

Applying Emic Sociocultural Concepts in ENL Preschool Action Research

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This study investigates the behavioral anomalies identified in a preschool Japanese emigrant newly enrolled in an English as New Language (ENL) program offered at a community center in northern Indiana. Along with native language support and persistent efforts in employing methods to alleviate the reticence and isolation exhibited in this child, a plan of action research was established, using as its basis a set of emic sociocultural concepts unique to the Japanese education system in order to redress these negative qualities. Max Van Manen's (1977) theory of reflectivity provides a theoretical foundation from which the teacher action research conducted herein locates intellectual stability and a thoughtful, culturally informed approach. The results of the research suggest the need for a heightened understanding and appreciation for the creation and maintenance of a multiculturally responsive classroom in granting individual students the autonomy and respect necessary for meaningful language usage to take place.

Keywords: preschool, early literacy, action research, reflectivity, multicultural education, Japan

General Overview

This research study was conducted at the ENL (English as a New Language) preschool of an Indiana community center, which functions as both a daycare, in allowing parents a means of child care while they are in adult ENL classes, and an enrichment program, in providing a curriculum for the educational development of their children. The ENL program itself utilizes the High Scope Curriculum, a pedagogical framework for early childhood education that focuses on student-centered and student-initiated activities and stresses adult-child interaction through participation, reflective questioning, and scaffolding

(Schweinhardt, 2003). Currently enrolled in the program are ten children speaking four different languages, ranging in age from three to five years. A brief case study composed prior to the undertaking of the present action research provided a general survey of these children, their situation and interactions, as well as information regarding the classroom itself, its organization and its curriculum.

This case study provided a rationale for a program of action research in the preschool to address the difficulty with which the newest student (a four-year-old Japanese boy, hereinafter referred to as “H”) has adjusted to the program, to his teachers and to his fellow classmates. Enrolled during the third quarter of 2013, H had been in attendance for approximately seven months at the time of this study. During his first weeks of attendance, he would seldom engage in activities or respond, whether verbally or physically, to the directions of preschool volunteers. He would instead stand around the peripheries of the classroom and observe the other children, often while sobbing. After the preschool program coordinator discovered that I spoke Japanese, she invited me into the preschool to ascertain and hopefully positively influence, through shared language, the unknown factors causing this behavior. Though the behavior did seem to diminish, despite my regular attendance since our first introduction and my numerous attempts to make him comfortable in what was at the time a new setting, this behavior still manifested itself in a variety of ways: quiet observation or brief narration of classmate behavior or statement on classroom protocol, sudden outbreaks of quiet sobbing, and standing on the peripheries during a class-wide activity.

Problem and Purpose

Through my early interactions and observations before and after the case study, an appreciable behavioral difference between the majority of the preschool students and H became the focal point of action research. Much progress has been made since I first met H, and even more since I began looking at the issues he has experienced through a more thoughtful analytical lens; yet, at the same time, there were still moments I found him not playing, or with a strange blank expression, at times even sobbing, all of which I was determined to affect for the better. At first, after examining more closely the ways in which H participated and interacted in the preschool, I resolved to see whether the demands of the curriculum itself, or, more narrowly, how my response to the demands

of the curriculum, created moments of disengagement or reticence on H's part. This study hopes to determine the unknown factor, or set of unknown factors, which might have been causing unseen friction for a very bright and precocious young boy. My purpose became to find a proper channel around or through this friction, one by which to guide H into the benefits and strengths of our program would serve to develop his social literacy and emerging bilingualism as a Japanese immigrant growing up in America.

Research Questions

My research questions focus on why such moments, unique in this particular classroom environment (as no other children exhibited quite the same behavior or response to intervention), were still occurring despite my continual efforts to make H comfortable in an enriching learning environment, aided by those of our preschool program supervisor and adult volunteers. My apprehensions regarding the possible effect (or “ineffect”) of the curriculum for H were aroused as a result of honest, though rudimentary, understandings of contentious Japanese sociocultural issues in education. The kind of communicative language teaching that provides a basis for the High Scope Curriculum, and the constructivist pedagogy found at its core, are often cited as an awkward fit at best and totally incompatible at worst (Seargent, 2008; Shimizu, 2010). The body of criticism and debate surrounding these issues, however, as I understood them, spoke only to education as it existed for students *in* Japan, not the essentially American education of a Japanese emigrant. Curiosity struck me: I wondered if the philosophy of Japanese education stretched further than national borders and if “education” is more than the sum of its academic parts in the vocabulary or theory of its country of origin. I wondered if H's frequent trips to Japan, his life outside the preschool living in a two-generation household of monolingual Japanese family, and his close relationship to his mother could constitute a strong desire, though not in a conscious way, for an educational setting, a linguistic setting, a social setting more in line with what he might receive were he still in Japan.

This idea gains notable stock when we consider one of the findings of my case study, one that has been repeatedly observed before and since: H, at four-years-old, does not have a firm understanding of national boundaries, saying at different points such things as “there are

three Japans [as in three countries]” and how frequently within a short timeframe he goes to Japan, despite rarely leaving the state. On the other hand, he has an inchoate notion of who is, what is, and how it is to be Japanese, citing Japanese people, Japanese language, and Japanese action in opposition to what appears to be a generalized sense of “other”. Notions of this kind are to be expected, as “it is relatively easy for immigrant children to change extrinsic cultural traits... but the intrinsic values of a culture are more deeply ingrained and much more integral to the individual’s identity” (Coelho, 1994, p.312). In observance of such an awareness of Japanese identity, I sought in the course of my action research answers to these questions:

1. How does H bring his sociocultural predispositions to the classroom?
2. How does my involvement in the preschool encourage or hamper H’s full expression of sociocultural predispositions?
3. What are the most efficient methods for creating a more culturally considerate approach?

Literature Review

To begin, it is pertinent to underscore why the above questions, perhaps very specific in their focus on the sociocultural background of one child, are being held in general when the composition of our preschool is, in particular, heterogeneous and culturally-diverse. Aside from the concerns regarding the behavior of H, the long-term benefits of participation in a preschool in general, and particularly a preschool such as ours built upon the High Scope Curriculum model and offered free of charge, are shown to have considerable impact on the future success of students in academic, social, and personal spheres (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Ludwig and Miller, 2007). The literature divides the quality of a preschool program into two separate, but interrelated categories of structure and process, the former encompassing “caregiver’s background, curriculum, or reported characteristics of the program” and the latter referring to “children’s direct experience with people and objects...the ways teachers implement activities and lessons, and the nature and quality of interactions” (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009, p.66).

While the ability of the High Scope Curriculum, for example, to positively impact lifelong outcomes of participants is certainly

demonstrable, a piece of the puzzle seems to be missing when we examine the question of whether or not meaningful education is taking place: “the availability of a demonstrably effective curriculum and procedural fidelity with respect to delivery of that curriculum are not likely to be sufficient to ensure student learning” (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009, p.76). So what can account for the discrepancy in outcome between an emphasis solely on the structural components of a curriculum and the learning of the children it is intended to service? That which ensures success in learning, in the simplest terms, can be said to be the “sensitive” interaction and instructional quality on the part of the teacher (Burchinal et al., 2008). Sensitivity to both students and the act of teaching alike is itself an integral part of what shapes a reflective and successful teacher (Van Manen, 2008, p.5).

The important social and academic gains of preschool participation find less a basis in the exact curriculum in which a parent enrolls his or her child and more so in the quality of the attention to the processes with which the child engages and is engaged by. The awareness of this fact of quality instruction, in conjunction with its far-reaching social, academic, and cognitive implications, is highly appreciable not only in regard to those who exhibit trouble with classroom and peer engagement like H, but to all the children of the preschool. Indeed quality instruction matters a great deal to all students, regardless of background and at every level of education; at no point, be it in elementary or high school, can a student benefit in any conceivable way from what might be felt as the insensitivity of a teacher.

Concerns as to what exactly constitutes “quality instruction” in a preschool setting, and its ultimate purpose in cultivating meaningful engagement and activity, still remain unaddressed. In a bilingual or multilingual preschool environment, like H’s classroom, successful program preparation and instruction can be qualified at least in part by the incorporation of “multicultural educational practices, children’s native language and culture, an ESL component... [and] a conscientious effort in diversifying... staff and personnel practices (Fernandez, 2000, pg. 162). These elements recognize the ways in which “home language of bilingual children is tied to their culture, and that culture prescribes appropriate ways of processing information and gaining knowledge” (Chang, 1993).

Before I met H, I was placed in the preschool for my skill in the

Japanese language, which I used and still use with H alongside English. In this way, taken as one component of quality multilingual preschool instruction, the presence of H's native language has always been in use. Still underdeveloped was Fernandez's (2000) provision of "multicultural educational practices." Though the aforementioned incongruences and culture clash between western educational ideologies and Japanese social apparatuses are well-noted, research on a potential reconciliation of these through adopting foundations of educational ideology in a foreign (i.e. non-Japanese) classroom structure is of significantly lower quantity. For that reason, I strived to uncover the possibilities of such reconciliation and its efficacy in my classroom.

Salient in the Japanese preschool are the three interdependent concepts of *amae* (甘え, emotional dependence), *sabishii* (寂しい, loneliness), and *omoiyari* (思い遣り, sympathetic consideration), the first two being stressed for my purposes here. Expanding on the work of psychoanalyst Takeo Doi (1973) to investigate emic social concepts that underlie socialization in Japan, Akiko Hayashi (2011) explained that these three "form a triad of emotional exchange, which although not unique to Japan or to the Japanese preschool, have a particular cultural patterning and salience in Japan and in the Japanese approach to the socialization of emotions in early childhood" (p.24). It is important to note that these words and the notions implicit in them are not "methodologies" in a formal sense or a set of terminologies irremovable from early childhood pedagogy in Japan, but instead operate in everyday language to describe complex social interaction as "cultural scripts or as forms of culturally embedded logic" (Hayashi, 2011). Nonetheless, these words are a common feature of the pedagogic repertoire of an ordinary Japanese preschool instructor when asked to reflect on their own teaching and are numbered among the many different concepts children are exposed to in and outside of schooling (Hayashi, 2011).

The Japanese preschool is, however, run with awareness of certain overarching themes of autonomy and deference, summarized in the terms *mimamoru* (見守る, to watch over; lit: "see and protect") and *machi no hoiku* (待ちの保育 lit: "the childrearing of waiting"). What might appear to be a shirking of duty to a western childcare provider is in reality a conscientious wholesome belief in the capability and need for children to engage in their own social practice outside the arbitration or will of an adult: "Japanese educators explained that the underlying

rationale of non-intervention...this strategy of supporting children's social-emotional development by holding back and waiting... is to give the opportunity to handle problems on their own, with a minimum assistance from teachers or adults" (Hayashi & Tobin, 2014, p.30). In such a way, the Japanese preschool and kindergarten teacher adheres to the belief that they as an adult, though ably providing students structure and guardianship in their role as an experienced educator, can never authentically replicate without displacing and diminishing for a child the natural developmental experience of what it is *to be* a child.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework which supported my action research was that of reflectivity, namely Van Manen (1977)'s three levels of reflectivity: (1) technical rationality, (2) practical action, and (3) critical reflection. The three levels, each based on different content areas of social sciences (empirical-analysis, hermeneutic-phenomenology, and critical theory grouped with psychoanalytical theory, respectively), are extrapolated by Van Manen to encompass the levels of practical awareness or knowledge from which an individual teacher bases decisions, and subsequently tailors action. The definition of what constitutes practicality (i.e., praxis, real-world application as differentiated from inoperable theory or armchair philosophy) for a teacher in a given scenario can be placed along any part of this threefold hierarchy.

At the first level, technical rationality concerns itself with "a set of principles, theories, and technical-practical recommendations which seem appropriate for the practical task of achieving certain objectives of curriculum development", or simply, "a means to an end" (Van Manen, 1977, p.226). The second level, practical action, emphasizes curriculum-focused motivation whereby "the teacher analyzes student and teacher behaviors to see if and how goals are met...an attitude that embraces these principles [economy, efficiency, and effectiveness] as the criteria for practical action" (Van Manen, 1977, p.226). At the third and final level of reflectivity, critical reflection, practical action "address[es]...the question of the worth of knowledge and... involves a constant critique of domination, of institutions, and of repressive forms of authority...; a distortion-free model of a communication situation that specifies social roles and social structures of a living together in unforced communication" (Van Manen, 1977, p.227). Perhaps important

to note for each of Van Manen's levels is that "practicality" is inherent throughout; no level is impractical as such but, through operation in a different framework, targets different kinds of practicality, the third given the attribute of achieving the greatest good.

Setting, Participants, and Limitations

The setting for my action research is the same described in the earlier overview: an Indiana community center that provides parents the opportunity to enroll their children in an ENL preschool. H attends the preschool twice a week, usually for the full three hours, during which time a variety of activities and play are offered. While attendance can vary on any given day, approximately four to seven children attend preschool along with H. These classmates provided a contrast and means of comparison for H in my case study, but, because the understanding and positive influence of H's behavior itself occupies my primary purpose in this research, and because the unique sociocultural approaches accorded therewith constitute the means to achieve that end, I avoid bringing other children into the discussion, except where to best allow a fuller understanding of the impact of the emic sociocultural concepts applied.

It is also important to note my position in the preschool, in conjunction with its responsibilities in providing state-regulated childcare service, to establish the proper limitations of my research. I effectively occupy the position of an assistant at this preschool, where I work under the ENL program supervisor, herself responsible for ensuring the mandates of the High Scope Curriculum are followed in terms of both the kinds of structural and process quality discussed in the literature above. She, as a salaried employee charged with the program as a whole, is subject to regular reviews conducted by both state and district personnel. As a result, for the sake of both her and my own future employment, it was mutually decided that any direct alteration of the curriculum would best be kept to a minimum.

My research and lessons thus emerged in a very narrow way: to help H by attempting to foster opportunities to experience *amae* and *sabishii* through *mimamoru* without excessive alteration to the curriculum of the preschool and its demand for certain forms of teacher action in the preset structure of an average day. Although the High Scope Curriculum does allow and encourage student autonomy, areas of overlap between these guidelines and concept of *mimamoru* and *machi no hoiku* give

rise to ambiguities regarding the question of degree (“How little is too little?”). For instance, prominent in US schools is an emphasis first on “choice”, valued because it is believed to foster intrinsic motivation and thereby to facilitate learning” and the related notion that “children learn best when they choose the activity; if you choose for them, they resist, they are less engaged, and they learn less” (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). However, in schools of this kind, I believe an intervention or interruption by teacher in the autonomy of “choice” would take place much earlier than that in school operated with a greater emphasis on the mindset of *machi no hoiku*. Through the implementation of my lessons, I attempted to bring into accord both the demands of the curriculum and the positive influence I sought for H through my adoption of approaches informed by *machi no hoiku*

Data Sources and Data Collection for Action Research

In light of the limitations of modifying the curriculum, my lessons consisted of applying the concepts of *amae*, and *sabishii*, under a stance of *mimamoru*, in a piecemeal fashion to my interactions with H, and in general maintaining a disposition of watchfulness as part of my interpretation of the tenets of *machi no hoiku*, for the critical purpose of reflecting on the efficacy and quality of these concepts, as well as their correlation with Van Manen’s three levels of reflectivity. This was done over the course of approximately three weeks. The vast majority of data was collected through direct observation, followed by note-taking, after application of these culturally-aligned mini-lessons; journaling both before and after the two days per week H attended the preschool; and perusal of academic literature on the subject. It is important to note that these highly qualitative sources of data, especially the useful tools of journaling and note-taking, align directly with the kind of reflectively inherent in the process of action research (Sagor, 2011).

Findings of Reflective Action Research

If I were to place my actions with regard to H prior to my undertaking of the preschool-wide case study, even at our first meeting months ago, somewhere along Van Manen’s (1977) three levels of reflectivity, they would most reasonably fall close to the second level: practical action. At that time, sobbing and standing on the peripheries of an activity were prevalent in his behavior. Going through my field notes and journal

entries from that period, little emphasis was placed on explicit cultural or social factors that were more likely in operation. Instead, my focus was on the formal material of the preschool, H's place in its structure and not, I realize now, on H's position within its processes.

My colleagues and I immediately tried to "fix" the behaviors we saw as negative, though we placed no articulated emphasis on why or how they should be conceived as such. My actions were simply an effort to stop the crying, to prod engagement in the activity with respect to the smooth flow of the preschool, to elicit the opposite of what I saw through use of language, and not granting the proper level of versatility to a situation I unfortunately preconceived as strictly binary: on or off, smiling or crying, playing or shying away, speaking or silence, practical or impractical. Indeed, "fixing H" formed the basis for my entering the preschool as an assistant: getting H to stop crying and to play like everyone else. While the presence of a student's first language in the classroom is an extremely vital component of bilingual education (Fernandez, 2000, p.160), and though my daily lighthearted conversations with H about the rainbows he saw and the buses on which he rode certainly did have a positive effect on his attitude each morning, a sociocultural appreciation of his presence, no matter how many rainbows we discussed in Japanese, could only provide so much.

After researching literature ranging in subject from shyness and behavioral disorders to the labyrinth of maternal attachment theory, nothing struck me with quite the same force as did the work of Akiko Hayashi (2011), forenamed above for her comprehensive treatment of reflection in Japanese preschools. Upon discovering her work, my appreciation of practicality and levels of reflectivity began to move closer to the third of Van Manen's (1977) scale: critical reflection. By taking the stance of *mimamoru*, preventing myself from immediately trying to jump into "fixing" the "problem" at hand, I instead began to shift attention towards both action and non-action for the purpose of "establishing interpersonal and social conditions necessary for genuine self-understanding, emancipatory learning, and critical consciousness" (Van Manen, 1977, p.221). How this was achieved for each of the different emic concepts active in the Japanese preschool is discussed in the three subsections below:

Lonely Bananas: *Sabishii*

For the first concept, *sabishii* (loneliness), I appropriated a method commonly employed by preschool workers and mothers to entice children to eat food they may not enjoy (Hayashi, 2011). There have been many occasions over the past few months on which H would refuse to eat during our mid-morning snack—a time not only to energize the children for the rest of the day but also an opportunity for less formal or less structured communication between peers and assistants, as well as an introduction to implicit concepts of western dining etiquette and “table manners.” A few of these times, his non-participation would escalate into sobbing, which would lead either me or another assistant to try to comfort H or ask if he would prefer another food altogether. The instant attention of this immediate “Oh no, what’s wrong?” response, closely aligned with a gray area between the means-to-and-end of technical rationality and the tunnel-vision practicality of practical action, might have obstructed a more considerate type of address characteristic of critical reflection.

Of all the students, I knew H to be the least picky where and when he did engage, and I thought I might try the kind of appeal to social empathy implicit in the notion of *sabishii*. So during snack time, I asked H if he did not think the piece of banana he received was lonely compared to all the others (which were being heartily devoured) and he picked it up, sort of stared at it for a brief moment, and then began to eat it. He then went on to play with his other food, consuming it in short order. The application of the concept of *sabishii* during snack time was repeated twice in a similar context and much to the same effect (in that there were foods eaten that nonetheless were not particularly enjoyed). Eating a banana might seem in itself a trivial step, but I believe this kind of routine and behavior is imperative for H to remain active in the preschool. Presenting the opportunity for activity might go unnoticed or underdeveloped when the action itself is so strongly anticipated or desired, but there is causation here. Only through invitation, continual engagement, and the activity made available thereby in the preschool will H best be able to successfully integrate and reap the benefits of second language exposure and acquisition, as well as the fundamental literacy and social skills our program works to strengthen.

Playing with Margie: *Amae*

Each day H brings with him to preschool a small pink stuffed mouse named “Margie”, which was given to him by his mother when he first began attending. I never paid a great deal of attention to this mouse, thinking, as the preschool supervisor and others did, it was comfort item of sorts meant to remind him of his mother. Interestingly, though, Margie usually stayed tucked away in H’s rucksack, always to be found in his personal cubby by the entrance to the preschool. Margie only saw the light of day during *playtime*, when H would walk her around the room while watching other children. After reading about how the concept of *amae* (emotional dependence) and a similar example noted by Hayashi, Karasawa, and Tobin (2009) of a young Japanese kindergartener “clinging to her mother’s leg when she’s dropped off at school and her daily routine of focusing on possession of a teddy bear and then whining when she loses control of it” (p.39) factored into the presence of a stuffed animal, I began to look more closely. The teddy bear mentioned in the example is a socialization tool used to express “immaturity, loneliness, and desire for connection” (Hayashi, Karasawa, & Tobin 2009, p.40).

After reading this, and in order to test its veracity in the circumstances of H, I observed when he retrieved Margie from his rucksack and what appeared to be his purpose in doing so. I discovered that, first, he would introduce me to Margie, coming up to my seat, saying her name and waving her around. Then, after I greeted her back, he would walk away and watch others play in different areas of the classroom. Where before I saw this peripheral watching as an “issue” in general terms (in that it seemed to be that H did not want or did not know how to play with others), I soon after realized that showing Margie about the room was actually an *invitation* to others for play. A few times H would physically present Margie to other children, extending her out as though he wanted to give her away. This behavior led to the following point, one where another moment of discovery occurred.

Inviting Friends: *Mimamoru*

At those points when H would show Margie to other children, the most common result was, as one might expect, a wrestling match. Before understanding the expression of *amae*, confrontations of this kind were something by which I was often chagrined, thinking “Not only does H have trouble communicating with other children, when he finally does,

he's met with resistance.” Raised voices and violent tugs signaled to other teachers that there was a problem in need of correcting, and, of course, the practical action in such a scenario would be to prevent anyone from getting hurt. I would often break up the fight, saying how Margie was H's toy that he brought from home and if H did not want to use it to play with other children, it was not required of him. The two went on their way and similar little spats like this would emerge from time to time. After reading about how a correlative situation might occur in a Japanese preschool, I can say with relative confidence how wrong I was! Not only had I misdiagnosed the purpose of Margie, but my intervention was too quick and too eager, maybe because of my sympathies for H, to allow for H to engage in the real social consequences of his actions. At the outset of a different incident, I calmed myself, watched, and waited to see what would happen with the understanding of *mimamoru* that,

Children know that their teacher is watching them and that if the situation gets too rough or out of control, that the teacher is there to help them. The teacher's watching in this way gives the children the confidence and security they need to try to work things out on their own. (Hayashi, 2011, p.90)

I was amazed to see that, after a little back and forth, the child to whom H had showed Margie picked up another toy nearby and began using it to play. At one point, H had even verbally responded to his playmate, saying “OK!” at the request to put Margie on the back of a toy car. While this kind of response was not always seen during the three weeks of observation (as sometimes the other child would be more possessive and unwilling to share at all), since my choice to relax my immediate response to H's involvement in the classroom, I have observed not only less sobbing but more interaction, and above all, more language usage.

Conclusions and Implications

Such an emergence of second language usage, one that sparked primarily the mindful participatory supervision of a situation already and perpetually unfolding, for the purpose of active and meaningful communication in a play activity, notably undergirds the purpose of my endeavor in this study. To create an atmosphere sensitive to the

sociocultural, in the broadest terms, and personal, in the most narrowed, identity of a student is first, I believe, to allow these things the space, time, and respect to operate, and in their operation, to *be* as they are. In every classroom where a mixture of language and culture is found, this of course can lead to what we as educators might call “trouble spots”: confrontation, disagreement, confusion, ambiguity; but we must be aware and critical of the fact that these points of conflict themselves get framed as unnatural, as a “problem” in need of “fixing”, instead of a relationship or process to be understood.

The discomfort of these moments is in reality an invitation for a deeper understanding, providing directions to a more meaningful place for student engagement. If there is a critique leveled against noting how inspiring a four year old to eat a banana has any effect on communication, how is it that we as individuals come to a point where we feel able to risk any communication at all, and grow through language and through participation in a community it signals? There first must be a situation, a context, and above all, an awareness of how we are and what we do, before the higher communicative function of language can not only emerge with active meaning, but actually have a place in which to have meaning.

Although it might contend with the “action” of action research in some minute way, I believe my reflection across Van Manen’s (1977) three levels brought to my awareness the insight provided by the emic sociocultural concepts above, allowing me to see how my own concerns and efforts to fit H into the preschool as I saw it, ironically prevented that very thing from happening. In embracing and adopting the stance of *mimamoru*, in tandem with others, I gained the opportunity to step back and understand, allowing H his right to explore and socialize. As Akiko Hayashi (2011) suggests, the kind of observant waiting that I have experimented with is not “a passive absence of action but instead a strategic deployment of non-action, a strategy” (p.81). This decision may appear to skirt the curriculum’s call for “teacher-supported activities”, but I feel as though I may have over-supported H in the past, trying to build a bridge to the preschool for him, when a more delicate scaffold was the only thing needed to empower him to begin building his own.

In the spirit of critical reflection, and its “aim to create doubt and critique of ongoing actions” (Van Manen, 2008), I have to ask myself (and others are certainly justified in doing the same): what is the actual

significance of all this, outside of the immediate? While comforting to know that H has made leaps and bounds in interacting with others in the preschool, what comes next? I think anyone can anticipate the difficulty of doing justice to a question of that weight while I attempt to bring this account of my research to a close, but I would still offer that H's increased level of bright, positive engagement in the preschool can only benefit him and his future education. As Magruder et al remind us:

children learn by engaging in daily interactions and experiences with peers and skilled adults... when provided a safe, nurturing, and culturally and linguistically responsive environment in which to learn, [they] communicate their experiences and discoveries...[and] the more interesting and interactive the conversations are that children take part in, the more language they learn. (Magruder, Hayslip, Espinosa, & Matera, 2013).

The findings, I believe, deepen the concept of providing a “culturally and linguistically responsive environment”. In my application of these concepts, a kind of internalization of cultural aspects took place. When the word “response” can be understood almost passively, as a kind of reactionary in-the-moment provision of a response, located within an understanding that students always bring a certain cultural *something* to the classroom which ought to be respected, my work with H, aided by the core tenets of action research, endorses a more informed, learned, critically-aware stance of heightened appreciation and identification with *what* it is: the essence of the unique cultural and linguistic substance that students bring to the classroom as English language learners. Thus “responding” to difference as difference gave way to “appreciating” difference as a natural phenomenon. By allowing H a place in the preschool, this appreciation provided a pathway for moving forward to provide the most accommodating, comfortable, and sensitive educational setting for all of our students.

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