

In the STARlight



Research & Resources for English Learner Achievement

Issue 2

Tongue-Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education

Dr. Otto Santa Ana, Editor



- + Key Points
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- + Implications
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June 2005

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“Racially, culturally and linguistically, somos huerfanos, we speak an orphan tongue.”

(Gloria Anzaldua)

“At its very core, language is the opportunity for self-expression through the discovery of new ideas and experiences.”

(Gudalupe Valdes)

Tongue-Tied:

The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education

Dr. Otto Santa Ana, associate professor and founding member of the César Chávez Center for Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Sharing Stories

Tongue-Tied is a book designed to create an opportunity for language minority students to share their stories and first-person experiences. According to Dr. Otto Santa Ana, nearly half of Latino, Asian, and Pacific Islander children are limited English-proficient students. This anthology, divided into six parts, offers educators thought-provoking insights into the multilingual students and their struggles with educational institutions that have silenced their home language and culture.

Breaking Ties

Simon Ortiz writes about the Native American experience with American schools and teachers. He speaks about the federal policy of sending away Native American children to Christian mission boarding schools far away from their homelands. According to Ortiz, “the policy was to break or sever ties to culture, family, and tribe, to change indigenous people into Americans.” It is his belief that this policy “destroyed the heritage and identity of native people.” Stories of children learning English and losing their native tongue are woven throughout the book.

Perpetuated Myth

According to Valencia and Solarzano, a myth is being perpetuated in that “low income parents of color typically do not value the importance of education, that they fail to inculcate such a value in their children,” and that they seldom participate in parental involvement activities. In contrast, Valencia, Henderson and Rankin share examples of many positive home life experiences where mothers in low-income homes exhibit high educational aspirations for their children, positive reinforcement for intellectual behavior, read regularly to their offspring and expose their children to a variety of learning experiences outside the home.

Building on Knowledge and Culture

According to Luis Moll and Norma González, in *Beginning Where the Children Are*, “it is important for a teacher to recognize and build on the knowledge and culture that children bring to the classroom, rather than unconsciously assuming that a child arrives at the school doors as an empty vessel.” The authors conducted a study for teachers to collect *funds of knowledge*, in which teachers visited poor immigrant and language minority families to find out about their societal knowledge and life skills. These teachers learned to disregard stereotypes and gained a better understanding of their students’ cultural background.

Home Language

The section entitled, *Mother Tongue*, addresses the child’s home language and the ties that are severed when the child’s school does not value his/her language. The connection between families and their children often suffer as depicted in the poems and personal reflections found in this section.

Implications for Teachers

Tongue-Tied provides an interesting reading for educators to learn about the multilingual richness of minority children and the harmful effects of silencing their voices. It gives the reader thought-provoking ideas for developing positive strategies to use in the classroom.

- Building on children's knowledge and culture in the classroom: *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*, by Kikanza Nuri Robins, Randall B. Lindsey, Delores B. Lindsey, and Raymond D. Terrell, 2002.
- *Understanding a Child's Socio-Economic Status*, Ruby Payne and aha!
<http://www.ahaprocess.com>
- *Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families*
<http://www.nwrel.org/request/2003dec/trust.pdf>

No Child Left Behind Implications

No Child Left Behind and *Tongue-Tied* expressly direct attention to the following areas: 1) Drop out prevention resources that can assist teachers in incorporating students' home culture and language skills in today's multilingual/multicultural classrooms; 2) Effective strategies educators can use to work with children of poverty to best meet their needs; and 3) Parent involvement tools that build on a better understanding and knowledge of the home language, traditions, and cultures.

Online Resources

A discussion of several programs available for language minority students:
Learning English, by Joseph M. Guzman, January, 2001, Education Next
<http://www.educationnext.org/2003/58.html>

A research-based web site on language-related issues:
Center for Applied Linguistics
www.cal.org/

Tips on how to teach about Native Americans more effectively:
Teaching About Native American Issues, Teacher's Corner
<http://www.understandingprejudice.org/teach/native.htm>

A searchable database with hundreds of prejudice researchers and social justice organizations:
Understanding Prejudice
<http://www.understandingprejudice.org/>

Unique multicultural education site devoted to teaching about the Hmong experience:
The Hmong Center-Multicultural Resources, Adult Basic Education, Cultural Education
www.hmongcenter.org

A Selective Book List

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice, Gay, G. New York, NY, Teachers College Press (2000).

And Still We Speak...Stories of Communities Sustaining and Reclaiming Language and Culture; and So They May Speak...An Agenda for Language and Culture Centered School Reform, California Tomorrow (2002).

The Culturally Proficient School: An Implementation Guide for School Leaders, Lindsey, Randall B., Roberts, Laraine, and Campbell Jones, Franklin, Corwin Press (2004).

"The family's quiet was partly due to the fact that, as we children learned more and more English, we shared fewer and fewer words with our parents."

(Richard Rodriguez)



STUDENTS OF TODAY ACHIEVING RESULTS

Produced and designed by San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
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Questions for Reflection

1. As educators, how can we create an inclusive and instructionally empowering learning environment that builds on and respects the languages, cultures and experiences of every group of students?
2. What are some of the benefits that can be reaped by providing a positive school-community relationship that promotes the enhanced ability of students to learn and teachers to teach?
3. What strategies could you develop to ensure that all students, especially those who have traditionally been underserved, yield high academic achievement?
4. How could culture and proficiency in a first language enhance the academic performance of students in the second language?
5. As educators, how can we collect "funds of knowledge" that will assist in gaining a better understanding of our students' cultural backgroundse?

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