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Megan Madigan Peercy

University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA

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Preparing English Language Learners for the Mainstream: Academic Language and Literacy Practices in Two Junior High School ESL Classrooms

MEGAN MADIGAN PEERCY
University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA

The growing numbers of English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. K–12 public schools have raised many questions about how to best educate these students. Much of the research on teaching ELLs has discussed the kinds of practices that should be used to increase ELLs’ school achievement, but few studies have documented the actual practices that English as a second language (ESL) teachers use to scaffold their students into achieving in mainstream classrooms. This study adds to the literature on the practices of ESL teachers by examining the teaching practices of 2 junior high school ESL teachers as they prepared their intermediate and advanced ELLs to spend their entire school day in mainstream classes. Findings indicate that both teachers engaged in a complex array of practices that helped develop academic language and literacy skills that students needed for participation in mainstream classrooms by (a) attending to mainstream content in their classrooms, (b) teaching students academic language, (c) providing support in students’ first language, (d) teaching students explicit reading strategies, and (e) using culturally responsive teaching methods. Implications for practice, future research, and policy include using measures that help teachers approach their instruction with a holistic understanding of students’ mainstream academic language and literacy needs.

Address correspondence to Megan Madigan Peercy, Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy, and Leadership, University of Maryland, 2311 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742, USA. E-mail: mpeercy@umd.edu
The growing numbers of English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. K–12 public schools have raised many questions about how to best educate these students. The lack of qualified faculty to teach ELLs, a national movement toward English-only education, and efforts to fully include ELL children in mainstream1 education to give them more access to the core curriculum and English-speaking peers have moved ELLs quickly into mainstream classrooms (August & Hakuta, 1997; Platt & Harper, 2002; Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003; Valdés, 2001). Still greater challenges in educating ELLs have arisen at the secondary level, where students are faced with increasing language and literacy demands in order to catch up with mainstream peers, all in a language that is unfamiliar to them (Faltis & Coulter, 2008; Lucas, 1992; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Townsend, 2009). It is important to consider, then, how ELLs, especially secondary students, are being prepared to meet the demands of mainstream classrooms before they arrive and what challenges arise along the way. Although significant bodies of work have detailed the kinds of linguistic and literacy instruction that ELLs should receive (e.g., August & Hakuta, 1997; J. M. González & Darling-Hammond, 2000; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2002), there are few descriptive studies regarding the type of academic language and literacy instruction that teachers are actually using to prepare ELLs to move into mainstream classrooms (for exceptions, see Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Valdés, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to describe how theoretical notions about teaching ELLs are playing out in real classrooms with real students. This paper examines the following research question: How do English as a second language (ESL) teachers prepare ELLs for the academic language and literacy demands of mainstream classrooms? The study focuses on the practices of two junior high school.2 ESL teachers. Specifically, this study examines their practices with their intermediate and advanced students and highlights the teachers’ efforts to make academic content accessible to their students and to develop their students’ literacy skills through their use of the following practices: (a) attending to mainstream content in their classrooms, (b) teaching academic language to students, (c) providing support in students’ first language (L1), (d) teaching students explicit reading strategies for comprehending texts, and (e) using culturally responsive teaching methods. These are all concepts that have been suggested as important in

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1 Although I do not care for its deficit connotation, I use the term mainstream throughout this paper to indicate content area classrooms that do not necessarily make specific accommodations for ELLs. I do not use the term content area because there are sometimes content area classes that are for ELLs (such as English as a Second Language History, for instance).

2 Both schools called themselves junior high schools rather than middle schools and enrolled students in Grades 7–9.
the literature on teaching ELLs and that therefore warrant investigation of how they are being used in teaching.

Findings indicate that the two teachers thought about their students holistically and engaged in an array of complex practices to develop their students’ academic language and literacy skills. This study examines the teachers’ practices in the five areas listed previously (rather than more general practices that are also important in working with ELLs but that might be subsumed by several or all of the aforementioned categories, such as using comprehensible input, utilizing differentiation, promoting interaction, and using graphic organizers) in an attempt to describe specific aspects of the complexity of their work.

ATTENTION TO MAINSTREAM CONTENT

Historically speaking, curricula for mainstream students and curricula for language learners have been quite separate, with little effort dedicated to making connections between them. More recently, however, there has been recognition of the importance of ELLs learning the same curriculum as English-only students and a concerted effort to connect the content and standards for ELLs and non-ELLs (Platt et al., 2003; Reeves, 2006). Learning the same content as their English-only peers is critically important for ELLs to achieve high levels of academic ability, close the achievement gap, and keep pace with the content and language knowledge of their grade-level peers (e.g., Cummins, 1996). This is especially important at the secondary level, as content instruction becomes deeper and more complex and the content knowledge gap between ELLs and English-only students can widen if instruction for ELLs focuses only on language development. Much of the work done on helping ELLs access mainstream content has focused on sheltered instruction, in which ELLs are taught mainstream content using strategies that aid in student comprehension and language and literacy development in the content area (e.g., previewing new content; activating students’ background knowledge; previewing vocabulary; slowing the rate of speech, repeating, and rephrasing; and providing information through multiple modalities; Echevarría et al., 2008; Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008). Sheltered instruction approaches have emphasized that students should simultaneously gain content knowledge and English language skills in order to gain greater proficiency in English and improved access to mainstream classrooms and curriculum.

Thus far, there is little research on student outcomes when sheltered instruction is used (What Works Clearinghouse, 2009). However, the limited research available on student outcomes when teachers use sheltered instruction techniques has demonstrated improved student performance on standardized tests of reading and math (Friend, Most, & McCrary, 2009; Pascopella, 2008). Despite a dearth of research, it appears that sheltered instruction
techniques are correlated with gains in student learning and that teachers do
their students a valuable service by using sheltered instruction techniques.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

*Academic language* is the “language associated with the academic discourse of
the various school subjects” (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 7) and is com-
posed of the registers (Fang, Schleppegrell, & Cox, 2006; Gee, 2004), vocabu-
larly, syntax, and discourse features used within the instruction, texts, and other
interactions of particular content areas (e.g., Bailey & Butler, 2003). It has
emerged as distinctive from the vocabulary, syntax, and discourse features of
conversational language, which are considered less abstract (Zwiers, 2007)
and complex and can be more quickly acquired by language learners (e.g.,
Cummins, 1979a). *Academic literacy* involves the reading and writing skills that
utilize academic language and, as Cummins (2000) explained, “requires explicit
teaching with a focus on the genres, functions, and conventions of the language
itself in the context of extensive reading and writing of the language” (p. 23).

Academic language has been identified as presenting unique challenges
to ELLs. Brown (2007) argued that “academic discourse is very challenging
for ELLs because it is characterized with complex syntax, technical vocabu-
larly, and a lack of helpful context” (p. 32). She built her argument on
Cummins’s (1981, 1984, 1996) work, which first made prominent the distinc-
tion between conversational language and academic language. Convers-
sational language is more contextualized and less complex than academic
language and includes opportunities for reiteration, repetition, interaction,
and clarification. In contrast, academic language is less contextualized, can
involve more complex syntax and vocabulary, and lacks opportunities for
interaction and clarification. The identification of the challenges that academ-
ic language presents has recently been refined further to recognize that each
content area has its own unique vocabulary, syntax, sentence structures,
register, and other linguistic features that ELLs must learn to comprehend
and produce in order to be academically successful (e.g., Bailey, 2007; Fang
et al., 2006; Gibbons, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2004). Therefore, for ELLs to have
maximum access to academic language, there are various instructional impli-
cations. First, teachers should provide vocabulary-rich opportunities for
learning, and they should focus on teaching new vocabulary and grammar
in context. Second, teachers should be aware of “the ways that language
builds knowledge in their content areas” (Fang et al., 2006, p. 269) in order
to make students aware of this through engagement with different kinds of
academic texts. Third, teachers should explicitly teach important content area
vocabulary and grammatical structures typical of the content area rather than
assume that students will glean and be able to produce meaning solely from
hearing and reading new grammar and vocabulary (Echevarría et al., 2008;
L1 SUPPORT

Although there has been much debate about bilingual versus English-only education for ELLs (Greene, 1997; Slavin & Cheung, 2005), many researchers agree that valuing ELLs’ ability to speak more than one language and, when possible, supporting students’ L1 for comprehension and clarification purposes helps ELLs succeed academically (e.g., Echevarría et al., 2008; Greene, 1997; Hansen-Thomas, 2008; Manyak, 2002; Ramos, 2005). A recent study by Friend and her colleagues (2009) illustrated that teachers find that L1 support significantly aids student learning. Furthermore, there a significant body of work asserts that students’ language and literacy skills as well as their content and concept knowledge “transfer” from their L1 to additional languages that they learn (e.g., Cummins, 1979a, 1979b, 1984; Domínguez de Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007; Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Durgunoglu, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993; Pollard-Durodola & Simmons, 2009; Proctor, August, Carlo, & Snow, 2006). One branch of this research has shown that bilingual students who view their L1 as a resource and who use strategies such as their knowledge of cognates (i.e., words in two different languages that are pronounced similarly and have similar meanings) to determine meaning are more successful readers (August et al., 2005; Jimenez, García, & Pearson, 1996; Nagy, García, Durgunoglu, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993).

EXPLICIT READING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION

August and Shanahan (2006) recently edited a review of the research related to developing English literacy skills in ELLs. The many findings in this volume included the need to further develop the text-level skills, including reading comprehension, of ELLs as compared to their native-speaking peers (whereas the word-level skills, such as word reading and phonological processing, of ELLs and non-ELLs are similar; Lesaux & Geva, 2006; Lesaux, Koda, Siegel, & Shanahan, 2006).

According to Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, and Rivera (2006), the majority of ELLs experiencing reading difficulties struggle with fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These scholars and others (e.g., Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Townsend, 2009) have called for schools to increase opportunities for ELLs to develop sophisticated vocabulary knowledge through frequent, systematic, intensive, and complex vocabulary
instruction in all content areas. Furthermore, Francis et al. (2006) argued that reading comprehension activities should help students focus on the process of comprehension (teaching students to be strategic and to monitor, select, and reflect upon the reading strategies they use), not just the products of comprehension (such as answering questions at the end of a passage).

Scholars whose work prepares teachers to develop these reading comprehension skills in ELLs (e.g., Freeman & Freeman, 2000; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005; Samway, 2006) have emphasized methods for comprehension instruction, such as drawing on students’ background knowledge, using text structure cues, using students’ knowledge about how to read in their L1 and transferring those skills to reading in English, recognizing cognates, and identifying and defining unknown vocabulary in context. Other strategies that aid ELLs with reading comprehension include engaging in vocabulary development before and during reading (Proctor, Carlo, August, & Snow, 2005), paraphrasing student remarks and encouraging elaborated responses, presenting ideas in verbal and written form, using consistent language, and instructing students in the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to make the “secrets of reading” (Gersten & Jiménez, 1994, p. 446) public to students (Chamot & O’Malley, 1987, 1994). Research on the impact of teaching ELLs to use strategies while reading has shown increased strategy use, more positive attitudes about reading, and improved comprehension (Jiménez & Gámez, 1996; Jiménez et al., 1996; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999).

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

It is important to recognize that the achievement of diverse students not only is related to developing their cognitive skills (Jiménez, Handsfield, & Fisher, 2007; Peercy, 2004, 2006) but also involves making connections between their socially mediated knowledge and their school experiences. Research in areas that seek to bring the resources present in the families and communities of linguistically and culturally diverse students into schools for use in curriculum and instruction (such as funds of knowledge research and research on culturally responsive teaching) has shown that making connections between home and school contributes to higher levels of academic engagement, higher levels of reading achievement, a greater number of correct responses from students (Au, 1980; Au & Mason, 1981; Gay, 2000; Tharp, 1982), stronger ties between the school and community, and greater parent involvement (N. González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll & González, 1994, 1997; Moll & Greenberg, 1990).3

3August and Shanahan (2006) recently made the distinction that research shows that being culturally responsive “can enhance students’ engagement, motivation, and participation in classroom instruction” but that the research has not yet established that being culturally responsive “improves literacy achievement or development” (p. 15).
Villegas and Lucas (2002) asserted that culturally responsive teachers are socioculturally conscious, have affirming views of diverse students, see themselves as responsible for and capable of changing schools to make them more equitable, understand how learners construct knowledge and how to promote knowledge construction, know about the lives of their students, and design instruction that builds on what students already know while simultaneously stretching them beyond the familiar. The field’s definition of culturally responsive teaching is continually being updated, but for the purposes of this paper it is understood as valuing students’ resources and backgrounds (e.g., Gay, 2000; N. González et al., 2005; Turner, 2005) while acknowledging that students need access to the school’s mainstream curriculum and system for school success (e.g., Delpit, 1988, 1992).

Although the theoretical literature on ELLs is abundant in these five areas, little work shows how teachers embody these practices in their teaching contexts. If researchers are to share these practices with teachers in meaningful ways, they would be best served to have examples of how teachers make these theoretically important approaches work in practice. The data detailed here show how these practices play out in two classrooms.

METHODS

This qualitative investigation used case studies (Eisenhardt, 2002; Merriam, 2001; Stake, 2005) of two junior high school ESL teachers, whom I call Becky and Kevin, to examine how these teachers made content accessible to their students and developed their students’ literacy skills in the five ways mentioned previously: through (a) attending to mainstream content in their classrooms, (b) teaching students academic language, (c) providing support in students’ L1, (d) teaching students explicit reading strategies for comprehending texts, and (e) using culturally responsive teaching methods. Case studies were used because they allowed for an in depth examination of each teacher’s practices. They also allowed for “theory-building” (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 6) about how teachers are putting research into practice regarding the academic language and literacy instruction of ELLs.

Participant Selection

Kevin and Becky were chosen as participants because the larger study examined questions of theory to practice, and both had recently graduated from the same preservice program (located in a medium-size city in the western United States). Furthermore, at the time of the study, they were both teaching ESL in junior high schools with similar demographics in the same school district.

All names are pseudonyms.
Thus, both teachers had similar external influences on their preservice and in-service practices. I also knew Becky and Kevin because I had taken a graduate course with each of them, and our acquaintance made them relatively comfortable with having me in their classrooms on a regular basis.

Participant Description

BECKY

Becky, a 34-year-old self-described “White, East Coast, loud woman,” was beginning her second year teaching, and she taught at Lee Junior High School. A former program director of outdoor adventures for inner city youth, Becky had a bachelor's degree in anthropology from a small East Coast liberal arts college. She had obtained her master's degree in education along with ESL and reading endorsements at a large university in the western United States, in the same mid-size city where she was teaching. Becky taught two class periods of ESL per day, Beginning ESL and Intermediate ESL, and during her other class periods she taught a class called Fundamentals of Reading to struggling readers. Her Beginning ESL class contained 16 seventh- through ninth-grade students, and her Intermediate ESL class had 24 seventh- through ninth-grade students.

Becky told me that she had become interested in ESL because of her interest in different cultures and her undergraduate degree in anthropology:

I couldn’t get placed [to student teach] in anthropology because no one teaches anthropology [in this area] except [Sunset High]. I just started researching and observing these random classrooms. Then I happened upon an ESL class and they were speaking tons of Spanish, and tons of different cultures were represented, and I was just like, “I think I like that.”

Having lived in South America for 6 months, Becky felt that she could sympathize with how challenging it is to pay attention and gain academic knowledge in a second language: “These kids...work really hard and don’t get a lot of credit.”

Becky’s classroom was set up with students sitting in small groups around rectangular tables. At the far side of the classroom were her desk and two comfortable white chairs, which were a much-coveted location before class started and during free times. There was a small loveseat at the back of the room and posters up around the room displaying classroom rules, reading strategies, and art. Becky’s classroom procedures and demeanor were not highly structured, and students frequently worked noisily, sometimes moving from their desks to sit in the white chairs during class time. The classroom sometimes appeared disorganized, particularly during transitions, and student noise and movement contributed at times to off-task
behavior. When students had a particularly difficult time settling down, Becky would count until students grew quiet, and then students would have to remain in their seats after the bell rang for as many seconds as it had taken for them to settle down.

KEVIN

Kevin, a 30-year-old White teacher, was beginning his third year of teaching. He had grown up in a mostly White homogeneous community about 40 miles from where he taught at Hill Junior High School. Kevin had obtained his bachelor’s degree in social studies along with his coursework for teacher licensure and ESL endorsement from the same large university in the western United States where Becky had worked on her master’s degree, licensure, and endorsements. He had decided to get an ESL endorsement after having positive experiences volunteering as an ESL tutor and because it fulfilled his “desire to be doing something that was really worthwhile.” He taught four periods of ESL per day: Beginning Reading and Writing Skills, Beginning/Intermediate Oral Skills, Intermediate Reading and Writing Skills, and Advanced Reading and Writing Skills. He also taught two sections of a course on state history and had a short homeroom period each day. Beginning Reading and Writing was his smallest class, with 6 students; Advanced Reading and Writing was his largest, with 31 students; Intermediate Reading and Writing had 24 students; and Beginning/Intermediate Oral Skills had 10 students. All of Kevin’s ESL classes contained seventh, eighth, and ninth graders, because they were grouped based on their proficiency level in English rather than their grade level.

Kevin’s classroom had desks in rows, with desks paired together. It had several pull-down maps, chalkboards, and an overhead projector screen at the front of the room. At the back of the room, his classroom was separated from the classroom next door by a heavy accordion door that could be opened to make a larger room. This separator made it easy to hear the frequent noise from the next classroom, a feature I often found distracting while I was in Kevin’s classroom. It seemed that his students had gotten quite good at tuning out the noise next door, but occasionally they also were distracted by it.

Kevin’s classes were quite structured. Class always began with a “bell ringer” activity that was written on the overhead projector at the front of the room. These were short warm-up writing activities that students were supposed to complete immediately after entering the classroom while he took roll and attended to other tasks, such as returning student work. The bell ringers either reviewed recent past material or introduced new content for that day’s class. Kevin also had other clear guidelines in place, such as requiring tardy students to stand at the back of the classroom until being dismissed to their seats and requiring students who were misbehaving or not on task during
class to pick up a certain number of pieces of trash on the classroom floor before leaving.

Setting

**BECKY’S SCHOOL**

In the 10 years prior to data collection, the student population of Becky’s school, Lee Junior High School, had shifted significantly. It had changed from 10% minority students to 40% minority students, with refugee families beginning to have a presence in the 3–4 years prior to data collection. According to the school district’s webpage, Lee had a student body of 1,400, and the two largest racial/ethnic groups represented were White students (70%) and Hispanic students (18%). Moreover, 38% of the students at Lee qualified for free or reduced lunches, and 28% were ELLs.

Through observation and informal discussion with Becky, I learned that there was a high degree of student mobility among the ELLs in her school, with students arriving and leaving at all times of the school year. ELLs at Lee were generally from lower socioeconomic brackets.

**KEVIN’S SCHOOL**

The neighborhood in which Kevin was teaching had once also been a mostly White homogeneous community, but in the past 7–10 years its demographics had shifted to include many immigrant families, primarily Latinos. According to the school district’s webpage, Hill Junior High School enrolled 1,475 students, and the two largest racial/ethnic groups at Hill were White students (73%) and Hispanic students (18%). Moreover, 30% of Hill students qualified for free or reduced lunches, and roughly 20% of Hill students were ELLs.

From observations and informal discussions with Kevin, I learned that there was a high degree of student mobility among ELLs in his school, and most students were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. According to Kevin, a large number of his advanced ELLs were U.S.-born students who he felt needed additional reading support but who did not necessarily need to be placed in ESL classes.

Although I did not have access to additional official data about the ELLs in the two schools (such as information on socioeconomic status, previous schooling, literacy levels in their L1 and in English, students’ age, and so forth), through informal discussion with the teachers I learned that their classrooms followed the national trend in which a slightly larger percentage of students receiving ESL services in their classes had been born in the United States (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007). In both teachers’ classrooms, approximately half of the students were U.S.-born and half were immigrants, with most of the immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries.
beginning classes were dominated by immigrant students with beginning-level proficiency in English, whereas their intermediate- and advanced-level students were both immigrants and U.S.-born students.\footnote{Students were placed in their classes based upon their performance on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Oral Language Proficiency Test and teachers’ observations of their performance in class.}

Role of the Researcher

My current positioning as a second language teacher educator and former positions as a teacher of ESL, as a teacher of foreign language (Spanish), and as a student in a language teacher education program certainly led me to approach the study with my own biases. I was interested in how ESL teachers were prepared to meet the demands of working with ELLs and how this preparation translated into their practices. Becky and Kevin were participants in a larger study that examined how the theory and research taught in their preservice program translated into practice. To reduce the likelihood that my biases would impact data collection and analysis, I triangulated my sources of data by collecting interview data (interviews with multiple sources to provide further depth of understanding of Becky’s and Kevin’s practices), observational data (multiple observations across all times of day and with all class periods), and documents from the teachers’ classrooms and preservice program. I also engaged in member checking with Becky and Kevin, as described in the “Data Analysis” section following.

Data Collection

I collected data in Becky’s and Kevin’s classrooms over a 4-month period, usually observing in each classroom two to three times per week. As described previously, Kevin taught four periods of ESL per day and Becky taught two periods of ESL per day, both ranging from beginning through advanced ESL. During the 4 months in which I observed in their classrooms, I observed all of the teachers’ ESL class periods several times. In all, I observed in Becky’s classroom 37 times and in Kevin’s classroom 38 times. Observations usually lasted the length of a class period (approximately 1 hr). During observations, I played the role of a participant observer, taking as many notes as possible (recording notes immediately after the observation took place when I was too busy helping students to take notes), and when asked by the teachers to help students, I worked to help answer student questions, clarify instructions, and aid students on projects in small groups. Before class or when they had finished their work I sometimes had the opportunity to chat with students about their home countries, their families, and their interests (often in Spanish, the home language of many of the students).
I conducted three formal semistructured interviews with each teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of the study that were audiotaped and later transcribed. In these interviews, we talked about the teachers’ backgrounds, their interest in teaching ELLs, their roles as teachers in their schools, their goals for their students, their preservice preparation, and their classroom practices, among other topics. I also engaged in numerous informal discussions with Becky and Kevin as well as used e-mail and phone correspondence to ask follow-up questions after I had completed data collection. Finally, I collected documents from Becky and Kevin, such as rubrics, assignment descriptions, and student work.

Data Analysis

To analyze data from observations, I used the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to examine the data for emergent themes both within and across cases. I began by simultaneously examining field notes and interview transcripts from each teacher to determine which themes emerged in each of the cases. Field notes revealed that a strong theme in both classrooms was explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies. I began to look at field notes across both cases for similarities and differences in reading strategies instruction and then also for similarities and differences in other instructional practices (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 18, called this looking for “within-group similarities coupled with intergroup differences”). It was clear that both teachers also emphasized in interviews that teaching academic language to students was one of their central goals, and during my observations both teachers used their knowledge of Spanish to support the comprehension of most of the students in their classrooms. In addition, Becky was emphatic in interviews about how important it was to her to value students’ cultural backgrounds in her classroom. As this theme emerged in Becky’s interview data, I examined data from her classroom to explore how it played out in her teaching. I also examined data from Kevin’s interviews and classroom to explore whether this theme was present in his teaching. As these patterns emerged in the data, and informed by my knowledge of the literature in these areas, I coded data in four categories: academic language, L1 support, reading strategies, and culturally responsive practices. I later added a fifth, attention to mainstream content, as I went back and reviewed field notes and interview transcripts and realized that the choice of authentic mainstream texts (rather than textbooks with short readings designed for ELLs) was another important element of the teachers’ practices. As the data clustered in these five categories, I was also mindful to select examples for this paper that were representative of the teachers’ practices rather than outliers. Thus, not all examples represent the most exemplary way of approaching instruction but instead are intended to show how the two teachers engaged in language and literacy instruction in real classrooms on a regular basis.
During data analysis, I engaged in member checking first by sharing my questions and ideas about the emergent patterns in the field notes and transcribed interviews and later by e-mailing Kevin and Becky excerpts of data and my interpretations of the data and asking for their feedback. In general, they agreed with my analysis, and our exchanges allowed me to clarify my understanding of their practices and to gain further insight from them into the reasons for their practices. Triangulation occurred through the collection and analysis of multiple sources of data (i.e., observations, interviews, and documents).

FINDINGS

Theme 1: Attention to Mainstream Content

Both Kevin and Becky taught their ESL classes with an eye toward the kind of content their intermediate and advanced students would encounter, and were already encountering, because they were in mainstream classes several periods each day. Kevin attended to both fictional and expository texts with his students, whereas Becky’s main focus was on one fictional text. Kevin received permission to purchase class sets of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and *The Secret Garden*, all modified in length and complexity for ELLs by Oxford University Press. He explained to me that he chose these fictional texts because he felt that they were “part of a bigger collective conscience” and that it “would be helpful for [ELLs] to be aware at least what the main storyline is.” Because he felt it was also important to model how to approach the reading of expository text, he used a U.S. history textbook that had recently been discarded by the mainstream history classes at Hill called *America’s Past and Promise*. He explained to me that he liked to use this textbook because it accurately reflected the kind and difficulty of academic content that ELLs encountered in their mainstream classes, and it gave him a way to model how students should strategically approach such texts in their mainstream classes.

Kevin also drew students’ attention to academic behaviors that were needed in his class and in their mainstream classes for them to be successful, such as note-taking skills, stating, “When you are in a class it is important to write down what the teacher writes on the board.” From time to time, Kevin also pointed out that certain kinds of expository text structures they were finding in the *America’s Past and Promise* text might also be text structures they would see in texts in their mainstream classes, such as cause-and-effect structures and compare-and-contrast structures in their science class, as in the following two examples: “So Yukio, in your science class, your teacher may want you to compare what is the same and what is different” and “We talked yesterday about how you might
see cause-and-effect text in your science books.” These two examples are somewhat perfunctory in that they were brief and did not delve deeper into students’ understanding of these connections, nor did they require students to make connections themselves. Nevertheless, Kevin modeled an important approach by showing students that it was possible and important to make connections between concepts and strategies in his class and their other classes.

Becky, too, drew parallels between the content of her Intermediate ESL class and what students encountered in their mainstream classes, and she created opportunities to interact with content that would be relevant in students’ mainstream classes. The focus of her Intermediate ESL class during the semester I observed was reading *Summer on Wheels*, a juvenile fiction novel written by the award-winning Mexican American author Gary Soto. This novel was an authentic text and was representative of the kind of engaging fictional material that students might encounter in their mainstream classes. At times, Becky attempted to make meaningful connections between the contents of the novel and students’ mainstream classes, as in the following questioning technique when she read aloud to the class a part of the chapter in which the characters used a Bunsen burner:

Becky asks the students: “What’s a Bunsen burner?” (She pauses. No students respond and so she elaborates.) “You burn things with it in the chemistry lab. I think you might be using it tomorrow.”

In this example, Becky defined a term for students by connecting it to their experience in another class, in this case their science class. This sort of prompt can expand students’ vocabulary base, enhance their comprehension of the text, and help them to make connections between various classes (e.g., ESL and science) and activities (e.g., reading and lab work). Ideally, students verbally respond to these kinds of prompts, which allows teachers to check students’ comprehension and students to practice language and connect ideas. In this case, because Becky’s students did not respond, it was hard to determine what students garnered from this connection that Becky made to their science class.

Becky also incorporated parts of the state core curriculum for mainstream students into her curriculum for ELLs so that they would also gain the knowledge and skills that their mainstream peers were learning. For instance, one of Becky’s class projects involved doing research on the Internet and then presenting the information learned to the class. Becky explained that gaining information from the Internet and presentation skills were part of the state core for mainstream students that she thought was important for her ELLs to have access to also. Before students began their oral
presentations in front of the class, Becky prompted them to recall important presentation skills:

Becky: What makes a good presentation? What kind of voice does [the first student presenting] need to use?
Ss (denotes several students responding at once): Loud.
Becky: How does she need to stand?
Ss: Straight.
Becky: Where's she going to hold her paper, in front of her face?
Ss: No.

Becky and her students discuss that the paper should be held lower, so that people listening can hear well and can see the presenter's face.

In addition, both Becky and Kevin mentioned that it was important that their students be mainstreamed, understand high school graduation requirements, and have the opportunity to attend college. They structured their curriculum and expectations in ways that scaffolded their students to be better prepared for mainstream demands by teaching from mainstream texts and covering content that mainstream students were expected to know and by teaching skills that were necessary for success in mainstream classes (such as note taking, presentation skills, and recognizing expository text structures). Thus, their approach to teaching ESL was responsive to the literature’s recommendations that language be taught through challenging, grade-appropriate content so that ELLs were learning content that was similar to that of their mainstream peers.

Theme 2: Academic Language

The text that Becky used for much of the semester with her students, Summer on Wheels, was a well-written authentic text for young adults. It was filled with rich vocabulary and sentence constructions that supported students in their acquisition of academic language in English. As Becky read the novel aloud to her class, she frequently led students in discussion of the meaning of phrases in the novel and asked them to write down words they did not know as they read, such as bubbling concoctions, resembling a futuristic city, disintegrated, and flat expressions. Becky explained to me that “[preparing kids for academic English] is my whole goal.” Through the descriptive language in Summer on Wheels, Becky’s students had much exposure to academic English, and Becky spent time developing their understanding of new words and phrases as they arose in each chapter.

Becky scaffolded the meaning of complex language with her students in various ways, such as by examining the meaning of new words in context and also by providing students with synonyms they already knew for new, more complex vocabulary. For instance, while reading Summer on Wheels
aloud to the class, Becky discussed the meanings of words like competitive and haughty:

As she is reading aloud to the class, Becky asks the class: “Do you think [the protagonists in the story] like this girl?”

Ss: No.
Mila: She’s very challenging.
Becky: Very good, Mila. She’s always challenging them. She’s very, what’s the word?
Students guess a couple of adjectives.
Becky eventually says “Competitive.”
Becky continues reading to the class and reads the word haughty aloud. She asks them: “What does haughty mean?”

Alice: Rude.
Becky: Rude, and snotty.

Another way in which Becky provided students with academic language was through discussion of the vocabulary for the different parts of a story, such as setting, characters, and plot.

Becky asks the class: “What’s the setting? Remember we’ve studied story elements before.”

Omar: Where the story takes place.
Becky: Setting is the time and place of the story. (She writes this on the board.)
Becky: What are the characters?
Zaida says it is the people in the story.
Becky writes on the board: “Characters—people doing the action.”
Becky: Then we have the plot, what is the plot of the story? (pauses to see if anyone will answer) . . . It is the sequence of events in the story. First this happens, then that happens, then that happens, then that happens.

Finally, Becky’s assessment after students finished reading Summer on Wheels required students to use various kinds of academic language, including descriptive language, providing justification for a decision, persuasive language, and language for sharing an opinion. She asked students to work in three centers. The first center required students to think about how they would turn Summer on Wheels into a movie and describe what adventures they would include as well as justify why they would change certain adventures. The second center required students to use persuasive language in a travel brochure to entice people to tag along with the Summer on Wheels protagonists on their adventures. The third center required students to write a letter to the Summer on Wheels protagonists about the summer adventures they would like to have and to share their opinions about whether the
protagonists would like their adventures. All three of these tasks required students to produce important academic language (descriptive, persuasive, sharing opinions) that they would need to develop for higher order writing and speaking tasks in mainstream classrooms. Most students performed well on these tasks, demonstrating through their writing that they understood the plot of the novel and that they were able to write for these varying purposes. A few students did not engage with the assignment in much depth, but it was not clear to me whether this was because of lack of comprehension, motivation, ability, time, or some other reason.

Early in the school year, Kevin discussed class goals with the students in his Advanced Reading and Writing class, stating, “Our class goals are to improve our reading and writing in academic English.” Thus, Kevin was explicit that building students’ academic language skills was a major part of his goals for them, and he explained his rationale to me in an interview:

We don’t go over the days of the week or colors or numbers or that kind of thing. That stuff they can do at home. I feel like students in ESL classes in public schools need to be learning and focusing on learning strategies of how to get through school and learn what they need to do so they can graduate. I don’t like to spend very much time on social English because I don’t think they need it. They get that in the halls [at school], on TV, and at home. So here we focus more on the academic . . . . I prefer to expose them to stuff [that] would be happening in other classrooms and use that to [help students] learn English.

6The full instructions for each center were as follows:

**Station 1:** Movies, Movies, Movies
**Directions:** You are a movie producer. You have been asked to turn the novel *Summer on Wheels* into a movie. What adventures would you put into your movie? Pick two adventures and describe them. What adventures would you change to make your movie better? Pick one and describe that adventure and the changes you would make.
What actors and actresses would you want to play the characters in the novel? Why did you pick these people?"

**Station 2:** Travel Brochure
**Directions:** Create a travel brochure for Hector’s and Mando’s bicycle adventures. Look at the sample brochure to get some ideas. Include at least four of their adventures. Draw pictures and use complete sentences to describe their adventures. Remember you want to encourage the audience to come to Hector’s and Mando’s bicycle adventures.”

**Station 3:** Letter to Hector and Mando
**Directions:** Write a letter to Hector and Mando. Tell them your ideas about what makes a summer vacation fun. Include and describe four adventures that you would like to have next summer. Also, include why you think Mando and Hector would enjoy or dislike your adventures.”
Kevin attended to academic English in his teaching in a number of ways. When reading *The Red Badge of Courage* with students, he discussed literary terms with them such as *juxtaposition* and *imagery*, pointing out how the text used both techniques and explaining that they would also hear those terms “in [mainstream] English classes” and would need to know what they meant and how to identify them in text:

Kevin: Something you will hear in other [mainstream] English classes, and in this class, they will talk about something called juxtapositioning. Has anybody heard of that before?

Leonardo nods eagerly and raises his hand.

Kevin calls on Leonardo. Leonardo says he doesn’t know how to explain it in English.

Kevin: Juxtaposition is when you have two things that are very different and you put them together. The author, Stephen Crane, put two pictures in his mind that are very different together. Can you see what these two pictures are that are very different? Take a look at that last page. Take a look at page 26 and see if you can tell what they are.

In addition, during class discussions when students would offer colloquial language to explain something, Kevin would use their terminology as well as share more academic ways of expressing their ideas. For instance, a student described the main character in a story they had just read as a “lame-o,” and Kevin wrote this word on the board, adding that the character could also be called “afraid” or “cautious.” When a student explained that the converse of this was that a character liked to go places, and Kevin asked for an adjective to describe this, one student said “mover.” Kevin used this word and added “adventurous” and “curious” to their list.

Thus, Kevin’s focus on academic language was clear in his exposure of students to texts and terminology they would encounter in their mainstream English classes and in his scaffolding of student descriptions to include more academic vocabulary. Becky worked with students on writing for different purposes, such as persuasive and descriptive purposes. In addition, in both classes, students were exposed to descriptive language and literary terms through reading and talking about narrative texts (*Summer on Wheels* in Becky’s class and *Tom Sawyer* and *The Red Badge of Courage* in Kevin’s class).

Theme 3: L1 Support

Both Becky and Kevin treated students’ L1 as a resource for learning English and provided some L1 support in Spanish during class (Spanish was the L1 of the majority of their students). Kevin explained to me,

I think that [L1] is pretty important. That is kind of the base that you build on. I don’t mind them using it at all [during class]. I think not making it an
issue of what language they are using makes them feel a little more comfortable using English. I have noticed, at times in the past I have tried to be strict about just English, and they became pretty reticent about that.

After taking an intensive university course in Spanish and spending 6 weeks abroad in Spain, Kevin had impressive fluency in Spanish and often drew on students’ knowledge of Spanish to help them determine the meaning of words in English. In the following example he elicited the meaning of the word Mediterranean, which appeared in their history textbooks:

Several students have had trouble pronouncing the word Mediterranean when it was their turn to read.
A student (Antonio) says, “That’s a heavy word, Mediterranean.”
Kevin: Do you all know what the Mediterranean is? Who doesn’t know?
Kevin asks Antonio, a Spanish-speaking student: “What word does Medi- sound like in Spanish?”
Antonio: Medio.
Kevin: And what does -terranean sound like?
Antonio: Terreno.
Kevin: Spanish can help you with lots of things.
Antonio: I know, huh?
Kevin: “So it’s ‘between lands,’” and he pulls down the map and shows students where the Mediterranean is.

Kevin also had a classroom atmosphere that encouraged students to serve as language brokers (e.g., Orellana, 2001; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003; Tse, 1995) for one another, and students more proficient in English would often help translate for less proficient students, as in the following example:

Kevin holds up a book and says: “This is a very famous speech, because it was given by an American Indian about his people and land because White people were coming and taking it. It is a children’s book called Brother Eagle, Sister Sky. His name is Chief Seattle. What I want you to do, I want you to listen to the speech, and look at the pictures. Now I know you won’t understand all the words. I want you to imagine what he is saying. I’m going to ask you to write down what you think Chief Seattle is saying.”
Kevin asks a Spanish-speaking student, James, to translate some of the ideas in the book aloud into Spanish for the students in the class who are less proficient in English, while he reads aloud.
As Kevin reads aloud, James simultaneously translates the speech into Spanish: “El águila, el búfalo, todos son hermanos.” (The eagle, the buffalo, they are all brothers.)

Kevin’s incorporation of students’ L1 knowledge gave them an opportunity to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the content they were
encountering than they would have without the support he provided, and students appeared interested and engaged during the reading of the book.

Becky was less proficient in Spanish than Kevin was, but she too used her Spanish abilities to explain instructions and concepts to students, using vocabulary in Spanish when she knew it. She also drew on the Spanish fluency of others in her classroom (other students, teachers’ aides, the researcher) when she felt it would be useful to convey information in Spanish. For example, after giving instructions about how to complete an assignment in English, Becky would often ask me or another student to repeat the same instructions in Spanish as well as answer any clarification questions students had if they wanted clarification in Spanish.

Becky also openly valued students’ proficiency in other languages as a resource, as in the following interchange with a Somalian student in her class.

Becky (to the whole class, about an assignment to summarize the plot of a chapter they had read): I’d love to see what your summaries look like and see how smart you are.

Somalian student: I’m not dumb.

Becky: Anybody who knows two languages has got some brains in their head, huh?

Somalian student: I speak four languages.

Becky asks which languages, and he tells her.

Becky tells him she is impressed he can speak so many languages.

The *Summer on Wheels* novel Becky read with her students also afforded many opportunities to draw on Spanish-speaking students as resources to help the class understand the dialogue in the text that intermingled some Spanish, particularly Mexican colloquial Spanish, with English. In the following example, Becky drew on her Spanish-speaking students’ knowledge of Spanish vocabulary and slang to help the whole class comprehend a dialogue that involved code-switching from English to Spanish.

Becky reads a chapter from *Summer on Wheels* aloud to the class. When she comes to a sentence that mixes in some Spanish with English, she asks the students: “*La gente*—what would that mean?”

Ss: People.

Becky, reading aloud, comes across another sentence in the book with Spanish slang in it, and asks Ss to define it: “*Hijo*—what does that mean?”

Zaida: Like, “oops.”

Becky continues reading. She comes across the word *vatos*. She asks the class: “What’s *vatos*? Ducks?” (She is thinking of the word *patos*, which means ducks.)

The students laugh, and a student tells her *vatos* is “Like homies.”

Becky keeps reading, and comes across the word *chamacos*. She asks: “*Chamacos*—what does *chamacos* mean?”
Ss: Kids.
Becky keeps reading, and asks the students “Ay caramba—what does that mean?”
Ss: Oh my gosh.

In fact, Becky had chosen *Summer on Wheels* intentionally because she felt that many of her students would connect to it. She explained that the previous school year, most of her students were Spanish speakers and had enjoyed the use of Spanish in the book. She had decided to use the book again because she felt that it had good character development and that several of her students would identify with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the protagonists. She explained,

> I thought “Well, 90% of my kids are Latino, so why not pick a book that has some Spanish in it and talks about some of their culture?”…When we read about *tamales* and we read about the food and stuff like that, they love it. They laugh at [the use of the colloquial Spanish word] *chamacos* [in the book].

Thus, both teachers used Spanish as a bridge to students’ learning of English and of content through such strategies as using cognates and scaffolding comprehension of English through explanation in Spanish. Because of his greater proficiency in Spanish, Kevin was more adept at drawing on students’ knowledge in Spanish and transferring that knowledge to their understanding in English. Although Becky could not use Spanish as a support in the same way, she encouraged students to serve as experts to inform her and the rest of the class about the Spanish used by the protagonists in *Summer on Wheels*.

**Theme 4: Explicit Reading Strategies Instruction**

Both teachers engaged students in explicit reading strategies instruction. Many reading researchers (e.g., Block, 1986; Carrell, 1987, 1991; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Duke & Pearson, 2002) have asserted that explicit instruction in how to use reading strategies to comprehend text helps students to “develop their own model for how to construct meaning” (Pearson & Fielding, 1991, p. 848). Becky spent some time teaching students how to use reading strategies or leading them through assignments that required them to apply these skills to text during all of the periods I observed her with her Intermediate ESL class. She spent the first 3 months of the fall semester reading *Summer on Wheels* aloud to her students, typically one chapter at a time, and leading students through the application of reading strategies to the text while they read. During this time she focused primarily on teaching students how to determine what the most important developments in the chapter were so that they could summarize the plot of
the chapter effectively, thus developing the skill of being able to identify the important details of the chapter. To this end, one of the major assignments students completed while reading *Summer on Wheels* was an abbreviated children’s version of *Summer on Wheels* in which they summarized each chapter in three to four sentences, accompanied by a picture. Not all students remained fully interested in summarizing their books during the several weeks the class spent on this activity, but their work generally demonstrated that they had grasped the main ideas of each chapter.

Becky also used *Summer on Wheels* as a vehicle for teaching another reading strategy: the use of context clues to determine the meaning of unknown vocabulary while they read. She prompted students to “be detectives” and make use of the context clues in the text.

Becky: “We’re going to be detectives, use clues, and investigate.” She says they will first practice with a couple of sentences and then start reading the book and looking for clues to help them understand unknown words in the book. She writes this sentence on the board: “The gnat landed in my food. I ate it by mistake.” She circles the word *gnat* and tells them this is the word they are trying to determine the meaning of.

Becky: “Who wants to take a guess, looking at the clues we have in the other sentences?” She calls on a student, and he says he doesn’t know. She tells him to take a wild guess, and he guesses a fly. She says this is an excellent guess and asks for other guesses. Other students guess that it is a bug or spider. After explaining the meaning of *gnat*, Becky begins reading the chapter, stopping to ask students to use context to determine the meaning of words like *puny*, *scrawny*, and *bystanders*.

Becky also spent time teaching students how to scan text for specific information; how to use prediction strategies to determine what might happen next in the story; and how to use text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections. She frequently prompted students to follow along in the text as she read aloud, explaining that this also would help them become better readers.

Becky explained to me that, in part, her attention to reading strategies in her classroom had emerged from a desire to improve her students’ academic opportunities:

My goal is to create more of an inclusive environment for these kids. And the only way that it is going to be an inclusive environment is if they can have everything that the other kids have—that is those skills. I want them to go on to college and stuff like that. I know teaching these strategies is one way to do it.

Equal access to content and to the skills needed for continuing on to higher education were thus important factors in Becky’s explicit instruction of reading strategies.
Similarly, in Kevin’s classroom, most of the intermediate and advanced class periods that I observed focused on reading strategies instruction, including paying attention to text types; using text features (such as headings, pictures, captions, and other graphics) to infer meaning; monitoring for comprehension while reading; asking oneself questions while reading; visualizing what was happening in the text; predicting what would happen next; scanning for specific information; and using text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections to make sense of the text. He used the America’s Past and Promise history textbook to introduce five types of expository text to his students (compare/contrast, cause/effect, problem/solution, sequential, and descriptive text) as well as to infer meaning from text features and to practice scanning skills. He used fiction, such as The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Red Badge of Courage, and some children’s stories, to explore the use of other reading strategies, such as visualization, prediction, monitoring for comprehension, and making connections to text (text to self, text to text, and text to world).

For instance, for approximately 5 weeks, Kevin and his students focused on identifying five types of expository text (compare/contrast, descriptive, cause/effect, problem/solution, and sequential) in their American history textbooks. Kevin explained to his students that they were learning about text types because “if you are able to recognize types of text, it will make your reading easier.” Kevin introduced each new text type by reading a children’s story to the class that he felt demonstrated the type of text they would be studying next. After introducing each new text type with a story, Kevin returned to the history textbook, asking students to identify the type of text they were reading in that section of the textbook: “Now look at this paragraph . . . . Is it compare and contrast, is it problem/solution, is it description, or cause and effect?”

Both teachers felt that teaching students strategies for comprehending text, such as prediction; scanning; and making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections, was critical to their students’ academic success, and they worked hard to ensure that students learned to use these strategies well. Furthermore, Becky emphasized additional strategies (such as knowledge of story elements) to aid comprehension of the fictional text her students read, whereas Kevin used strategies to help with comprehension of both the expository (such as knowledge of text types and text features) and fictional texts his students read. My observations of students in these two classrooms indicated that although they sometimes tired of discussing reading strategies and began engaging in off-task behavior, they generally did comprehend their texts and understand how to apply these strategies while they read. As reading researchers have shown, these abilities are critical because they are necessary in academic work throughout students’ school experiences.
Theme 5: Culturally Responsive Teaching

Both Becky and Kevin embodied aspects of Villegas and Lucas’s (2002) vision for culturally responsive teaching in their practice. Villegas and Lucas defined their first tenet, *sociocultural consciousness*, as “an understanding that people’s ways of thinking, behaving, and being are deeply influenced by such factors as race/ethnicity, social class, and language” (p. 22). Becky’s *sociocultural consciousness* was evident in a concern that she expressed to me, one that her own cultural and linguistic background prevented her from engaging students in the most effective ways possible, because she feared that students could not identify with her:

Becky: I wish I was like, I think it would be better if I was Latina.
Researcher: Why?
Becky: I think [my students] could identify with me more. I think they need more people that they can identify with, and I think that I would be a stronger role model. . . . I really questioned whether I could even be an effective, a really truly effective ESL teacher, and a White, East Coast, loud woman (laughing). Do you know what I mean? Because I can’t ever take *me* out of the picture. I can be more sensitive and stuff but my picture is with me in it, and I am not a Latina woman, or I am not a Somalian woman or man.
Researcher: What makes you think that that would make you more effective?
Becky: Identity. [Students could] see themselves in me. They can’t now. Plus, I am from New York: I am not even in their proximity, and they know that. I don’t know what it is like to grow up [in their neighborhoods]. The mirror isn’t there and I think that it is very important.

Becky questioned her effectiveness because she did not share the same background as her students, but her awareness of this difference also seemed to make her work harder to understand her students’ perspectives. She recognized herself as a cultural being and realized that her culture and her students’ cultures affected the ways in which they interacted and learned, which is critical to culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, as cited in Willis & Lewis, 1998).

Certainly Becky’s choice of *Summer on Wheels* demonstrated her *sociocultural consciousness*. Her use of the book was an example of her designing instruction that built on what her students already knew, because the protagonists’ language and culture were familiar to many students, and Becky was able to draw on students’ knowledge of Spanish as a resource.

Furthermore, Becky demonstrated an understanding of her ESL classroom as a place where her students could be with other students like
themselves and feel comfortable, because they were mainstreamed much of the day:

Becky: [The principal] integrated [all seventh-grade ESL and mainstream students] within a pod. She doesn’t like [ELLs] to be separate [from mainstream students, because she wants them to have access to the mainstream curriculum]. But I think that there is [also] a place for them to be separate, I really do.

Researcher: And why do you say that?

Becky: You see how happy they are in class and it is all because they are with their peers and they get to hang out and they really feel that they can say whatever they want and I think that is great. They need that because they are probably silenced in their other classes. Afraid of accents or afraid of something.

Becky also told me that she was committed to being a change agent and that she did not want to “perpetuate the status quo of marginalizing and cultural insensitivity” that ELLs often experience in schools. However, she noted that she felt her capacity to be an agent of change was limited:

I think I could do a lot better job of understanding the different cultures that are in my classroom and be more sensitive and compatible to those cultures but I am not, because the [school] system is set up in such a way where you have to manage a lot.

Here, Becky’s criticism echoed Villegas and Lucas’s (2002) comment that “a host of factors work against teachers’ becoming agents of change [one of the characteristics of culturally responsive teachers], including the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the educational system” (p. 24).

Kevin also demonstrated cultural responsiveness in a variety of ways, one of which was designing instruction based on what his students already knew. He frequently drew on his Spanish-speaking students’ knowledge of Spanish to build their understanding of what they were reading in English, often leading them to recognize cognates and break down words into parts (as in his explanation of the meaning of the word Mediterranean; see the “Theme 3: L1 Support” section of this article). In this way, he validated their L1 as a useful tool and encouraged students to view their language knowledge as additive. In doing so, Kevin also modeled a constructivist view of learning for his students in which the students not only contributed their knowledge and ideas to move forward in their own learning but also did so to further the learning of classmates, such as in instances when students who were more proficient in English served as language brokers for students who were less proficient in English by translating class discussion from English to Spanish for the less proficient students or translating from Spanish to English what less proficient students wanted to share with the class.
Students’ eagerness to share ideas in both languages, their eagerness to help classmates with translation, and their attentiveness to one another indicated that they appreciated Kevin’s validation of their L1 in his classes.

Kevin’s knowledge of and involvement in students’ lives outside of school was also evidence of his cultural responsiveness. Early in the school year, he could remember what countries his students were from and would refer to their countries of origin when talking to students and about students. He frequently asked students to draw on their lives to make sense of what they were studying. For example, when reading a story about a fish that was separated from his school, he said, “Maybe you can make a personal connection here, and think about a time that you were separated from people you know” (this certainly may have been relevant and poignant to some students’ immigration experiences). In another instance, students were learning how to use a Venn diagram and Kevin asked them to compare and contrast “the place you were born” with “the place you live now.” In addition, Kevin often connected with students’ family members in a variety of ways. For example, he said,

If their parents get a letter at home and they don’t understand it they will bring it in and have me explain it…. I remember at the end of the year last year Henry’s brother, who was in high school, came in and asked me to help him explain some of his graduation requirements and stuff. I think compared to most teachers my job really goes much further than the classroom.

It was also important to Kevin to scaffold students into academic literacy and participation in a democratic society:

Researcher: What kinds of things do you want students to get out of your class, what do you feel is most important that they learned when they are leaving?

Kevin: I think to be able to read for fun and write to express themselves as well as to read academic text and write in academic areas. Those are the school focuses. Then also to be prepared to be responsible citizens.

Researcher: So how are you defining “responsible citizen” to them in class?

Kevin: I think there are two approaches, one of them is that in all likelihood these kids will be American citizens someday. So that is why we are doing early American history. We are going to go into the constitutional government. Kind of a basic understanding of the government. Also the whole sense of being a responsible person for your actions…and taking care of what you have responsibility for. Taking care of the earth, your family, your studies, etcetera…. I try to have my two rules [take care of yourself, take care of others] exemplify that you have got to take care of things.
Another aspect of Kevin’s culturally responsive practice were his attempts to pique students’ sociocultural consciousness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). While reading a chapter in the *America’s Past and Promise* history textbook, Kevin took advantage of a number of opportunities. One related to a painting depicting Columbus as a heroic figure, standing in a shaft of light. Kevin posed the following question to the class:

Kevin: If the painting had been painted by an Indian instead of by a European, would the painting be different?

Students: Yes.

Student: The painter believed that Christopher Columbus was a big hero.

During the same class period, Kevin and his students continued to talk about Columbus’s voyage, and Kevin asked the class:

Kevin: Did he [Columbus] really discover it [America]?

Ss: (Some say yes, some say no.)

Student: No, because the Indians were there first.

Kevin: So Columbus just discovered it for Europe?

Ss: Yes.

By leading students in inquiry about Columbus and his role, Kevin was asking his students to think critically about his contributions and to consider that his contributions have been constructed and understood differently by different groups of people.

The following week, the students had moved on in their textbooks and were discussing the conquest of Mexico by Cortés. Here, too, Kevin required students to activate their sociocultural consciousness and consider the impact of Cortés’s conquest on indigenous peoples:

Kevin: Now I want you to imagine. Imagine you’re a Native American living in Mexico, what kind of changes would happen in your life? [once Cortés has conquered it].

Student: The language will change.

Student: The religion will change.

Such speculation was culturally responsive in a number of ways: It may have drawn on the background knowledge of the Mexican students in Kevin’s class about historical events and changes in Mexico; it also incorporated students’ experiences with and knowledge of the kinds of changes that occur in colonized societies, of which many of his students may have had both direct and historical understanding from experiences in their home country.

Both teachers exhibited cultural responsiveness through the questions they asked, the texts they used, their knowledge about students’ linguistic
and cultural backgrounds and home lives, and an awareness of how their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds were in play in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

The classroom and interview data suggest that Becky’s and Kevin’s teaching reflected many practices that the literature on education and literacy development has asserted are important for the academic success of ELLs but of which there are few classroom examples (for exceptions, see Echevarría et al., 2008; Manyak, 2002; Valdés, 2001). Becky and Kevin prepared their students for the academic language and literacy demands of mainstream classrooms by using grade-appropriate, cognitively demanding materials with their students (Cummins, 1981; Echevarría et al., 2008), which is a critical step in readying students for the linguistic and cognitive demands of a mainstream curriculum. Furthermore, they scaffolded this content by explaining and using academic language and vocabulary and by providing L1 support in Spanish. They also focused heavily on developing students’ reading comprehension abilities in English, which is a significant demand for academic success in mainstream classrooms (ERIC Development Team, 1999; Harper & de Jong, 2004).

Also present in Becky’s and Kevin’s practices was another important dimension in the school success of linguistically and culturally diverse students: that of being culturally responsive. Both teachers demonstrated many facets of the cultural responsiveness that Villegas and Lucas (2002) outlined. Becky recognized that her own culture came into play in the classroom, she supported and celebrated her students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge through her choice of the novel *Summer on Wheels*, and she encouraged students to feel that their language and culture were welcome contributions in her classroom by soliciting and praising their L1 abilities and making connections between texts and student’s cultural knowledge. Kevin, too, was culturally responsive: He helped students take active roles in constructing their knowledge by leading them to examine cognates and by encouraging them to serve as language brokers for one another, he was aware of and engaged with students’ lives outside of school, and he was committed to helping students become active participants and responsible citizens in a democratic society.

It is important to see the recommendations of the literature on ELLs enacted in practice in the cases of Kevin and Becky. Although Becky and Kevin did not demonstrate perfect examples of these practices each time, these cases illustrate that these practices are indeed possible in real classrooms with real students, and they provide valuable examples of how two teachers are enacting these practices in their classrooms. The examples from Becky’s and Kevin’s practices also illustrate that these teachers are combining many different kinds of knowledge about teaching ELLs in any given
teaching moment, and thus teachers must have a complex array of understanding—a holistic way of thinking—about teaching ELLs. For Becky and Kevin, what guided their decisions about teaching their students was anchored in their understanding that students needed access to academic language and literacy so that they could move into active and informed participation in mainstream classrooms. From this holistic vision emerged informed instructional decisions that were not simply about oft-mentioned techniques for ELLs (i.e., using visuals and manipulatives, using cooperative learning) but rather were driven by an understanding about students’ mainstream academic language and literacy needs and thus provided a deeper way of approaching instruction. Certainly, the teachers’ daily experience teaching mainstream students themselves (Kevin’s state history classes and Becky’s reading/language arts classes) also helped them to be aware of what their ELLs needed to perform successfully in mainstream classrooms.

It is also important to note the complexity of the teachers’ practices. The themes identified here in both teachers’ practices are not easily separable, nor should they be. I separated them into the five themes for the purpose of illustrating as clearly as possible some of the practices used by these ESL teachers that prepared their ELLs for the demands of mainstream classrooms. However, it is possible, and I would argue desirable, to see connections and overlap in teachers’ practices as they prepare their ELLs for mainstream classrooms. For instance, one of the excerpts from Becky’s classroom shared here as representative of L1 support (in which Becky asked Spanish-speaking students in her classroom to clarify the meaning of gente, ¡hijo-, vatos, chamacos) is also representative of the kinds of culturally responsive exchanges around language and culture that occurred in her classroom while her class read Summer on Wheels.

That is, not only did Becky check students’ understanding of the English meanings of Spanish words in the text and use L1 as a support, but she also used a text that was of cultural and linguistic relevance to many of her students and placed herself in the position of learning from them and constructing the meaning of the text together. Thus, this is also an example of Becky engaging in culturally responsive teaching.

Similarly, in a culturally responsive example highlighted earlier from Kevin’s classroom one can also see the theme of reading strategies instruction as he encouraged students to predict what they would read next in the passage about Cortés. Not only did students’ consideration of the perspective of a Native American living in Mexico when Cortés conquered it help them to think critically about Cortés’s actions, it also helped prepare them for what they would read next.

The interconnection of the themes in these teachers’ practices illustrates that the teachers were engaged in multiple and complex practices in their lessons to prepare their students for the demands of mainstream classrooms. Although research has examined these practices separately, Becky and Kevin brought
them together in various ways to make their teaching effective. Because both were novice teachers, it is likely that their ability to weave their practices together in even deeper and more meaningful ways will increase with more experience.

Certainly, both teachers also demonstrated room for growth. Becky’s teaching of mainstream content and vocabulary by helping students define words in the context of the sentence and discussing synonyms for words was representative of important ways to help students learn academic language. However, at times it was rushed, and she could have probed students' comprehension and background knowledge more deeply. Ideally, Becky’s practice of teaching academic language will continue to grow as she develops as a teacher, and she will incorporate deeper questioning techniques and encourage students to make more connections between their reading and their background knowledge. Kevin, too, had room to grow in his practices. Over time, his explicit reading strategies instruction may become more seamlessly integrated with the texts themselves rather than the strategies driving his instruction, for instance. Perhaps both teachers will also become more comfortable and adept at introducing and discussing culturally sensitive topics and will gain more confidence with how to solicit and mediate student discussion about these sensitive issues.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Teaching ELLs in ways that prepare them for mainstream classrooms is complex work, and although there are significant amounts of research about what teachers should be doing, there is little information about what teachers are doing to help students make this transition (e.g., Harper & de Jong, 2004; Lucas et al., 2008; Snow & Griffin, 1998; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2002). An examination of Becky’s and Kevin’s practices illustrates several aspects of practice that are important to ELLs’ academic achievement and shows that these often happen in simultaneous and complex ways. Thus, teachers of ELLs not only need to know instructional tricks and strategies (such as using think–pair–share activities and graphic organizers) for working with ELLs, but they also need to have a deeper way of thinking about their teaching and knowledge of how to bring findings from various bodies of research together: engaging in instruction that teaches students mainstream content while also attending to language, focusing on students’ academic language development, providing opportunities for L1 support, scaffolding students in effective ways to read both narrative and expository text, and teaching in culturally responsive ways. This has important implications for both research and practice. More research is needed that documents the instruction of ELLs. What kinds of practices are teachers actually engaging in? How do they go about planning their instruction in ways that differentiate instruction and target specific student needs? What sorts of support do teachers need to engage in the
kinds of complex practices exhibited by Kevin and Becky? Are more experienced teachers doing this also, and how do their practices differ in sophistication from Kevin’s and Becky’s? How are teacher education programs preparing both ESL and mainstream teachers to engage in these multiple facets of instruction? How does or should ongoing professional development for teachers help them engage in this kind of work? How do students in such classrooms respond to this kind of instruction? Much more detailed qualitative work, such as case studies and ethnographic work examining the work of teachers of ELLs, is needed to provide further data about how teachers are preparing ELLs for the academic challenges of mainstream classrooms. This research will provide important examples for teacher educators to examine and analyze with preservice and in-service teachers.

Future research should also examine student outcomes when teachers use these complex practices so that experts can begin to build a more detailed body of work arguing what effective instruction of ELLs looks like. In the current study I did not examine the academic performance of students in Becky’s and Kevin’s classes, and therefore I cannot establish a connection between Becky’s and Kevin’s practices and student outcomes. In future work, it will be of vital importance to begin to make connections between the kinds of instructional practices that teachers use and students’ demonstration of readiness for the demands of mainstream classrooms.

Practical implications include the need to take a hard look at teacher education programs and what they are preparing both mainstream and ESL teachers to do with regard to teaching ELLs. There has been much discussion (e.g., August & Hakuta, 1997; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Menken & Antunez, 2001) about teachers’ lack of preparedness to work with ELLs and questions about how to prepare them. The complexity of the kinds of practices that Kevin and Becky bring together indicates that for mainstream teachers, adding a class period about ELLs to existing coursework or even a single add-on course to a program is not sufficient to help teachers begin to engage with all of these concepts. Instead, infusing information about teaching ELLs

7Lucas et al. (2008) recently recommended that “a separate course be added to the teacher education curriculum—namely, one devoted to teaching ELLs and one that all preservice teachers are required to take” (p. 370). They suggested an add-on course rather than infusion, stating:

Although such infusion could be a long-term goal, we do not see it as a viable option at present…. given the lack of experience with the education of ELLs by most teacher educators and the time that it takes to build substantial knowledge among them, it would be irresponsible to rely on an infusion strategy that requires distributing specialized knowledge and practices for ELL education across the faculty. (p. 370)

I fully agree that a single course about ELLs is an appropriate intermediate step and include infusion in my recommendations because I see that as the end goal.
throughout multiple courses within programs is a more meaningful way of addressing the multiple facets in which these two teachers engage in their practices.

Coursework needs to heighten ESL teachers’ understanding of mainstream curriculum and instruction as well as the procedural demands on ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Collaboration with mainstream colleagues on a regular basis is also an important way for ESL teachers to become aware of mainstream demands and for mainstream teachers to learn more about how to teach content in ways that are comprehensible and meaningful to ELLs (Arkoudis, 2006; Creese, 2002, 2006; Davison, 2006; Martin-Beltrán, Peercy, & Selvi, in press; Peercy & Martin-Beltrán, in press).

For both mainstream teachers and ESL specialists, teacher education about how to best teach ELLs often slips into lists of isolated techniques and tricks rather than the more complex practices that emerge from the sophisticated academic skills that students need to master for success in all content areas. Experts need to share theories about the effective teaching of ELLs and illustrate that none of these techniques stands alone, but instead all are interwoven in complex ways. A meaningful way to do this is through using examples and in-depth cases such as those from Becky’s and Kevin’s classrooms.

There is also a policy implication in the findings of this study: If ESL teachers know about mainstream classrooms, they can move students toward meeting the challenges and expectations inherent to mainstream classrooms. Thus, measures that help inform ESL teachers about mainstream classrooms are important. Such measures include encouraging collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers (which is currently not very common; see Martin-Beltrán et al., in press, and Peercy & Martin-Beltrán, in press) as well as examining whether secondary ESL teachers should be required to have licensure in a content area field with an ESL endorsement added to their content area (policies currently vary by state) so that they are qualified to teach mainstream students. Endorsement rather than certification in ESL would allow secondary ESL teachers to teach content classes for which ELLs can receive credit toward graduation (if ESL teachers are not certified in the content area, courses count only as elective credit, which does not help ELLs move toward graduation). There is still much work to be done to develop an understanding of the kinds of instruction necessary for moving ELLs toward successful participation in mainstream classrooms, and there is much to learn from teacher cases such as Becky’s and Kevin’s.

REFERENCES


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