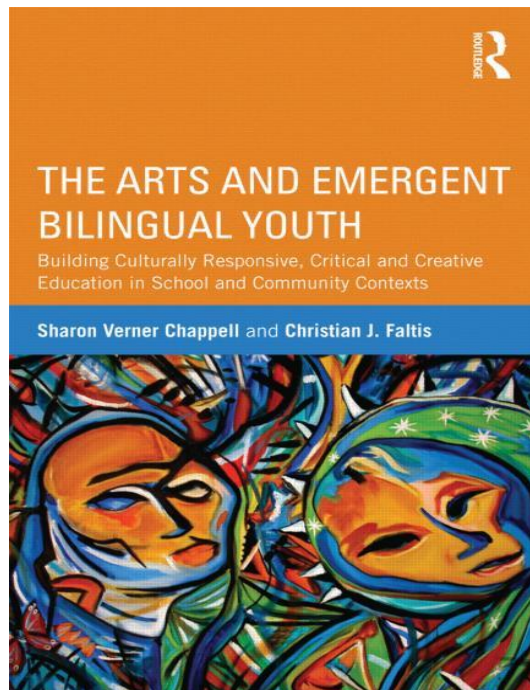


Review of *The Arts and Emergent Bilingual Youth: Building Culturally Responsive, Critical and Creative Education in School and Community Contexts*

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In *The Arts and Emergent Bilingual Youth: Building Culturally Responsive, Critical and Creative Education in School and Community Contexts*, Sharon Verner Chappell and Christian J. Faltis provide a much-needed guide to both researchers and practitioners who are seeking ways to incorporate creative pedagogies in America's rapidly changing classrooms. The term "emergent bilingual youth" (Garcia and Kleifgen, 2010) in the title is an indication of Chappell and Faltis's orientation to the students at issue here: the authors emphasize the strengths, rather than the limitations, of children who are learning English. The phrase "community contexts" is also intentional, as the book addresses both classroom learning and out-of-school learning: in after-school programs, at home, and in social interactions. This asset-based, holistic approach to creating inclusive curriculum guides the authors' exploration of the enormous potential of the arts as a basis for cross-cultural teaching and understanding.

The arts-based teaching and research methods in *The Arts and Bilingual Youth* include approaches as diverse as photography, poetry, drama, gardening, puppetry, and digital storytelling. These methods, as well as more commonly-used curricular tools such as painting and writing, are explored from two points of view: first, as channels through which students can express some of the complexities of becoming dual-language speakers; and second, as modes with which teachers and researchers can tell stories "outside the box" of traditional research. Each chapter of the book works toward both of those ends, in that each includes discussion of the data behind using the arts with English Language Learners, while also providing examples from practitioners who have compiled the data by doing the hands-on picture-, story-, and play-making (and more) with students.

Chappell and Faltis begin with some explanation of ELLs in America, emphasizing sociocultural phenomena such as the high dropout rate among this population, the erroneous but common belief that the native language of all or nearly all ELLs is Spanish, and the fact that emergent bilingual youth represent a majority of the students in America who are living in poverty. Their introduction, though, also includes poetry and narrative writing by

practitioners pointing to the value of both multilingualism, and of having children in the classroom who represent the "other" to children who may be accustomed to being "the mainstream." In a narrative about a photography project with 7-year-olds, a teacher writes that using images along with words created a safe place for children getting to know each other, and provided latitude for storytelling that a text-only project might not have. At the end of the introductory chapter and each following chapter, the authors include various useful "Questions to Consider."

Chapter 2 addresses teacher understanding, and considers beneficial ways to respond to exponentially increasing cultural and linguistic diversity among American students. Chappell and Faltis assert that the arts are a natural conduit for expression of the culturally-acquired "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) unique to emergent bilingual youth. When children describe their unique funds of knowledge, the authors write, they not only engage and inquire more about social and cultural issues; they also educate their teachers and peers. As an example of such teaching, Dafney Blanca Dabach describes using "shadow photography" with undocumented youth, in which students photographed shadows of themselves that incorporated their dreams about the future. In pictures representing potential occupations as divergent as hip-hop dancing and military service, the undocumented students showed both instructors and classmates that they had distinct hopes and dreams, some of which were the same as their peers'.

In Chapter 3, the authors focus on community and family involvement in schools, and in emergent bilinguals' learning in general. Here, teacher Shannon Burgert makes a case for including parents, siblings and community members through her yearly "Matter Party," during which students represent what they've learned about matter through various media: storytelling, songs, demonstrations, and even an ice sculpture. In her classroom, the arts are particularly beneficial to ELLs because visual media usually relies on little or no text. Chappell and Faltis elaborate, writing that many of the arts naturally involve the community, through events such as dramatic performance and art exhibitions.

Involvement of the community and families, in turn, informs schools about how to incorporate relevant cultural practices, and builds bridges between curricular, extra-curricular, familial, and community assets.

The title of Chapter 4 is “Playing with language, Playing through the arts,” and the chapter lives up to its name. The authors describe play as the basis of meaning-making, and therefore as the basis of learning. Chappell coins the term “libratory play” (p.61) to describe playing with language and art as ways to alleviate some of the rigidity of the conventional classroom. Both authors state that the arts, often viewed as play by students, can help foster connections between home experiences and school experiences while simultaneously encouraging expressions about social justice. Here, the authors also specifically cite sociodramatic play as an optimal place to observe the concepts of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development – as children, particularly ELLs, act out scenes, they are teaching and being taught by both peers and instructors. In this chapter and throughout the book, Chappell and Faltis encourage readers to re-envision their own feelings of being “inside” and “outside” of groups in their own childhoods. In doing so, those of us who teach non-mainstream children may gain multiple perspectives that lead to empathy with, rather than sympathy for, children who feel that they’re on the “outside.” It may also lead to an ability to teach students to create “everyday acts of playful resistance,” (p.77) works of art that may nudge them toward feeling that they are on the “inside,” or that may change what the “inside” is.

Chapter 5 is centered on the concept of story, and the ability of all the arts to relay “what we know, who we are, and how we live” (p.83). The chapter emphasizes the idea that many non-mainstream children may not have heard stories about children like themselves before they come to school; therefore schools are responsible for both presenting those stories, and encouraging children to tell them. Three vignettes written by teachers describe the power inherent in letting students describe both their cultural and linguistic selves – through storytelling, community art, and puppetry. Faltis and Chappell also make the often-overlooked point that personal

narrations can integrate content areas – one person’s narrative may touch on issues of language, geography, science, and the arts in ways that conventional curricula do not.

In Chapter 6, the authors look specifically at literature in the classroom. The chapter begins with some basic reading theory by Rosenblatt (1978) and Keene and Zimmerman (1997), both of which include the idea that meaning is made when we read and then co-construct ideas with others. This leads to the logical idea that emergent bilingual students are constructing ideas about the books they read with other student—students from very different places and cultures. True to their strengths-based foundation, Chappell and Faltis present this concept as an asset for both minority and non-minority students, and as a teaching opportunity for instructors who can encourage reading and writing that presents new ideas to each group, through practices as diverse as creating graffiti and deconstructing concepts of assimilation in children’s books.

World events, and ways to include them in a diverse classroom, are the focus of Chapter 7. Here the authors examine timely ideas such as holidays and traditions that are celebrated in schools, popular culture and who gets to be deemed a “hero” or “heroine” in the contemporary classroom, and ways in which service learning can integrate heterogeneous groups of students. This chapter, along with several others, includes vignettes that include teaching methods along with vignettes examining research methods. There is a particularly powerful description of a Youth Participatory Action Research project in Chapter 7, in which journalism, poetry, and drama were all incorporated in an ESOL classroom.

Youth involvement with media is addressed in Chapter 8, and Chappell and Faltis begin the chapter with two fundamental points. First, the authors write that many technological spaces, particularly the internet, provide a place for boundaries of both geographical space and language to be crossed. Second, they say, technology often allows students to voice their concerns in way that cannot be “corrected” by instructors, and/or incorporates self-

correcting programs such as SpellCheck. Digital modes are often geared toward the creation of local or personal narratives; Chappell and Faltis cite digital storytelling as one mode that has frequently been used by students to tell personal, family, or community stories. The vignettes in this chapter also emphasize the fact that digital communication is ideal for building alliances within communities – in one case, student films were shown in a community center and then a local theater; in another, instructors examined the use of Power-Point-based stories in an after school setting, and the ways those stories could be translated to the classroom.

In Chapter 9, the authors take us back into the classroom, looking at best practices for building counter-narratives in traditional settings. They base their suggested methods on two theories: first, that the “experiential knowledge” (p.163) of emergent bilingual youth is foundational to teaching them; and second, that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary if teachers are to incorporate and appreciate all the resources of students and communities. The first vignette here involves teacher education that candidly confronts the biases and prejudices that lead to oppression from even the most well-intentioned teachers. In the ethnodrama described in this chapter, teachers develop understandings from multiple points of view (both protagonist’s and antagonist’s), which may help them feel what their non-mainstream students feel, as opposed to merely observing from a position of “authority” in the classroom. A second vignette embodies the principles of both experience and interdisciplinarity: a joint effort between New York University and the Museum of Modern Art transports teachers and students to the museum for a personal taste of works they may not otherwise see; the art, in turn, addresses topics from advocacy, to geography, to social status and beyond.

Framed as an epilogue, Chapter 10 looks toward the future, and asks: What is the likelihood that diverse communities can sustain productive practices for bilingual youth once they initiate them? Chappell

and Faltis assert that one key is attention to the ethics of creating with youth: How will they be represented? What influence will adults have? Who stands to benefit from the production of art? Another key, the authors say, is a deep regard for the fact that youth-produced art can contribute to both “community memory” (p.186) and “community dialogue” (p.187). Poetry, photography, painting, rap and other media stand to educate the world outside the emergent bilingual’s local circle, both in and out of school. What is taken for granted by one group can be an unknown to the other, which can lead to misunderstandings and even conflict. Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor’s poem “Language Lessons 1”, at the end of this chapter, artistically exemplifies this point: “There’s no word for lend in Spanish, only borrow”.....”errors of translation differ from mistakes.” (p.194). Like each of the other chapters, this one addresses both the possible trajectories of future research, and the ways in which classroom teachers can integrate research and community practices within schools.

Appendix A is a hands-on guide for the instructor aiming to create inclusive curriculum with three guiding principles: knowledge of the community, knowledge of participants, and self-awareness. Appendix B is a list of useful resources, including arts, literacy, social justice, and community non-profits.

The Arts and Emergent Bilingual Youth is such a comprehensive guide to the power of expression because it lays out theoretical rationales for using the arts with ELLs, provides language researchers with new data, and gives practitioners examples of teaching methods that worked. The book accomplishes all of this while speaking a language accessible to all three audiences, a rare feat in academic texts. One reason to incorporate the arts with language learners is that the arts can often show, rather than tell. Similarly, good writing is made up of examples rather than explanations. By incorporating primary research, practitioner vignettes, and artwork in this volume, Chappell and Faltis show us all the examples we need.

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