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Jason Antaya
California State University, Monterey Bay

**Making Our Way: The Incorporation of Intermediate Fluent Bilingual Students'
Personal Experience and Primary Language in a Mainstream Humanities Class at
the Middle School Level**

Jason Antaya

Action Thesis Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Jason Antaya

Approved by the following Masters of Arts in Education Thesis Committee:

_____   12/9/10
Nicholas Meier, Ph.D., Advisor   Date

_____   12/9/2010
Bill Jones, Ph.D.   Date

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Abstract

Teachers in middle school classrooms in California often have groups of students still in the process of building fluency in English while trying to succeed at learning grade level content. These same students bring with them a wealth of background knowledge as well as experience with two or more languages in their life. This research project explored the question of how to incorporate intermediate fluent bilingual students' personal experience and primary language to improve a teacher's practice in a sixth grade Humanities class. The project used a qualitative teacher action research design as its methodology. Evidence was collected using a teacher journal, classroom observation notes, and student work samples. There were three main findings in this research. First, the presentation and encouragement of the use of multiple languages during instruction had a positive effect on student motivation and participation. Next, student writing samples generated accurate assessment information relating to both language acquisition and understanding of content. Finally, the offer of multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate and reflect on learning was beneficial to the acquisition of English and content area knowledge. Study findings raise some questions regarding the combination of English and other languages in the learning environment as well as how assessment can be used to improve learning.

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Chapter 1

The complex puzzle of providing an effective classroom environment for intermediate bilingual students has captured my heart and imagination since I began teaching in the California public schools fourteen years ago. Since then I have met and worked with hundreds of young people who are vibrant, intelligent, and reasonably fluent in two languages: Spanish and English. Across all content areas, I have worked to facilitate the acquisition of fluent English skills for these students while simultaneously providing a rigorous academic curriculum. I have found this to often be a difficult task to accomplish.

Teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students in my classroom has always called for innovative lesson planning and remaining flexible enough to make adjustments. However, over the years, one constant joy has been to communicate with my students in both their home language and their second language about their personal experience. Furthermore, I have often found my interest in my students' personal experience to be a valuable asset to my teaching practice. The positive relation I perceive between my student's primary language and their personal experience and the acquisition of their second language is well researched and documented (Cummins, 1991; Escamilla, 2006). I am confident and excited to think that a study of the incorporation of these aspects in my teaching is likely to yield much information about how I can improve my own practice.

The goal of creating a successful paradigm for the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students similar to those in my classroom has been shared historically by other educators as well as the wider population. In fact, the adoption of proposition 227 by California voters in 1998 demanded a state wide educational policy change that prioritized the use of English in the classroom while restricting the instructional use of the native languages students speak. This policy conflicts with findings of a major study into effective practice for English learners (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Across the state, schools adjusted their programs accordingly by reducing

bilingual students' access to instruction in their home language[1]. In my middle school most bilingual students were already receiving instruction in English entirely. Nevertheless, teachers and school administrators began to try to clearly articulate a plan to accelerate the education of linguistically diverse students by using English a vast majority of the time.

While the current academic program for intermediate fluent bilingual students at my middle school stems in part from the regulations stated in Proposition 227, the large number of intermediate fluent bilingual students in the mainstream classes is not just a result of statewide educational policy shifts. There has always been a tension at the school site program level between a bilingual student's needs for additional and specialized English instruction, the utilization of their native language, and their need to be exposed to grade level content in English. Most recently, the instructional leadership team has increased reliance on an English Language Mainstream (ELM) approach for students at the intermediate level of fluency in English and with a long history of education in the United States. This approach replaces another in which English was taught in separate English Language Development (ELD) classes[2].

Statement of the Problem

While initially skeptical of the policy of placing intermediate fluent bilingual students in a mainstream class, I now believe that it has potential to facilitate academic success for many intermediate fluent bilingual students. This type of program emphasizes grade level academic expectations in content areas and increased interaction with fluent English speakers. These types of educational environments have been shown to be beneficial for intermediate fluent students' academic and language development (Collier, 1995). This, in addition to the previous reflections on my own practice, have caused me to ask the following research question for further study: How can I use the incorporation

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[1] A five year study that evaluated the effects of the implementation of Proposition 227 on California's English learner population found that overall the amount of students receiving bilingual programs in the state dropped from thirty to eight percent (American Institute for Research, WestEd, 2006).

[2] ELM and ELD are names of program models for English learners in my school district. English learners in an ELM program receive grade level content instruction one hundred percent of the time. Students in an ELD model receive some degree of English instruction separate from their grade level peers.

of my intermediate fluent bilingual students' personal experience and primary language to improve my practice in a sixth grade mainstream Humanities core class[3]?

The exploration of these aspects of my classroom experience has helped improve my instruction for the emerging bilingual students in my classroom. It has also given me a deeper understanding of the contradiction I have perceived between English dominant educational policy and my understanding about the ways that bilingual students learn academic content. My colleagues who also taught sixth grade Humanities were a valuable resource for me during this study. We met twice monthly to collaborate on educational issues and study data. I shared and discussed findings from this study with them. My hope is that this type of "grass roots" collaboration between teachers will, in turn, transform our school from what I consider a good school into an excellent school for culturally and linguistically diverse students. I also hope that my reporting of this study can give an interesting portrayal of instructional issues at the classroom level that relate to educational policies for bilingual students across the state.

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[3] A Humanities mainstream core class consists of two periods. One period is Language Arts and one period is Social Studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Following the passing of Proposition 227, The California State Department of Education commissioned a report to investigate the effectiveness of "English Only" policies for the education of California's diverse students (AIR & WestEd, 2006). This report found no conclusive evidence that this shift in educational policy had any effects, positive or negative, on the overall success of culturally and linguistically diverse students in California's public schools. The inconclusiveness of this report demonstrates a continued general need to explore more deeply the lively and crucial debate that surrounds the use of language in California's classrooms.

Because this debate is an old one in California, the first part of this review of the literature will present the education background for second language learners in California. This will be followed by a discussion of theoretical frameworks that have been established to help visualize effective education for linguistically diverse students. The discussion on theory will start with the concept of additive and subtractive education (Lampert, 1975 as cited in Cummins, 2001). Following this, the discussion will explore both linguistic and cultural aspects of learning theory for intermediate fluent bilingual students.

The final section of this review will discuss theory on classroom teaching practice for intermediate fluent bilingual students. In particular, strategies for incorporating the personal experience and primary language of intermediate fluent bilingual students will be featured. A discussion of case studies of previous attempts to include intermediate bilingual students' experience and primary language in the classroom will conclude the review of literature for this action research project.

Background

Improved teaching practices have far reaching implications for all learners. However, intermediate fluent bilingual students are an important subgroup that has unique educational needs. It is important to remember that these students make up ten percent of the overall school population nationwide (Lazarin, 2006). Furthermore, while more and more bilingual students and their families can be found anywhere in the country, the

majority of students learning English as a second language have been historically found in a few states. California is one of these states with twenty-four percent of its student population learning English (EdSource, 2010). Compared to this, forty-four percent of the students at the middle school in this study are English learners. Such statistics make it evident that there are a lot of students who stand to profit from better teaching practices in the classroom.

The importance of serving such a large minority population of students in our classrooms is compounded by evidence that shows that English learners are scoring much lower on major assessments than their fluent English counterparts (Lazarin, 2006). For example, 29% of English learners scored at or above the basic level of reading at the eighth grade level compared to 75% of fluent English speakers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2005. On one hand, this achievement gap between English learners and other students makes sense in that a student still learning a second language is, by definition, going to have a more difficult time on an English language exam. On the other hand, this evidence points to the inadequate job that schools have done to meet the different needs English learners have as students learning both content standards and English fluency simultaneously.

The achievement gap between English learners and other students has not gone unnoticed (Lazarin, 2006; Ovando, 2003). Many educational reforms and curriculum solutions have tried to target English learner achievement. Unfortunately, the achievement gap between English learners and native English speakers still persists after decades of reform movements in the United States. At the same time, current school accountability structures rely heavily on testing results for English learners. A discussion of theories for second language learning will be helpful for envisioning how this achievement gap can be finally overcome.

Additive Versus Subtractive Education

The theoretical framework of additive versus subtractive education examines educational reform for culturally and linguistically diverse students and proposes a framework for redefining the way teachers and institutions serve these students (Cummins, 2001). Additive education is when teachers see their role as adding a new

language and culture to their students' already existing base of knowledge. In opposition, subtractive education describes the education process as one of replacing or ignoring what the students already bring to a classroom setting. According to the additive versus subtractive paradigm, the effectiveness of an educational program for linguistic and culturally diverse students depends on its ability to be additive.

There are four main characteristics in an additive model of education: (1) including the students' language and culture at the school, (2) encouraging community participation in the education process, (3) providing curriculum that stimulates intrinsic motivation, (4) professionals at the school becoming advocates for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Cummins, 2001). These characteristics make it is evident that success at school for language minority students depends on a teacher's negotiation of a wide range of factors both inside and outside the classroom environment. An important distinction of this model is the teacher's responsibility for both providing an inclusive environment while actively finding ways to become an advocate for his or her students.

The framework of an additive versus subtractive education can also be used to critically examine the quality of the interactions between teachers and students in a school setting (Valenzuela, 1999). In this view, a politics of caring exists in any classroom that has language minority students. These politics can occur in a subtractive manner when members of a teaching staff begin to view the low academic performance of language minority students as evidence of them not caring about school. Meanwhile, language minority students who are struggling academically can begin to perceive their teachers as not caring for them. Because of this different understanding, the teachers and students can become unable to work together to create a healthy learning environment. A part of this subtractive environment is a teacher's view that academics are the exclusive domain of the schools. As a consequence, opportunities to foster achievement by building on students' identity are often ignored.

Additive education takes into account the fact that teachers and the students often have different backgrounds (Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, it tries to bridge the gap between the different images of and expectations for the daily interactions between adult educators and their students at a school. Additive education actively branches out to the

surrounding community as well. Its goal is to establish schools that welcome language minority students and find ways to help these students succeed while advocating for a more equity between groups in the larger society.

Second Language Learning

Much research on successful second language acquisition emphasizes the positive linguistic correlation between a student's proficiency in their primary and secondary language (Cummins, 1991). The necessity to incorporate a student's cultural knowledge and prior experience to improve second language learning has been found to be no less important (Wong Fillmore, & Snow, 2000). For these reasons, this section is divided into two subsections. It will begin with a discussion of linguistic theory related to second language learning and follow with a discussion of the effects of culture on language learning.

Linguistic theory.

Second language learning for school is a complex process that can be visualized as a continuum of different linguistic elements (Cummins, 1979; Collier, 1995). To begin with, theory suggests that humans possess an innate ability to learn how to communicate orally. This ability is sometimes categorized as basic intercommunicative skills (BICS) (Cummins, 1979) and encompasses most of the communication that a student will naturally have with peers during the course of a school day. At the same time, students are consciously acquiring language in school through the formal teaching of language. The ability of a student to use this type of language taught in school has been called cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979). It is important to note that communicative and academic language acquisition occurs in the same way for both a student's first and second language.

The first and second languages also interrelate as they develop (Collier, 1995). In terms of formal education, the second language of a student depends to some degree on the amount of formal education that a student receives in their first language. In other words, students with more school experience in their first language generally acquire academic English faster that those with less formal schooling in their first language. Advocates for bilingual education cite this interrelatedness of the first and second

language as reason to provide formal instruction in both languages to language minority students (Ovando, 2003).

Studies of bilingual students also point out that these students often develop language by simultaneously combining aspects of their first language and their second language (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Escamilla, 2006). These studies suggest that the English that a bilingual student uses in a classroom, therefore, is actually a representation of their dual language propensities. In this way, academic proficiency in a second language is dependent not only on experience in the first language, but also on how a student integrates both languages. Such a view stresses the importance of breaking down the dichotomy between the first and second language abilities when considering intermediate fluent students' production of a second language.

This discussion of linguistic theory for second language learning illustrates how learning can be viewed as a multidimensional continuum. Along this continuum, a student develops skills to communicate in natural as well as formal education settings. A key factor to second language learning along this continuum is the knowledge and experience a student has with his or her first language. In addition, it is also helpful to analyze how first and second languages interact together to create a bilingual students' mode of expression.

Cultural theory.

The everyday experiences of a student are central in the development of his or her language (Collier, 1995). For education, a student's experience in the classroom is of primary concern. However, it is important to consider the many contexts that exist within a student's past, present, and future experience. This discussion of language learning from a cultural perspective addresses how experiences in and out of the classroom affect the learning of intermediate bilingual students. The effects of this education will in turn be discussed in regards to its effects on overall society.

From a cultural perspective, the prevalent form of instruction in Western education can be described as essentially an oppressive practice (Freire, 1993). In a traditional classroom setting, the teacher deposits information into the minds of students and the students are supposed to express understanding of the information. This banking concept of education relies on a teacher's ability to avoid alienating his or her students

with either intellectualism or authoritarianism. Juxtaposed against this is a problem-posing education that encourages dialogue and meaning making between teacher and student as well as between the students themselves. A problem-posing approach relies on a teacher's ability to relate to students and include them in decision-making processes in the classroom.

Within the problem-posing framework of thinking, teaching becomes a politically dynamic relationship between students and their instructors (Cummins, 1997). These dynamics reflect the larger power structures that exist in a society. When students come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds their relationship with their teacher can either reinforce these dynamics or transform them. An educator's own definition of his/her role and his/her identity is a crucial part of this. This cultural perspective imbues the teacher with the responsibility for working with students on a more equal footing to achieve the most effective and liberating education possible.

The inclusion of intermediate fluent bilingual students' primary language and personal experience can be two avenues for effective and liberating instruction (Mays, 2008). Intermediate fluent bilingual students' background can serve as a barrier to school success because of the disparity between their language and perspective and those presented at school. Innovative teaching practices that emphasize students' primary language and personal experience can help overcome barriers by allowing students opportunities to share what they know and are experiencing already. Intermediate fluent bilingual students can also collaborate with their peers to build understanding. Benefits of a collaborative learning environment can also include increased student motivation and communication, two keys to successful second language learning (Collier, 1995).

From a cultural perspective, the traditional banking model used with bilingual students in many Western classrooms creates a culture of disempowerment that makes learning difficult. Opposed to this model is a model of education that works to provide critical thinking opportunities for students. This problem-solving approach to education is fostered when students are asked to share their language and knowledge from beyond the classroom while they are in the classroom. Within this cultural paradigm, a teacher's decisions about second language learning in the classroom either reinforce or question the larger political dynamics of the broader culture.

Instructional strategies.

The theoretical conception of the teacher as a facilitator of learning and mutual participant in the creation of understanding has strong support in literature that addresses technical aspects of teaching in the classroom (Gibbons, 2002; Echevarria et al, 2008). This section begins by discussing some teaching strategies that optimize the use of students' personal experience and primary language in the classroom. The discussion of theories of teaching is followed by a presentation of case studies that support the efficacy of using such approaches.

Theorists concerned with effective teaching strategies sometimes refer to the notion of schemata in the design of effective lessons (Echevarria et al, 2008). Schemata describe the basis for which any student tries to organize their knowledge of the world. A primary goal for using this theory is to find ways to help a student relate to content that is being taught in the classroom. This theory is then adapted to provide opportunities for students to use their own expressive language and access background experience in the learning process.

The activity called "Expert and Home Groups" is an example of a teaching strategy that a teacher would use within this framework (Echevarria et al, 2008). The basic idea of this strategy is that different groups of learners become 'experts' in a particular aspect of a topic. The teacher's role, in turn, is to provide groups of students with opportunities to acquire and then share their understanding with other groups. Students are able to construct their own meaning and then convey it as an authority, rather than depending on the teacher to be the dominant meaning maker.

Theorists note the importance of considering a student's background knowledge because their schemata may not match those of the culture for which a text or resource was written (Echevarria et al, 2008). Inclusion of some form of task analysis of the knowledge and language is recommended when planning for instruction. One example of a tool for planning instruction is called "Pretest with a Partner" (Gibbons, 2002). The purpose of this activity is to allow students an opportunity to preview concepts and vocabulary that will be assessed at the conclusion of a lesson or unit. Assessments made by the teacher during the activity can be used to tailor lessons that appear later in an

instructional unit. Such a lesson activity is the first step toward creating meaning in a mutual fashion with the students.

While teaching practices like those described above are part of an effective design for all students, additional measures can be made to facilitate the use of intermediate bilingual students' primary language in a mainstream setting (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). The judicious use of a student's primary language to clarify and analyze ideas presented in the grade level content is one approach. For example, a translated vocabulary list of key concepts is a way to allow students the use of their primary language as an asset for clarifying difficult words (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). Another approach is to provide students with translated copies of texts in their first language whenever possible (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). This allows students the opportunity build understanding toward critical thinking about the content discussed. Providing resources in students' first language also sends the message that students' language and culture are valued in the learning environment.

A teacher attentive to the needs of intermediate fluent bilingual students will also attend to their own delivery of English as it relates to students' first language (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). Rapid rate of speech, the use of colloquialisms, and the use of slang can cause comprehension problems for students. This is true especially for those students with little experience learning English. On the other hand, Teachers can help students by bringing extra attention to confusing homophones in English and cognates between languages. When students are made aware of the similarities and differences between languages, they can use that knowledge to make meaning (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). Attempts such as these represent a teacher's willingness to craft their own expression as part of a learning environment that invites students to learn and express themselves with confidence.

Studies conducted in classrooms with teachers and intermediate fluent bilingual students indicate that the use of personal experience and primary language has positive results (Gumperaz et al, 1999; Stritikus, 2006). Dynamic interaction between students and teachers are an example of these results. A deeper understanding of content by students was also evident in these cases.

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The implementation of cooperative groups in a classroom creates a positive shift away from the dynamic of the teacher as depositor of knowledge (Gumperaz et al, 1999). When they are allowed to collaborate, students use their strengths to exercise more power over learning decisions in the classroom. An analysis of bilingual students' conversations in cooperative groups indicates that students use both languages to operate successfully in the learning environment (Gumperaz et al, 1999). Even while engaged in seemingly casual conversations during cooperative tasks, bilingual students were observed working in both languages to make meaning in complex ways. Interestingly, these learning successes were often found go beyond the scope of the objectives of the lessons observed. This occurred in cooperative groups because bilingual students were able to raise their own linguistic concerns while negotiating meaning with their peers. What is more, the students used their abilities in both languages to their advantage while addressing these concerns as well as the content objectives. Throughout these learning experiences, the teacher played the role of a facilitator whose job it was to create the right conditions for these types of meaningful collaboration.

Another study expands the importance of the role of a teacher's attitude about language use in the classroom (Stritikus, 2006). A comparative examination between two teachers' view of the role of the primary language in literacy development illustrates advantages to the use of primary language in the implementation of reading curriculum. The classroom in which the teacher used primary language in a direct way to teach English had students with high motivation and a deeper understanding. On the other hand, the students in the classroom in which the teacher strictly used a prescribed English only program were often relegated to producing answers in workbooks. The larger implications of this dichotomy were that, in the first case, students were observed making deeper meaning about the content being taught. Whereas, in the second, it was observed that students spent the majority of the instructional time producing language that held little meaning to them.

Research about what works for intermediate fluent bilingual students reinforces the notion that these students need an environment in which they can be free to communicate with the teacher and their peers in a natural way. Teachers can foster student achievement by effectively planning to help students utilize their own personal

experience to their advantage. For teachers with bilingual students, this involves including opportunities for students to integrate their primary and secondary language to make meaning of content. While the best plans ultimately allow students to develop their own understanding and critical thinking about content, the attitude and actions of a teacher also have a profound effect on the extent to which students achieve their goals.

Summary

This review of the literature has shown that a continual investigation of effective teaching practices for California's culturally and ethnically diverse students is still appropriate and necessary. The concept of additive versus subtractive education for culturally and linguistically diverse students provided an overall theoretical framework for discussing effective schooling for these students. Next, the discussion of second language learning in terms of linguistic complexity and larger cultural implications fostered an understanding of the importance of the incorporation of students' primary language and personal experience in the classroom. Finally, examples of effective teaching practices and studies that support the use of these practices show that a teacher's attitude and technique can be powerful tools for creating success.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The goal of this study was to discover ways to utilize the incorporation of the personal experience and primary language of my intermediate fluent bilingual students so that I could improve my teaching practice in a mainstream Language Arts and Social Studies core classroom setting. Student language and academic content need to be delivered in a way that promotes student interaction within a familiar context in order to help intermediate fluent bilingual students advance to full fluency in English (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Echevarria et al., 2008). Therefore, I wanted to find out how the incorporation of intermediate fluent bilingual students' personal experience and primary language during instruction affected my teaching practice. This study of my instruction in terms of these areas was an ideal way to discover new possibilities for teaching students who are working to incorporate their knowledge of two languages with academic content and succeed in a mainstream setting.

I used a qualitative teacher action research approach in this study (Mills, 2007). This approach was an effective way to facilitate a study of my own instruction for a number of reasons. First, it allowed me to systematically examine the effects of my teaching in my usual teaching environment, which includes intermediate fluent bilingual students placed in a mainstream Language Arts and Social Studies sixth grade core class. Second, this approach helped me question my assumptions about my own teaching practice after fourteen years as a bilingual educator. Finally, I was able to share the ongoing findings of this study with other sixth grade Language Arts teachers at my school during twice monthly collaboration meetings.

Setting

The setting of this study was a public middle school located on the central coast of California. The school serves a population of about 700 students annually. At the time of the study, sixty-six percent of the school was considered proficient in English. Eighty-one percent of the students were considered bilingual or had at least one other language in the home or family environment. The vast majority of the bilingual students at the school were Hispanic and spoke or understood Spanish and English. According to the school census

during the year previous to this study, Speakers of other languages included speakers of: Cantonese (1), Ilocano (1), Korean (1), Tagalog (1), Portuguese (3), Mixteco (7), and Tarasco or Purépecha (1). It is important to note that long-term English learners at this school are not placed in separate English Language Development classes (with a few exceptions). Instead, they are placed in a mainstream classroom where they are held to the same academic standards as other bilingual and monolingual fluent English speaking students on a daily basis. This type of mainstream Language Arts and Social Studies core class is prevalent at all the grade levels at our middle school.This is the type of class that I taught during the study.

Participants

The participants in this study were the intermediate fluent bilingual students who were considered English learners (ELs) in my mainstream sixth grade Language Arts and Social Studies core classroom. Criteria for EL classification includes a performance score of a 3 or 4 overall on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). This overall score indicates that a student has an intermediate or early advanced ability to use English across the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, the students had a performance score of Basic level (3) or below on both the Math and Language Arts sections of the California Standards Test (CST). A student's score can range from Below Basic (1) to Advanced (5). All students are expected to perform at the Proficient (4) level each year. I collected data and observations from 8 students. Seven of these students were Mexican-American and spoke Spanish and English. One student was from the Phillipines and spoke English and Tagalog. Six Participants were female and two were male. Ages ranged from 11 to 12 years old.

Procedures

This study used my reflections on my teaching practice in a sixth grade Language Arts and Social Studies core classroom. For the Social Studies portion of the course curriculum, students developed skills used by historians and geographers to study ancient civilizations around the world. This course started with the study of the distant past and ended at the fall of the Roman Empire in 500 A.D. In the Language Arts portion of this

course, students read and responded to literature selections from a variety of genres, both fiction and nonfiction. Students were also expected to read and complete books from the school library on a regular basis.

The overall content knowledge objectives of this class are outlined in the California standards for Language Arts and Social Studies for sixth grade. The overall objectives also included English Language Development (ELD) standards for all four of the main domains of communication: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The course textbooks included *The Language of Literature* (2002) published by McDougal Littel and *Ancient Civilizations* (2006) published by Prentice Hall. I used an "Into, Through, and Beyond" type of lesson plan that included an agenda on a daily basis. Class agendas were determined by a pacing calendar determined by the school district and/or mutually agreed upon by the sixth grade teachers at my middle school.

Data Collection

I primarily used direct participant classroom observation logs and a teacher reflection journal to record my observations. I also collected student work samples. I collected this data across the course of an entire school year.

The direct participant classroom observations were taken in the form of notes during class instructional time. These notes identified how prepared and engaged the students were and any behavior issues as well as what types of responses the students gave in the varying group configurations during lessons in the class. I wrote in a teacher reflection journal on a daily basis after instruction. These types of data collection recorded students' use of personal experiences and language in the learning environment. I also recorded my own perceptions of my use of these aspects both during instruction and planning.

Student work samples were also used as evidence in this study. Student work samples included homework, written assignments, and assesments as well as results from multiple choice benchmark exams and quizzes. Other examples of student work were in-class assignments such as posters and pieces prepared for publication. During the year, Students organized their work in portfolios. They also wrote reflections and analyzed results in their portfolios. They kept separate portfolios and updated them at the end of each

unit of study in Language Arts and Social Studies. I analyzed these samples to discover the ways in which the students expressed knowledge of content. I also studied the ways in which the students expressed English and their native language in their work. Through this analysis I found evidence that helped me hypothesize about how I can use the incorporation of my students' prior knowledge and native language to improve my practice.

Data Analysis

I used a coding system to organize the data that I collected from direct participant classroom observations, my teacher reflection journal, and student work samples. My coding system was dependent on any common themes and interesting aberrations that emerged during the study as well as predetermined categories or themes I had derived from prior theory and research. Such themes included: students' language and culture in the classroom, community participation in the classroom, and student motivation. Learning logs, graded student work samples and assessment test results were also analyzed using standard grading scales and rubrics. Individual assignment rubrics defined evidence of the use of fluent English, self expression, and critical thinking about grade-level content. This data provided evidence that allowed me to compare ELs' response to my instruction with their fluent English counterparts'. It also fostered my communication with colleagues through the discussion of common assessments. All of this added a depth of understanding to how the incorporation of students' background and native language affected my teaching practice in a mainstream Humanities sixth grade class.

As I tried to find patterns and meaning in the data I collected. I first attached working labels to observation notes, blocks of journal text, and work samples that I collected. Next, I organized these labeled pieces of evidence into groups with similar themes so that my data was in a manageable form. In this manner, I will be able to analyze evidence that contained the same or similar themes over the course of the study. Once I had the themes established I was able to revisit them as I coded more data. In this manner, I refined categories and identified patterns that emerged.

While this process of coding was effective for analyzing my observations, the text from teacher, and student reflection journals, a second level of analysis was also helpful in

checking for assumptions I was making about the evidence. The use of concept maps was helpful for developing a visual representation of the major themes and patterns and connecting influences, either known or perceived, that were connected to student performance. I was able to review the concept maps for consistencies and inconsistencies in factors relating to my perception of my instruction and student performance. This technique allowed me to clarify any assumptions apparent in my understanding.

I shared my data with other teachers who had a similar student population during our twice monthly grade level professional development collaboration meetings. This collaboration added another dimension to the analysis of and reflection about the data. As I shared my data, I asked my colleagues to comment on themes, patterns, and factors that they recognized in their own work with intermediate fluent bilingual students at our school site. I was be able to check my own assumptions latent in my own interpretation of my findings during these periods of collaboration.

Summary

This chapter described the methods I used to execute my action research project in a middle school on the central coast of California. The principal question I tried to answer was how do I incorporate intermediate fluent bilingual students' personal experience and primary language in my teaching practice in a mainstream Humanities classroom? I used classroom observation logs, a teacher journal, and student work samples as my data. I labeled and grouped this data by predetermined and emerging themes. Afterwards, I organized the grouped evidence into concept maps to better interpret my findings and question any assumptions I was making. Finally, I shared my findings with colleagues who were teaching similar groups of students in order to further question my own understanding.

Chapter 4: Findings

I conducted the study of the incorporation of intermediate fluent bilingual students' personal experience in my teaching practice in a mainstream Humanities class at the middle school level. The study took place during the spring semester of my students' sixth grade school year. I collected data by making observation notes of eight students' participation during instructional time, recording my own reflections in a teacher journal, and collecting student work samples and assessment data.

Three major findings relating to the incorporation of the students' personal experience in my practice emerged as a result of this study.

- Finding #1: The presentation and encouragement of the use of multiple languages during instruction had a positive effect on student motivation and participation.
- Finding #2: Student writing prompts that related to personal experience generated valuable assessment information relating to language acquisition and understanding of content.
- Finding #3: Providing students with multiple and varied learning experiences was beneficial to their acquisition of English and content area knowledge.

These findings are presented as the story of my teaching a Humanities core class during one school year. This core class consisted of a period of Language Arts and a period of Social Studies for the same group of students. This story will describe how the incorporation of intermediate fluent bilingual students' personal experience in my instruction interacted with my intention to help these students acquire fluency in English and the ability to express understanding of grade level content. Each finding also has a discussion and analysis of the results. The presentation of the findings traces the issues from those more familiar to me to those less familiar and more surprising across the length of the study.

Finding #1: The presentation and encouragement of the use of multiple languages during instruction had a positive effect on student motivation and participation.

Year after year of teaching, my classrooms have been filled with many bilingual students struggling to do their academic work in English. I have often tried to discover

ways to help these students succeed by using the skills and language that they have already developed. Sometimes I am successful, other times I am not. Nevertheless, my own struggles and triumphs in the process of learning a second language to academic proficiency inspires me to continue to explore this approach as an educator. This section will trace my findings relating to my attempts to create an effective classroom environment for intermediate fluent bilingual students. Along the way, the findings substantiated some beliefs about the practices of cooperative grouping and the use of multicultural literature that I had employed previous to the study. However, I also discovered unexpected aspects in the students' learning experience that helped me continue to adapt my teaching. Examples of specific cooperative strategies students employed as well as the importance of humor for classroom culture were two surprising areas of discovery.

Cooperative group strategies.

By the time the spring semester started the classroom learning environment contained some foundational pieces. The first was that students were arranged in heterogeneous cooperative groups of four students. I managed the cooperative groups following Kagan's principles of organization and implementation (2008). Still, I constantly struggled to find ways to increase participation rates of the shy intermediate fluent bilingual students. Also, I was concerned with finding ways for the less reticent students to stay focused on discussion topics. During any cooperative group activity, I would constantly be circulating around the room redirecting conversations that veered off topic and trying to stimulate silent groups. Cooperative groups offered many opportunities for students to express themselves, but they also ran the risk of becoming irrelevant to the instruction.

I purposefully assigned students to groups with students of different gender, language fluency, and academic background in an attempt to minimize these difficulties. I figured that this would increase the amount of interaction intermediate fluent students would have with fluent students and therefore stimulate conversation. I also combined two strategies to take advantage of the cooperative groupings and build understanding. The first strategy was called, "Think-Pair-Share" and the second strategy was called, "Numbered Heads Together" (Kagan, 2008). I asked students to first reflect on a question

and then share ideas with a neighbor. Next, I asked all students in the group to share answers and formulate a new answer. Finally, I randomly picked a number so that one student in each group was required to express his or her understanding of the concept in question. My reasoning behind combining the two strategies was to allow students multiple attempts to cooperatively construct an understanding before being asked to share their ideas orally. Also, I hoped the change of formations between the students would keep the students actively considering the topic I wanted them to discuss.

Observation notes made in the class during periods when I was employing these strategies indicate that intermediate fluent students actively participated in small group discussions as well as shared responses with the larger group. In general, intermediate fluent bilingual students participated in these ways as much as the other fluent English speaking students in the class. These students also regularly took leadership roles by organizing and facilitating small group and partner activities. On one such occasion, a student took a leadership role in the group by helping another student stay on topic. It was evident that intermediate fluent students were often active and motivated to learn when they were interacting in constructed conversations about content. However, they were also just as likely to veer off topic and socialize with their peers as well.

Along with these results, there were also positive consequences to cooperative groups that happened naturally among the students. Some intermediate fluent students were very adept at constructing a more long term working relationship with their neighbors. For example, I observed a student divide and share tasks with her neighbors on two occasions that were organized by me. In the first case, the student and her neighbor, another intermediate fluent student, helped each other with their independent reading by sharing and recommending books that would help them achieve their reading goals for the quarter. In another observation, one of the same students was writing down the homework notes while the other worked to complete an assignment she was late on. This type of mutually beneficial collaboration to cope with the grade level coursework helped the girls succeed as well as establish a friendship that continued beyond the classroom.

The next time cooperative groups were selected in the classroom, one of the students established a similar relationship with a high achieving fluent student in her

group. I also observed that another intermediate fluent student formed an alliance with a high-achieving girl in her group. As in the previous examples, the students divided tasks and helped each other meet the expectations in the learning environment. I was delighted by the natural and unplanned way these relations grew from the girls' own personal experience in the classroom. It seemed that cooperative groups could foster student growth in ways I had not expected previously. These examples were part of a general trend I observed among the students. The dynamics of this trend were characterized by a mutual desire to succeed and have others in the community succeed.

However, the relationships established by the students were not always beneficial. In particular, two students had a difficult time working together and I had to intervene. While both students had worked positively with others previously, one student began to complain that another was copying her answers rather than working with her on assignments. The student claimed that she had already confronted the other on the issue and that the accused was not taking responsibility. My examination of their recent work showed that the written responses were identical. I followed by counseling the student who had been plagiarizing about the importance of honesty and asking her to write her own answers. Needless to say, the first student was no longer willing to work with the second due her mistrust. This resulted in an unhappy ending to that partnership.

The majority of student communication in these types of collaborative relationships took place in English. During the cooperative group discussions intermediate fluent bilingual students also contributed in English almost always. This use of English as the primary language for communication between students was somewhat surprising because the majority of the students had some degree of bilingualism. However, it is important to note that it was not unusual to hear Spanish being spoken in and out of the classroom at various times.

In summary, cooperative groups were a good starting point for finding ways to foster communication between students in the classroom. While generally effective, these groups required constant attention and feedback by me to function well. A surprising finding was that some intermediate fluent bilingual students developed collaborative relationships that helped them succeed academically. In addition, observations indicate that the majority of communication in the classroom was in English.

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__Humor in the classroom.__

Intermediate fluent students used their bilingual listening and speaking skills in a variety of ways. Most notable was the way in which some students mixed languages to create humor during class discussions. While there is some question as to how this humor contributed to the acquisition of content, the overall learning environment benefitted from these interjections of light-heartedness by the students.

The use of humor was first observed during a Social Studies lesson in the fall semester that covered the Ancient Middle East. During a discussion, a student purposefully switched the term, "Mesopotamia" to "Mensopotamia." The word *menso* in Spanish means dumb and the pun the student was making was inferring that inhabitants of the ancient civilization were a group of idiots. While this play on words did not really contribute to understanding of the content of the lesson, it made everyone in the student's group laugh and the entire class enjoyed the laugh when I repeated it after asking the student's permission. This humorous mix of English and Spanish served to become a point in our studies that I could refer back to as we continued. While I admit that it may be inappropriate to label an ancient civilization, "stupid," this play on words indicated a personal connection that the student was making with the curriculum. In this case, the student's bilingual ability allowed her to make a personal connection with the content she would not have had if she spoke only English.

In another example of the playful way the students interacted with the different languages in the classes, a student made a joke out of the name of an author we were studying in Language Arts. During our study of Science Fiction I was presenting the novel, *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells to the class. During an introductory discussion of the novel, the student produced the name of the title and author when prompted by me. However, instead of saying, "H.G. Wells," the student announced the author's name as "H.G. Huevo." This purposeful mispronunciation of the name brought about a chorus of laughter from the other students in the classroom as well as me. Similar to the first example, students were highly engaged in the lesson as a result of the joke. While the joke bordered on inappropriate, yet it served as a positive contribution by an intermediate bilingual student to the learning environment.

One student's use of multiple languages during class stood out because she was the only intermediate fluent student whose family was from the Philippines rather than from Mexico. Besides English, the student spoke Tagalog as well as another language indigenous to the part of the Philippines she was born in. This background as well as a gregarious personality allowed the student to begin to incorporate the Spanish language so many of her peers occasionally used around her. To her credit, the student often interacted with these occasions in a humorous way that contributed positively to the learning environment. For example, she tried to mimic a Spanish translation when asked to read the English translation of a poem in her small group. This mimicry was done in an inoffensive way so that the rest of her group began to laugh and participate in the oral language practice exercise.

Intermediate fluent bilingual students' use of humor was a delightful and surprising addition to the classroom environment. Instead of showing frustration with difficult content or fear of marginalization, the examples above show that the students sometimes embraced the linguistic challenges they faced with a relaxed confidence. In turn, the results of these humorous occasions made the classroom feel like a place where the students could be themselves and try their best.

Multicultural literature.

The second foundational strategy I used in the learning environment was the use of multicultural curriculum. This meant that the curriculum included perspectives and topics that reflected both the ethnic make up of the class as well as a wider global experience. I also wanted the curriculum to engage the students' interests. The sixth grade Social Studies content helped with this because it concentrated on ancient world civilizations. In particular, the study of ancient Egypt and Greece were high interest topics for the students.

For the Language Arts portion of the class, I made careful selections from the literature anthology. I chose short stories and poems that I believed would most likely attract the students' interest. I also found literature that would let them make connections to their personal experience. In particular, I picked selections that presented a multicultural perspective and, in some cases, incorporated more than one language. The response of individual intermediate fluent bilingual students varied greatly. Some

students struggled to read no matter what the selection. Meanwhile, others were nearly always performing as well as many fluent students.

Most interestingly, there was some evidence that indicted that low performing students excelled when a selection held relevance to their personal background. One example occurred during a unit on poetry when I selected the poem, "Street Corner Flight" by Norma Landa Flores from the literature anthology, *The Language of Literature* (2002), used by the class. The poem was translated into both English and Spanish and had a bilingual audio recording that accompanied it. After hearing the poem, volunteers read each version aloud in class. One student, a struggling reader in English and Spanish, was highly motivated to read the Spanish version of the poem to the class. Despite her struggles, the student was often fearless when it came to reading aloud. This student's reading of the poem was beautiful and displayed a fluency and inflection in Spanish that she had been struggling to build in English. Furthermore, an oral interpretation of the poem in English given by her in our discussion that followed showed a sophisticated understanding of symbolism. By giving her interpretation, the student met an important learning objective for that lesson.

This example helps demonstrate how the multilingual learning environment had positive effects on the student's participation as it shows how a student reacted to a bilingual poem in a manner that demonstrated proficiency with the grade level content. This proficiency was demonstrated in regards to both language proficiency and content knowledge. First, The student's oral response demonstrated advanced fluency in the speaking domain of language acquisition. Second, the student's interpretation of symbolism demonstrated a grade level objective for reading standards. All of this aptitude was expressed in English with the Spanish translation acting as a motivating, and scaffolding factor for the student.

Another literature selection that highlighted Latino experience and presented a Spanish and English text was *The Circuit: Stories from the life of an immigrant child* by Francisco Jimenez (1997). This selection, told from the perspective of a young immigrant boy from Mexico, mixes Spanish names and ideas within the English text. In general, the intermediate fluent bilingual students were actively responding to instruction about the novel across the series of lessons in the unit of study. In addition, there were results

similar to what happened in the poetry unit. Evidence suggests that this presentation of life similar in language and context to that of the students' struggling the most helped some of them with interpreting themes at a high level of critical thinking.

One way that this increased level of understanding of the novel became apparent to me was when I asked students to write a reflection as part of the anticipatory activities leading into the reading of each of the two chapters we studied. One struggling student's written reflections began to show a depth of understanding that I had not witnessed from the students previously. This understanding surfaced when he wrote his own reflections about his experience as the part of an immigrant family similar to that of the protagonist in the story. Before this reflection activity, the student's written responses had been often very brief and general, far below grade level expectations. During the reflections, his responses were of adequate length and included important details about his personal life.

The themes in the novel brought up questions about bilingualism and identity for another student. This student had replied in a journal response to the theme of loneliness in the novel that school was a place that she felt lonely, bored, and frustrated during the day. While she was often quiet in class, I had not suspected that she was feeling the frustration she expressed in her journal. With this knowledge, I made sure to pay some extra attention to finding ways I could make the classroom a more dynamic place for the student.

Two more incidents occurred during the reading of the chapters that showed how some of the intermediate fluent students related their own bilingualism to the Spanish and English in the novel. During the first chapter discussion, a student showed her propensity to interpret metaphors in bilingual texts by renaming the title "Under the Wire" to "Under La Frontera." The term "wire" in the title refers to the border fence between the U.S. and Mexico. By replacing this term with the Spanish word for the border area, it was clear that the student was relying on her Spanish language ability to establish a deeper meaning in the text.

On the other hand, another student confronted the title of the next chapter, "Soledad" with frustration. She said she did not understand the meaning of the word when prompted by me to explain the meaning. This surprised me because I expected that this word, which means loneliness in Spanish, would be familiar to her. Furthermore, the

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student stated that she had forgotten how to read Spanish altogether. It was apparent that the appearance of English and Spanish had caused the student to share her personal background with students in the group and I. Moreover, I was able to get a clearer understanding of the extent to which the student had developed her first language, Spanish. This was valuable knowledge to have as I was working diligently to find ways to help the student with fluency and reading comprehension in English. This discussion caused me to delve deeper into the question by encouraging the student to select some books in Spanish for her independent reading.

These examples illustrate that my inclusion of multicultural and bilingual texts had a positive effect on student participation with the curriculum. Some students who generally had struggled academically produced quality writing and performed in depth analysis. This happened because they could use their background knowledge to help make connections to themes in the literature. Also, the use of multicultural literature caused some students to question their cultural and linguistic identity in a constructive way.

Discussion.

There were a number of positive findings that developed concerning student motivation and participation in a multilingual learning environment. I found that intermediate bilingual students responded well to opportunities to discuss their personal ideas about curriculum in cooperative groups. I attribute these responses to well designed student groupings that allowed students to collaborate with other students from a variety of academic and linguistic backgrounds. Also, many students simply enjoyed talking with their peers.

The development of collaborative partnerships to accomplish tasks was a pleasant surprise. Student partnerships developed for several reasons. The first reason is that students had varying skills and strengths that they could contribute to a partnership. For instance, a student who had good organization skills could offer help to a student who was a good reader. The reader, in turn, could help their partner with a difficult word to decode during class. Another reason was the high level of socialization that the students experienced during their first year of middle school. Students had a real need and desire to establish friendships as they progressed through their first year of middle school. The

multiple occurrences of students trying to humor each other are examples of these students trying to establish social acceptance within the class and school environment.

Another positive finding was the students' response to multicultural and multilingual texts. A reason these texts were successful with intermediate fluent bilingual students was that they mirrored, to some extent, the students' own life experiences. This semblance appeared both on the surface and under the surface. On the surface, protagonists, settings, and languages familiar to the students' own experience helped them easily identify with the content of literature. Under the surface, themes such as class and race identity, poverty, and economic opportunity were easily identifiable to many students experiencing similar situations in their lives.

What I learned from this is that I need to continue to help establish cohesive cooperative groups carefully organized to maximize the strengths of intermediate fluent bilingual students and their peers. I also need to structure a variety of opportunities for students to discuss content and issues in the classroom. Furthermore, careful selection of multicultural and multilingual content that reflects my students experience will help them have deeper more meaningful conversations.

The appearance of humor and the mixing of languages by the students have future implications for my future practice as well. First, I need to find opportunities when I can deliver jokes or humorous anecdotes to relate to my students. This should add to a positive learning environment and foster students' expression as well. Second, I should blend the use of different languages into the curriculum with English being used the vast majority of the time. This approach, rather than relying on English only, will create a more vibrant and dynamic learning environment for my intermediate fluent bilingual students.

Finding #2: Student writing prompts that related to personal experience generated valuable assessment information relating to language acquisition and understanding of content.

While the first finding I described focused primarily on how the students interacted in the classroom environment during instruction, this finding surfaced through analysis of the students' written work done throughout the course. My intention during

writing instruction was to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to express their personal experience while engaging in grade level tasks. I had often observed that even with the use of language scaffolding techniques, such a graphic organizers (Echevarria et al., 2008), many students struggled to perform well. It seemed that so much of the academic content and vocabulary was foreign to the students' experience that the students were struggling to simply understand the conceptual landscape during instruction. These difficulties were especially apparent when the students were asked to demonstrate understanding through writing. For these reasons, it seemed wise to try to find ways for the students to better contextualize their understanding while writing. I wanted to find ways for the students to utilize their background experience to their advantage. This seemed like the essence of what an additive learning environment should provide.

I found out that students often did use their background to their advantage. I also discovered that those assignments provided me with a clearer picture of what areas of strengths and future strengths the students possessed in writing. Previous research had shown that assessment for English learners should allow teachers to effectively evaluate content learning compared to their language ability (Almeida, 2007). With this in mind, I tried to incorporate students' personal experience into the longer essay assignments in the various writing genres that were a staple of my program. This section describes how such attempts to provide an additive learning environment for writing proved to be both motivating and helpful to the students. It also shows how this additive approach increased my ability to understand the language and content area needs of these students as well as evaluate the degree to which their dual language ability played into their development.

The course content for Language Arts establishes a series of writer's workshops that require the students to perform in different writing genres. Originally, the writing prompts were provided by the curriculum, yet the evaluation rubric I used was a generic one for expository text (see Appendix A). This type of rubric allowed me to be flexible and adapt the writing prompts provided so that the students could relate to them more easily. In particular, three of these workshops lent themselves to be readily modified to include student experience. The three genres were nonfiction narrative, poetry, and persuasive essay. In all cases, students took advantage of the opportunities the

assignments afforded them to share their experience and many produced quality work that was either at, or, near grade level proficiency by the end of the course.

Narrative nonfiction.

The narrative nonfiction essay is the first example of a writing project that incorporated the personal experience of the students. After reading and analyzing several examples of narrative nonfiction, I asked the students to produce an essay that described a personal experience in which they were impressed by the power of nature. This prompt related to a selection we had just studied that had described a wild fire in Yellowstone National Park. I developed the "power of nature" idea because it seemed to have universal appeal in that I assumed that all students could think of a time in which they were confronted by at least mildly severe weather. In fact, there had been a large wild fire in the mountains surrounding the community the previous year and many students chose that as their topic.

As a result of this choice, all of the intermediate fluent students were able to brainstorm an exciting general idea to write about. Besides narratives about wildfires, there were also accounts of thunderstorms, floods, and earthquakes. Using the expository writing rubric and a writing workshop setting, the students were able to produce multiple drafts, practice editing, and finally publish expository works. During the process, I was able to discover specific areas of strengths and future strengths each student possessed as a writer. For example, although one student had a vivid memory of the wildfire the previous year, it was evident that he struggled with vocabulary and organization of the narrative elements in his writing. As result, I received over a page of seriously flawed writing. However, instead of being disappointed with the overall low performance structurally, I was happy to have evidence of great effort and motivation by the student to tell his story. What's more, by following the writing workshop process, there was plenty of material for the student to edit with peers and myself.

This example is an illustration of how an additive learning environment can be beneficial to the most struggling students. Although well below grade level in his writing abilities at the time, this student still had the confidence to generate five paragraphs of writing. He was able to produce this much partly because the subject had so much relevance for him. In fact, this relevance seemed to be the only thing carrying him

through the assignment. A generic prompt unrelated to his personal experience may have prevented him from even attempting the difficult writing task, as it had in the past. For my part, working with this student on his writing began to show me the depth to which he was struggling with written expression. This awareness eventually led to the establishment of a student study team with other teachers in order to try to better meet the student's needs.

A writing example by another student on this same assignment was of particular interest because it incorporated two languages in the narrative. The student included Tagalog in the personal narrative of a dangerous flood she had experienced in the Philippines. The following quotes shows how she utilized her first language with success in the essay, "We saw the black cloud in the sky and we already know that there would be a storm coming and it called 'Bagyong Ondoy'." The inclusion of the unfamiliar and ominous sounding name of the type of storm in one of the students' native languages added suspense to the narrative. In this case, the student's bilingual ability literally added on to her writing score on the essay. In addition, upon further analysis of the writing sample it was evident that the student had a strong grasp of the form of nonfiction narrative in English and her use of her native language contributed to this.

The sample in the previous paragraph also provided a valuable assessment of the student's language proficiency. Her misuse of the verb, "know," showed her need for more work with irregular past tense verbs. In addition, the student's misuse of the words, "it called," confirmed that writing in past tense was still an area that she needed to work on. It is interesting that she used the past conditional tense correctly by writing, "would be a storm coming." This demonstrated a strength she possessed in her writing skills. This student's struggles and successes with the various tenses in one short sample highlight the complexity of language acquisition for intermediate bilingual students.

While there were other examples of students interjecting Spanish in their writing, the previous example provided the clearest illustration of the benefits of adding personal experience and background to a writing assignment. First, the student was able to develop an interesting narrative that approached grade level proficiency while judiciously using her first language to narrate her background. Second, I was able to assess her language

abilities clearly and specifically. This allowed me to target specific areas of need when I planned future lessons.

Poetry.

Another writing project that I adapted to include personal experience was the construction of a poem at the culmination of a unit on poetry. I required that the poem be in three stanzas and that it contain examples of figurative language. I offered the students a language scaffold to use if they wished (see Appendix B). The language scaffold repeated the words "I am" in each stanza. This gave the students a personal direction to write about, but I also allowed for a freedom of expression if they preferred less repetition in their poem. My idea was to assess the students' understanding of the basic form of poetry. My hope was that, like the previous workshops that relied successfully on the students' memories and background for content, their lives would prove to be interesting topics for their tries at poetry.

This focus worked again as most of the students started easily with plenty of motivation to write. Topics ranged from issues of identity, to music, and to family. The poems that all students generated showed elements of grade level standards for poetry. The following example by one student demonstrates how impressive the student writing based on personal experience can be.

"I am a girl.

I understand life

I say hello

I dream goodbye

I try to get a good grade

I hope I do

I am a girl."

The combination of the language scaffolding and the incorporation of personal background give this poem a simple and strong voice. The line, "I dream goodbye," provides an intriguing image that plays well with the line that follows, "I try to get a good grade." The two lines create an anxious tone in the poem. This tone is offset by the tone of confidence expressed in the line, "I understand life," expressed earlier. Overall, the poem reflected what I had observed about the student in class. Namely, she was an

energetic and motivated student who was trying to acquire enough language ability to meet her own high expectations for herself in class. She had expressed frustration about these issues to me during conversations. Yet, in this instance she was able to turn her struggles into her strength by using them as content for her poem.

Another testament to the success of the poetry project came during class when the students were required to recite their poems. Many of them did so with little hesitation. One student, who was known for his sense of humor, gave an energetic recitation of his poem that brought the class to laughter several times. Despite being classified as an English learner, his oral presentation that day could be characterized as nothing less than proficient in regards to oral fluency and public speaking skills.

The learning environment on that occasion was full of energy due to the contributions students brought to it with their writing. The reliance on personal experience as a writing topic once again paid big dividends by motivating some students to work toward grade level content. While this activity did not motivate everyone, the additive process I was utilizing in combination with each writing genre assessment rubric was effective for different students at different times. Across the length of the semester, all of the eight intermediate fluent bilingual students showed measurable growth in their writing

Persuasive essay.

I depended again on student background experience when it was time for the students to write a persuasive essay for their second district wide formal writing exam. I consider the persuasive essay to be one of the most difficult genres in the sixth grade curriculum. Therefore, I wasted no time in trying to find a topic that the students could easily relate to for a practice essay. I settled on the issue of the school dress code, while the prompt for the district-wide exam would be about tobacco smoking. It was evident from my past experience that the issue of a school dress code was one that the students could easily generate an argument for. In addition, the district did well to align the commonplace issue of smoking with the science department's yearly health and wellness unit.

My hope was that with strong opinions already in their minds, the students would be able to grapple with the complicated form of the essay with some success. After a

week of analyzing and writing about the pros and cons of the school uniform in a writer's workshop format, the students wrote their practice exam in the form of a persuasive letter to the principal. In general, these writing samples showed the basic understanding of stating a position. At this point, students often lacked evidence to support claims. In addition, some of the writing samples still demonstrated trouble with usage of verb tense and basic sentence construction. While many students easily generated an opinion about the school dress code, a deeper understanding of the language necessary to produce an argument was rare.

I went through an editing process with the persuasive letter they had written to build more understanding. This process included evaluating good and bad examples of written positions and changing the letter into a persuasive essay. After this, the students took the formal benchmark exam. Results from the exam showed that some students with a basic understanding still struggled to organize a coherent essay. However, the intermediate fluent students closest to advanced fluency produced essays that demonstrated a more complex understanding of persuasive structure. These samples included opinions supported by evidence as well as the defense of a position against a counter argument.

It was clear at the end of the unit on persuasion that some intermediate fluent students still needed intensive work with sentence and paragraph writing. On the other hand, I was heartened to see that others were clearly progressing toward fluency in English writing in a difficult genre. Across these varying degrees of proficiency, the process of building arguments based on issues familiar students proved to be a good starting place.

Discussion.

The use of personal experience to increase students' writing ability was effective across a series of writer's workshops in the Language Arts curriculum. Prompts that related to students' personal background allowed them to use their experience to succeed in multiple writing genres including narrative nonfiction, poetry, and persuasion. In addition, I discovered that designing ways for students' to utilize personal background and experience was an effective strategy for designing assessments. These writing assignments provided me with an avenue to clearly assess strengths and future strengths

in intermediate fluent student's language development as well as their knowledge of writing genres.

Linking student personal experience to writing and using the editing process as a learning tool were important discoveries. A primary goal of the editing process was to help the students write using their personal experience. However, this approach left questions for me regarding how to use writing with academic content that was unfamiliar to the students. The students' success using personal experience as a topic can be partially attributed to vocabulary and ideas that they already possessed. To reach advanced fluency and grade level standards I expected the students to learn new vocabulary and use it to express understanding of content. The students' writing samples had given clues to their language development needs. With the knowledge of these strengths and future strengths, I began to wonder how to best present the grade level academic content in a meaningful way. In a sense, I felt like it was time to take the students to the final frontier.

Finding #3: Providing students with multiple and varied learning experiences was beneficial to their acquisition of English and content area knowledge.

This finding concentrates on how the background and personal experience of my students caused me to make my teaching more adaptable and formative in nature (Chappuis, 2009). First, issues with student attendance and independent work habits caused me to be more flexible in my grading policy as well as begin a series of lunchtime study halls. Next, I began to use assessment more frequently as a tool for student learning in response to student difficulties with grade level academic expectations in the course. Finally, I employed the flexibility of the independent reading program in order to help structure some students' reading habits and fluency.

All of these examples were aspects of my teaching that I rearranged or adapted to accommodate the needs of the students. In this way, they can all be classified as additive teaching practices. In each case, I changed my classroom policies by adding consideration for a student or the group of students as whole. Each time I did this I focused on the ultimate goal of helping my intermediate fluent bilingual students grow toward fluency and grade level proficiency. Most, if not all of the students demonstrated

a positive change in their own learning behavior as a result of the changes I made to my approach.

Lunchtime study hall.

There were a number of factors relating to the students' performance that caused me to adapt my regular classroom procedures. While I have used the basically the same student accountability structures and grading policies for many years, I began to question the validity of a system that so many of my students were struggling to succeed in. I began to identify a number of factors that were interfering with student achievement according to my policies. Some factors included:

- Low motivation to complete independent work.
- Unstable home situations.
- Interpersonal issues between students.
- Excessive absences.

A student who missed days of school or did not complete work would quickly fall behind in assignments and assessments. Often the situations that caused the problem seemed beyond the control of the student. At first, I followed my normal classroom procedures for the different situations. For example, I would always conference with a student and contact parents to communicate about issues relating to low performance on assessments or missing course work. Current grades were regularly posted and progress reports were sent home every five weeks. Moreover, many of the students received additional support from the school through counselors or tutors. Despite these efforts, it became evident that the disruption of inconsistent attendance and work habits caused problems with the some of the students' learning.

My idea to help these students catch up was to begin a study hall during lunch for twenty minutes. While this is a common practice among teachers, I had not used this method very often over the years. A healthy lunch break is important for a teacher. Yet, the results I began to see from student attendance at the study hall made up for the twenty minutes of free time I donated to the classroom. What's more it usually saved me time in the long run as I was able to hold students accountable in a smaller group setting.

The study hall allowed students to complete course work or assessment activities as well as read independently. Students who still struggled with grade level content, in

particular academic vocabulary, came to the study hall to improve low scores on selected and short response assessments. While I made it a requirement for many students depending on their needs, uninvited students began to arrive to take a reading quiz, ask a question, or quietly finish an assignment. It is important to note that even those students that I threatened with a detention so they would attend showed high motivation to work on assignments to improve their grade once they were in study hall.

The positive attitudes of these students and their willingness to work seriously and independently either of their own free will or at my insistence during lunch contrasted with what their attendance and grades sometimes indicated on paper. This contrast shows that some of the students' experiences outside the classroom were affecting their abilities to respond to the learning environment. The lunch time study hall became an alternate way for them to succeed in the independent work that they otherwise struggled to complete on their own for various reasons.

My willingness to spend more time, extend deadlines on assignments, and allow students to have multiple attempts at assessments took into account the diverse needs of the students. I accommodated individual student needs while maintaining a high expectation for grade level expression. I made it clear to the students that I wanted them to succeed and would use all of my efforts to help them. I found that this additive approach motivated the students to achieve as much as their circumstances allowed and sometimes, in the best cases, more.

Formative assessment.

Evidence that many intermediate fluent students needed extra help with grade level content, in particular academic vocabulary, often came in the form of low scores on selected and short response assessments. In particular, many students had difficulties with the short response section on the weekly Social Studies quiz. This question generally demanded a deep understanding of the content covered in the course. In addition, the question always contained academic vocabulary, which made the language demands of the response fall within the advanced level of fluency. Many intermediate fluent students would respond in fragmented sentences, or worse, would leave the response blank.

It is important to note that I began to veer away from attempts to engage my students' primary language for purposes of academic development. As I noted earlier, it

had proved effective in some instances in the learning environment and on writing assignments. Yet, I had few documented successes of using Spanish formally as a means for a student to understand grade level content. My observations showed that the students preferred to operate in English when working with advanced language demands of grade level content and vocabulary.

While the students could sometimes express a deeper understanding orally in English or on a project such as a poster, they could not, generally, respond in writing to a question that tested a deep understanding of the content. Rather than assign the students failing marks, I began to search for alternative ways to use the quizzes and tests as a means to assess and teach the content. I began to shift my perception of myself to that of a coach trying to help the students help themselves reach grade level academic expectations as represented in the assessments.

The most promising additive teaching technique I discovered was the formative assessment process. A primary part of this approach is to administer an initial assessment of student understanding of the learning. Instead of just giving the students the assessment at the end of a set of lessons, I began to give the students the quiz as a part of the coursework early in the set of lessons. After that, we reviewed the quiz as a group and students were able to self correct their first attempt at the quiz. They could then use the self-corrected quiz as a study guide for the final assessment at the end of the set of lessons.

Many students' scores increased dramatically in the selected response sections of quiz. This made sense since they had the exact form of the test to study before hand. The short response question, however, still needed more improvement. A more involved approach to help the students with their writing started with developing a checklist of aspects I expected a proper response to possess. Then, I used the checklist to provide the students with direct feedback on their first attempt at the response. I also showed the students examples of good and bad attempts at answering the prompt and let them practice using the short response checklist to evaluate the examples. I would sometimes use a peer editing approach to give the students even more experience with writing a good response. In this manner, the students would get direct feedback on at least one response before being asked to demonstrate their knowledge for an assessment grade.

The adoption of this formative assessment process had immediate benefits for all of the students. For students working just below the advanced level of fluency, this process seemed to help especially. The following are examples of a student's analysis of a short story before and after the formative assessment process:

Student Response	Question: How does the setting affect the story?
Answer on Pretest	There's an oasis and the sandstorm that killed Hamed.
Answer on Posttest	Because the setting is the Sahara desert, it affects the story because people can die in sandstorms.

The improvement between these two responses shows how the formative assessment process can help students improve their writing toward advanced fluency. In the first response the student identifies the setting of the story in a grammatically incorrect simple sentence. The student demonstrates a basic ability to identify the setting with words like, "oasis" and "sandstorm". However, she communicates it without any analysis of how the plot element influences the story. In the second example, the student makes a more complex sentence and attempts to explicitly connect the plot element and its influence in the story. While still only partially correct, the second sentence indicates that the student developed a more sophisticated understanding of the influence of plot on the short story.

Evidence of the effects of the formative assessment process on student short response answers was impressive. It was as if I had received a small time capsule of each student's understanding of the current learning objectives. The formerly subtractive process of assigning students failing marks on quizzes at the end of each week became an additive process in which the students could learn from their own experience and earn higher marks. My own process of grading these quizzes became much more than just assigning a letter grade. With the formative assessment process, I was getting and giving direct and explicit feedback about the students' learning progression. As a result, the intricacies of building advanced fluency became apparent. Furthermore, both the students and I began to feel better about their abilities to manage difficult grade level academic tasks.

Independent reading program.

The final example of how I adapted my teaching to consider the needs of the students relates to the independent reading program I implemented as part of the curriculum. The program is called Accelerated Reader and is used by all the Humanities teachers in conjunction with the library at our school site. This reading program uses a point system to identify the language level of books so that students, teachers, and parents can easily identify books that are within a student's reading range. The program also has an extensive comprehension component. Students take a comprehension quiz and earn points for correct responses. As a facilitator, I set quarterly point goals with the students and they work toward earning points toward that goal. Their progress toward the goal contributes to their overall grade for the Language Arts portion of the course.

Three elements in this reading program make it beneficial for intermediate fluent bilingual students. First, the freedom of selecting a book from the library encourages students to find books on topics that they want to read, Second, the program has an index system that informs students about at their reading level. Third, the goal setting element of the program allows students to establish achievable targets and monitor their own progress. In all cases, the students' background and experience are determining factors in their path to improve their reading habits and capabilities.

Despite these positive elements, many students struggled to reach their reading goal. It became evident that most of the students' personal experience did not include very much sustained silent reading. The freedom of choosing books and charting personal growth did not translate into motivation for many students. I had to begin to find other ways to make the reading program work for the students, or else it was in danger of collapsing.

Over the course of year, I developed a number of modifications that I found to be beneficial for increasing participation in the reading program. The following list shows some ways I did this:

- Facilitated the use of literature logs for students to write reading reflections.
- Facilitated the use of data sheets to track progress toward reading goals over time.

- Conducted group read aloud situations followed by comprehension quizzes to earn points.
- Facilitated the use of action plans to help students manage and reflect on independent reading behaviors.
- Actively located books that I could recommend to individual students.

Many students responded to some or all of these modifications to the reading program. For example, when a student who had come close to meeting her point goal for two previous quarters finally reached it, she excitedly took the data sheet she had used to track her growth home to show her parents. In another example, a student who struggled with reading comprehension and selected response assessments wrote long and in depth reflections in his literature log on the books he was reading.

The final data produced using the Accelerated Reader program attest to the effectiveness of these modifications. The average percent of student reading goal achieved by the group of students' for each marking period rose from 59% to 140% across the length of the school year. In fact, some students began to earn more than triple their point goal. This means that they were reading sometimes three to four times more books than when they had started the year. Overall, the number of students who reached their goal increased from 2 out of 8 to 5 out of 8 by the end of the year. Perhaps most importantly, I observed a genuine love for reading developing in some of the students as they chatted about story plots with each other or recommended a good book to read.

To my frustration, there were still some students who did not reach their goals at all. These students showed low motivation to find books they were interested in. They often carried the same book for weeks and made slow or no progress toward completing the book. Even the time during class that was supposed to be spent reading, was spent pretending to read. I found myself continually trying to find the patience and tenacity to continue try to help these students develop a habit for reading. It became clear, however, that there was little I could do if they had no interest in cultivating the habit for themselves.

Discussion.

The modifications that I made to the AR reading program were a part of an overall approach I developed to respond to students' academic needs and to challenge

them to reach levels of advanced fluency and content knowledge. I often found myself becoming more of a facilitator trying to find ways to help students reach their goals. I constantly searched for different ways to let students exercise their independent reading choices. Evidence suggests that student performance increased while I undertook such efforts.

In another example, chronic low performance results on assessments caused me to shift my thinking about testing. Instead settling with the use of assessments as tools to check for understanding, they became powerful tools to drive instruction. As a result, students began to find success in the classroom. In particular, this approach seemed to benefit students working on the final steps to build English fluency with academic concepts.

Finally, low motivation to complete homework and challenging experiences outside the classroom affected attendance and became obstacles to student success. Because of these issues, I was forced to change my grading policies and find an alternative time to teach some students. Again, these adjustments caused a positive change in student performance. When given a second chance to demonstrate understanding of content learning objectives, students almost always took the task seriously and showed improvements.

All in all, these findings demonstrate that when students were struggling with different aspects of the academic program it was beneficial for me to reflect on how the students' personal experience influenced their capability to meet learning expectations we had established. Once I made this analysis, I then needed to adjust my program accordingly. It is interesting to note that these findings suggest that activities that optimized the students' primary language other than English did not become as a significant an overall factor as I had expected. Rather, students preferred to use English as the dominant language when trying to learn academics in English.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from my action research into the question: how does the incorporation of intermediate fluent bilingual students affect my instruction

in a middle school mainstream Humanities classroom? There were three major findings in this project:

- Finding #1: The presentation and encouragement of the use of multiple languages during instruction had a positive effect on student motivation and participation.
- Finding #2: Student writing prompts that related to personal experience generated valuable assessment information relating to language acquisition and understanding of content.
- Finding #3: Providing students with multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate learning was beneficial to their acquisition of English and content area knowledge.

My description of each finding was told as a narrative of my experiences during the course of a school year. In each finding I first explained issues more familiar to me and followed with those that surprised me. Finally, I discussed the implications of each finding relating to how my teaching practice evolved.

Chapter 5: Action Plan

This action research project was designed to answer the question: How does my instruction incorporate the personal experience and primary language of my intermediate fluent bilingual students in a mainstream Humanities classroom at the middle school level? I was prompted to conduct this study because over the years I have been concerned with the difficulties many intermediate fluent bilingual students have had when trying to understand grade level academic content in English. At the same time, I have always viewed the students' background and their bilingual abilities as an asset to them and to the learning environment.

The study was planned as a way to investigate how my instruction incorporates the background and primary language of the intermediate fluent students in my classroom. I wished to find ways to turn the aspects of the students' experience that put them in a more challenging position to learn into areas of strengths that they could use to succeed academically. My plan was to find out some strategies and actions that I could take as a teacher that would allow the students to use their own personal experience to their advantage.

Limitations of Study

The data used for this study came from classroom observations and a teacher journal about one group of students within one classroom. Data presented in the study comes from a small cohort of students. There is a much larger population of students with similar, but not identical circumstances. Therefore, it is important to note that while this study may serve as a guide for other teachers, educational settings are highly specific. Any group of intermediate fluent bilingual students in the mainstream classroom setting will have individuals with different needs and varying backgrounds.

Discussion of Findings

There were three major findings in this project. First, the appearance of multiple languages in the learning environment had a positive effect on student participation. Next, Student writing prompts that related to personal experience generated valuable

assessment information relating to language acquisition and understanding of content. The final major finding was that providing students with multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate learning was beneficial to their acquisition of English and content area knowledge. All of three major findings from this action research project had both familiar and surprising aspects to them.

The presentation and encouragement of the use of multiple languages during instruction had a positive effect on student motivation and participation. Students responded well to the freedom of interacting with peers in multiple languages. The thoughtful arrangement of cooperative groups and selection of multilingual and culturally relevant literature amplified the bilingual students' involvement in the classroom. The results of this involvement were seen in the vibrant learning environment of the classroom and the increased academic skills of the students.

The second finding related to how student writing samples relating to personal experience generated accurate assessment information relating to both language acquisition and understanding of content. I found that when writing prompts were closely connected to students' personal experience, the students were often motivated to perform well on the assignment. These writing assignments also provided me with a very good assessment of both student literacy level and understanding of content. A surprising aspect of this finding was the effective use of a language other than English in some students' writing samples.

The last finding in the action research was that students benefitted from multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate and reflect on their learning. Their acquisition of English and content area knowledge were influenced positively by adaptations I made to the academic program. Adaptations such as establishing a lunchtime study hall and revising the course grading policies were ways in which I attempted to account for the effects of student experience in and out of the classroom. In this manner, the students and I were to find a mutual ground in which they could demonstrate understanding of content and acquisition of English.

These findings have important implications for my instructional practice. First and foremost, they indicate that time spent to carefully evaluate, validate, and encourage student use of personal background and primary language is well worth it. These

measures taken by me as the teacher are important and necessary steps to making the difficult task of simultaneously learning content and a language possible for the students. What I discovered reinforced what I had believed from previous experience and from previous research. Intermediate bilingual students were often motivated by my attempts to help them make connections to their own experience. In a sense, these connections allowed the students to, "get a foot in the door" when it came to grappling with language demands at the edge of their development.

The research results have also caused me to redefine the way I have evaluated the role that two languages play in bilingual students' development. Before the study I viewed students' primary language other than English as a definite resource that could be utilized formally to develop academic success in English. After this study it has become apparent that the bilingualism of each student is the product of a complex history in which two or more languages are not clearly separated and have developed in different ways. The concentration on the formal development of students' primary language other than English in the mainstream classroom context was not as important as I expected. Rather, the creation of an atmosphere that encouraged diversity and positive expression in any language gave rise to opportunities for real engagement with academic concepts in English.

These findings corroborate what theoretical frameworks describe as essential for intermediate fluent bilingual success. The respect and inclusion of the languages and personal backgrounds of the students played an important part in the students' academic success in English. The students benefitted from my attempts to adapt the learning environment to meet their needs. However, the findings seem to add to the uncertainty reported in the study on the effectiveness of proposition 227. This is because while English was used the vast majority of the time, languages other than English were shown to have a positive effect on the learning environment as well.

Action Plan

I will continue to innovate my academic program based on the incorporation of my students' primary language and personal experience during each school year. I plan to take several steps based on the results of this research project. First, I will actively

encourage students to share their primary language and personal experience during interactions in the learning environment. Next, I will plan writing assignments that optimize the use of the students' personal experience as a source of knowledge. Finally, I will continue to innovate upon how assessment and self-evaluation is used as a tool to improve learning in the classroom. I will also continue to use techniques such as cooperative grouping and the use of multicultural literature.

As a part of a team of Humanities teachers at the middle school level, I plan to share and discuss my findings with my colleagues. I will do this primarily with my grade level data team and with a wider audience at our department meeting. Within the data team I will share my findings to help us generate better assessments and locate effective teaching strategies to employ across the grade level classrooms. At the department level, these findings can help to determine how teachers can implement school wide programs such as the independent reading program effectively.

The needs of intermediate fluent students are diverse and complex. The pressures on teachers to help these students to gain language fluency and academic proficiency are increasing. The achievement gap between schools with high percentages of English learners and those with primarily fluent English speakers is persistent in California. This plan of action is an example of an approach that empowers students to succeed by finding ways to turn their apparent weaknesses into strengths. This type of activity, for me, is the core of what it means to be a teacher in California in the twenty first century.

Appendix A: Expository Writing Rubric

Rubric Scoring Guide for Paragraph, Report, and Essay Writing

	Advanced (4 points)	Proficient (3 points)	Basic (2 points)	Below Basic (1 point)	Score
Organization	Strong topic sentence/thesis statement addresses the prompt/topic in a compelling and highly interesting way Reasons, details, facts strongly support topic Varied or subtle transitions sound natural, enhance the flow of the paper Effective examples, evidence, elaboration used Strong conclusion (when necessary) revisits topic/thesis in an interesting way	Topic sentence/thesis statement addresses prompt or topic and includes key words from the prompt Reasons, details, facts are clear Transitions used fit the paragraph's purpose Good examples and/or explanations Solid conclusion (when necessary) restates topic/thesis	Attempts a topic sentence or thesis statement Reasons, details, facts don't support topic, are confusing Use of ordinary transitions or transitions not used effectively Few/weak examples and/or explanations Weak conclusion (when necessary) mostly repeats the topic/thesis statement	Topic sentence/thesis statement is absent or unclear Reasons, details, facts are unclear or not related No transitions or transitions not used correctly No examples and/or explanations No/inappropriate conclusion (when necessary)	
Content	Quality and quantity of information educates and/or entertains the reader Intriguing or highly interesting examples, evidence, and explanations bring the prompt to life Fully develops prompt	All information relates to the topic/thesis statement Examples and explanations help reader understand the topic/thesis Clearly addresses the prompt	Information repeated or wanders from the topic/thesis Few examples and/or very little explanation Accurate, but prompt not developed	Not enough information or information unclear Examples inaccurate, confusing, or omitted Off prompt or no clear connection to prompt	
Style	A variety of sentence structures (simple, compound, complex) Rich words, content, vocabulary, and/or figurative language create mental pictures Style of paragraph/essay uses specific words and sentence structures that reflect a specific purpose	At least two different sentence structures; variety in the way sentences begin Familiar/ordinary words fit the topic/thesis; descriptive words used effectively Style of paragraph/essay answers and fits the purpose/prompt	Mostly simple sentences or sentences that begin the same way Basic words and descriptions Style of paragraph/essay fits the purpose but needs development	Many fragments and/or run-on sentences; several short, choppy sentences Repeated words or phrases No clear purpose in writing	
Grammar/ Mechanics	Very few errors in CUPS	Some errors but they do not interfere with reading or understanding the writing	Several errors that slow down the reader	Filled with errors that interfere with reading	
				Total Score (of 16 possible)	

CUPS=CAPITALIZATION—USAGE—PUNCTUATION—SPELLING

7-2

I Am Poem

I am
I wonder
I hear
I see
I want
I am (repeat first line of poem)

I pretend
I feel
I touch
I worry
I cry
I am (repeat first line of poem)

I understand
I say
I dream
I try
I hope
I am (repeat first line of poem)

POEMFORM

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