multicultural encounters. Compelling multicultural education becomes active advocacy that engages teachers and students from the point of who they are to reach equity in the educational process. *We infuse* compelling multicultural practices into the teaching and learning process in the classroom, we cannot just teach about it. By infusing compelling multicultural into the curriculum, educators avoid serious intercultural miscommunication that may have grave consequences for the teaching and learning process. In this manner, educators keep lighthearted about humorous situations prone to happen in a multicultural setting, the kind where people laugh only after the fact (Axtell, 1991).

*A Definition for Socio-cultural Factors – Culture*

Culture refers to the cumulative deposits of knowledge, experiences, communication patterns, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group interactions; in a sense it is behavior through social learning (Leighton, 1982 and Ibrahim, 1993). Culture's byproducts translate into acceptable/unacceptable "multicultural manners" (Dresser, 1996, p. xvii) that foster or impede multicultural encounters. In words of Guadalupe Valdés, "[culture] is the ordinary, hard-working, inner world of families" (Valdés, 1996, pp. xi & 17). As we are socialized into our groups, "we learn much of our behavior unconsciously" (Banks & Banks, 1997, p. 40) nevertheless; cultural behaviors have a powerful effect for the human learning. "Meaning achieves a form that is public and communal rather than private and autistic" (Brunner, 1990, p. 33).

The idea of *funds of knowledge* was originally proposed by James B. Greenberg (1989), a social ecologist from University of Arizona during the annual conference for the Society for Applied Anthropology. Greenburg was a first thinker to speak to the richness of the experiences, versus the lack thereof, of immigrants in classrooms in the United States. Moll et al frame their discussion of *funds of knowledge* on the argument of the significance of prior knowledge and experience in the acquisition of additional knowledge and skills, a centerpiece for my discussion in this dissertation.

*Culture "determines" the way we think, feel, act and learn forever (Victoria Vázquez Webbert, 2003, personal commentary).*

My avowal is an analysis of auto/biographical experience through more than twenty years of didactic experience and my own personal narrative in the process of *coming of age* within the mainstream culture in the United States. Culture is mostly invisible to the individual (Brunner, 1990, p. 41) but it is a powerfully dynamic force that dictates the behaviors exhibited in areas of human relationships. The teaching and learning process, a vibrant human relationships ground, is particularly sensitive to the all-encompassing effects of culture beliefs and norms. The classroom is the primary arena for the interplay of culture and power in schools in the United States .... Teachers and students interpret culture to mediate learning and power in their daily encounters. “We are responsible for giving our students a voice not for contributing to their silencing” (Darling-Hammond, French, J. & García-Lopez, 2002, p. 26).

Alexander M. Sidorkin explores the issue of school and human relationships from the advantaged point of view of someone with educational experience in two very dissimilar socio-cultural settings, socialism and capitalism. Sidorkin’s experiences prevented him from having a sense of ethnocentrism that either glorified the nation of his birth or blinded him to its obvious flaws. Sidorkin’s vision is clear and contrastive in the observations he makes of the Soviet Union, his place of birth and the United States of America, his place of residence. As a newly appointed teacher, Sidorkin pondered about what makes a good teacher. Sidorkin felt baffled by the unevenness in results of the instructional methods. Implementing the same strategies to the teaching – learning process could result in varied responses from class to class. “Nothing seemed to work in a predictable fashion” (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 1). After many tries Sidorkin stated: “I finally learned how to be a decent teacher, which involves a lot of improvisation [not

standardization], paying attention to my own intuition [phenomenological influence], listening to the kids [existential stance – learning from experience], and trying to take it easy” [plain common sense] (p. 2). What follows is a succinct summary of the lessons Sidorkin learned and shares with his readers.

Having learned to do something is not the same as understanding how it works....amidst the small personal discoveries, the individual human beings and their actions started to fade away for me, and relations came into focus. I argue that an underlying reality of human relations constitutes the crucial context of education. (p. 2).

Sidorkin’s solution was his proposal for a pedagogy of relations that made the ethics of care an “ontologically basic” (p. 88) for the educational process. Caring for others as the basic fabric of existence, the *I – Thou* relationship permeating every human thought and rational or affective decision (p. 89). In the United States, Pedagogy of relation is according to Sidorkin the only hope to rescue the educational process from vanishing as a whole.

There are many school factors that affect the success of ethnically diverse students, the school's atmosphere and overall attitude toward linguistic and culturally diverse students, involvement of the community and the school curriculum are some examples that permeate the human relationships phenomenon within the school setting. Learning a new language and culturally mediated academic content are facets of the educational process strongly impacted by the culture of the human participants. Religious practices and beliefs, child rearing customs, male/female roles, beliefs about fate, morality, proxemics and time, stages of acculturation, the affective filter, motivational



forces and socio-economic class are dimensions of the human way of life that have pervasive effects on how students from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds cope with *learning* and *being* in the United States, a profoundly ethnocentric and nationalistic country. At the inception of the American Republic, the founding fathers idealized a utopia, designed around the white, European male (Spring, 2000, p. x). Winthrop's "city upon a hill" (p. 11) would be admired by all people, "which meant a well ordered religious society that would win God's approval and be used as a model by the rest of the world" (p. 12); a premonition of the burden to befall upon the *American* school later.

"The educational policies of Massachusetts Bay Colony are considered the precursors to the development of public schooling ... and to the belief that public schools could end crime, eliminate poverty, provide equality of opportunity, improve the economy, train workers, and create social and political stability (Spring, 2000, p. 9). The bar was set high for educators to come but initiated in lowly feelings of hatred for others who were not White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestants. The "land of the lovely whites" (Takaki, 1993, p. 83) comprises the forces that obeying to particular interests groups have defined the kind of knowledge that is acceptable thus apt to be taught in the schools of the United States (Kliebard, 2004, pp. ix, xv, 141 – 142). Struggle for the American curriculum is an account of the "cherished values" (p. xv) that gained preponderance during the development of what we know as the *American* curriculum. The so called *American* curriculum has been involved in a sensuous dance with the forms of power that have subjugated the political and social scene of each epoch in the history of the United States and continues to do so in contemporary times.

*Academic Research – A Personal Multicultural Perspective*

Voluminous writings, by renowned scholars and ordinary authors of our times, focus on the topic of multicultural education. In my daily work, I come across beliefs that peddle multicultural education as the panacea for social adaptation of minority groups expected to become mirror images of their mainstream counterparts. Informed scholarship becomes critical analysis of difference and equity through education. Gloria Ladson-Billings points at differences in ethnic epistemology and ontology between the Euro-American and African forms of thinking by comparing quotes by members in both camps. Rene Descartes proclaimed: “I think therefore I am”, representing the individualistic minds of the Westernized thought and in contrast the African phrase *Ubuntu* proclaimed: “I am because we are” (Ladson-Billings, 1993, p. 84) a view of the importance of cohesive group relationships in the African American frame of reference. Epistemological and ontological rationalizations mold the axiological interactions of multiethnic groups vying for their share of knowledge and position in the larger mainstream group; the way we bridge these differences marks the fundamental quality of our teaching for a growingly diverse student population and “provides them with the rules of the culture of power that makes acquiring power easier” (Delpit, 1995, p. 25).

Epistemology is a system of knowing; Ladson-Billings’s urgent plea implies a difference between hegemony and liberation and the legitimation of one cultural epistemology over another. Ladson Billings’s allusion to W. E. B. Du Bois “*double consciousness or two-ness*” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. p. 1, 5) alerts the readers to the inner conflict brought on by the creation of divergent, dialogical selves that deal with a Eurocentric and a native culture to become “culturally competent participants” (Ladson-

Billings, 2001, p. 144) and resonates with locality of truth for me, a “mestiza” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 69) from the colonized island of Puerto Rico. This double consciousness represses and empowers in social and curricular sites. *We become who we are but always mindful about what we should learn to be.*

Compelling multicultural education provides the tools for learning *who we are and who we should learn to be* without denigration of either being. Lisa Delpit emphasizes the relevance of teaching the skills that afford equity in mainstream settings: “I’ve heard your song loud and clear; now I want to want to teach you to harmonize with the rest of the world” (Delpit, 1995, p. 18). Many minority and successful members of society have been able to conquer spaces because they received the knowledge and skills that their mainstream counterparts were afforded through education (p. 19). Our obligation is to continue learning and continue reaching out to fellow human beings with words of equity. “Such knowledge would have to provide a motivational connection to action itself” (Giroux, 2001, p. 35). In words of the late Audre Lorde to “use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 113). ), although not Lorde’s original meaning, I believe we can use the master’s tool, the institutionalized educational system, to provide education for liberation.

#### *Consideration in Compelling Multicultural Education*

The teaching of diverse students has been relegated to a trial and error process in schools across the United States. The information available to educators in the field of multicultural education is vast, thus mind boggling. This superabundance of resources limits the educated decision making process that should be happening in classrooms where diverse students receive instruction. The effectiveness of the learning process for

linguistically and culturally diverse students has been relegated to the results of standardized measures that are not responsive to the stages of English language proficiency, prior academic knowledge or socio-cultural differences of the very diverse student population in schools of the United States. The process is flawed from its inception. Equal access to education for English Language Learners (ELLs) is a mandate since the 1974 *Lau vs. Nichols* Superior Court decision when school districts were required to take "affirmative steps" (Ovando, 2003, p. 9) to overcome the educational barriers faced by non-English speakers and other culturally diverse groups of students.

Under the *Civil Rights Act* by "Merely providing ELLs and other diverse students the same curriculum, the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum available for native speakers of English is not enough, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (Bilingual Education in the United States, Policy – History [n.d.] ¶ 7). For culturally diverse students, the existence of a language barrier, differing prior academic knowledge and cultural norms that deviate from the mainstream effectively bars them from equal access to education. Language barriers exist in cases where students are immigrants from other countries as well as when students belong to cultural groups who learn dialectical forms of English and use them for communication within their group; such is the case with Ebonics (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 35) and the residual use of Gullah in some areas of South Carolina and Georgia (Banks & Banks, 1997, p. 278). To approach the task of schooling diverse students, educators must have knowledge of second language acquisition (SLA), of the impact of prior schooling on teaching and learning and understanding of how socio-cultural factors shape the learning of all students.

In this qualitative research my aim was to define the dimensions embedded in the teaching and learning process of English language learners, demonstrate how these dimensions interact to increase the probability of effectual learning for students from diverse backgrounds and present an integrated graphic organizer to illustrate teaching and learning as a decision making process. The idea of teaching and learning being a decision making process is a revolutionary concept in an era of standardizations, deskilling of teachers and students and compulsory assessments. However, the place for decision making in the classroom is irrefutable, every day, in every classroom at that time teachers close the doors to their classrooms. Through critical analysis and synthesis the resulting framework, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*, confirms that the language and instructional progression of linguistically diverse students is the result of educated decision making in the classroom as opposed to the chance consequence of trial-and-error initiatives. The framework provides critical knowledge to assist educators in lesson preparation and instruction to support English language learners and other linguistically and culturally diverse students.

A compelling multicultural education program requires that participants in the human fields are compelled to critical thinking, imagination, and commitment to a new reality, inclusive of the wealth of our stories and peoples. Education for diversity is a new dimension of the continuous journey toward justice and equity in the fulfillment of the promise of democracy. Education for diversity gives us new questions to ask and directions to follow to reveal the human possibilities in an era marked by global relations. “People trying to be more fully human must not only engage in critical thinking but must be able to imagine something coming of their hopes; their silence must be overcome by

their search” (Greene 1995, p. 25). Compelling multicultural education is a sheltering place for a multitude of voices in a multicultural society, a place for many dreams.

*Culture determines the way we think, act and learn forever*

*(Victoria Vázquez Webbert, 2003, personal commentary).*

*Literature Review Summary – Dearest Mother*

Dearest Mother,

Although I enjoy teaching very much, it is very hectic. There are 28 students in my third grade class. Six speak English, the rest speak a bewildering variety of eight other languages, of which I know a few words of only three.

With the others, we use sign language and get along as best we can. I am working to get parents to translate, but most of them know no English. I hope to next year to get a better start with language.

(Teaching Tolerance, 1999, p. 5).

The missive cited above could have been written at the beginning of this school year by any grade level school teacher concerned about the academic achievement of her students and her ability to reach them through a language and culture foreign to the teacher. However, this letter was written in 1908 by a teacher in Brooklyn, New York. Her students spoke French, German, Italian, Dutch, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Russian, Swedish and British English. A century ago the United States experienced a greater immigration challenge than it does today. People were frightened. There was anger and prejudice. Today, 100 years later, all those immigrants are the family forebears of the

now mainstream groups in the United States. The United States is a *nation of immigrants*; only the source of the immigration groups has changed with time. The end result is the same; a stronger nation because of its diverse heritage.

*Considerations for My Study from Curriculum Studies*

A different story about curriculum in the United States could be conveyed, if narrated from the point of view of the international forces who were coconspirators in the pillage of the *American* land (Takaki, 1993). “A mirror is a one way reflection” (p. 16); to understand the multicultural United States one is forced to see in this new mirror the reflection of the many faces and points of view of the masses of immigrants – “strangers from other shores” (p. 7) who built and continue to build the academic story of the United States. The “complex and difficult” (p. 69) story of the United States must be seen through the kaleidoscopic elucidations of the many voices and histories that created the United States. Takaki emphasizes the active role of immigrants in the creation of the history of a multicultural United States when he states: “Like the black soldiers, the people in our study have been actors in history, not merely victims of discrimination and exploitation” (p. 14). “Contrary to the popular image of the United States as a monolingual culture dominated by the English language and White Anglo-Saxon traditions, numerous indigenous people’s dreams and realities have long been filtered through a polyglot prism” (Crawford, 1991, p.13).

*Changes in the American Educational Horizon*

While it is true that the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries were periods of more linguistic tolerance it would be inaccurate to claim that the mainstream American view sanctioned a multilingual and multiethnic United States; the situation was more a case of omission

and of changing localized political, economic and social forces than one of reaffirmation of the individual's rights or any systematic ideas about language itself. In the late 1880s, attitudes began to change, English patriotism intensified, and support for multilingualism began to waiver (Kliebard, 2004). An *Americanization* campaign was launched, and fluency in English, the language of the dominant Anglo-Saxon race, became associated with patriotism (Casanova & Arias, 1993; Tamura, 1993 cited in Fitzgerald in *Views on bilingualism in the United States: A selective historical review*, electronic version, ¶9).

The push for homogeneity became a well-established pattern within schools during the first half of the 20th century (Crawford, 1991, p. 24). Homogeneity and hegemony of the United States was driven by many factors, including the standardization and bureaucratization of schools and the need for national unity during the two world wars, and the desire to promote patriotism from the colonized as a means to consolidate national goals for the country (Walsh, 1992). During this period, many large urban schools created Americanization classes to prepare immigrants for integration into mainstream society. These classes often had an ethnocentric stance, presenting cultural patterns of the United States as being more desirable than the immigrants' ancestral cultures and languages (Higham, 1988, p. 32). Apart from these classes, the predominant approach to educating language-minority students in the United States during this period was the sink-or-swim method, also known as submersion (Crawford, 1991, pp. 166 – 170). In the introduction to his book, Anderson (1988) reminds his readers that ... “within American democracy there have been classes of oppressed people and that there have been essential relationships between popular education and the politics of oppression” ... “schooling for second-class citizenship” (p. 1).



Educational opportunity for all peoples has never been a consideration in the debate about the language of instruction; rather political dominance is the main motivator. The recurring patterns of language invasion represent “another item on the list of practices of the broad context of how a nation can use schools to impose its will on a conquered people” (Spring, 2000, p. 207). Similar to the African American experience, Hispanics/Latinos have turned to the power of an education in the struggle for empowerment. LULAC – Latin American League of American Citizens has already successfully sued the federal government and improved the educational process for all minorities; the most recent the META consent decree adopted by Florida which demanded that all teachers be trained on instructional practices that made education accessible for children of language minority families (p. 205).

Moving forward to this day and age, educators face a mounting demand to conform to the forces that mold the schooling process in the United States. Caring education professionals consider how to comply with imposed pedagogical demands and still provide students with an education that affords them the opportunity to overcome a disadvantaged status. In simple words, how do we walk the talk instead of just talk the talk? The allegory of the starfish and the fisherman comes to mind to reaffirm my belief in critical pedagogy as the originator of a personal power that can galvanize the individual and the collective will to confront the status quo.

In the referenced story, we are told that after a particular high tide a fisherman walks to a shoreline filled with stranded starfish and begins to throw them back into the ocean one starfish at a time. A man comes by and commands the fisherman to stop such futile attempt, since in the face of the thousands of starfish grounded at the shore, he

couldn't possibly make a difference. At this comment the fisherman looks up at the man, grabs a starfish, and throws it back into the ocean as he states "it made a difference for this one" (author unknown)! We have the power to make a difference in the stereotypical way of thinking of one human being at a time. Those who, as a result, change socio-critical positions also become advocates for a new conceptual frame of reference and in time co-author philosophical revolutions aimed at a more just civilization. In Freirian words, join students to: "engage in conscientization... engage in education as the practice of freedom" (Freire, 1993, p. 87).

I gather support for the visual framework through the extensive literature review to explain the process of teaching and learning language and content for ELLs. *This model represents the intersection of the stages of language acquisition, students' prior knowledge and culture as the tenets of an informed pedagogy for the widely diverse student population of schools in the United States historically and at this time.* The framework/model is a necessity to holistically clarify how language acquisition, prior knowledge and socio-cultural factors mold the process of learning for ELLs.

ELLs and their teachers engage in a prolonged and intimate intellectual embrace in which cultural worldviews become the conduit of successful or failed relationships "the necessary meditating variable" (Ibrahim, 1991, p. 180). The need for multicultural effectiveness in education and in teacher training programs is a recent development in counseling and teacher development .... that ignores the impact of Puritanical ethics embedded in the educational process and the impact these assumptive values have for those who are different in terms of gender or culture (p. 181).

Gary Howard speaks to this truth in *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* (1999). His is a journey of transformation through the learning of self and the selves of others, diverse students, who were different but not inferior to the mainstream group to which Howard belongs. Uninformed educators cannot engage in compelling multicultural education practices when they do not understand the dimensions rooted in such concept. In the past, once aware, many of my colleagues have dropped their jaws in awe of their lack of knowledge and in horror for the injustices they may have committed while in ignorance of fundamental information. The framework assists educators in lesson preparation and implementation that supports ELLs and their learning.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR MY ANALYSIS - METHODOLOGY

*Theoretical Framework - My Definition of Critical Pedagogy*

Schooling in my early years and an advanced education later in life have enabled me to achieve beyond the limits typically imposed by gender, race, ethnicity and class. For a brown female from Hispanic descent growing up in the middle/low socioeconomic stratum in the island of Puerto Rico, the prevalent ideological discourse - the song of the siren - dictated dropping out of school, having several children and working two or three menial jobs to make ends meet. The invitation to dance to the cadence of these 'natural expectations' was built into self, school and society by the use of a language of conformism infused into the colonized school curriculum and reinforced by the stereotypical attitude towards women by the social institutions of the time. Some of us built "collective resistance" (Walsh, 1991, p. 13) to escape that destiny.

The fight for voice, "the language needed to paint one's reality" (Wink, 2005, p. 59) of the people from Puerto Rico, opened spaces in the critical consciousness of teachers who refused to submit their students to a process of cultural reproduction (Giroux, 2001, p. 87). These educators rejected the use of a foreign tongue and the imposition of cultural practices strange to the collective psyche, practices aimed at alienation and diffusion of group solidarity (Walsh, 1991, p. 10). Instead of a sense of subjugation, critical educators inspired in their students a sense of empowerment inherent to critical thinking and action. Years later, I would rediscover this same urgency in the call for "*praxis*" of Freire's work (Freire, 1983, p. 85). These educators of my youth practiced critical pedagogy without having the label or definition for it and resisted the

reification of the roles assigned to colonizer and colonized imbued into the school syllabus. They practiced the “rational thinking” (Noddings, p. 1995, p. 87) that is targeted towards improving their students’ lives.

The compulsory curriculum for my 7<sup>th</sup> grade English class required that students read biographies of *Celebrated American Figures*. Our class read Helen Keller’s life story written in riveting narrative style and with language so compelling that we felt immersed in the heroine’s mind during the reading and some of us even learned sign language. Our English teacher, Mrs. Martinez, experienced in life and in teaching, urged us to compare the difficulties in Helen Keller’s life to our own limiting conditions to evaluate alternate possibilities. Our dreamy faces betrayed our silences telling stories of hope beyond the conditions of our joint reality. The week long activity finished with us, students, writing an essay about our fondest dreams. Mrs. Martinez read the essays and questioned each one of us about a possible plan of action to achieve our dreams. I still remember that lesson; probably my classmates of the time remember it too. The *me* of today was brought forth then by a critical educator, practicing critical pedagogy, who opened the door of possibilities to her students.

Accordingly, my conceptualization of critical pedagogy is connected to the power of education and proactive action grounded on reflective thinking “with the world, in the world and with others as the subject and maker of history” (Freire, 1983, p. 55). I am aware of the limitations intrinsic to schooling but I also presume its potentialities when driven by critical pedagogy. “Teaching is an existentialist project – you choose yourself as a teacher .... it is a job of empowering teachers and students to change their worlds in light of their desires and reflections, making sense of their own situations, not to change

it for them” (Greene, 1973, p. 21). The education that teachers and students create inside and outside the classroom has been the only form of critical pedagogy I have known and the one I propose for the theoretical framework of my study.

*A Philosophy for Teaching and Learning – Critical Pedagogy*

The most exciting part of my study is my on-going intellectual conversations with the thinkers who have contoured my thoughts even before I learned their names. “Critical pedagogy is not a product; it is a process of development” (Wink, 2005, p. 117). Critical pedagogy morphs into a new form of living for teachers and students immersed in reinventing themselves in reaction to their oppressors. Critical pedagogy is recreated by teachers and students in their search for empowerment and embedded in their explorations of the multiplicity of possibilities within the educational realm. “This is a time of questioning whose knowledge should be considered valid and a time when research participants champion their ideas about how their experiences should be interpreted, theorized and represented” (Phillion, He & Connelly, 2005, p. 9). Critical Pedagogy continues to evolve in my study with the denouncement of *pedagogy of trial and error* in favor of critical pedagogy for decision making. Decision making in Critical Pedagogy takes into consideration the lives and stories of ELLs as these are manifested in their stages of language acquisition, prior knowledge and their cultural worldviews. In the interpretation and application of this knowledge educators and students recreate educational practices for social justice in classrooms and communities.

Critical pedagogy, also known as “*liberation pedagogy*,” (Freire, 1993, p. 79) draws from Freire’s observations concerning the effects of literacy on the uneducated populace of Brazil roughly sixty years ago. Literacy was the beginning of critical

awareness about circumstances that oppressed them to encourage their desire to liberate themselves from their oppressors. Liberation is a painful process in which observation; analysis and action closely follow personal convictions. Praxis in the form of liberating actions cannot be granted on people; it can only be facilitated for them through problem posing and solving education. To make liberatory education available to their students, teachers must understand the reality of their students' lives and engage in teaching as decision making. Scripted education fosters what Freire called *banking education* and support of the status quo (Freire, 1983). Freire's a status quo denounced education in which some know it all and transmit it to those who do not know anything (p. 73).

#### *An Historical Framework for Critical Pedagogy*

Existentialism rejected the meta-narrative of *Truth* in favor of the fluid idea of a personal ontology and epistemology grounded on the lived experience and guided by an individual axiology that is social at inception. "Existentialists reject the idea of a preformed human nature that can be used to guide education, prescribe duties, predict fate and describe the role of the human being in the universe" (Noddings, 1995, p. 59). Existentialist views on choice and responsibility, inherent to the freedom of humans to choose their reality and pursue self-actualization, were the catalytic force for the thinkers who developed Critical Theory, a precursor of Critical Pedagogy and my chosen theoretical framework.

Critical Pedagogy does not lend itself to a neatly arranged categorization of philosophy, ideology or theory and owes its inception to the theoretical posture of multiple philosophical thinkers. From Marxism, Critical Pedagogy receives a consciousness about how social class and socio-economic conditions operate in unison to

generate political and social repression; from Existentialism it adopts the belief in a human being always in a state of flux, unfinished and pliable to the influences of thought and experience within specific but temporal locales always evidencing a pressing engrossment with life; angst and exhilaration emanating from choice in the on-going construction of meaning and from postmodernism Critical Pedagogy concerns itself with the analysis of contemporary oppressive influences in the shape of universal values and meta-narratives coming face to face with the collective being.

*Selected Philosophical Voices in Critical Pedagogy*

I have been conscious of the power of reflexive education since the early days of my middle school education. At that time my understanding of education as a subversive activity did not have the authority granted by the philosophers and theories I came to learn later in my education. My instinct was that of a consciousness of oppression and a desire for deliverance from what I perceived was a prescribed way of life. My examination of Critical Pedagogy was set in motion by the work of Paulo Freire's as it resides within the multiple intersections of thought and experience intrinsic to phenomenology, hermeneutics existentialism and Critical Theory and as it faces deconstruction at the hands of poststructural philosophers who attempt to demystify the power embedded in critical thinking and *praxis*.

The theoretical position of my study primarily stems from a profound conviction about my personal obligation to respond to the call for *praxis* (Freire, 1993, p. 84). Schooling does not automatically imply *education*. *Education* in a more Freirian context provides for a progression in which "men and women develop their ability to perceive critically the way they exist in the world" ... "they come to see the world not as a static



reality but as a reality in the process of transformation” (Freire, 2000, p. 12). This process of transformation is summed up in *praxis*, a synthesis of critical thoughts combined with action to ameliorate unnecessary human pain (Freire, 1993, p. 100). In *praxis*, observation and deliberate action closely follow personal analysis regardless of the influence of a burly status quo that promotes the “banking concept of education as an instrument of oppression” (Freire, 1993, p. 72), an oppression that dulls the mind and strategically stifles the questions.

Next, my encounter with philosopher Maxine Greene, the respected aesthetics, critical pedagogue of our time, contributed to my notion of Critical Pedagogy as the process of urging educators to advance, in themselves and their students, a restless, probing disposition that endlessly inquires *why*. In the answer to the incessant query of ‘why’, teachers find learning always in the process of being produced (Greene, 1973), an epistemology in which the self is the actor and producer of a very personal script; constantly moving into new stages and non-conformist actions, that shies away from meaninglessness and the invisibility imposed on ‘others’ and thus in turn necessarily on us. Critical Pedagogy in Greene’s terms, can engage students on beliefs that surpass the limits of a dreary, mechanical life, to take initiatives to find freedom in solitude with others within the open spaces that questioning the status quo brings and the possibilities this cognition begets. “Whatever inspiration is, it is born from the continuous ‘I don’t know .... It’s a restless realm of posing questions, of taking risks, and looking at what is not yet entertained” (Edited transcript of speech by Maxine Greene at the Lincoln Center Institute, July 8, 2003, ¶ 1).

In succession, bell hooks contributed to my interpretation of the field of Critical Pedagogy with a call for *engaged, radical and transformative pedagogy* enmeshed in hooks's feminist thinking with an invitation for "teaching to transgress" (hooks, 1994, pp. 10 – 22). The hookian context provides the justification for pedagogy that enables men and women to develop their ability to perceive critically the way they exist in the world. The teacher constantly presents new paradigms and asks students to shift their ways of thinking to consider new perspectives, to consider other possibilities (pp. 153 – 154). The hookian invitation for teaching to transgress summons readers to contravene the injustices of bias and prejudice in society at large (p. 51). ELLs may not feel at ease in the midst of an educational setting which appears to be neutral while fostering practices that contribute to the silencing of students and educators by demeaning the value of their life experiences (p. 39). bell hooks extends an invitation to educators to contextualize the practices of domination widespread in teaching practices and thus provides further justification for my study.

Joan Wink intensified my search for *praxis* in Critical Pedagogy when she characterized Critical Pedagogy once again. "My definitions continue to be woven into the context of theory and practice; I offer yet another definition based on the influence of Maxine Greene .... Critical pedagogy is a prism that reflects the complexities of the interactions between teaching and learning .... After we look through this lens, the basics are not the basics as they used to be" (Wink, 2005, p. 26). Wink urges critical educators and curriculum scholars to understand Greene's call for an on-going teaching and learning process that departs from the individuality of teachers, students against the backdrop of their community lives. Education in this fashion is reinvented, tweaked and

tailored to address an ever changing reality to keep learning meaningful and make it the springboard for proactive stances. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* validated this newly found belief: "Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious .... Knowing is painful because after it happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. "I am no longer the same person I was before" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 70).

Britzman's words provided further support to my position of awareness and change through the subtle but subversive powers inherent to the educational process: "In psychoanalytic views, the most incredible interference is, oddly, the most indirect" (Britzman, 1998, p. 6). Critical Pedagogy becomes an activator of unmitigated convictions and my response to the call for *interference* with patterns of power in the status quo integrated into the educational process. As an educator and researcher in the making, my personal and academic commitment is to the continued interpretation of the learning process for students from diverse backgrounds and the teachers who provide for their educational needs. My advocacy is for teaching and learning for a social justice that is culturally sensitive and teaches what ought to be taught, not as dogma, but as the response to the needs of the people in all spheres of society (Ayers, Hunt & Quinn, 1998, p. 29). My call is for Critical Pedagogy through the authority of education.

My theoretical framework and methodology build upon the historical development of Critical Pedagogy and the scholarship of thinkers who I consider are more harmonious with my existential thinking. I make every effort to establish connections between the auto/biography of students, teachers and myself and the theoretical references in my study. Critical Pedagogy is embodied in my position that advocates for educators in schools across the United States to seek theoretical perceptive

appreciation of the process of second language acquisition. This exploration takes into account the larger contextual socio-cultural pieces that shape the teaching and learning of linguistically and culturally diverse learners necessary to engage in teaching for social justice. This qualitative research suggests how teachers of diverse students may engage in the educated decision making process that assists diverse students in identifying and overcoming their unique sources of oppression. I seek to demonstrate that neither SLA theory nor socio-cultural theory alone provides a comprehensive understanding to guide the process of teaching and learning for diverse students.

*Critical Pedagogy and the Passionate Pursuit of Teaching*

My theoretical framework is grounded on critical pedagogy and auto/biography in an effort to maintain social justice as the focus and goal of my inquiry. My methodology becomes an intimate conversation connecting theory to experience, in which theory informs experience and experience shapes theory in an on going Hegelian cycle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis with the prospect of garnering glimpses of truth along the way. My understanding is primarily phenomenological and hermeneutic, describing the lived experience of second language learners, including my own and that of my children and students and providing an interpretation of it for theory. Our stories motivated me to become a researcher and theorizer who is an “interested and subjective actor” (Lichtman, 2006, p.25). My interest is in the synthesis of theory, experience and practice of the instructional process of second language learners to increase perceptual awareness of the process. I become a researcher and a learner of the ideas that evolve from my reading, thinking, investigation, interactions and synthesis.

As I willingly enter a world of labels for thoughts, novel thinking and embrace questions not pondered before, I query myself about the choices I still have to make and my commitment to stand by those choices. Critical Pedagogy provides the tools I need to fulfill the human duty to be concerned about teachers and students, which I choose to pursue through a vocation that assists students and their teachers grasp the enormity of the options they have even under the most harrowing circumstances. My obligation is to continue learning and continue reaching out to fellow human beings with words of emancipation. “Instruct the oppressed about their situation as a group situated within specific relations of domination and subordination . . . such knowledge would have to provide a motivational connection to action itself” (Giroux, 2001, p. 35). To “use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 113).

I approach curriculum from the proposition for *currere* (Pinar, 1974) fueled by the desire that ELLs can sketch the relations among school knowledge, life history and learning in ways that might function for self-transformation within a reality that is woven from their experiences, voice and their ever changing lives. I run the course with the objective of becoming, and fostering becoming in teachers and students, at the intersection of academic knowledge and life histories (Pinar, 2004). Hence, my objective is to examine the variables of high impact that affect the learning of language and content for ELLs receiving instruction in the mainstream classrooms of the United States. My standpoint is that educators in schools across the nation must have primary theoretical perceptive knowledge of second language acquisition as well as of the larger contextual socio-cultural pieces that shape the teaching and learning of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. In my study, I suggest how teachers of diverse students may engage in

the educated decision making process that will assist diverse students with their learning. Ultimately, I seek to demonstrate that neither SLA theory nor socio-cultural theory alone provides a comprehensive understanding to guide the process of teaching and learning for diverse students.

I propose *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* as a visual representation of the thinking process that should be transpiring at the intersections of teaching and learning for students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and their teachers. I am committed to curriculum and within it teachers and students fully aware and engaged in the teaching – learning process that offers the possibility of “miracles by stimulating an awareness of the questionable...” (Pinar, 2004, p. 315). I too will face death and disappearance, I do not make a difference but I can make a difference. I make a difference when I share awareness of the human being as an agent responsible for creating and recreating personal meanings (Noddings, 1995, p. 63). I feel enthralled by the possibilities.

#### *Methodological Justification*

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that as ample as the field of second language acquisition is there is a gap of understanding in the academic literature addressing theories of teaching and learning for second language learners. Utilizing critical analytical inquiry grounded on auto/biography, for my inquiry I have thoroughly scrutinized academic research related to the dimensions of second language acquisition (SLA), prior academic knowledge and the cultural worldview of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to justify my research methodology. This analysis commenced decades ago with my concern about how people learn a second language,

English, more effectively and became the focus of all my postsecondary academic efforts. The knowledge I bring into the field is mature and informed.

Critical analytical inquiry demands an active approach in which the analysis evaluates statements presented as conclusions to assess if conclusions have been adequately supported (Cederblom & Paulsen, 2001, p. 30). My methodology also has a dual purpose. First, I want to share with my audience the philosophical foundation for my ethical position and the deliberations compelling my research in the field of second language acquisition. Then, I want to elucidate the theoretical fundamentals of my analysis and thesis. It is impossible to theorize in a vacuum; ideas build and generate from theory preceding us in the same manner that our ideas will shape the theoretical models of the classrooms of tomorrow.

*Support for Theoretical Framework, Inquiry and Method*

Chamot and O'Malley (1994) posit that any pedagogical approach should have a sound theoretical basis to meet at least three criteria: (a) the approach should be grounded on research; (b) it should explain what and how something is learned; and (c) it should provide guidance for instruction (p. 12). This section reviews the theoretical framework of approaches related to learning English and learning English for academic purposes. The construct of academic language and its terminology was initially advanced by Cummins (1981), and other researchers in the field of second language acquisition. There has been general agreement among scholars understanding the academic language in use in a classroom contributes to the academic achievement of English Language Learners (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981; Spolsky, 1989; Saville-Troike, 1991, *Bilingual Research Journal*, Fall 2001, *Transfer in the Academic Language*

Development of Post-secondary ESL Students, Theoretical Framework of Academic Language section, ¶1). My methodology supports a rationale for the need of theoretical synthesis grounded on the lived experience to critically respond to the need for comprehensible instruction for English language learners in schools of the United States.

Rolf E. Muus, author of the textbook *Theories of Adolescence*, makes reference to the usefulness of a sound theoretical framework when he quotes Thomas Jefferson: ... “theory is the most practical of men’s instruments” and Kurt Lewin’s: “There is nothing as practical as good theory” (Muus, 1996, p. xx) early in his book. Muus asserts the fact that theories do not die, they are difficult to prove or disprove ... theories that may have been considered dead or obsolete may be reassessed (p. xix). In this spirit, I intend to establish a coherent theoretical perspective of the stages of language acquisition of second language learners, the kinds of prior knowledge culturally and linguistic diverse students bring to their educational process, the cultural differences these students exhibit and the impact of these three dimensions on the teaching and learning process of diverse students to justify their representation in the conceptual framework I developed, *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*. My discussion has been the result of ongoing reflection and intimate conversations with the subject matter throughout most of my life.

#### *Inquiry Process – Thinking in the Right Direction*

According to Marshall and Rossman, a weakness of qualitative research is the potential for bias from the part of the researcher. I crossed reference findings through the implementation of varied inquiry methods. *Inquiry methods in this study referred to the knowledge gathered and analyzed through the ample literature review, the insights*



*derived from auto/biographical information and the events narrated in the school portraiture of Esplanade Brook High School which closes the methodology chapter. At the intersection of the understanding gleaned from these sources we find consistent interrelation of theory, experience and knowledge. The triangulation of inquiry methods should assist with the reliability of the results. “Researcher participation is at the heart of qualitative research process” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, pp. 106 -140).*

*First, the review of documents is the primary inquiry method for this study. The task of educating ELLs is an overwhelming process for both educators and students. It is additionally compounded by the reality that there is too much information available to educators and limited guidance to evaluate the information for applicability of these resources in classrooms in the United States and with a particular set of students. During the document review phase, I have studied the large body of knowledge, available in all kinds of texts, regarding second language acquisition to portray the more salient theory in regards to the teaching and learning of ELLs. Throughout the study of the academic literature, I have examined academic research related to the dimensions of second language acquisition (SLA), prior academic knowledge and the cultural worldview of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to explain the process of teaching and learning for them. “I stand on the shoulders of giants” (The Very Highest Quality Information, Standing on the Shoulders of Giants, 2006, ¶ 2) in my quest for analysis and synthesis of theory that effectively describes the progression of teaching and learning for English Language Learners (ELLs).*

*Second, the presentation of the school portraiture of Esplanade Brook High School in chapter four is the culmination of theory and analysis embedded in*

auto/biography and artistic creativity. The events and interpretations in this narrative are the result of my participation in the school setting some years ago drawn against the backdrop of casual conversations with a friend and colleague, presently teaching at this school. The writing flowed from the inner corners of my recollection of events and peoples who deeply touched my understanding of demographic change and its impact on learning. My students in this school deepened the conceptualizations later presented in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*.

The school referenced portraiture is the narration about a school that undergoes profound physical and curricular changes as the student population and community it serves changes drastically through the years. The narrative is erected upon the events of an actual school in a metropolitan school system in the northeast region of Atlanta, GA. The names of the participants have been changed to prevent the disclosure of the specific school but the school and events are real. The story presents the fictionalized development of a suburban high school in the Metropolitan Atlanta area. The school undergoes drastic changes in student population which result in the kind of concerns and solutions that are the focus of my study. The narrative represents the growth of students and educators who are faced with rapid demographic changes and the responses they develop and implement to continue being academically successful. The portraiture becomes a tool for triangulation for the knowledge gained through the literature review and anecdotal accounts.

#### *Inquiry Organization and Analysis*

A theoretical dissertation involves the development of a new perspective to a particular topic. The researcher provides a critical account of the research in the field and

develops a particular line of thought or theoretical position on the chosen issue. My theoretical dissertation primarily aims at describing the development of a conceptual framework as it is justified within relevant SLA and cultural psychology literature. I selected critical pedagogy as my theoretical framework and critical analytical inquiry for my methodology. Theory, auto/biography and a school portraiture dance in cadence to support a thesis of wholeness when instructing English language learners. Theory and creativity supported by the auto/biographical experience justify the philosophical underpinnings of *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*.

Knowledge interpretation and analysis involves making sense out of what people have said along with the information gathered through other inquiry methods. According to Marshall and Rossman, (pp. 152 – 164) it is a messy, non-linear looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what has been observed or said in another place to and allow for the massive information to evolve into patterns and themes that later can be interpreted, affirmed or negated. More importantly, knowledge organization and analysis builds the grounded theory that is an indispensable component of reliable qualitative studies. I remain committed to an open ended process that either confirms or negates the postulations I currently embrace.

#### *Inquiry Representation*

At the end of this comprehensive process of inquiry during the literature review, the auto/biographical component and the school portraiture, I add insights to my analysis by using among other summative devices, the qualities of the impressionist tales described in Van Maanen's work (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 102). My interpretation of impressionist tales is fleshed out in the details of the portraiture of Esplanade Brook High

School. I borrow the proposition that to clarify meanings the researcher emphasizes the ethnographic notion of subverting what is normal by effecting dramatic recall (p. 103).

The narrative in the school portraiture for EBHS is an attempt to show readers the relationship between perspective, knowledge, and judgment to make the organization of knowledge enlightening and interesting to professionals that work with ELLs. This story is about what rarely used to happen thirty-three years ago (p. 102). In the turmoil and hopeful narrative of Esplanade Brook High School, I expect to foster a more optimistic attitude in the teachers who read my work. These tales of human warmth vividly described as they have happened in the story of this school as seen through my eyes, the eyes of a participant and researcher, identify with commonly shared human experiences like fear, joy, loneliness, hopes, expectations and dreams that both teachers and students share should also facilitate the eradication of attitudinal behaviors that interfere with the teaching and learning of ELLs.

#### *The Why for My Methodology*

I come from an Existentialist theoretical framework; I believe that teaching is a decision making process and therefore we have choices to make; from a Socio-critical belief that tells me that we must strive for social change in the quest to improve the lives of oppressed and disenfranchised minorities and from a Constructivist belief that espouses the idea of learning as a socially created process. These are the driving forces behind my methodology and my commitment to contribute a framework to understand the learning of ELLs.

In my estimation, understanding the high impact areas that influence the teaching and learning of ELLs in isolation is not enough. Educators need a more holistic approach

to understanding all the areas that affect the teaching and learning process of ELLs. This analysis creates a reflective filter that enables educators to confidently respond to: Who am I teaching? Armed with this information, educators make informed decisions to design and deliver comprehensible instruction for ELLs. No more trial and error strategies are necessary.

*Further Thoughts, Directions, Limitations and Implications*

While *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*, I believe, is a missing component for the understanding and efficacy of teachers of students from diverse language and culture backgrounds, I feel that the implications are more far reaching. All students bring into the equation of teaching and learning a language, that even when it may be English, deviates to some degree from the *Standard English* necessary for success in school. All students bring into the equation of teaching and learning their own culture that may deviate to some degree from the WASP, middle class hidden culture of the curriculum implemented in schools across the United States. All students bring into the equation of teaching and learning a socio-cultural background that largely determines how each student learned to learn. In my estimation, the implications of this framework apply to all students. I invite future researchers to use the framework as an educational tool and a departing point for future research involving the academic achievement of all students.

The limitations of this study are related to the theoretical nature of the research. Ethically, it is impossible to provide faulty education to a group of students to compare their performance with students whose education was provided on the basis of more optimum methods. *The absence of a comparison group, or supplementary empirical data,*

*may be pointed at as a limitation of the study.* This is a weakness to overcome in qualitative research. The rigor of this study and the possibility that it may represent a turning point for future research and practice requires that one remember that “earlier historical moments still operate in the present, allowing researchers to attach a project to any of the canonical texts or historical moments” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, pp. 29 – 30). To recognize and acknowledge the academic firmness of my study means that we accept the multi-dimensional moments of qualitative research as they reappear in my thick narration of events and my passion for theory and analysis grounded on semiotics, phenomenology, and hermeneutics.

My examination becomes fusion and elucidation of theories, people and places that can be generalized to the learning of other second language learners and extends an invitation to general practitioners to consider the premises discussed in this work for the education of all students. For ELLs, instruction that is tailored to provide for their unique linguistic, academic or cultural needs represents the difference between just and unjust education and a bridge for equity; “We are no longer teaching if what we teach is more important than who we teach or how we teach” (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 22).

## CHAPTER V

## SCHOOL PORTRAITURE

*Esplanade Brook High School - Mirror Image of an Evolving Suburban High School*

The rising number of English language learners in Georgia schools and in the United States presents a test to educators who diligently search for ways to meet the needs of all students at a time when schools are experiencing an increasingly diverse student population. Behind the recurrent question “*What do I do with my ELLs?*” Georgia educators search for answers to make school a more fulfilling experience for linguistic and culturally diverse students.

The genre of school portraiture, heralded by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot, is a qualitative research tool that merges the boundaries of the aesthetics and empiricism to capture the complexity of the human experience in the artistic portrayal of reality (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, introduction). With the freedom to observe and interpret events afforded to this type of scholarship, Lawrence Lightfoot promotes knowledge as the artistic fusion of facts, experience and creativity as she quotes Picasso in *The Art and Science of Portraiture*: “I painted all my life like Raphael so that one day I could paint again like a child” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xvii). The researcher and the artist merge boundaries to reproduce and analyze a reality that is vibrant in detail while still honest to the phenomena being observed. “Another lesson that the arts can teach education is that literal language and quantification are not the only means through which human understanding is secured or represented” (Eisner, 2002, p. 204).

A celebrated example of academic school portraiture, *Made in America* (1997), is the retold story of Madison High as seen and interpreted through the eyes and senses of Laurie Olsen. The passionate tale morphs into the case study of a particular high school that brings academic clarity to practitioners in the school. In this sense, *Made in America* is a hybrid between the factual nature of a case study and the artistry embedded in the art of writing school portraits. School portraits amalgamate the boundaries of the fiction and non-fictional worlds to provide a richer and more enlightening account of reality than possible through the common means of the empirical account.

With the eyes and heart of a young girl, who thinks *all* can be done if one wishes it hard enough, tempered by the mature awareness that *ALL* is an enormous task, I attempted to *artistically* paint the soul of Esplanade Brook High School, a school in transition located in the heart of suburban Atlanta, Georgia. This portraiture embodies the childlike affection I feel for the school's students, staff, and the community it serves. The interpretation of *what is* gives way to the vision of *what could be*. The narrative captures the physical and attitudinal shifts of a school and community caught in the throws of rapid transformation over the last ten years and the effect of these changes on the academic and social setting of the school. The portraiture of EBHS describes the changes in panorama, student population, beliefs and attitudes of the school community and leadership as they experience massive immigration along with "white flight," the demographic trend where upper and middle class white Americans move away from non-white inner-city neighborhoods to predominantly white suburbs (Kruse, 2005).

The events and interpretations in this narrative are the result of my participation in the school setting about seven years ago drawn against the backdrop of casual exchanges



of ideas with a friend and colleague, presently teaching at this school. We both worked in the school depicted in this portraiture during the beginning and peak points of the alluded changes. Our conversations depicted stories of change, pain and ultimate success for a school in the throws of change. Towards the end of our conversations, we decided to tell these stories to assist the young instructional staff at EBHS understand the school's rich heritage and to give hope to the many others who find themselves in similar circumstances. This work is also a memorial to a dear friend, colleague and master teacher, who taught in the school concurrently with us until her last breath.

*Esplanade Brook High School - A New Beginning*

Esplanade Brook High School was named after the physical attributes of its geographical location thirty-three years ago, early seventies, in the northeast part of the metropolitan area of Georgia. This area, now part of the Atlanta suburbia, was then just the expansion of a green meadow, out in the bundies, bordered by a curvy, crystal clear creek. The locals affectionately named the little river: "*The Brook*." The residents of the sparsely populated community enjoyed spending the late hours of the windswept afternoons by the banks of *The Brook*. "Meet me at *The Brook* by later" was a common farewell among the residents of the community as they went about their chores during the busy hours of the day.

Most men tended to their farms or ranches while the women took care of their homes and infants in this idyllic rural town. Most residents would indeed see each other again in the early evening hours over by the brook's banks just to shoot the breeze, let their youngsters play and the ladies chat about the latest events around town. The clean air around the area had the humid, green smell of communities not yet tainted by modern

technology. The community residents all knew each other by name and shared the familial camaraderie that stems from holding the same beliefs and traditions rooted in the Southern Baptist faith.

It was just natural that the new high school would be named Esplanade, a more sophisticated name for meadow, and Brook for the creek where the residents of the community spent so many happy moments. Thus the name of the new school Esplanade Brook High School was announced with pomp and circumstance during a celebration held by the little river's bank. Residents recalled that only the town's church inauguration had been commenced with so much anticipation and with so many festivities. The opening of the new school however would surely mark a new era for them. The residents thought of the school as an extension of the familial setting of the home. They expected the school would support the values and beliefs, the way of life the community felt comfortable with. Esplanade Brook High School would open its doors the coming fall.

Late in the summer, while the residents congregated for yet another celebration for the opening of the new school; folks admiring the vigor of their young commented on the youngsters' vitality and their similarities with the mustangs in their ranches. The newly appointed high school principal, sitting at earshot, mustered under his breath, "*The Mustang,*" it will be our school's mascot ... nothing else fits." The Brook, the only witness to this early pronouncement, forever captures the twinkle in the eye of Mr. Melbourne and tacitly concurs with this choice for the school's mascot; it represented the spirit of the community's young. Later, Mr. Melbourne, his staff, parents and students agree with the symbolic representation of the student body.

The following fall, the now finalized school building meets all the requirements of the modern age. A solid construction of concrete and steel, air conditioned all throughout, white, tall walls but barely a few windows. “State of the art” was the pronouncement of the school state functionaries describing the facilities during the ribbon-cutting-ceremony marking the official transference of the building to the local school authorities.

The structure of the building seemed too distant and aloof to match the nature of the gregarious community. The residents did not know what to make of it but were determined to make the school a warm and friendly place for their young. The ladies of the community sowed colorful curtains for every classroom and the men worked in the landscaping of the school. Soon the otherwise austere presence of Esplanade Brook High School was transformed to reflect the content demeanor of the happy go lucky residents of thirty-three years ago. Big, bold silver emblazoned lettering was lifted up on top of the school’s roof – EBHS, a tiara fitted for a majestic queen, barely a week before the first day of school, thirty -three years ago. The residents celebrated yet again.

#### *The Blissful Years at EBHS*

EBHS opened its doors on a sunny Monday, right after Labor Day weekend. The night before, most students could not sleep with the collective excitement. They now would attend their own school in their own community. The school body was made up of 319 students, 18 teachers, three of which would present the exploratory classes, an assistant principal and the school’s principal, Mr. Henry Melbourne III. A counselor, Mrs. Harriett Smith would join the staff the following school year when her youngest son would begin kindergarten in the nearby elementary school facilities. They all agreed they

could make do without her until then. The student population was 93% White and 7% Black. Mr. Melbourne's father had promised the residents to secure the school during his campaign to become mayor of the local town a few terms before. Now, approaching the end of his second term, Mr. Melbourne's son fulfilled the promise; the new high school was now a reality.

The early years at EBHS were happy uneventful years. Students attended their courses and graduated at the end of their senior year without much commotion. Most graduation ceremonies were followed by a host of summer weddings as the young formed new family ties and joined their in-laws residences across the many ranches and farms in town. By the end of the summer of the following year after graduation there would be a new crop of tiny babies to continue the traditions of the close knit community. The program of study at EBHS conformed to the mandates of the Georgia Department of Education. Students in the ninth grade were enrolled in: Agriculture, Family and Consumer Science, Language Arts, Mathematics, Physical Education, Science, Social Studies. Family and Consumer Science was an elective course for girls and Physical Education an elective course for boys twenty-three years ago. The core courses and electives for the sophomore, junior and senior year were set by the program of study determined by the Department of Education in downtown Atlanta. These offices were too far away to worry about their mandates was the consensus of the people in town.

A few students in the senior class would worry about the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) scheduled for the Saturday before each Spring Break. Only a few of the students in the graduating class planned to attend Georgia State University in the fall to follow in their progenitors' footsteps. John Fitzgerald Jr. would pursue a career

in medicine to become the town's doctor and Theodore Warden II would attend law school; his father was the only court appointed judge in town. Everything looked sunny at EBHS twenty-two years ago. Change was slow to come in this community.

*Changes in the Horizon for EBHS and the Community*

For almost another decade, the residents of the EBHS community lived their lives like they always did. Men continued to farm, women continued to wed and have babies, and the young continued to attend school. Imperceptibly at first, a few large agricultural enterprises began to take over some of the farms. The large and powerful companies promised to increase the farmers' revenue and decrease the amount of time and work they needed to dedicate to their farms; all was good, eleven years ago.

The use of agricultural machinery monumentally increased the crops and the production in the chicken and agricultural farms. More laborers were needed to harvest and process the products. The community began to grow with residents brought in by the new agricultural companies. Yet, the new residents spoke a different language, and acted and looked very different from the townspeople. The new residents had larger families thus the student bodies at the local schools began to change. At first everybody was very welcoming of the new residents but worries about their large numbers rapidly sunk in.

As diversity increased in the community, business was not business as usual at EBHS. The majority of the new students did not speak English fluently and teachers began to have problems delivering their lessons. At first, teachers in most instances allowed the new students to *sink or swim* in their classes. A few teachers made use of the students who were more fluent in English to assist those who were not. In time, teachers brought their concerns to the administrators. The teachers wanted to call the parents to a

meeting to provide suggestions about how they could help the newly arrived students. To their surprise they could not do this; the parents did not speak English, and most parents worked well beyond the hours that teachers could see them at school. A cloud of concern settled in the subconscious of school teachers and administrators of EBHS. Teachers at EBHS were aware that while students at the lower grade levels had time to overcome limitations, for high school students, time was limited even for students who were on grade level academically and possessed the kind of academic skills necessary for success.

*The Evolution of a Community and School*

The landscape outside EBHS has changed. At the turn of thirty years, the spacious farms have given way to many subdivisions and shopping centers. The community dwellers commute for jobs, mostly in downtown Atlanta, that keep them away from their homes for long hours. The wives have joined the work force too to create two-income-family households. The younger children attend child care centers while those of school age go to school and to after-school-hour programs waiting for long hours before their parents are able to pick them up. Nobody has time, or any desire, to sit by The Brook's banks anymore. The waters are murky these days anyway. The old times' green smell around the community is no more. The residents have grown accustomed to the odor of tar from the paved roads that crisscross the community, the acrid smell from the processing plants, the chemical emanations from the gas stations, the continual fine dust settling in their houses and lungs of the local concrete plant and the smell of decay when the garbage is not picked up on time. Allergies and other respiratory problems affect a large majority of the residents.

The changes in EBHS are dramatic also. The school population swelled to over three thousand students forcing the addition of modular units outside the school to house the excess number of students. The staff has increased to about eighty-three teachers with an administration of eighteen instructional staff that includes the principal, six assistant principals, eight counselors, one social worker, one school nurse, one school secretary and a school registrar. There is also the constant presence of a School Resource Officer (SRO) to ensure the orderly atmosphere at the school.

During the last ten years the student body has changed even more in EBHS. The student population is now 23% White, 31% Hispanic, 33% Black and 13% *other*, which comprises a smattering of Indian, Bosnian and Asian descent students. Curiously, the staff at EBHS remains mostly White, with only a few staff members being from the African American ethnicity. ESOL, English for Speakers of Other Languages is a new class to serve the needs of those who are English language learners (ELLs). It was added to the curriculum eight years ago. In ESOL, English language learners are grouped according to their English language proficiency level. In the beginning levels students concentrate in their English language development while later ELLs begin to learn content in English. Mrs. Betty Forge, the school principal is a Caucasian lady in her late fifties who frequently comments on the virtues of times past. Teachers at EBHS seem to think Mrs. Forge will retire as soon as her years of service allow her to do so.

In the last ten years, EBHS has also become a place where ethnic divisions have created frictions among the many groups of students. Fights, vandalism and graffiti became visible signs of the discontent felt by the student population. Students, not interested in school as a social or academic entity, began to drop out of school or not pass

the required high school graduation test which forced them into the ranks of drop outs. The growth in students who are not fully proficient in English also manifested in the school's performance as measured by standardized assessments mandated from the state's department of education. EBHS now became part of a grouping of schools who did not meet adequate yearly (AYP) progress according to the artificially mandated levels of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 for students in sub-aggregated school population groups. Worse the classification as a low performing school has caused a drop in the morale of teachers, parents and students. The *golden school* is now frequently referred to as *the ghetto school*. When people refer to the school, images of disarray, decay, filth and morose teachers and students come to mind. Nobody, that can help it, wants to teach or learn in EBHS.

*Towards a More Effective and Inclusive Pedagogy at EBHS*

Three years ago, Dr. Angelique Pryor became the new school principal at EBHS. Dr. Pryor, an African American lady in her late thirties was determined to make things change in the school. Her immediate concerns were to do with the physical plant. As a person who believes that "what meets the eye nourishes the spirit," Dr. Pryor in her own words had to: "rob, steal & borrow" to make the building attractive once again. On the first year of her tenure, Dr. Pryor vigorously fought for permanent additions to the main building to replace the many trailers in the back of the school. Next fall marks her 4<sup>th</sup> year at the school and the inauguration of the new freshman wing which will alleviate the overcrowding in the other wings and eliminate the need for 75% of the trailers at the school. The building has been painted and the manicured grounds make the school a very inviting place. In the main corridor visitors can admire a full size flag display from the



many countries the students and staff come from as a symbol of the diversity present at the school and Dr. Pryor's commitment to building solidarity among the students and staff. The school's resource office (SRO) is now of Hispanic origin and the referrals for discipline problems have declined. Dr. Pryor makes the concerted effort to hire members of her staff from diverse languages and cultures. Dr. Pryor has made a tremendous effort to bring her school's staff ethnic ratio to match as closely as possible that of the student population at EBHS. Remarkably, students in the cafeteria do not sit forming segregated ethnic groups anymore. Their seating arrangement, by choice, reflects more the metaphor of a beautiful tapestry; all the colors are clearly distinguishable but still flow with uniqueness and artistic harmony.

The next step in Dr. Pryor's list of concerns was to raise the feeling of school pride among the students. To foster the students' academics, an after school tutoring program has been implemented. To staff the program Dr. Pryor has applied to grants like the Century 21 Learning Schools. The school also has a night program for adults. Leisure activity courses are paid partly by county's The Parks and Recreation Department and by the students in attendance. The GED, ESOL, Basic computers, and Math courses are subsidized by the local technical college at no cost to the adult students. Dr. Pryor's first concern is to make available to the students academic help that will ensure that more students graduate from her high school. Future Educators of America is a successful program that provides one on one tutoring for interested students and for The Mustangs Basketball Team, who have won the regional championships the last two years and additionally *sport* a 2.50 GPA or higher.

Students who attend school regularly and keep the required GPA are also allowed to participate in intramural clubs and activities. Dr. Pryor's commitment to academic success permeates every activity sponsored at the school. "If you do well, you will be compensated ..." is the tacit message Dr. Pryor constantly sends to the students at EBHS with every decision she makes. There are a number of active clubs designed to get the students involved in after school activities and keep them from the streets where they could be easy prey to street gangs. Students can choose to become involved in school clubs dedicated to any of the academic content areas for enhancement or for help, or become involved in the arts, music or sports. This year marked a very special occasion when the *Miss Esplanade Brook High School* contest was amply covered by the local newspapers and largely attended by members of the community. The young ladies who participated in the event were so proud of themselves and the school and were representative of the rich ethnic groups in EBHS. Concepts of beauty were explained within the cultural boundaries that define them during the recognition ceremony; every ethnic group was allowed a princess and queen during the competition. The parents, the young ladies and the young men who escorted them, all made comments in regards to how proud they felt about their school to members of the press.

Still EBHS remains in the infamous Needs Improvement (NI) list. The school missed the status of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row and had to offer *school choice* this year. EBHS did not meet the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) in academics for the Limited English Proficient (LEP) and Students with Disabilities (SWD). In this case the community exercised more common sense than the federal and state education officers. Only two families decided to move their children

to a different school in the district. Their decision largely obeyed to their needs to have their children closer to their places of work than to any concerns about the school's academic program. Mr. Han, the father in one of the families that moved, made a poignant remark to this effect when he stated: "If children with limited English or with disabilities could reach similar academic marks as their peers who are fully able, they wouldn't be part of the named subgroup." These were Mr. Han's words during the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meeting Dr. Pryor called to announce to the families their privilege to move their children to another school. Mr. Han wanted everybody to understand that his decision to move had nothing to do with any concerns about academics and/or morale of teachers and students at EBHS. Mr. Han had used The Talk System during the meeting to understand the topics in his native Vietnamese language. His comments were drowned by the massive round of applause the participants offered the principal and staff of EBHS. Theirs was a loud statement of support and recognition for all they have done for the students and parents in the last three years.

Even though the community has changed drastically, once again the catalytic force of a leader that understands the community and is committed to the academic labor brings together all the stakeholders and garners support to keep improving EBHS. The staff is committed to the wellbeing of all the students and the administration is especially proactive. Together they will continue to find ways to preserve the school's mission of being: "A safe, secure place and productive place that fosters high expectations from students and parents and celebrates diversity for the benefit of all the students at Esplanade Brook High School." In 2005, all looks sunny at EBHS yet again.

### *School Portraiture Analysis*

The school portraiture referenced before is based on a real school in one of the metropolitan school systems in the northeast region of Atlanta, Georgia. The names have been changed to prevent the disclosure of the specific school. The school is near and dear to me because I worked there a few years ago with my dear friend Lillian Llanos Bromberg until her recent, untimely passing. This is also a school I still watch closely because of my interest in being part of the staff again, this time as an administrator. Education has the power to mold the lives of the students it touches and in the case of a high school; it is the last chance to help students understand that the choices they make will determine the life they live.

Esplanade Brook High School's portraiture is a work of intense thinking paired with recollections of my own experiences there and refreshed by editorial comments of a current staff member of the school and historical information contained in the numerous yearbooks lining the walls in the school's office. Joan Elaine Barnaby graciously shared with me her impressions about the EBHS, of the last couple of years, over the course of a few collegial dinners. Writing about EBHS has made clearer to me the reasons why I want to conduct this study. EBHS epitomizes the face of an evolving suburban high school in the rapidly changing Georgia and many other high schools across the United States. In my dissertation, I aimed at sustaining the premises introduced in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* to foster understanding of the teaching and learning of ELLs through sound qualitatively research, descriptions and interpretation of my experiential reality that of my students, parents and colleagues. The

knowledge represented in this framework, in my experience is necessary to improve and serve the needs of ELLs and their teachers in classrooms and in schools like EBHS.

The experience of writing the school portraiture was at times hallucinating. For extended periods of time, time stood still while I wandered about my daily chores in a state of semi-consciousness. My mind inhabited the corridors of EBHS. The eye of my mind could see the staff there and be part of the daily events as I understood them to be. I thought or dreamed about EBHS all day long for several weeks during a qualitative research class in 2006. During my conversations with Joan, it seemed like we both still belonged to the staff there. Writing this portraiture also made me feel the acute isolation of the setting I work when compared to the setting I enjoy most, the dynamic school site.

To compose the EBHS school portraiture, I poured over historical information about the school found in the web and over a few of the school's year books I had from the time I worked there. My friend Joan lent me some recent school publications which I avidly read. I appreciated the time she put into discussing this project with me and her commitment to make sure I had a clear and current idea about the EBHS of today. I appreciated her final comment about my work: "This is cool."

#### *The Personal Impact from Writing the School Portraiture*

The experience of writing this school portraiture strengthened my resolve to finish my doctoral degree and return to a school based professional situation where I can directly and timely affect the lives of the numerous students and staff at the local school level; if it were at EBHS my professional career would have come full circle. Writing this portraiture also made me curious about the level of responsibility the managers of the academic areas at the state's office feel in terms of this increasingly diverse student

population in Georgia. The answers I received from the one program manager willing to share her thoughts indicates that our leaders need to acquire more competence in the area teaching a diverse student population. Teaching ELLs demands that professional educators understand and apply principles of second language acquisition, the impact of culture on the instructional process and the impact that prior learning has on the creation of new learning. My observations in my daily informal interactions with professional educators from all academic content areas confirm the need for our leaders to be better prepared to deal with an increasingly diverse student population.

Finally, writing the school portraiture made me think about the responsibility inherent in conducting educational research. Certainly, we do research to learn about the dimensions at play in the educational process and to make the educational process more meaningful and successful for teachers and students. For me, doing educational research has been a quest for finding meaning in what I do every day, in the professional endeavor. As an educator and a human being, I want to know that the knowledge and actions in my private and professional worlds foster a more just educational process for all the students and teachers involved and eventually a more fair society. Writing this school portraiture reassured me of my chosen path.

## CHAPTER VI

WORKING TOWARD A POSSIBLE SOLUTION - FRAMEWORK FOR  
UNDERSTANDING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ELLS

Building a system of schools that can educate people for contemporary society requires two things U.S. schools have never before been called upon to do: To teach for understanding. That is, to teach all students, not just a few, to understand ideas deeply and perform proficiently. To teach for diversity, that is, to teach in ways that help different kinds of learners find productive paths to knowledge as they also learn to live constructively together (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.5).

The educational history of the United States has been distinguished by cultural and linguistic multiplicities against the backdrop of instructional practices incongruent with the reality of this pressing diversity. As I look around in classrooms in Georgia, the latter immigration wave has been predominately comprised of children from Hispanic, African or Asian backgrounds who cannot hide their features or disguise their native accents. “The sounds of the *other* have now become audible and the hues of the American social landscape have darkened noticeably” (Cummins, 2000, p. 4). The consequent reality for these students is that they proclaim their diversity loudly each and every day. It is obvious that these students arrive from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds but what is not so apparent at that point is that they will remain perpetual *foreigners*, even when born in the United States.

Diverse students are as a rule entering urban schools, by birth to immigrant families or by primary immigration. These new families are heavily congregating in the

southern and western states of the United States (OELA's NCELA, December 2006, Georgia Data and Demographics section, ¶ 1). However, with the latest immigration wave, perceptions about diversity have changed. In many cases, groups distinguished by their ethnicity, culture and language are perceived as *different* in the eyes of the still white majority education force but now these *differences* conjure damaging connotations of inferiority. "When teachers ignore or communicate indifference to students' home language and culture, this message constitutes a specific to students with respect to their identity" (Schechter & Cummins, 2003, p. 9). The consequent feelings of inadequacy resulting from deficit assumptions further damage social processes, including the practice of education in the midst of the school house. "Diversity has been constructed as the enemy within" (Cummins, 2000, p. 3). "Diversity becomes a euphemism for those ethnic minorities with less power and status in society" (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002, p. xii). As a consequence of their persistent alien status and the play of power and ideology within the white mainstream population, "students' identities become infested with shame" (Cummins, 2000, p. 13) with dire repercussions for the learning process.

The predicament diverse students face in the middle of a white majority educational system intensifies when we consider that the United States as a society has equated difference (based on race, ethnicity, language, religion, disabilities, etc.) with inherent intellectual inferiority (Banks, 1995). These perceptions of inherent inferiority, referred to as *deficit assumptions* (Weiner 2006), continue to damagingly influence our society and the expectations and practices of schools across the nation. The deficit paradigm, the assumption that poor student performance or behavior stems from problems with the students or their families that ought to be *fixed*, has long been deeply



embedded in the culture of urban schools in the United States (Weiner, 2006). Parallel to Weiner's argument, I attempt to describe how teachers are able to dissect and defy deficit assumptions in the classroom to become aware of the untapped strengths of *the funds of knowledge* (Moll, 1992) their diverse students contribute to the learning process. "Merely belaboring the disproportionately poor academic performance of certain students of color, or blaming their families and social-class backgrounds is not very helpful in implementing reforms to reverse achievement trends" (Gay, 2000, p. xiii).

The hypothesis supported by my conceptual framework suggests that the acquisition of social language BICS and academic proficiency CALP (Cummins, 1986 & 2000) emerge at the juncture of the unique features of language, prior knowledge and culture that both educators and students contribute to the educational practice.

*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* delves further into the elements that make up the main domains of language, culture and prior knowledge to counsel that the descriptors supporting the definition of the main domains constitute the nuts and bolts of the learning process for ELLs and their teachers. The decision to select language proficiency, prior knowledge and culture as the centerpiece for my discussion was based on my experiences with learning a second language and academic knowledge and supported by SLA theorists who with premises define and support my stance.

Reference to the theorists who have molded my thought and knowledge is embedded through the entire dissertation but mainly concentrated in the literature review. Yet I find it pertinent to add one more piece by Bialystok and Hakuta which I deem to be especially applicable to my work and to the exciting challenge I accepted in writing this thesis.

Each of the perspectives we have chosen for the discussion – language, brain, mind, self and culture brings with it a compelling tradition.

Language is what makes humans distinct from other species, brain is the ultimate seat of human knowledge, mind is the source of understanding and classifying of the knowledge we claim; self is identity, and culture is the basis for social identity. Understanding how we acquire a second language is an exciting challenge because it engages all aspects of the human nature (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, p. 6).

*An Analogy: The Workings of Software Systems and Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

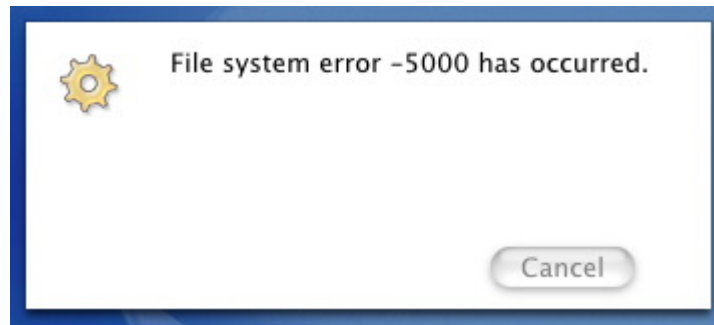
When bridging the distance between *known knowledge* and *new knowledge*, an analogy readies our understanding for new schema. Researching the Internet for a parallel that would assist me in explaining my thinking regarding the work teachers do in the classroom when they teach ELLs and the thinking and decision making process that must be occurring along the way, I came across the apparently divergent topic of software development, implementation and troubleshooting. The thinking process ingrained in this narrative powerfully engenders the intention of my dissertation and contributes a clarifying ingredient.

Software design, implementation and troubleshooting and effectual instructional planning and practice share comparable traits; *the delivery of either may be merely accidental and sloppy or directed and purposeful*. In either case *the end result* of either process is directly influenced by the method chosen to arrive at it.

Figure 5.1

## Visible Workings - Adequate Understanding of System Internals

This site is dedicated to the elimination of this error message and all that it represents:



The problem isn't just that the user doesn't know what error is. *It's that the program gives the user no help with diagnosis.* Today, software people think of two modes of diagnosis, *if indeed they think at all about what anyone will do after an error happens.* The first mode is used by the user who knows nothing at all about the internal workings of the program. She has no recourse other than mostly-random changes in how she uses it. "It worked before, but then I tried doing this slightly different thing. I guess I won't do that thing again." *Or she flails around changing the program's environment in ways that might have some effect on it.* The second mode is used by the *programmer who understands the program.* She opens the source code, fires up the debugger, and steps through the program. *She can see as much of the workings of the program as it's possible to see.* This web site is about the middle ground: *adequate visibility into the*

*internal workings of programs* - a visibility that serves the needs of users, programmers, and testers (Marick, 2001, ¶1).

*Revisiting the Research Question in Light of the Analogy*

How does *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*, reflect current findings in SLA research to assist educators in making effectual instructional decisions when planning and delivering teaching for ELLs?

Making effective instructional decisions for ELLs is inherent to instruction that is tailored to provide for ELLs' unique linguistic, academic and cultural needs; it represents a conduit for educational equity. The uniqueness of the teaching and learning process has long been a thought provoking conversational piece for practitioners like me and for a growing number of scholars in the SLA field. August & Hakuta meta-analysis is the product of the synthesis of thirty-three recent case studies of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds as these students attempted the learning process in schools across the United States. In their meta-analysis, August & Hakuta identified the following attributes in programs that offer *optimal learning conditions* for linguistically and culturally diverse populations.

A supportive school-wide climate, school leadership, *a customized learning environment*, articulation and coordination between and within school, use of native language and culture instruction, a balanced curriculum, explicit skill instruction, use of instructional strategies that enhance understanding, systematic student assessment ... (August & Hakuta, 1997, p. 171).

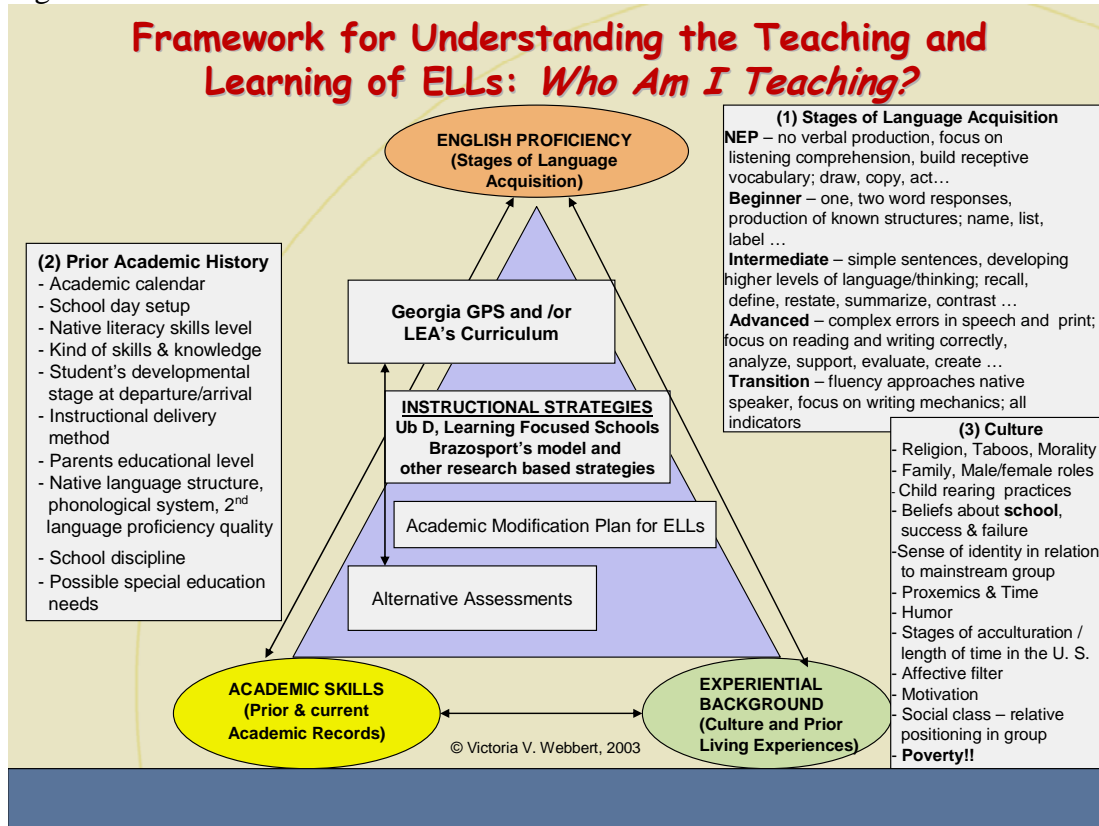
In this description, it is imperative to notice the complete absence of suggestions for scripted instructional strategies or prescribed classroom methodologies. The ideas proposed by August and Hakuta advocate the need for thoughtful examination of variables present in the learning process as the prerequisite for the determination of a viable course of action. “A focus on responsive instructional engagement encourages students [and teachers] to *construct* meaning and to seek reinterpretations and augmentations to past knowledge within compatible and nurturing school contexts” (Garcia, 2005, p. 122).

As with software program development, implementation and troubleshooting, current educational practices in schools in the United States do not provide educators help with a diagnosis or an appropriate course of action to tackle the needs of the steadily growing diverse student population. The *workings* of the language acquisition process calls for the formulation of questions about the students’ stages of language acquisition, prior knowledge and socio-cultural backgrounds in order to build effectual instructional practices. What is the student’s current English language proficiency stage? How would the teacher I know? How should this functional language stage mold the teacher’s instructional planning? What does the student know about the topic? What kind of literacy skills the student brings? How did the student learn to learn? How would the teacher know? What are the cultural boundaries that may impede or foster learning of knowledge and skills the teacher intends as the result of a lesson? How would a teacher know? How could a teacher modify instruction to address the students’ unique learning needs? When students face academic difficulties; how did it get to the point where things went wrong instructionally?

*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* assists educators in the analysis of the student's instructional program as a whole for designing purposeful and directed language and academic teaching and learning. Akin to software development and implementation, the effectual instruction of ELLs does not leave the *workings* of the educational process to chance. Effectual teaching engages in premeditated knowledge search to *make sense of the instructional process as an arena for educated decision making* with the purpose of shifting towards more capable pedagogical approaches. There is a need for the restatement of Garcia's important appraisal here: "A focus on responsive instructional engagement encourages students [and teachers] to *construct* meaning and to seek reinterpretations and augmentations to past knowledge within compatible and nurturing school contexts" (Garcia, 2005, p. 122). *The course of action is deliberate in its planning and outcome.*

*Revisiting Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLS as a  
Response to the Research Question*

Figure 5.2



Classroom teachers are in effect teachers of ELLs; they are accountable for teaching English as a new language within the academic consideration of the subjects they teach and the benchmarks they are required to meet. I believe that classroom teachers must know certain essentials to accomplish this feat. This task is comprehensive and complex but it can and must be done. *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* offers a formula or foundation to guide teachers of ELLs in planning instruction that is deliberate in its intent and outcome. The teacher becomes the diagnostic software engineer who *debugs* errors in the educational program and

implements steps that are akin with the internal workings of learning a second language and content through a newly acquired tongue.

*Saliency of Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

There is not one typical profile of the English language learner in today's classrooms. "You can find an American citizen, an immigrant or refugee, a temporary resident, a migrant worker, a vacationer, or an international student studying abroad" (Ariza, 2006, p. 15). As a result the teacher must be prepared for linguistic, cultural and instructional situations that challenge the assumptions of a pre-service professional preparation deep-seated in the beliefs of homogeneity in thought of a White mainstream society. The most salient areas teachers need to consider when planning purposeful education for their ELLs are brought forward in the framework and discussed in detail in the Literature Review Chapter. The following topics are reminders of the more prominent points in the discussion.

A. *Second Language Acquisition Theory*

*The teacher must know the fundamentals about how first and second languages are learned. The student will go through stages of language acquisition. Many factors such as age and personality shape the learners' path. The markers that identify each language proficiency stage are latent indicators for informed educators to change their instructional course of action to address and challenge each stage. Each stage of second language proficiency is marked by observable language behaviors that signal transitional stages in the maturation of a second language for the instructor and the student who are observant of the most salient characteristic for each stage. By observing these characteristics,*



teachers and second language learners can engage in classroom activities aligned with the student's current stage of language proficiency to ensure that teachers and students do not expect utterances from ELLs that are ahead of or lower than their stages of acquisition.

Attentiveness to the markers of each language stage enables teachers and second language learners to engage in language acquisition activities that foster comprehensible input. Comprehensible input can best be explained by referring to the zone of proximal development in Vygotsky's ZPD theory and Krashen's Input Hypothesis ( $i + 1$ ). The principles in these theories suggest the need for scaffolding approaches as described in Krashen's theory (Chapter Two) where ( $i$  = actual level and  $i + 1$  = potential level). Krashen's hypothesis propose that a speaker will move to the next level of acquisition when the experience of the target language (the input) includes some of the structures that are part of the next stage of acquisition, and the speaker is encouraged to use language that reflects that more advanced stage (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Vygotsky's reference to ZPD describes the specific ways that adults or peers socially mediate or interact to create circumstances for learning. The ZPD can be thought of spatially as a place where students engage in learning through interaction with teachers, artifacts, or more capable peers. More recently, scholars have extended the notion of ZPD to a third space, that is, a hybrid space created when students interact with teachers or peers while engaged in learning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). Scholars conceptualize ZPD as a "space in which alternative and competing discourses and positionings transform

conflict and difference into rich zones of collaboration and learning.” (Gutiérrez et al., 1999, p. 286).

*B. Prior Academic History/Knowledge Theory*

*The teacher ought to know the student’s educational and literacy background, the student’s prior academic history/knowledge.* Prior knowledge can be explained as a combination of the learner’s preexisting academic *knowledge, attitudes, and experiences regarding the schooling process.* Teachers capitalize on prior knowledge when they teach a new concept after brainstorming with their students about what they already know on the subject.

Creating visual support, such as “semantic webs,” with the topic in the center and students’ knowledge surrounding it, is a good way to engage students in the topic and to find out what they already. Another simple technique is to ask them what they want to learn about a topic ... *if they already speak some English.* As Savaria-Shore and Garcia (1995) note: “Students are more likely to be interested in researching a topic when they begin with their own real questions” (p. 55). Students learn more effectively when they already know something about a content area and when concepts in that area mean something to them and to their particular background knowledge or culture.

When teachers link new information to the student’s prior knowledge, they activate the student’s interest and curiosity, and infuse instruction with a sense of purpose. Prior knowledge acts as a lens through which learners observe and absorb new understandings based on the knowledge they have acquired before. It is a combination of who we are, based on what we have learned from

both our academic and everyday experiences in the past and in the present.

Teachers can help their students make the transition from the unknown to the knowledge necessary for academic achievement by tapping on students' prior knowledge. Research shows that we can jump-start learning by accessing preexisting attitudes, experiences, and knowledge and bridge the gap between what is being taught and what is already known (Kujawa and Huske, 1995).

Students learn and remember new information best when it is linked to relevant prior knowledge. Teachers who link classroom activities and instruction to prior knowledge build on their students' familiarity with a topic and enable students to connect the curriculum content to their own prior learning (Beyer, 1991).

Jim Cummins theory (1986 & 2000) about two distinctive and separate sets of language skills essential for academic success is a basic tenet for the implementation of classroom practices for ELLs. The central idea is that there are two kinds of language required for academic success, Basic Interpersonal Communicative Language (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). English language learners as a norm have developed BICS by the time they exit English assistance language programs; yet, typically, CALP still requires additional development and instructional support (Cummins, 1986 & 2000).

### *C. Socio-Cultural Learning Theory*

*The teacher ought to understand the culture of the students.* For cultural minorities, the influences that have an impact on identity development and thus affect learning are “the larger culture, specific ethnic group of origin, community religion type of neighborhood, social class, educational level, gender, sexual

orientation and stage of development” (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 36). Where do ELLs come from and their cultural values and beliefs about family structure and the role that education plays in their family belief system will determine how ELLs learned to learn and thus how are they more prone to learn in school.

The praxis of culturally responsive pedagogy confirms the theory. When instructional processes are consistent with the cultural orientations, experiences and learning styles of marginalized African, Latino, Native, and Asian American students, their school achievement improves significantly (Gay, 2000, p. 181).

These affirmations do not intend to foster stereotypical images of diverse students in classrooms of the United States nowadays. In spite of the fact that overarching cultural tendencies do comprise a body of study that enlightens the instructional process, classroom experiences may be completely different for particular students from same backgrounds. The framework calls teachers to look into the dimensions that shape culture and language as the tool to determine the degree to which the academic experience of one student may be successful while another student’s, perhaps from the same ethnic group, may flounder in the same academic setting. Culture is so ever encompassing to the human nature as to constitute the foundation for a life of scholarship dedicated to its investigation. The manner in which culture impacts every aspect of the human endeavor (time, personal space, interpersonal relationships, language etc.) has been Edward T. Hall’s life work (1973, 1981, 1989, 1990). Hall’s ample scholarship delves into

the most intimate features of culture to a level that I consider beyond the scope of this dissertation but appropriate as a reference for more in depth understanding of the far reaching effects of culture.

Culture refers to the cumulative deposits of knowledge, experiences, communication patterns, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group interactions; in a sense it is behavior through social learning (Leighton, 1982 and Ibrahim, 1993). Culture's byproducts translate into acceptable/unacceptable "multicultural manners" (Dresser, 1996, p. xvii) that foster or impede multicultural encounters. In words of Guadalupe Valdés, "[culture] is the ordinary, hard-working, inner world of families" (Valdés, 1996, pp. xi & 17). As we are socialized into our groups, "we learn much of our behavior unconsciously" (Banks & Banks, 1997, p. 40) nevertheless; cultural behaviors have a powerful effect for the human learning. "Meaning achieves a form that is public and communal rather than private and autistic" (Brunner, 1990, p. 33).

A compelling and effectual multicultural education approach requires that participants in the human fields are duty-bound to critical thinking, imagination, and commitment to a new reality, inclusive of the wealth of our stories and peoples. Education for diversity is a new dimension of the continuous journey toward justice and equity in the fulfillment of the promise of democracy. Education for diversity gives us new questions to ask and directions to follow to

reveal the human possibilities in an era marked by global relations. “People trying to be more fully human must not only engage in critical thinking but must be able to imagine something coming of their hopes; their silence must be overcome by their search” (Greene 1995, p. 25). Compelling multicultural education is a sheltering place for a multitude of voices in a multicultural society, a place for many dreams.

*The Workings of Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* embodies the conception of an idea that has taken roughly three decades of professional practice to come to fruition and continues expanding with the feedback of students, colleagues and peers. After my experience with my own learning of English as a second language, my son’s struggles with academic language proficiency and my initially failed attempt teaching the Egyptian supervisors, it was clear to me that learning social English (BICS) and academic proficiency (CALP) were separate processes that went hand in hand with culture for the construction of effectual customized instruction to address the language and academic needs of ELLs.

Accordingly my initial diagram back in 2003 was a simple triangle surrounded by the bubbles labeled Stages of Language Proficiency, Prior Academic History, and Culture. The premise supported by my conceptual framework proposes the attainment of a second language and academic proficiency emerge in the juncture of the unique features of language, prior knowledge and culture that both educators and students bring into the educational formula. My framework delves further into the elements that compose these main domains to suggest that the units of knowledge hidden in the

descriptors supporting the definition of the main domains. Shortly after, thinking about the interconnectedness of the ideas represented in the diagram suggested to me that these bubbles required to be joined by arrows that indicated the ongoing relationship of the domains in the learning of ELLs. Still not convinced of the argument symbolized by the main triangle, bubbles and arrows, it occurred to me that the arrows should be bidirectional because the influence of each domain on the next is ongoing and multidirectional. A clearer idea was emerging; however the need to define the main domains more clearly indicated a need for specific descriptors or components that would indicate to weary educators where specifically should they concentrate their efforts in research and/or for the planning and delivery of lessons for ELLs. In the next year my job entailed researching the SLA literature to find vital components that could be associated with each of the named domains.

I spent much of 2004 – 2007 introducing the ideas promoted in the conceptual framework to other language and education specialist across Georgia as the Title III Program Specialist of the Georgia Department of Education (DOE). With each presentation suggestions for the sought specificity were incorporated from suggestions in the field. During a presentation in Warner Robbins a teacher suggested adding humor to the Culture domain. Humor is often interjected in the lessons teachers prepare for their students in an effort to the students interested and engaged but humor is not universal. The *humor* domain was added.

Reading the academic literature and Ogbu's definition of minorities enlightened the fact the one's relative position within the larger mainstream group could have an impact on learning. The *sense of relation* within group was added. At another workshop

discussing the believed *immoral* behavior of some students belonging to minority groups who predominately opt for having babies out of wedlock helped me understand that morality is in point of fact culturally bound and definitions of moral behavior vary among diverse cultural groups. The *morality* domain was added to the framework. Each suggestion was carefully incorporated into the diagram as a descriptor for the domains that surround the main triangle, which ultimately represents the student. The conceptual framework was the result of careful explorations and of dialog with experts in the field.

The domains that define the stages of language acquisition and prior academic history were created as synthesis from the abundant literature in the larger SLA field as confirmed by the anecdotal experiences of myself, my son, students learning English and learning school and their teachers. Currently, prominent researchers in the field of language acquisition and/or second language acquisition still pay close attention to the observable stages of language proficiency. “Language development is usually marked by linguistic behaviors of increased complexity” (Kottler & Kottler, 2002, p. 47).

“Researchers have found that most people, whether their first language is Hindi or French, acquire a working knowledge of certain structures in English in a fairly set order” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 5).

Classic and more recent researchers agree that the progression of language acquisition in the native language also follows a generally predictable order ... “children who are learning their first language during early childhood use similar kinds of verbal constructions and make the same kinds of grammatical mistakes .... Second language researchers need to catch up with first language research” (pp. 7 & 8). Observing the proficiency levels of students acquiring a second language allows educators to visualize



and internalize the developmental characteristics of the process of language acquisition to mold instruction to the progression and needs of the second language learner.

In my experience and in the SLA literature (Cummins, 1983 & 2000), gaining advanced proficiency in a second language can typically take anywhere from four to seven years. The learner at this stage is not yet fully bilingual; full bilingualism may take up to ten years. Nonetheless, at the near proficiency stage students have developed some specialized content-area vocabulary and can participate fully in grade-level classroom activities with occasional extra support. Students can speak English using grammar and vocabulary comparable to that of same-age native speakers. A native English language learner should be able to produce language in this manner during the same period of time. There are two kinds of language necessary for academic success, Basic Interpersonal Communicative Language (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The English language learner has BICS in place when they exit English assistance language programs; usually, CALP still needs additional development (Cummins, 1986 & 2000).

*Summary of the Workings in Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning  
of ELLs*

The premises that support the workings of my conceptual framework are simple; the implementation process is complex. I find support in Collier's (1995) observation that "This is a very no-nonsense, down to earth discussion of a very complex topic: academic second language acquisition" (p. 1) referring to the need for discussions grounded on informed pedagogy. The domains and descriptors in my conceptual framework form a lens through which I suggest educators and ELLs can filter the demands for academic

learning in the United States to form a reasoned view of the pedagogical practice and enhance teaching and learning. Informed teachers and students *make sense of the instructional process as an arena for educated decision making as they* move towards effectual academic implementation. Like kaleidoscopic images, each component in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* is multi-dynamic and multi-faceted. Each aspect interacts in multiple ways within and among each domain to suggest the possibility for academic learning that varies from ELL to ELL. Teaching and learning become insightful, deliberate and personal.

These multi-dynamic and multi-faceted layers represented in the conceptual framework by the multicolored bubbles titled English Proficiency (Stages of Language Acquisition), Academic Skills (Prior and Current Academic Records and Experiential Background (Culture and Prior Living Experiences) are the main domains of learning for ELLs. The outer rectangles labeled and numbered as 1. Stages of Language Acquisition; 2. Prior Academic History and 3. Culture, represent a disclosure of the components embedded in the superseding topics. The descriptors in the rectangles attached to each main domain depict focal issues educators ought to take in consideration when dissecting their students' academic reality and are included as guidance for the readers but are not intended to be and an exhaustive list of study areas. The center triangle certainly represents the student around which all teaching and learning processes take place.

The bidirectional arrows that connect the multicolored bubbles represent the two-sided connection and interdependence of the named major domains in the development of lesson planning and lesson delivery that target the needs of ELLs. The dimensions of

language acquisition, prior academic learning and culture envelop the essence of an English language learner striving or struggling to succeed academically

The final components in the framework are represented by the smaller rectangles over-imposed onto the main triangle to stand for the dynamics of suitable instruction guided by valid assessment as informed by the knowledge gathered about the student while examining the areas of language proficiency, prior knowledge and culture. The driving argument in this part is that *once teachers understand who they are teaching they are in a position to examine what needs to be taught* (Georgia and/or LEA's Curriculum) *and how they are to teach it* for enhanced student academic success. Thus, the program of study and the assessment measures, aided by selected and resolute instructional strategies, work together in the effectual planning and delivery of instruction for ELLs. Teaching is a decision making process that ought to examine *who is being taught* when determining *what to teach* and *how to teach it*.

*Additional Academic Rationale for Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* is rationally supported by the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, who suggested that human development and learning occur as a result of an individual's interaction with society and that this interaction takes place within and is informed by a particular cultural context. Vygotsky's work (1986 & 2006) & (Moll 1992) emphasize that individuals make sense of their world through discourse and interaction with others. Thus, knowledge is socially constructed and situated in culture from exactly the domains and descriptors portrayed in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*. Vygotsky further

postulated that learning occurs when students are effectively *scaffolded* to acquire new knowledge; this happens as a result of informed classroom interactions. In scaffolding, teachers or in some cases more capable peers identify the knowledge that students already have and bridge that knowledge to acquire new knowledge.

Scaffolding occurs in a space referred to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Moll (1992) describes the ZPD as specific ways that adults or peers socially mediate or interact to create circumstances for learning. The ZPD can be thought of spatially as a place where students engage in learning through interaction with teachers, artifacts, or more capable peers. More recently, scholars have extended the notion of ZPD to a third space, that is, a hybrid space created when students interact with teachers or peers while engaged in learning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). These scholars conceptualize this as a “space in which alternative and competing discourses and positionings transform conflict and difference into rich zones of collaboration and learning.” (Gutiérrez et al., 1999, p. 286).

*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* is also grounded in Piaget’s theory of constructivism, or the theory of the social construction of knowledge. Constructivism upholds that knowledge is not permanent and objective, but rather is fluid and subjective, constructed by the student through discourse and interaction with teachers and peers or through experience with things and events. A constructivist theory of learning postulates that students are active builders of their learning, not passive receptacles into which information is deposited. According to Piaget, children do not internalize knowledge from the outside in, but construct knowledge from the inside out through interacting with the environment. Children construct their own knowledge about

language, science, and social institutions long before they go to school (Piaget, 1932/1965, 1937/1954, 1947/1966, 1948/1973, 1969/ 1970 cited in Aldridge & Eddowes, 1994) & (Wadsworth, 2003). In the constructivist perspective, the role of the teacher becomes one of facilitator; teachers facilitate students' learning through classroom discourse, interaction, and personalized assignments that take place in the classroom. Students are at the center of the learning process and the role of teachers is to facilitate that learning through guided that is deliberate *in its planning and outcome*.

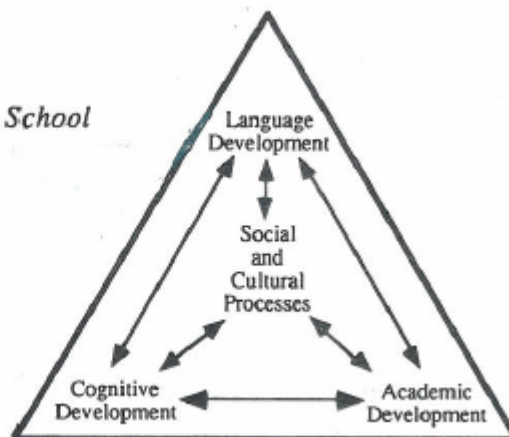
*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* closely models after Vygotsky and Piaget's work and was founded on the conviction that "in order to understand the individual, one must first understand the social relations in which the individual exists" (Wertsch, 1985, p. 58). To scaffold students learning, educators must address their students' language acquisition stages, their prior knowledge and the socio-cultural worldviews of their students. Teachers must also value their students' prior knowledge and perspectives of the world as the "*funds of knowledge*" (Moll, 1992) that have a place in the instructional process rather than as impediments to be overcome. Students learn most effectively when they are active co-constructors of their learning. *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* uses socio-cultural theory and constructivism to advocate for the kind of teaching and learning that can be imagined and implemented.

*Virginia Collier's Model - Congruent Thinking*

Virginia Collier (1995) opens the chapter Social & Cultural Processes of her somewhat unknown book *Promoting Academic Success for ESL Students* with the affirmation: “Now that we have examined some of the natural, subconscious linguistic processes that occur inside the learner’s head, let’s take a look at another major aspect of second language acquisition: the socio-cultural dimension” (p. 21). The diagram below appeared under the heading: *Interrelations among Socio-cultural, Linguistic, Cognitive, and Academic Dimensions of Language Acquisition*.

Figure 5.3

**FIGURE 1**  
*Language Acquisition for School*



(Collier, 1995, p. 21)

Staring at the diagram made my heart skip a beat! The conceptualizations that I had so carefully formulated about the learning process of ELLs based on my observations and research, *at first sight* seemed to *find confirmation in* significant theory produced by a famed researcher, linguist and theorist in the academic SLA field, Virginia Collier! My academic elucidations so far would not be so orphaned after all. At that point I was rather excited and resolute in my desire to either confirm or refocus my thoughts. Collier’s initial clarification of the diagram was fairly encouraging as well.

To understand the relationship between this socio-cultural dimension of language acquisition and the linguistic and cognitive dimensions, I have created a figure that symbolizes the overall process of language acquisition. At the heart of the figure is the student in everyday life with family and community expanding to school in the past present and future. *The four dimensions presented in the figure are interdependent. If one is developed to the neglect of the other, this will be detrimental to the student's overall growth and future success.* We can modify the existing social contexts in schools through changes in instructional practices and administrative structures to provide the most supportive social context for our students' successful acquisition of second language and academic achievement (Collier, 1995, pp. 21 - 22).

Collier's explanation of her diagram would indeed serve to solidify my thinking during the on-going development of *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*. I became fully aware of Collier's model during the review of SLA academic literature during the literature review phase of this dissertation. However, I wonder if in my professional readings during times past I came across this information since *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* model is so complementary of Collier's framework. Collier approaches the improvement of the instructional process for ELLs by observing and describing the progression of events happening inside the students' minds in hopes that this information would trigger understanding and better instructional practices from the part of teachers of diverse students but does not offer explicit suggestions to teachers as to how to accomplish it.

*My approach is reversed but balancing!* Because I understand that the language, cognitive and academic domains of diverse students necessitate of ongoing instruction and are interdependent, I offer to teachers and learners detailed descriptors to define these domains and a prioritized sequence of events for the planning and delivery of effectual lessons for ELLs. Collier describes what is happening within the mind of an ELL to emphasize the point that the language, cognitive and academic domains must be developed simultaneously to avoid detriment to the student's academic achievement. I understand what is happening in the minds of ELLs and proceed to offer specifics about what then effective educators do; I suggest to teachers how the cognitive, social and academic dimensions are to be understood in the interaction of specific descriptors during the teaching process and the sequential steps in this inquiry process.

Collier symbolizes the overall process of language acquisition happening inside the student as it is happening; *I symbolize the teaching processes that should be happening as a response to what the student is experiencing during the process of acquiring second language proficiency and academic content.* Collier's superb explanation of the mental processes ELLs engage in during learning offers the strongest premise to support my work!

For non-English background students whose future depends on acquiring English, how well the language is taught and how successful schools are in creating content in which students have access to English academics will determine to a large extent how quickly and how well these youngsters learn (Valdés, 2001, p. 27).



*A Student's Profile and its Contribution to Understanding*

As educators we are conscious of the profound impact of our work on the psyche of our students. This impact is bilateral, shaping our learning as educators and the stories of our students as they go through life. Jerry is a poignant example of this teacher-student indestructible link. Jerry was a student in my 6<sup>th</sup> grade class in Kendale Lakes Elementary, Miami, Florida during the 1990 – 91 school year. Jerry's mother and I, belonging to the same cultural background and both wanting the best for Jerry, formed a bond as educator and parent that spilled beyond the classroom walls to focus our efforts on Jerry's academic success. Jerry was then a 12-year old, male student completing his 6<sup>th</sup> grade education at the local suburban elementary school.

Rambunctious but kind, Jerry could test the patience of any teacher at any point in time while almost immediately bringing a smile to the face of this same teacher with a sweet comment or gesture. As a routine, I would admonish Jerry about his lack of commitment towards his school work and the real possibility of "having to flip burgers for a living for the rest of his life." My constant admonishment for Jerry was that *he could do better!* Lo and behold, in the year 2003 during a visit with my daughter in Miami, FL, about twelve years after Jerry left my 6<sup>th</sup> grade class, I found Jerry as a worker in a fast food restaurant. Recognizing me, Jerry turned his now manly and handsome face in my direction and stared at me with big, bright, concerned eyes while blurting: "Mrs. Vazquez... I am Jerry .... But .... I am also attending college!" It only took me a few seconds to recognize my student of years past and smile at his spontaneous remark reminiscent of our mutual experience as teacher and student. Funny after all those years, this was what Jerry remembered most. Jerry took a short ten-minute break to

converse with me and assure me of the bright future ahead of him in the field of information technology. Therefore, I was rather tickled when I read Ladson-Billing's story of a rather particular but caring teacher in *The Dreamkeepers* (1994) offering the same insight into the influence of a teacher's work:

My sixth grade teacher was a coach. She could yell, scream, cajole, and nag with the best of them. "You know you can do better," was her favorite phrase. Funny, the sound of her voice repeating that phrase haunted me as a college student, as a graduate student and as a university professor: "You know you can do better" (p. 25)!

This is the magnitude of the influence we as educators have in the classroom; it is timeless and enduring. And, this is the reason why I advocate for teaching as an educated decision making process. We, as educators have the authority to make a difference one student at a time. My study provides a visual framework of the learning process of ELLs to provide educators the initial knowledge necessary to engage in educated decision making processes when teaching diverse students. *Knowledgeable educators do not leave the learning process to chance.* Informed teachers and students then *make sense of the instructional process as an arena for educated decision making processes* as an ongoing progression in the classroom in order to move towards more effectual academic implementation.

*Students' Profiles Highlight Tenets in Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

Through the years, in which I have dedicated my learning to understanding the process of second language acquisition and learning, I have presented staff development to mainstream teachers of diverse students in which some of my students became examples to exemplify a point. In the Appendix, I include brief case scenarios from my practice that even though minimally demonstrate the understanding I seek to foster when applying the principles in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* to the actual teaching practice.

The cases are discussed mostly from the frame of reference of the students' stages of language acquisition. More complex analysis would depend on accessing additional information regarding the students' educational histories and their socio-cultural worldviews. After this simple exercise, several of the teachers participating in my sessions felt very reassured about their incipient capacity to teach diverse students which in turn reaffirmed my resolve to see this work published.

*Colleagues' Spontaneous Feedback about My Work*

Sharing the principles embedded in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* with colleagues who struggle with a challenging educational practice is a very rewarding experience. Most times, teachers attending my sessions are well intentioned professionals who had been feeling anxious about teaching students they do not understand, linguistically or culturally.

The emails that follow are verbatim copies of the more recent feedback I have received about my work and represent the typical comments of educators who attend my

in-service sessions. These comments are small examples portraying the topics teachers welcome hearing about when discussing the education of the diverse student population in their classrooms. These emails highlight *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* as an instrument that tends to the needs of educators and stresses the value of an overhaul for current staff development practices when addressing the needs of ELLs.

The information gathered from these informal conversations with peers and colleagues do not represent in any sense empirical data collection to support the principles advocated in the framework but qualitatively do add a human and practical dimension to the work in this thesis. The comments were spontaneous observations about my work and a small sample of the reaction I receive anytime I share this model. The development to the framework is vibrant and alive because it evolves with each observation in on-going epistemological quest to find knowledge. The remarks have always been unprompted and thus uncompromised. For clarity, a short commentary precedes each one of the emails.

- Andrew is the young, African-American assistant principal of a thriving high school in Gwinnett County. After presenting to the staff at his school as a result of the school's invitation to share principles for the teaching of ELLs he writes:

**Andrew XXXX/XXXXXXXXXX  
High/GCPS**

11/28/2006 05:01 PM

To Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and  
Instruction/GCPS@gcps  
cc Lisa XXXX/Teaching and Learning/GCPS@gcps  
Subject Re: Diversity In-service on 11/28/06

I am just getting your email. I have been running around all day today. You really did an excellent job. The graphic organizer you shared is a quick reminder of what counts for ESOL students. Thank you so much for taking the time out of your very busy schedule to present to the teachers here at XXXXXX. The information you shared certainly enhanced our understanding about our ESOL students. We have received

nothing but positive comments since you left.

Once again thank you and I hope that I can call on you again in the near future.

Andrew XXXXX, Jr  
Assistant Principal  
XXXXXXXX High School  
Norcross, GA 30093  
678-380-XXXX

----- Forwarded by Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS on 11/29/2006 08:40 AM -----

- Dr Sudha is a science and mathematics teacher at the same high school where Andrew is an assistant principal. Dr. Sudha is from India and her foreign attire and piercing eyes made me wonder if my presentation of the framework was making any sense to her. After all, knowledge is culturally bound and Dr. Sudha and I share divergent worldview perspectives but as it seems a common understanding of the students we serve. Her comments are poignantly accurate in regards to my purpose in my study; to pay attention to the non-academic details that will make the academic instruction effectual or not.

**Sudha XXXXX/Meadowcreek  
High/GCPS**

11/28/2006 05:16 PM

To Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and  
Instruction/GCPS@gcps

cc

Subject Today's meeting/talk

Dear Ms. Webbert:

My name is Dr. Sudha XXXXX and I teach Physics at XXXXXXXX. It was a pleasure to listen to your talk which was an eye-opener to many who teach the ESOL students. It will help us remember and focus on non academic things that are important to these children and their academics, which we tend to forget when you are drowning in your own academic world of teaching and covering the curriculum. Thanks for your presentation.

Dr. Kumar ----- Forwarded by Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS on 05/30/2007 12:12 PM -----

- Latavia is a relatively young, African-American teacher at the same high school where I presented my framework in Fall 06. In our conversation after

the in-service, she related her struggles schooling ELLs. Lisa teaches mainstream US History and admitted that her students' lack of basic knowledge about the US made it hard for her to proceed with her presentation of more advanced concepts related to the government and civics of this nation. At first, she thought her students were not properly schooled since she had taken for granted certain basic knowledge ingrained in the education of students schooled in the United States. Eventually she realized that her ELLs, even though more advanced in their English language skills, had simply not been exposed to the fundamentals necessary to build advanced historical knowledge about the country they now lived in. By instinct rather than by knowing, she decided to begin her lessons with basics about the geography of the United States and its development as a super nation. She admitted to feelings inadequacy while adding lessons that were not in the standardized curriculum. The presentation provided her with a justification for her methodology that in the end would benefit her practice and all her students.

**LaTavia XXXXX/XXXXXXXX  
High/GCPS**

To Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and  
Instruction/GCPS@gcps

11/30/2006 03:31 PM

cc  
Subject Thank you!

Hello Mrs. Webbert-

I just wanted to thank you for delivering such empowering information yesterday. I had received ESOL training in Broward County, Florida, but had never been exposed to some of the ideas in your framework presented yesterday. So often, we as educators are pulled in so many directions to the point that we forget to "focus on exceptional children." I don't think we do this because we are inconsiderate. There are expectations set, not by classroom teachers that challenge compassion and accommodation in order to create a more "standard" environment. Every now and then, it is inspirational to have someone remind us

why are teachers. Our role is to educate, not by methods of force feeding, but by focusing on individual student needs and showing sensitivity to and acceptance of that student's total being.

Thanks again,

LaTavia XXXXX

- Lisa is an executive director for teaching and learning in the school system I work. Parts of her duties include the assistance of schools that fall into the dreaded *Needs Improvement* category artificially created by the No Child Left Behind Act 2001. Based on the data for each particular school Lisa determines which instructional specialists would need to be invited to interact with the teachers and leadership at the affected school. In the fall of 2006 Lisa called me at my office to ask if could help with this school. Her email after the sessions which all involved the explanations around *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* ended sum up the encouragement I look to muster in professional educators I am able to reach.

**Lisa XXX/Teaching and Learning/GCPS**

11/29/2006 09:39 AM

To Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS@gcps

cc Beth XXX/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS@GCPS, Tricia XXXX

Subject Re: MHS Diversity Training 11/28/06

Victoria,

Thank you so much for your time, expertise and enthusiasm!! It makes a difference for those who hear you.

Regards,

*Lisa XXXX, Ed.D.*

**Division of Teaching and Learning**

Gwinnett County Public Schools

<http://www.gwinnettk12online.net>

[lisa\\_@gwinnett.k12.ga.us](mailto:lisa_@gwinnett.k12.ga.us)

678.301.XXXX

- Beth is the Title III director in my school system, Gwinnett County Public Schools. Her leadership and perceptive stance about the teaching and learning process of ELLs makes it possible for the Title III the staff to share the principles embedded in the teaching and learning of ELLs with mainstream staff who struggle teaching ELLs the most. Her email was a response to the feedback from the presentation in Fall 06 to one of the local high schools.

----- Forwarded by Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS on 06/05/2007 07:37 PM -----

**Beth XXXX/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS**

12/01/2006 08:54 AM

To Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS@gcps

cc

Subject Re: Fw: Thank you!

We've got to get them (teachers and leadership) to focus on the student as the center with the content and strategies applied as appropriate, rather than the other way around. What works for ELLs will work for others. The converse is not necessarily true.

One of the difficulties with MHS is the constant turnover of teachers every year. Each August, they start from the beginning. Victoria, there are also some things that you know and do that will always be more effective than another person doing it. Can you clone yourself?

- Ms. Mellor is a special case. She was the National Teacher of the Year in 2005-06. We met in March 06 during the Title III Conference at Kennesaw State University in Cobb County, GA. She was the keynote speaker for the conference. During lunch Kathy and I wound up in the same table and began a conversation around our mutual interest, the education of ELLs. She had attended the breakout session in which I presented the principles around the development of *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* and commented how the instrument was a useful graphic organizer to summarize the variables that intervene in the education of



ELLs. I offered to email her the Power Point Presentation and let her consider my arguments in more detail. I did. Roughly a year later, very timely for my dissertation she communicated back with me.

- The email that follows is one of many professional, electronic conversations we have had since. Her feedback is especially enlightening since her ELL student population is very small. Some of the segments she teaches are composed of as few as six students and mainstream teachers in her school may not have had an ELL student ever in their careers. However, when a teacher does get and ELL and comes to her for advise; the framework helps her induce the teacher into the essentials of teaching ELLs.

"Mellor, XXXXX"

<XXXXX\_Mellor@NKSD.NET>

To <Victoria\_Webbert@Gwinnett.k12.ga.us>

cc

Subject RE: Hello again - ready for a break?

05/05/2007 10:28 AM

Hi Victoria, Thank you for sending the updated version of the framework to me. I am working on your impressive project and would like to devote more time to it. I love the practical nature of this and you must really enjoy doing it. I had family come in unexpectedly for the weekend. Because it is the end of the year, I have a lot of culminating activities at night. I'd love to give you some feedback about your work; how soon would it be a good timeframe?

Thanks, Kathy

----- Forwarded by Victoria Webbert/Curriculum and Instruction/GCPS on 06/30/2007 08:13 PM -----

Laura is the Title III director in a local school system in GA. Her school system covers a small geographical area but has a very high concentration of ELLs. We have coincided in multiple professional meetings, conferences and in-service sessions for ESOL. Laura is very aware of the work I have done and have offered valuable suggestions for the development of the instrument.

"XXXXXXX, Laura"  
 <laura.xxxxxxxx@gcssk12.net>

To <victoria\_webbert@gwinnett.k12.ga.us>  
 cc

11/07/2006 02:51 PM

Subject flow chart and narrative

Victoria,  
 Thanks so much for chatting with me. It is so nice to know I have someone with your expertise to call on at times like this. I appreciate you sharing your revised version of the above documents. The chart is an asset when trying to explain to new classroom teachers the intricacies of what they need to "know and do" with their ESOL students.  
 Talk to you soon.  
 Laura

**Laura XXXXXXXX**  
*ESOL Director*  
*Gainesville City School System*  
*International Center*  
*770/536-0081*  
[laura.xxxxxxxx@gcssk12.net](mailto:laura.xxxxxxxx@gcssk12.net)

#### *Recent Venues for My Work*

In addition to multiple classroom presentations and county in-service sessions, I share my thesis with state and/or national peers during annual professional conferences. The most recent venues were the GA NAME in February 2007 and the Student at Risk Conference in Savannah, GA in March 2006. In the current year I anticipate presenting this work at the AERA conference in the fall of 2007.

This work has also been a centerpiece for Gwinnett County Public Schools' ESOL Program's Staff Development. The intensive, 30-hour staff development utilizes the framework as a graphic organizer around which the course is organized. Lastly, the framework is published in the GA Department of Education's ESOL website as an significant resource for educators across Georgia at

[http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/GPS\\_Differentiation\\_ELLs\\_Stra\\_Res.pdf?p=4BE1EECF99CD364EA5554055463F1FBB77B0B70FECF5942E12E123FE4810FFF53501CAA8CB82838C596EBD449943138&Type=D](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/GPS_Differentiation_ELLs_Stra_Res.pdf?p=4BE1EECF99CD364EA5554055463F1FBB77B0B70FECF5942E12E123FE4810FFF53501CAA8CB82838C596EBD449943138&Type=D)

As a professional, I renovate my intellectual work in tandem with my interactions with peers and colleagues but in true existentialist pose I also become conscious that my work transforms me as I learn. This renovation gives way in a yearning for more investigations and more support in the advancement for knowledge in the teaching and learning of ELLs and makes *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* an organic medium for the exchange of ideas and practices for teaching all students.

*A Vibrantly Alive Model – The Echo of Many Voices*

Sharing my work with other professionals brings *resonance* to my work. Postman (2005) utilizes Northrop Frye’s definition for resonance as in cases when a “particular statement in a particular context acquires a universal significance” (p. 17). Far from representing an arrogant statement about this work, it implies that my work speaks to the experiential knowledge of professional who have dedicated their didactic experience to the teaching of English language learners. *This conceptual framework makes sense.*

My conceptual framework is vibrantly alive and constantly transforming with the feedback of colleagues, teachers and students enmeshed in the daily practice of trying to learn English and school in a language and culture minimally understood. “Resonance is a metaphor writ large .... a medium of communication has the ability to fly beyond the context into new and unexpected ones and it is always implicated in the ways we define and regulate our ideas of truth” (p. 19). “Just like Athens becomes a metaphor for intellectual excellence .... and Hamlet a metaphor for brooding indecisiveness. .... and Alice a metaphor of a search for order in a world of semantic nonsense” (p. 20).

*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*

becomes *a metaphor for intellectual order and more focus for the field of second language acquisition and L2 academic learning.*

This intellectual confusion is evidenced in the difficulties accomplished professionals face when they engage in the futile attempt to make sense of the massive and unsystematic information available in the field of second language acquisition for school learning. The voluminous information on the subject of teaching English language learners found in publications and the electronic media is mind boggling for educators faced with the daunting task of researching and tailoring information for urgent use in their classrooms and overburdened by busy schedules and artificially imposed deadlines. Disconcerted caring educators find themselves accommodating sleek, pre-packaged programs that promise to be the cure-all to their instructional concerns which often, fail to meet the educational needs of their linguistically and culturally diverse students.

My many conversations with colleagues who have invariably asked what to do with their ELLs indicate to me the need for this intellectual order in the field of second language acquisition and *school learning*. The clarity of this metaphor makes sense in the search for epistemological truth as expressed in the commentary of colleagues. The model accurately portrays is the unique individuality of English language learners along with the need to custom tailor lessons to teach ELLs effectively, and how to do it.

#### *Summary for Working towards a Possible Solution*

This dissertation is a theoretical dissertation. In other words, the methodology calls for “a meta-analysis of studies and theory to evaluate the possibility for execution of a new theory, technique or strategy” (Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 7). My objective is and has been to investigate the viability of the ideas organized in the conceptual framework I

designed to improve the practice of education. The spontaneous feedback of colleagues provides an informal review of the ideas in my work as seen through the eyes of the implementers but does not intend to be part of the evaluation of ideas.

Desirable empirical data deemed to be important for the discussion or necessary for enhancing the analysis could be the central component of a post-doctoral longitudinal study. In a follow up study, researchers may perhaps aim at measuring the changes in pedagogical practices of teachers who implement the premises espoused in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* to then also measure the long range rate of learning and academic success for the students in the research group. *It would be my hope that researchers in the making take this lead.*

## CHAPTER VII

## THE RUBIK'S CUBE: A METAPHORICAL COMPARATIVE PARALLEL

Figure 7.1

*How to Solve the Rubik's Cube*

The *naive* way to approach this problem is as follows: there are 12 edge pieces, and 8 corner pieces. A corner piece could never go in the spot of an edge piece. Edge pieces and corner pieces can be arranged in  $12 * 8$  ways, according to basic counting laws. Now, each of the edge pieces can have one of two orientations, and each of the corner pieces can have one of three orientations. So we must multiply the previous number (counting the different locations of pieces), by  $2^{12} * 3^8$ , representing the total number of positions. This number is 519,024,039,293,878,272,000 ( $\approx 5.19 * 10^{20}$ ). However, this is not the correct answer, due to physical constraints

of the cube, not all of these positions are possible. We are able to rotate all but one of the corner pieces in any way, but the final corner piece is determined by the first seven. So we must divide our final answer by 3 to account for this. The same argument holds for the edge pieces, so we must also divide by 2. Finally, we cannot swap two edge pieces or two corner pieces. If you decide to take apart your cube, and simply swap two edge pieces, you will find the cube unsolvable. What will happen is that you can solve the edge pieces, but then two corner pieces will be swapped, and this situation cannot be fixed. So, we divide the total number again by 2 (i.e. we divide the above number by  $2 * 3 * 2 = 12$  -- from the previous section). This result, the “order” of the cube “group”, is:

43,252,003,274,489,856,000 ( $\approx 4.32 * 10^{19}$ ). I like to give a physical representation to big numbers, so here goes: if you had a cube for every legal position, then you could cover the entire surface of the earth, including oceans about 250 times. A chain consisting of all the cube positions would stretch about 250 light years. Feel free to invent your own comparisons, which, alas, I still don't understand (Jeays, 2006, section 3).

*The Rubik's Cube as a Metaphor for the Education of ELLs*

Words, metaphors, analogies and in a broad-spectrum epistemological representations have always effected a powerful draw for me. Thoughts and ideas are the centrifugal force of a personal ontology bore from learning and thus being. Consequently through this writing process, I feverishly prodded my imagination in an attempt to craft that ideal representation of the teaching and learning process for ELLs and their teachers

in its entire immensity. My purpose was to reign in the epistemological multiplicities brought onward in my work within a straightforward solidifying thought. Teaching and learning for ELLs and their teachers is so complex but simultaneously it is so feasible!

When bridging the distance between *known knowledge* and *new knowledge*, an analogy or metaphor readies our understanding for new schema. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) define metaphor purely as an “understanding and experiencing of one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). But, could I in truth come up with *one kind of thing* to describe the teaching and learning process of ELLs and their teachers? I kept trying to conjure the more appropriate metaphor to illustrate my thoughts. Suddenly, my thoughts fortuitously turned to the Rubik’s cube, an enigma from my times as a young adult, and I got excited. The more I thought about it, the more excited I became.

The Rubik's Cube is a three-dimensional puzzle; “it is a modern day mechanical marvel surpassing the ancient wonders of the Hellenistic traditions and rivaling John Dee’s Scarabaeus of 1547 in the ingeniousness of its internal construction” (Taylor, 1980, back cover). Rubik’s became a craze in the United States a little more than two decades ago. The challenge was to manipulate the cube so all of the same-colored squares were on the same side. I gave it a try as a young woman and returned to it recently in my search for that ideal metaphor that would help me exemplify the complexities of teaching English language learners. The unsolved puzzle on my night stand reminds me that solving *the Rubik’s cube is hard work and so is teaching and learning!*

Back in the 1980s, everyone gave the Rubik’s Cube a try, typically through trial-and-error. What most people eventually learned was that trial-and-error didn't work; in fact, a wrong move could wind up eventually sabotaging the entire task. Soon it was



evident that *solving the puzzle was not a matter of luck or randomness; it required forethought, strategy and an understanding of which successive series of moves would lead to the desired result* (Jaeyns, 2006). Some people actually embraced the challenge; the majority of people, like me, just threw up our hands. After all, the possible legal moves in this mechanical puzzle are so many that not one source could compile all the 43,252,003,274,489,856,000 ( $\approx 4.32 * 10^{19}$ ) mechanical moves (Jaeyns, 2006, section 3). Not one source, electronic or hard copy would be able to compile every possible move in solving the Rubik's cube; the approximate number is a mathematical calculation.

No matter how much you fiddle and twiddle at random with the cube, you will never be able to return it to its original state. There are over forty-three billion possible ways of arranging the pieces of the Rubik's cube, so you can, so you need to have a method to get it back the way it began (Bossert, 1981, p. 5).

At this point in my research, I was wondering if other scholars had written dissertation work correlating the Rubik's cube with teaching and learning. And indeed, the Rubik's cube has been a source of inspiration for other thinkers who see in this enigma the possibility of representing a number of fascinatingly complex processes. Yet, most dissertations written on the subject of the Rubik's cube tend to focus on the mathematically generated algorithms to solve the cube. It was stimulating to find Robertson's work (2005) tying in critical pedagogy and the mysteries of the Rubik's cube. In *Stories from More Sides Now: The Rubik's Cube and other Journeys through Critical Pedagogy*, Robertson describes her journey as a dissertation writer in search of a method to bring critical pedagogy into her college teaching practice. "I now turn to play

out additional metaphorical parallels between the Cube and critical pedagogy – building blocks that represent the foundational pieces in this study” (p. 7). For Robertson practicing critical pedagogy compassionately and intellectually in the midst of a group of students who wanted a straight answer for their tests or papers felt as an unsolvable puzzle.

I can't think of a better metaphor to describe my instructional reality. I am puzzled about what to do, as I am also, metaphorically speaking, and facing disparate pieces of a critical pedagogy puzzle, i.e. power practices, democracy, my Freirian values, etc. Without a strong conception of the whole, or the bigger pedagogical picture, I am stuck turning the same logics around in my mind (pp. 10 -11).

As educators, we too, find ourselves challenged with solving elaborate puzzles created by the interfacing of teachers, students and mandated curriculum. The puzzle of teaching and learning is infinitely more complex than the renowned Rubik's cube. In the case of teachers and students, the conundrum we are obliged to solve is how to teach and learn, how to create knowledge best and as an on-going process, within a scenario *influenced by far more facets than those ever possible in a Rubik's cube!* Decision making in critical pedagogy must take into consideration the lives and stories of ELLs and their teachers as these are manifested in the stages of language acquisition, prior knowledge and cultural worldviews. In the interpretation and application of this knowledge educators and students recreate educational practices for social justice and learning in classrooms and communities. *Who are we, who are our students and what we ought to teach and learn, are facets of the instructional process that influence every*

*possible outcome in the classroom and are far more complex than all the possible mechanical moves in a Rubik's Cube!*

What's exciting about this metaphor and why educators and learners should care is that in education, as in solving a Rubik's Cube, *we need a well-built notion of the whole in order to determine the discrete steps in the process, not the other way around!* As with the Rubik's cube, in education, the wrong move now can lead to negative ramifications later on, the equivalent of an unsolvable puzzle. We can cite for instance the many students who abandon the educational path to enlarge the already swollen ranks of laborers as patently evident in the AYP results of *The No Child Left Behind Act of (2001)* of numerous schools in the United States. As was the case with many Rubik-cubers two decades ago, politicians and high level educational officials resort to short-sighted trial-and-error approaches to determine which educational move to make next, by mandating a series of scripted instructional strategies or prescribed classroom methodologies that in the long run fail and *ultimately cause some educators and students to simply give up.*

#### *The Naïve Way to Approach Teaching and Learning*

This chapter is a short chapter; there is not much more to say that in teaching and learning it is impossible to compile all the possible moves for all the possible selves caught up in the everyday educational act. It is further impossible to summarize the complexities of the teaching act in a scripted, sequential, infallible curriculum as the standardization movement in education seems to suggest. Informed teachers and students *make sense of the instructional process as an arena for educated decision making in order to move towards more effectual academic execution.*

Like kaleidoscopic images, each component in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners* offers a multi-dynamic and multi-faceted opportunity that allows for the consideration of the unique characteristics of the students and teachers embedded in the teaching and learning process. In this conceptual framework, each component may interact in multiple ways within and among each component to create descriptions of academic learning that varies from ELL to ELL and are never scripted or prescribed. Teaching and learning become insightful, personal and dynamic. In my research of the Rubik's cube, not one source proposed every possible Rubik's cube move or solution. *How naïve to believe that we can accomplish this feat in the immeasurably more complex site of education!*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE END AND BEGINNING OF A PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC JOURNEY

Qualitative researchers involve themselves in every aspect of their work. Through their eyes, meaning is brought from an amalgam of words, images and interpretations. Through their eyes, a creative work comes into fruition. We are not static humans who maintain an aloof posture as we pursue our thoughts, dreams and desires and the thoughts dreams and desires of those from whom we learn. Rather our work is an expression of who we are and who we are becoming (Lichtman, 2006, p. 206).

*The Need to Know when to End the Qualitative Inquiry*

After a few years actively researching my topic and more that forty years laterally thinking about it, I had the sense that my discussion had come full circle. Meloy (2002) describes this sense of intuitive finality in her discussion about “knowing when to end” (p. 142) the qualitative dissertation. Her observation that “it was not hard to recognize the signs pointing to the end of the study” and “I was suddenly overcome with the feeling that there wasn’t any point in my talking about it anymore” (p. 142) rang a loud bell with me. Even though every ending engenders a new beginning, “we are never there in an absolute sense quite there” (p. 171); it was time to assess how well my thesis responded to the initial research questions and the premises grounding my dissertation. There is some relief in the feeling of being near the end, of bringing some closure to the subject matter but there is also a nagging feeling about the study’s true contribution to knowledge in the

field. It was time for “judging the soundness of the research” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 192), and the “quality of the qualitative process” (Melloy, 2002, p. 144).

*Revisiting the Research Questions and Grounding Premises*

As the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) increases in classrooms across the United States, language and content area teachers search for information, that can make instruction more effectual for teaching an increasingly diverse student population. The voluminous information on the subject of teaching English language learners found in publications and the electronic media is mind boggling for educators who need this information for immediate use in their classrooms. *Educators and learners yearn for a more comprehensive and integrated discernment of the process embedded in learning a second language and academic content for English language learners.*

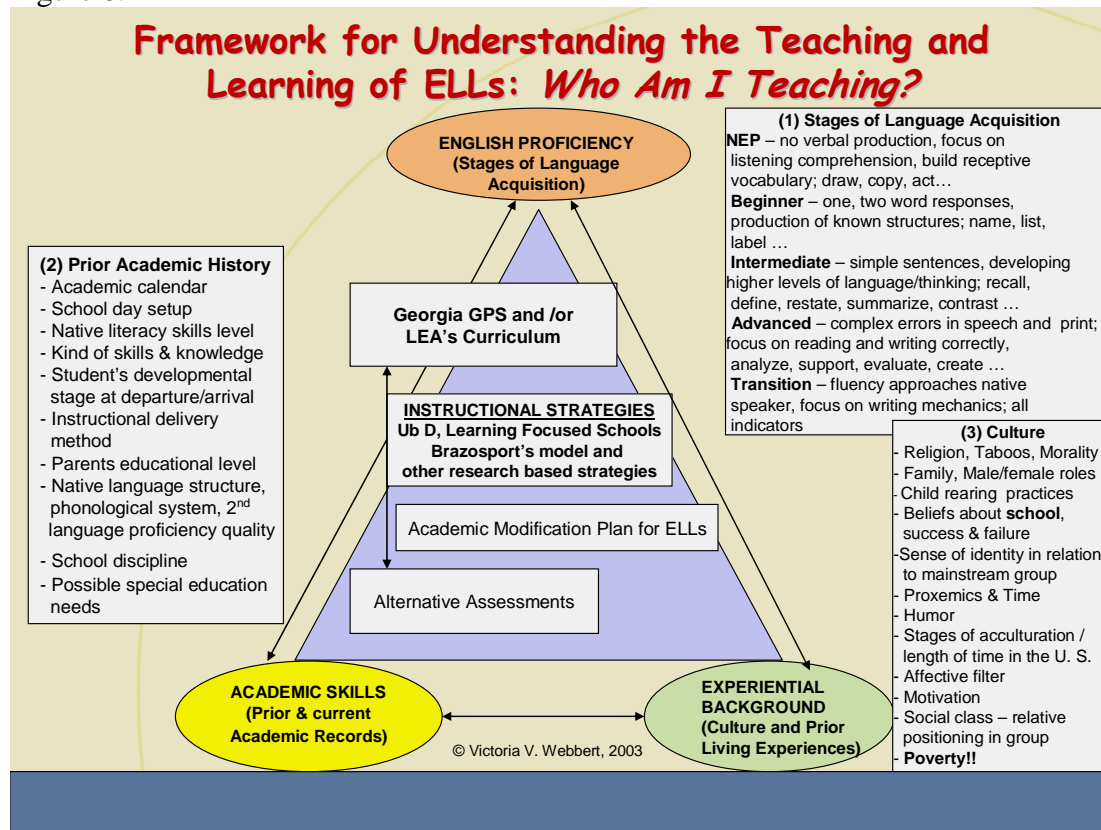
As a response to these yearnings and taking in consideration my experiences as a second language learner and second-language-learner teacher, the academic literature available in the SLA field and later the lessons learned during my writing of the school portraiture, my research questions investigated the functionality of *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*. I continue to develop this conceptual framework as a response to the need for a *more integrated representation of the process embedded in learning a second language and academic content for English language learners*. The study was performed with the goal of strengthening and expanding the potential of the framework among teachers, preservice teachers and even learners and as a response to the research questions and premises grounding this investigation. (Please refer to the introduction in chapter one of this dissertation.)

*A Response to the Study's Queries: Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

In the United States, there is not one typical profile of the English language learner in today's classrooms. "You can find an American citizen, an immigrant or refugee, a temporary resident, a migrant worker, a vacationer, or an international student studying abroad" (Ariza, 2006, p. 15). As a result the teacher must be prepared for linguistic, cultural and instructional situations that challenge the assumptions of a pre-service professional preparation deep-seated in the beliefs of homogeneity in thought of a White mainstream society. The most significant themes teachers need to consider for planning purposeful education for their ELLs are brought forward in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*. In my study these subjects are discussed in detail in the Literature Review and Methodology Chapters. However I consider appropriate at this point to review some topics in the following pages as to be the reminders of the more significant points in the discussion.

*Second Language Acquisition Theory – Part One in Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*

Figure 8.1



Attentiveness to the markers of each language stage enables teachers and second language learners to engage in language acquisition activities that foster comprehensible input. Comprehensible input can best be explained by referring to the zone of proximal development in Vygotsky's ZPD theory and Krashen's Input Hypothesis ( $i + 1$ ). These theories suggest the need for scaffolding approaches as described in Krashen's theory (Chapter Two) where ( $i$  = actual level and  $i + 1$  = potential level). In sum, *the teacher must know the fundamentals about how first and second languages are learned.* (For a



full discussion of this topic, please refer to the review of the academic literature in chapter three of this dissertation).

*The teacher ought to know the student's educational and literacy background, the student's prior academic history/knowledge.* Teachers capitalize on prior knowledge when they teach a new concept after brainstorming with their students about what they already know on the subject. Jim Cummins theory (1986 & 2000) about two distinctive and separate sets of language skills essential for academic success is a basic tenet for the implementation of classroom practices for ELLs in this dissertation. English language learners as a norm have developed BICS by the time they exit English assistance language programs; yet, typically, CALP still requires additional development and supplementary instructional support (Cummins, 1986 & 2000).

*The teacher ought to understand the culture of the students.* For cultural minorities, the influences that have an impact on identity development and thus affect learning are “the larger culture, specific ethnic group of origin, community religion type of neighborhood, social class, educational level, gender, sexual orientation and stage of development” (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 36). Where do ELLs come from and their cultural values and beliefs about family structure and the role that education plays in their family belief system will determine how ELLs learned to learn and thus how are they more prone to learn in school.

The praxis of culturally responsive pedagogy confirms the theory. When instructional processes are consistent with the cultural orientations, experiences and learning styles of marginalized African, Latino, Native,

and Asian American students, their school achievement improves significantly (Gay, 2000, p. 181).

In spite of the fact that overarching cultural tendencies do comprise a body of study that enlightens the instructional process, classroom experiences may be completely different for particular students. The framework calls teachers to look into the dimensions that shape culture and language as a tool to determine the degree to which the academic experiences of diverse students may vary from successful to failing even for students belonging to the same ethnic group. Culture is so ever encompassing to the human nature as to constitute the foundation for a life of scholarship dedicated to its investigation. The manner in which culture impacts every aspect of the human endeavor (time, personal space, interpersonal relationships, language etc.) has been Edward T. Hall's life work (1973, 1981, 1989, 1990). Hall's scholarship delves into the most intimate features of culture to a level that I consider beyond the scope of this dissertation but appropriate as a reference tool for more in depth understanding of the far reaching effects of culture for the teaching and learning process. (More information about this topic can be found in chapter three of this dissertation.)

### *The Workings of the Framework*

*Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* embodies the conception of an idea that has taken roughly three decades of professional practice to come to fruition and continues expanding with the feedback of students, colleagues, professors and peers. After my experience with my own learning of English as a second language, my son's struggles with academic language proficiency and my initially failed attempt teaching the Egyptian supervisors, it was clear to me that learning social English (BICS) and academic proficiency (CALP) were separate processes. Learning academic English for school success goes hand in hand with the construction of prior knowledge and culture the students bring into the instructional setting. Effectual instruction implies customized instruction that addresses the language and academic needs of ELLs.

### *Virginia Collier's Model - Strongest Support*

Collier's explanation of her model (referenced in chapter six of this dissertation) would indeed serve to solidify my thinking behind my on-going development of *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs*. Collier approaches the improvement of the instructional process for ELLs by observing and describing the progression of events happening inside the students' minds in hopes that this information would trigger understanding and better instructional practices from the part of teachers. *My approach is reversed but balancing!*

Because I understand that the language, cognitive and academic domains of diverse students necessitate of ongoing instruction and are interdependent, I offer to teachers and learners detailed descriptors to define these domains and a prioritized sequence of events for the planning and delivery of effectual lessons for ELLs. *I*

*symbolize the teaching processes that should be happening as a response to what the student is experiencing during the process of acquiring second language proficiency and academic content.* Collier's superb explanation of the mental processes ELLs engage in during learning in the end offers the strongest premise to support my work!

*A Mirror Image in Experimental Research*

Bringing about a paradigm to judge the soundness of qualitative studies requires some attention to the parameters applied to appraise conventional empirical research, an implied sounding board for evaluating qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the culmination of the naturalistic inquiry, an early term used to designate qualitative studies, brings about questions regarding the “truth value of the study, its applicability, transferability, consistency and neutrality” (p. 290) and propose four constructs to more accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm: “credibility, transferability, generalizability and confirmability” (pp. 290 – 297).

After careful deliberations, instead, I favored the idea of “connoisseurship” brought forward by Eisner (2002) as a more comprehensive term to describe the epistemological achievements in this theoretical dissertation. “Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation .... Connoisseurs notice in the field of their expertise what others may miss seeing (p. 187). This seeing is artistically and academically enhanced by the use of triangulation.

Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point. Derived from navigation science, the concept has fruitfully applied to social science inquiry. Designing a study in which multiple cases, multiple informants and more than one data gathering

method are used can greatly strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 194).

Becoming aware of the usefulness of the a triangulated design during my qualitative research coursework, I decided early on to inform the inquiry process by grounding the investigation on *inquiry methods referent to the knowledge gathered during the ample literature review, the insights derived from auto/biographical information and the events narrated in the school portraiture of Esplanade Brook High School which closes the methodology chapter*. At the intersection of the understanding gleamed from these sources I found consistent interrelation of theory, experience and knowledge. The triangulation of the inquiry methods should assist with the reliability of the results. "Researcher participation is at the heart of qualitative research process" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, pp. 106 -140).

#### *Confirmability, Limitations and Further Recommendations*

"Confirmability of a study captures the traditional concept of objectivity" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, pp. 194 - 195) but in qualitative research this construct is intimately tied to the natural subjectivity and bias of the researcher and how it will shape the investigation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) yet again refer to the need to address whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another investigation. Marshall and Rossman respond with a list of suggestion to be implemented during the research process.

Such strategies include the use of a research partner who could play "devil's advocate, my dissertation committee has certainly fulfilled in this role, and critically questioning the researcher's analyses. The researcher must also have an active consciousness of previous researchers who have written about bias and subjectivity. I

fully acknowledge my potential subjectivity during the investigative process. “Qualitative research is inexorably tied to the human being as a researcher” (Meloy, 2002, p. 108).

The limitations of my study are closely related to the theoretical nature of my research which is intrinsically an acknowledgement of the existence of personal bias inherent in the discussion of the topic (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Acknowledging my potential preconceived notions compelled me to select the auto/biographical backdrop as a preferred medium for the dialogue in my study balanced against intense research of theory in the SLA field.

Clearly criteria of goodness for qualitative research differ from the criteria developed for experimental and positivist research. Qualitative research does not claim to be replicable. The researcher purposefully avoids controlling the research conditions and concentrates on recording the complexity of situational contexts and interrelations as they occur naturally (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 196).

Ethically, it would be impossible to provide faulty education to a group of students to compare their performance with students whose education was provided on the basis of optimum methods. The qualitative nature of this study, the absence of a comparison group, or the call for more empirical data, may be pointed as limitations of this study. I suggest that the empirical data necessary to enhance the analysis in this research may be the vital component of a post-doctoral longitudinal study. In a quantitative study, researchers would aim at measuring the changes in pedagogical practices of teachers who internalize and implement the premises espoused in *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners*; then

measure the long range rate of academic success for the students in the study; and unequivocally correlate the increase in academic achievement of ELLs to the changes in pedagogical practice. This would be a tall order, we must admit!

*The Academic Journey – Evolving Afterthoughts*

For me the process of writing this dissertation took approximately forty years to complete. From the moment when I decided to learn and then teach English, my academic queries revolved around the enigma of this process. What do teachers need to know and do to teach English language learners successfully? During my Masters Degree program, I grasped the importance of the stages of language proficiency in planning and delivering effectual lessons for my ELLs. However for a long time, I was still baffled by the mixed results in the academic achievement of my students. Like Sidorkin, I realized that implementing the same strategies to the teaching – learning process could result in varied responses from class to class. “Nothing seemed to work in a predictable fashion” (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 1). Something was sorely missing in the understanding of this process.

The experiences with my son, whose learning of English and academic content was hampered by insufficient prior knowledge in the native language, and with the Egyptian supervisors, whose cultural beliefs and values served as a barrier for their learning, eventually shed some light into the teaching and learning process of ELLs. I learned that the quality of prior learning experiences of ELLs and the modes in which ELLs learned to learn are of more significance for teaching and learning than the methods and strategies suggested in SLA Literature to teach these students.

The theory supported by my conceptual framework suggests that the acquisition of social language BICS and academic proficiency CALP (Cummins, 1986 & 2000)

emerge at the juncture of the unique features of language, prior knowledge and culture that both educators and students contribute to the educational practice. *Framework for Understanding the Teaching and Learning of ELLs* delves further into the elements that make up these domains to advise that the definition of these main components in teaching and learning constitute the nuts and bolts of the learning process for ELLs and their teachers. My focus of attention is a response to my existentialist philosophical beliefs and the agreement with “postmodernist perspective that centers on human behavior within the contexts or relationships in which it occurs” (Parks, 2000, p. 669).

#### *The Personal Journey*

I find myself completing this study with the distinct feeling that this finale is inexorably also a new beginning. While I have been enlightened on this journey, I feel the incompleteness of the process. “Analysis is an ongoing process, not a linear process following the collection of data .... often referred to as an iterative process” (Lichtman, 2006, p. 164). I may have missed or neglected some ideas along the way but more significantly I acknowledge the evolving quality of knowledge. Knowledge is never done; it is never complete it is ever changing. The researcher, like the healer in African American narratives, must access understanding and knowledge of a client’s [student’s] suffering [language proficiency, prior knowledge and culture] before therapy [teaching and learning] becomes a feasible conduit to address the client’s instructional and/or mental health needs (Parks, 2003, p. 458 - 460).

The arduous path, bustling with activity, during dissertation writing, validates the knowledge gained through a doctoral program yet recurrently deposits me right at the beginning of my restless thinking disposition. Unsettling feelings about power,



empowerment, critical pedagogy, emancipatory practices and awareness remind me of the febleness of teaching and learning within institutionalized learning settings. The idea of curriculum customized for the needs of individual students may be contested by government institutions at large but it is the conduit for quality education for all students. I am forced to look at the reality that the power of the teaching and learning process is a strangely personal stance between teachers and their students yet it is constantly challenged by those who hold power. I am forced to realize that I have very little power, especially working in the institutionalized educational world; that I might need to revisit my options to fulfill the spirit of my work.

At the same time, I am forced to recognize that other fellow human beings have a right to their own interpretations of power and epistemology. I am forced to recognize that even the essentialist views that my colleagues or students may hold are valid forms of personal and academic power. I am constantly prodded to reexamine my convictions and embark in new journeys of knowing, being and doing all over again. Disquieting feelings rouse me from certainties held before.... the intellectual path once clear becomes perplexed, clamoring and expectant as I am urged to reexamine my convictions forever again. The joys, tears and anxieties are inexorably bound to be resumed at a later time .... And in this sense my work will never be complete.

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APPENDIX

DETERMINING THE STUDENT'S ENGLISH PROFICIENCY STAGE



*Can you determine the Student's English Proficiency Stage?*

1. Jana came from Russia two years ago after three years of formal schooling in her native country. She was silent for one year. Now she understands most of what she is told and usually responds using short, simple sentences.

***Language Proficiency Stage: Early Production Stage***

***How do you know?*** Just out of the “silent period”; comprehension is increased but responses are not proficient. Student would benefit from instructional activities that increase her receptive vocabulary and promote further language acquisition. English language learners at this stage may name, list, label, group, respond, answer and in general show understanding of the second language usually through one/two word responses.

2. Joon, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader, came from Korea around four years ago and was placed in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the same grade level he was attending in his native country at that time. He understands academic written text at grade level; takes on the same assignments as his classmates do; and goes to ESOL for one period a day. He writes very complex sentences that sometimes are redundant and seem to have reversed syntactical order. Most of the time he speaks “perfect English” but when he makes a *mistake*, it is usually a strange one.

***Language Proficiency Stage: Intermediate Fluency to Advanced***

***How do you know?*** Speaking errors are minimal and reflect advanced English language skills. Understanding of the written text indicates advanced language skills that in due course most students will achieve. Written expression is usually the last skill to be

mastered. Student was academically ready for grade level instruction. What are the ramifications of his academic background for instructional planning? The instructional focus at this stage of language proficiency is on developing higher levels of language use in the content areas. ELLs at this stage *are beginning to think in their second language and use this thinking language to learn purposefully*. They show understanding and use of the second language through the *use of advanced thinking actions*. English language learners may analyze, create, defend, debate, justify, support, evaluate and use more complex thinking processes to evidence mastery of the second language.

3. Luis came from Guatemala last week. He is in the first grade and only sits and looks around the classroom. He only speaks to another student who also speaks his native language. He cries easily and appears confused. Today he uttered his first word in English: *playground*.

***Language Proficiency Stage: Pre-production Stage***

How do you know? **Minimal comprehension; no verbal production; communicates with gestures and action (crying, included)**. When discussing this case, it is important to remember that a child who comes from Mexico, Central and/or South America and “speaks a native language” does not necessarily speak Spanish. There are many indigenous languages in these geographical areas that do not resemble Spanish in any way. The instructional focus at this stage is on *listening comprehension*. Learners evidence their command of the language and the academic content mostly through *performance indicators that are silent*. English language learners may point, move, mime, draw, select, match, copy, circle, choose and in general show understanding of the second language through actions rather than through words. A learner functioning at a

level 1, may illustrate the water cycle on a poster board, or use flash cards to show understanding of it by correctly ordering the steps in the cycle, while still being unable to orally respond to questions about the water cycle on a written test.

4. Claude came to us from Canada eight months ago. He had learned English in school there. He is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and is able to hold simple conversations with peers and teachers. His best friend translates class notes into French for him. Once he understands the requirements of a particular assignment, he is able to do the work and sometimes helps his friend do his work too. If his teachers and/or peers ask him one/two word response questions, he is able to communicate with little or no difficulty.

***Language Proficiency Stage: Intermediate Fluency***

***How do you know?*** *Claude holds simple conversations; attempts tasks involving higher level thinking skills in English; his academic knowledge is comparable to the expectations for native English-speaking peers. ELLs at this stage are beginning to think in their second language and use this thinking language to learn purposefully. They show understanding and use of the second language through the use of advanced thinking actions. English language learners may analyze, create, defend, debate, justify, support, evaluate and use more complex thinking processes to evidence mastery of the second language. Student was academically ready for grade level instruction.*

5. Maria has lived in the United States since she was thirteen years old. She has been schooled in English from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade all the way to her high school senior year and is scheduled to attend a local college in the fall. She is fully

proficient in Spanish and has no difficulties with English. She has an extensive, sophisticated English vocabulary, much of which can be attributed to her love of reading. She reads extensively. She makes a few “errors” in her written or oral expression, but she has a marked Spanish accent. When she works on oral reports, she gets very anxious and makes a lot more mistakes in English.

***Language Proficiency Stage: Transition***

***How do you know?*** - *She has mastered all four language skill areas: Listening, speaking, reading and writing. Full proficiency does not depend on a person’s speech being accent-free. “I’ve discovered over the years that when people say immigrants are not learning English; they usually mean that they don’t sound like native speakers” (Tse, 2001, p. 28). Affective issues impact speakers of all languages. A pronounced accent will usually be a remnant for students who learn a language after puberty due to the maturation of the oral muscles required to produce the sounds from a different language and a diminished ability to distinguish non-native language phonemes. Maria would benefit from the same classroom support activities designed for mainstream classroom students .... Furthermore Maria represents me during my late high school years and early days in college.*