

Fridman Tatyana (2007) Action Research Study of a Child with a Chinese Cultural Background.

This action research study is about a young English language learner who was labeled learning disabled. I wanted to find out whether the use of a culturally familiar teaching method, used by the mother in her home, would allow this child to be able to learn more easily. The research project took approximately six weeks and included two interviews: one with a child's mother and another with a Chinese EFL teacher. Following the interviews, I observed the mother teaching vocabulary to her child, and then the mother observed me. We then compared notes. As a result of the study I came to the realization that the rote learning strategy that was used by the mother works well with this child in an elementary level of schooling. Close communication with the mother gave me a better understanding of the motives intentions of an immigrant mother. This project gave us an opportunity to learn from each other and use this experience in our work.

ACTION REASERCH STUDY OF A CHILD FROM A CHINESE CULTURAL
BACKGROUND

by

Tatyana Fridman

A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Arts in the English as a Second Language

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

October, 2007

Committee:

Pam Telleen, Primary Advisor
Dr. Ann Mabbott, Secondary Advisor
Pat Lieppman, Peer Reader

“You cannot understand mental activity unless you take into account the cultural setting and its resources, the very things that give mind its shape and scope”

Jerome Bruner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction -----	1
My First Language Teaching Experience -----	1
My Teaching Path Continues on the Other Part of the World -----	2
About my Project -----	5
Chapter Two: Literature Review -----	9
Definition of the ELL/LD -----	10
Language Acquisition and Learning Disability -----	11
Non-biased Assessment -----	16
Culture is an Essential Element in the Assessment Process -----	17
Research about Asian Learning Styles -----	19
Vocabulary Teaching Strategies -----	24
Chapter Three: Methods-----	30
Purpose of the Study -----	30
The Subject -----	31
Data Collection -----	34
Chapter Four: Results-----	38
Interviews-----	38
Learning From Each Other-----	42
Chapter Five: Conclusion -----	54
Reflection on my Learning -----	54

Limitations -----	58
Recommendations for Future Studies -----	59
Research Implications -----	59
Appendix A Chinese Teacher Interview Questionnaire-----	62
Appendix B Parent Interview Questionnaire-----	64
Appendix C Lesson Plan -----	67
Appendix D Susie’s Rain Forest and Desert Review Tests-----	70
References -----	73

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 Susie's tests results -----49

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My first language teaching experience

The study of language acquisition has been an interest of mine since I started my teaching career many years ago in my home country, Moldova, which was one of the fifteen republics of a big and powerful (at the time) nation – the Soviet Union. I graduated from a State Pedagogical Institute with a Bachelor degree in teaching Russian Language. Since I studied in a republic that had a culture and a language different from Russian, I went through a program that was specially designed for teaching Russian language to Moldavian speaking children. I taught in the secondary Moldavian school, where Russian language was mandatory as a state official language. The majority of my students were fully bilingual, although some of them seemed to have difficulty learning the Russian language. What caused this difficulty? What can teachers do to help? Questions like these were on my mind constantly. I remember organizing a club for the students who were interested in learning more, but unfortunately I couldn't attract the low achievers. At that time in our schools children with low learning abilities were considered "lazy" or unmotivated, but we didn't have special programs for learning disabled students. Only children with severe impairments had to attend special schools.

With that said I would like to highlight the fact that for many parents, who come to the United States from the former Soviet Union, it is very difficult to understand the term "learning disabled". This expression most likely could be perceived by parents as "not normal" or impaired. In that case a "lazy" child could improve by changing his/her attitude, in contrast to a child with a known disability. That is why this news could be offensive and upsetting for families, and in order to avoid disappointing them, tact, patience, and parent education have to be considered. I believe that if parents knew more about special education in the US school system many of them would understand the benefits of the program, and would support it. In order to be a knowledgeable educator and advocate for immigrant families, I decided to study the connection between special education and language learning process. I wanted to know how the parents of children with learning disabilities use their cultural techniques while working with their youngsters. To learn from their experience is one reason that attracted me to this topic.

My teaching path continues on the other side of the world

Years later, working as an ESL teacher here in Minnesota, I encountered the same issues with my students, only now they were learning English. Going through a cardinal transformation myself by having to change my language, I can compare this process with climbing ranges and ranges of mountains with exhaustive falls and euphoria of reaching the peaks. For many immigrants this is a life long journey. While getting accustomed to

the English language and a new culture, I understood that a number of factors might influence the learning process: stress, lack of communication with the outside world, family crises, difficulty with acculturation, adjustment to a new school system, and these are just a few. I also became familiar with the feeling of being perceived by other people as an unintelligent person because of the lack of my English and accent. People who normally don't have any connections with foreigners have a tendency to consider a person with an accent or a "broken English" as a "slow learner" or simply stupid. And this is not something abnormal; it is how people commonly judge others by the way they speak. For instance, some educators might not realize that learning a language is a long and complicated process, which might be influenced by different circumstances, such as past experiences, culturally different learning styles, difficulty in adjusting to a new culture, and inability to transfer the knowledge from native language into English as easily as some of the other students. Where is the borderline, which can separate learning disability and difficulty with learning a new language? Is it possible that minority students who are having a hard time learning might be misinterpreted as learning disabled? This question draws my attention as an ESL teacher, and motivates me in my work on this paper. It is possible that incorrectly identifying minority children as having a learning disability is taking place in many school districts of the US.

Taking my family through the adjustment to a new country, I can say that I "walked in the shoes" of the ESL families myself. This experience gives me an obligation to study this area and maybe contribute some information to the field of distinguishing difficulties in learning a language and learning disabilities.

How often do we see a student struggling with acquiring English? How often do we see a low achieving ESL student who is referred to a special education program? Often enough to draw the attention of many educators who would like to know how to help and how to understand whether the student has a learning disability or, simply, is dealing with acquiring a language. Over the years I was invited to several child study teams for discussions of questions that were raised by the teachers and parents. Is this the right time to refer this child to special education? Have we considered all the factors that possibly influence this child's learning? Did we include the measurement of the acculturation of the family in the process? I saw that my knowledge of this topic is scarce, and I felt the need to fill this gap. I definitely wanted to be a knowledgeable ESL teacher in order to do a good job advocating for my students.

How do we distinguish between learning disabilities and language learning difficulties? By saying learning difficulties I mean a student who has a different first language background and cannot reach his/her grade level standards because of inadequate English proficiency as opposed to students whose natural ability is low. Ortiz points out the fact that if these difficulties with learning a language are not addressed, meaning if the instruction is not modified meeting specific needs of a student, the difficulties might become more serious over time (Ortiz, 2001). That is why the importance of the correct diagnosis with the second language learners is obvious to me.

I came closer to the idea of studying this topic two years ago, when an ESL kindergartener entered our school. She was identified with a learning disability, but to me, and the mainstream teacher, her learning difficulty was not as striking. She knew her numbers, letters and some sounds and her fine motor skills were very good. What was different in her behavior? She couldn't remember names of classmates, and had a hard time socializing with her peers. Later, some other pieces surfaced such as: difficulty with abstract thinking, problem solving, and vocabulary. It intrigued me. Again and again I have been thinking about this child wondering if those difficulties

are coming from her cultural background. Being myself a recent immigrant I understand that many things in daily life can appear differently to you just because you grew up in a very dissimilar environment.

About my project

Even though some educators believe that it is more important to provide a child with a special education assistance rather than take their time trying to determine whether it is a learning disability or cultural differences, I think that each child deserves to have a chance to receive the help he/she needs and not to be labeled. It is a very sensitive issue to most of the immigrant parents and it should be resolved as precisely as it can be.

Wilkinson and Ortiz (1986) discovered that Hispanic students after spending three years in a special education program showed decline in their verbal performance and IQ scores and the achievement scores were at the same starting level. It elicits the fact that neither mainstream nor special education adequately served the academic needs of the language learners(Garcia, & Ortiz, 1988). Further Garcia and Ortiz state: “Serving students in the mainstream is more cost effective than placement in special education, particularly if the student is underachieving, but not handicapped. More importantly, perhaps, are the long-term benefits for students themselves who will have a greater chance of achieving their social, political, and economic potential because they are provided an appropriate education (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988).” The importance of the development of proper diagnostic procedures for the English learners in schools is well known among educators. My goal for this project is to gain as much knowledge on this topic as I could in order to be a well-informed member of a child study team for the ELLs, and possibly come up with some realizations about the cultural influence on the student’s learning.

It is important to understand that the identification and evaluation of culturally and linguistically different children is vital, especially when placement in special education is being considered (Collier, & Hoover, 1987). Because questions regarding referring ELLs

to special education are raised frequently I would like to study about cultural differences that may impact the learning styles of minority students. I would like to find answers to the questions: How different from those used in school are the strategies that parents are using to teach their child? Which strategy, commonly used in school or parent's used at home, works for this child? Is there a way of teaching the child new strategies by using familiar previously learned strategies? Gaining some outcomes from this action study I hope to shed some light on another question that is important to me: is it possible that a culturally influenced learning/teaching style plays a role in this child's identification as learning disabled. Taking into consideration that this project is limited by its time and methods, I think that further study should be conducted in order to determine whether the student's difficulties are attributed to cultural differences or a learning disability. The main purpose of this study is to find out the way we as teachers can successfully apply in school the technique that was used by this child's parents. Will this child be able to make progress more easily?

This project will include an interview with one of the parents of this student with the intention of gaining some information about the way the parents were taught during their years of schooling and the strategies that are used at home now to teach their child. The second interview, with a Chinese teacher, will give me an opportunity to gain some knowledge about teaching methods in Chinese schools in the present time, and compare that with the first interview. Based on the information retrieved from the interview and an observation I will utilize the strategy that the student has used at home and methods that are often used in the classroom. I hope to come up with the strategies that work effectively with this particular student, and the students with the similar cultural

background. After the interviews I will analyze the received information by comparing what I have learned from both representatives of a Chinese culture, and see what is in common there. I will ask a mother of this child to let me observe her teaching the child new vocabulary words in order to understand the way she instructs her daughter at home. During the observation I will take notes. I will ask the mother to continue working on the words for a week and will assess the child's learning following that time. The next part of my project will take a demonstration of my teaching the child new vocabulary words for the mother. Another assessment will follow my teaching. I will analyze the results and introduce them in chapter four. Another goal that I hope to achieve is to understand how much a close communication with a parent impacts a child's learning in school and also how much we, teachers, can learn from it.

The following chapter will introduce the historical development of the ELL/LD study, and reveal different researchers' points of view on the connection between language learning and language disabilities. It will discuss the importance of studies about cultural differences and the way it influences learning styles of students. In addition, since the focus of my project is a student with a Chinese cultural background, I would like to refer to some studies about East Asian learning styles. Even though many researchers published their studies in a field of learning disability of cultural different students, I found that there is not much studies done on the way educators can utilize cultural styles of teaching in their practice, particularly rote learning method, which is widely used in a Chinese schooling.

CAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The questions of my research are: How different from those used in school are the strategies that parents are using to teach their child? Is there a way of teaching the child new strategies by using familiar previously learned strategies? Which strategy works for this child?

Because the focus of this project is a child with a learning disability, some studies about the process of the identification of culturally diverse students with LD will be reviewed in this chapter. The strategies for teaching vocabulary to ELLs and LD will be discussed. Since the subject of the study is a child from a Chinese cultural background, the information about East Asian teaching and learning styles will also be introduced in the following chapter.

According to the 2000 census, almost every fifth person in the United States speaks a language other than English. It is projected that by the year of 2030 nearly 40 percent of the K-12 students will be children whose native language is not English (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary, National Symposium on Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners, October 14-15, 2003: *Symposium Summary, Washington D.C. 2004*). The growth of the minority student population anticipates the increase of interests to the ESL field, and most importantly to the question about separating language learning difficulties from learning disabilities.

In the recent presentation to Hamline University Elizabeth Watkins, LEP and Minority Issues Specialist, Division of Special Education with the Minnesota Department of Education, stated that number of LEP students is the fastest growing population in the Nation. Latest data show disproportionate growth of minority students referred to special education. This brings challenges for special education teachers who are facing difficulties with finding the appropriate assessment, and services (Watkins, 2007).

It shows that first of all many more ELLs are labeled LD compared to native English speakers, and secondly it shows the inconsistency in the evaluation process in different states of the US. Overrepresentation of the ELL students in special education reveals a big problem that educators encounter while trying to establish an accurate assessment process for culturally and linguistically different children with learning difficulties.

Definition of the ELL/LD

The definition of disability that is given in I.D.E.A. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) includes Autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, other health impairments, severe profound disability, specific learning disability, speech/language impairment, traumatic brain injury and visual impairment. SLD (Specific Learning Disability) Companion Manual of the Minnesota Department of Education describes SLD “as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding and using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.”

The same document declares that “a child may not be identified with specific learning disability if the severe discrepancy is primarily the result of: 1) a vision, hearing, or motor impairment; 2) mental retardation; 3) emotional disturbance; or 4) environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage (Watkins, 2003).”

IDEA describes English language learners with learning disabilities as ELLs who do not easily acquire the English language or do not make gains after several years of instruction in both language acquisition and academic content are often referred for special education services. ELL who qualify under IDEA must have at least one of the impairments specified under IDEA and, because of that condition, need special education. However not every minority child meets the criteria and many factors should be considered before referring him/her to special education. There are many factors that affect a child’s learning, but they don’t always indicate learning disability (Boyd, 2002).

Language acquisition and learning disability

Disproportional representation of ELLs in special education programs is found across the country. For instance, Henderson, Abbot, and Strang (1993) came across the fact that in some parts of the United States, minority children represent 1% of those in special education and in some – over 26%. A few years ago University of Texas Austin conducted a study of 21 Spanish speaking English language learners with reading related LD (Wilkinson, Ortiz, Robertson, & Kushner, 2004). After the study was completed they found that only five of 21 students were having reading related learning disability. The researchers agreed with the district multicultural team that another six had disabilities, however ten other students had significant underachievement, but no disabilities were confirmed (Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006).

In order to seek a solution for many schools the three agencies organized the National Symposium on Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners, which was held in October 14-15, 2003 in Washington D.C. Educators from Mexico, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom had discussions about a possible solution to the dilemma of appropriately identifying language learners with learning disabilities. The focus of the discussions was on: development of the best assessment tools, identifying the differences between learning disabilities in native English speakers and language learners, cultural and individual factors that influence the outcome of the ELLs and ELL/LD. Gail McKoon from Ohio State University led the elaboration on recent researches in the field of ELL and LD. She high-lighted a few factors that negatively impact the outcomes of the studies that were conducted in the past 20 years: 1) not many studies used valid and reliable measurements; 2) many studies reviewed just a few subjects and therefore can't be generalized; 3) there is no organized buildup of research findings; 4) many conclusions of the studies can not be evaluated because the assessment instruments are not available; 5) many studies were conducted without the necessary expertise from other disciplines particularly in linguistics and cognitive psychology. An insufficient number of studies in this field impacts the quality of education of language learners. It is important for educators to understand that there is a considerable difference between "learning a second language and learning in a second language (October 14-15, 2003: *Symposium Summary, 2004*). This confirms the fact that much more rigorous research should be done across the nation involving different issues with underachieving language learners. One of the areas that is not explored sufficiently is the cultural influence on the way students learn, and what could be done in order to eliminate that obstacle in the learning process.

Collier (2004) recommends an assessment process for minority students with learning and behavior issues. She addresses the challenges that even experienced educators face with the variety of student cases. Collier suggests obtaining the following information from the student's family prior to referring him/her to a special education: 1) prior education; 2) current home language; 3) current language proficiency; 4) English; 5) achievement; 6) behavior; 7) adaptation. Collier explains how the educators should use this information. She advises that the following factors should be taken into consideration during an evaluation process of the ESL candidate for special education:

- If the teachers know that the child had some education in his/her home language, it means that the school staff's goal is to find an effective way of transferring the knowledge from a native language to English. On the other hand if it is known that there is no schooling in this child's past the educators have to start working on school expectations, rules, school communication, and basic learning skills. In cases when a possible learning disability is considered, she suggests focusing on the process of adaptation to the school expectations, interactions, and whether language is showing progress, and whether the same behavior pattern is observed in both languages.
- Another factor in consideration of a learning disability is home language. Collier points out that if a child's home language is not English, structured intervention in the native language should be encouraged in case there is suspicion of a learning disability. It will show whether the student has the ability to improve his/her language skills. Failure will show that disability should be considered.

- Measuring language proficiency accurately could be more difficult because of inadequate standardized tests, especially native language tests. In regard to this Collier suggests some alternative measuring tools. She notes that sometimes students score low in their home language just because they haven't had previous schooling in their native language. However, low scores in both languages could be a sign of a learning disability. Again a structured intervention in the primary language is suggested.
- Collier highlights the importance of the assessment of the English proficiency level for the appropriate ESL placement. She also underlines the fact that some students speak very well in English, but don't function in the classroom adequately, thus they look as though they are learning disabled. That is why cognitive academic language proficiency must be assessed, and not just oral language. She also makes the point that if the student has a learning disability, the ESL and special education professionals should work together on IEP (Individual Education Plan) planning because of the correlated influence of both areas.
- Once again, Collier stresses the fact that every child learns at a different pace and if for any reason he/she doesn't meet the benchmarks, he/she might be placed in a special education program. To avoid inappropriate placement she suggests reorganizing all programs to include differentiated instructional environments where any student can enter a lesson at his/her entry point and learn to the maximum of his/her abilities. Collier's recommendation: Screen

all standardized instruments before administering, using consistent rubric such as the Test Evaluation Checklist.

- Different reasons for destructive behavior could be produced by cultural shock, home or school environment, biochemical dysfunction, or innate problems. To these students assistance should be offered immediately. If the intervention of placing the students in a self-monitoring, supportive and safe environment has no or little affect, this child has to be evaluated further.
- Finally, Collier addresses the acculturation factor, which plays a significant role in a minority child's learning and behavior. Evidence of cultural shock could appear as a learning disability, and in the long run, if not addressed might cause further problems. Another factor that was pointed out was that cultural shock goes in cycles, and can reappear in a certain period of time, however most students respond to the intervention with a positive change. If there is no evident progress in a child's behavior, it means that the intervention is inadequate or some undiagnosed problems are occurring (Collier, C., 2004).

I included Collier's assessment plan in my paper because, in my opinion, it is a very clear and fairly accurate guide for educators in their consideration for placement of LEP students in special education programs. I also think that this plan underlines the importance of taking into consideration the child's culture, which is a major focus of my study. Traditional schooling in different cultures plays a dominate role in the way that the child is taught at home, and I would like to look further for more information about

acculturation of families. I will return to Collier's description of the acculturation process later in this chapter.

Non-biased Assessment

As it was noted earlier, one of the most significant tools for identifying learning disability in minority children is non-biased tests, the search for which has continuously gone on for the past 20 years. Wagner, Francis, and Morris (2005) extended their concerns about difficulties that could be encountered by the teachers while assessing the language learners who are under suspicion for learning disability. They point out that if the students have medical problems, such as hearing or visual impairments, or severe mental retardation it would be revealed at an early age, however some disorders are not obvious and could be observed only after starting formal schooling. In that case to discover this disability in minority students would be even more challenging.

Development of the native language assessment tools is essential for language learners; however, Wagner, et al emphasize the fact that there are just a few high-quality tests in languages other than English (Wagner, Francis, & Morris, 2005).

While working on the search for accurate assessment tools many researchers are looking for other essential features that accentuate language learners with learning disabilities. For instance Shrader (nd), presents a few factors that should be ruled out while identifying minority children with LD:

- Physical disabilities: hearing, vision, motor
- Insufficient exposure to a task
- Language or culture (the first being easier to measure than the second)
- Emotional or behavioral disabilities

- Mismatch between the child and the instructional environment
- Extreme environmental deprivation
- Disruptions in schooling, missing a lot of school or changing schools a lot”

(Shrader, unknown).

As Shrader notes, culture is very difficult to measure. However it is important to take it into consideration and hopefully sort and draw out some knowledge about a culture that educators can use in their teaching practice. I anticipate that my project will help us understand whether this child’s cultural way of teaching/learning at home interferes with her learning, and how we can use that habitual style in our teaching.

Culture as an Essential Element in the Assessment Process

No minority child should be identified with learning disabilities without paying attention to her/his culture. Culture is described in the Columbia Encyclopedia as “the integrated system of socially acquired values, beliefs, and rules of conduct which delimit the range of accepted behaviors in any given society. Cultural differences distinguish societies from one another. Culture is based on the uniquely human capacity to classify experiences, encode such classifications symbolically, and teach such abstractions to others. It is usually acquired through enculturation, the process through which an older generation induces and compels a younger generation to reproduce the established lifestyle; consequently, culture is embedded in a person’s way of life. Culture is difficult to quantify, because it frequently exists at an unconscious level, or at least tends to be so pervasive that it escapes everyday thought (Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, 2001-05).’ Without knowing in what cultural environment the child grew up, we can’t understand the motives of her/his behavior, or the nature of the learning process. Collier

and Hoover emphasize the importance of consideration of the child's native culture, language, and stage of acculturation when she or he is referred for suspected learning disability. Knowledge of sociocultural factors may help educators reduce unnecessary referrals and bias in making decisions about special education placement (Collier, & Hoover, 1987). Cheng (2004) states "members of the society share the symbols that are emblematic of their culture, which may have a profound impact on their behavior. The meaning and importance of one society's symbols may not be obvious to members of other groups."

Consideration of the cultural differences entails the consideration of the learning styles that this particular culture developed over the centuries. Collier and Hoover (1987) stress that it is important to pay attention to the strategies, which are and were used by culturally diverse students. They also state that children learn their daily skills and learning strategies within their home customs. Often strategies that are effective in their culture are not so in the new culture. Woodward (1981) introduces the fact that many Indochinese children have been taught to use rote drill and verbal mnemonics as learning strategies, which were very effective in the typical classroom of their nation. In American schools, students are given a lot more independence in their learning process. The teacher's role is to guide students on to the right path while teaching the students how to interact with the materials on their own, what teacher's expectations are for them in these activities, and how to draw conclusions and information from the activities, with least teacher assistance (Collier & Hoover, 1987).

In order to understand the way that teaching was practiced in China I specifically, referred to several Asian ethnic studies, and some of them were very interesting. In fact I

found many similarities in the traditional Chinese ways of teaching with the ones that were practiced in my home country. Specifics of the Asian culture teaching and learning styles will be illustrated in the next section.

Research about East Asian Learning Styles

As was stated previously, the subject of my study is a child from a Chinese background, therefore I decided to explore some sources depicting Chinese culture and in particular describing teaching and learning styles of this ethnic group. This information will be very helpful to the educators who have students from an Asian ethnic background. In my opinion, it is very difficult to understand sometimes why the child behaves, or learns the way he/she does, not knowing the way he/she is used to gaining and processing the new information. I know from my own experience that a change from an authoritative type of teaching/learning to a collaborative, hands-on type of learning used to “freeze” my thinking. Sometimes it was hard to understand what the teacher’s request was because it was the one I was not used to. This lack of experience might explain why some ELLs have a difficult time understanding the directions even when they speak English well. And this teaching/learning process starts very early for a child. For instance Greenspan in the article “China vs. America? Learning strategies in the 21st Century talks about differences in education in Western and Eastern traditions, and stresses the fact that the process begins long before children start talking. She states that educational psychologist, Howard Gardner, claims that it is obvious, even in the simplest forms of infant play, that different ways of learning begin long before school begins (Greenspan, 2006). This confirms my belief that a child absorbs the culture at a very early age, and often it reflects in the way he/she learns at school, even when the parents are saying that only English is

spoken to a child. This is one of the reasons that I am working on this project, which hopefully will provide some answers to my questions. Further Greenspan states that at a time when North American parents concentrate on teaching their children creativity, and problem solving skills, Chinese parents use pictures and gentle guidance, a learning style known as “ba zhe shou jiao” (teaching by hand holding). For instance in America, teaching art consists of giving out the paints and letting the children create on their own. A Chinese teacher places many picture examples on the wall, and takes a child by the hand showing how to draw. The Chinese culture of education emphasizes mastering technical skills, learning through mimicry, concentrated discipline - and value of respectful traditionalism (Greenspan, 2006).

Even though Chinese students represent the biggest group of the world’s learners, almost 25%, there is not enough study of this learning culture. Because Chinese schools are characterized as an exam-oriented system, students adopt their learning strategies to deal with the tests. Kennedy, from the University of Hong Kong, describes Chinese adult learners as learners who use rote drills and memorization style in order to prepare for exams, but not because this is their preferred style (Kennedy, 2002). In fact when Littlewood asked over 2000 Chinese language learning adults about their preferred learning styles, most of them named active and communicative models (Littlewood, W., 1996). Even though some learning styles are recognized and described as East Asian traditional, it would be wrong to attribute those styles to each person from Asian countries. Zhenhui Rao, a professor of Jiangxi Normal University in China, describes how to deal with mismatch between teaching styles of instructors from Western schools and learning styles of students in East Asian cultures. In East Asian he includes

Vietnamese, Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese traditional schooling systems. Rao says that in order to close the gap between teaching and learning styles we need to explore the way East Asian students deal with their language learning tasks. Rao introduces six major learning styles of East Asian students: introverted, closure-oriented, analytic and field-independent, visual, thinking-oriented and reflective, and concrete-sequential.

I will introduce all six styles here because I believe that first, it will show broad teaching /learning traditions of this culture, which will keep us from showing just one side of the very rich Asian schooling traditions. Secondly it will help us understand where the parents of the subject of my study are coming from while explaining their way of teaching.

1. Introverted – Students tend to be motivated mostly by their own ideas and feelings. Related strategies include working alone or in pairs with a well-known friend, disliking lots of continuous group work.

2. Closure-oriented - Students tend to plan language study sessions carefully, do lessons on time or early, and avoid uncertainty. Related strategies include consider the teacher as the authority, expecting constant attention from the teacher, and meeting the requirements of the teacher.

3. Analytic and field-independent – Students tend to place more emphasis on details than on the overall picture. Related strategies include examining and logically analyzing the given material, searching for contrasts, focusing on correctness, and finding cause-effect associations.

4. Visual – Students tend to prefer that information be presented visually rather than in spoken form. The strategy they use is mostly visualization of the object they learn.

5. Thinking –oriented and reflective – Students tend to prefer systematic, analytic investigation of hypotheses and to be precise in their performance in all skills. Related strategies include concern for accuracy and not taking quick risks in conversation.

6. Concrete-sequential – Students tend to prefer language learning materials and techniques that can be applied in a real, chronological, linear manner. Related strategies include following the teacher’s guide- lines to the letter, memorization, demanding full information, and avoiding compensation strategies (Rao, 2002).

There always will be students with different learning styles in a typical classroom thus educators must provide various types of instruction to match their way of learning. Teachers do not have to change drastically their teaching approach, even a little adjustment in the use of different methods and techniques would be a move towards success. It is true in any typical class of English speaking students, and even more so with students from different cultural backgrounds. In order to prevent the failure of the second language learner, we need to provide the appropriate instruction and use the most effective strategies. To choose the most efficient strategies we have to be knowledgeable about the child’s learning style and his or her cultural background. Rao (2002) recommends these instructional strategies for students from most East Asian countries:

- Make liberal use of visuals. Use photographs, drawings, sketches, and cartoons to illustrate and reinforce the meanings of vocabulary words. Show films, videotapes, and live dramatizations to illustrate lessons in text.

- Assign some repetitive drill exercises to provide practice in basic vocabulary and grammar, but don't overdo it.
- Do not fill every minute of class time lecturing and writing on the blackboard. Provide intervals for students to think about what they have been told; assign brief writing exercises.
- Provide explicit instruction in syntax and semantics to facilitate formal language learning and develop skill in written communication and interpretation.

In order to decrease teacher/student style conflict, Rao suggests encouraging learners to change their behaviors and learn new strategies in order to expand their capability in learning. Students are able to make changes in their learning styles; however some preparation for this smooth transition is required. Conflict between teaching and student-learning style can cause a lot of stress from both sides. A study that was conducted in the Hong Kong City University provides some interesting insights on the way the Chinese students were coping with an increased amount of pressure and stress. At first students dealt with the stress on their own, then they asked for help from their relatives, and only as a last resort they approached their educators. This information provides some insights on the Chinese traditional way of coping with the problems, which is different from what we see in American schools. The researchers of this study suggest organizing support groups, classes for teaching coping skills (Ip, Kwok, Leung, & Wong, 1996).

Vocabulary teaching strategies for ELLs

Because my project will be based on teaching vocabulary, I would like to refer to some studies that focus on teaching vocabulary strategies. Learning vocabulary is one of

the most important parts in the process of learning a language. Cummins points out that academic English requires knowledge of more sophisticated vocabulary in order to understand abstract expressions, math, science, and social studies content. Schools spend 12 years trying to extend expressive vocabulary that native speakers bring from homes, and it is not a surprise that for ELLs it takes at least five years of exposure to academic English to become equal with their native to English language peers. “ESL students must catch up to a moving target.” Every year they have to make a gain that is much bigger than the norm for their grade level. Therefore English language learners should have an extensive language support in the classroom (Cummins,2007). The ability of finding effective strategies in teaching vocabulary is an important element of teaching the language to ELLs. A group of researchers from Lesley University conducted interviews with the ESL teachers in Massachusetts. The purpose of the interviews was to identify which vocabulary teaching strategies were used more frequently in an elementary school. Many teachers stated that they used a variety of strategies in order to meet the needs of different students. Among the most frequently used strategies were named: repetition and practice opportunity, multisensory approaches, use of objects, real props, and hands-on materials. In their research there was introduced a chart (adapted from Krashen and Terrell, 1983) that shows how the use of strategies is changing in depends on what level of English proficiency students a teacher is working with. For instance working with the students at a early production level, a teacher talking takes 50 to 60 % of a lesson, and most of the student activities consist of TPR (Total Physical Response), role-playing, answering what, who, and where questions, and labeling. However while working with the students at intermediate fluency level teacher talk takes only 10% of the lesson, and

the student activities are more complex, such as essay writing, analyzing charts and graphs, problem solving, answering why and how questions, and pre-writing activities (Facella, Rampino, Shea, 2005). Baker, Simmons, and Kameenui from the University of Oregon agreed that certain strategies should be used depending on the language level and the grade level of the learner. They suggest that with teacher's assistance students participate in thematic discussions and scaffolding where they practice using the new words correctly. Teachers can increase or reduce the amount of scaffolding depending on how students are able to analyze the word meaning on their own.

Another important point in teaching vocabulary to ELLs that they made shows that in order to develop good vocabulary skills, students have to be strong independent readers. Only skillful readers can develop and use effectively their vocabulary strategies. As the researchers show second language learners usually apply the same strategies as native speakers do, but they use them less efficiently. To make the students become avid word learners should be the ESL teachers' goal. Under strong teacher guidance students learn how important it is to pay attention to a word meaning during share reading activity.

They learn how using dictionaries, glossaries, and semantic mapping help them in understanding word relations with the context, and get a deeper knowledge of the word meaning. Next Baker, et al offer their plan of the vocabulary strategy integration. They underline the importance of the prior knowledge in building of a new word meaning. Especially it is useful with the culturally different students. Matching the vocabulary words with the content, and learning the content with the deeper word meaning is another strategy that should be considered for using in teaching vocabulary (Baker, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995). The importance of the use of the students' prior knowledge in learning

vocabulary is underlined by Cummins. He emphasizes the fact that prior knowledge is a base for building background knowledge for a new content. He distinguishes three main strategies for *activating prior knowledge*, which are: 1) use the knowledge of content area, 2) use the knowledge of the words that students acquired from their prior experiences, 3) use the knowledge of the words that students learned from secondary sources (books, TV, videos, etc.) “When we activate students’ prior knowledge we attempt to modify the soil so that the seeds of meaning will take root.” (Cummins, 2007)

Cummins introduces some strategies, which should be considered in teaching ELLs. He suggests using *demonstration/modeling, visuals, and hands-on manipulatives, tools and technology*. For instance using blocks for teaching math content in primary grades, or measuring tools in upper grades. Visuals enable the students to see the subject of their discussion. Pictures, real objects, graphic organizers, videos, and so on, make the explanation clearer and easy to understand. *Whole class group project* gives ESL students an opportunity to apply the knowledge in real life experience, and promotes a deeper understanding of content. *Language clarification* includes different strategies to clarify the meaning of new words by scaffolding, paraphrasing, modifying the instruction in order to match the students’ level of English, using synonyms and antonyms, translating the words into a home language, etc. *Dramatization/ acting out* is another strategy that is very effective with the newcomers. By imitating and gesturing commands students come to understanding of the new words (Cummins, 2007).

Similar teaching strategies, which appear to be effective, are revealed by researchers analyzing the studies on teaching vocabulary to students with learning disabilities. For example direct teacher instruction with the use of graphic depictions,

such as semantic maps, grids, and graphs, show to be helpful. Multiple exposures to the new words, especially contextual, support students' learning and promote deeper understanding. Smaller number of words in a certain period of time has to be considered in teaching vocabulary. Because of inability of the mainstream teachers to provide as much time as LD students need for vocabulary instruction, the use of computer-assisted instruction is suggested (Bryant, D., Goodwin, Bryant, B. & Higgins, 2003).

Even though the interest in cultural implications for language learning acquisition has drawn many researchers in the recent years, I feel there are still so many untouched areas that need to be covered by new studies. As I already stated the most difficult task is to understand how cultural differences affect student's learning. There are no specific measurements of cultural influence that have been created yet, so more and more observations, interviews, and experiments should be conducted in order to learn how much it impacts the student's learning and what teachers can do to make it work for - not against the teaching process.

The minority population in our country has been growing rapidly. Li-Rong Cheng (2003) showed that children of immigrants will report for 88 percent of the growth in the under-18 population in the United States between 2000 and 2050. ". With this anticipation we should expect more and more educators asking questions about cultural differences and their implications on learning styles, and identifying learning disabilities in minority students.

In regard to that I would like to investigate the possible misinterpretation of a culturally different learning style for a learning disability. I hope to collect some information, which will be useful in the ESL field while dealing with uncertain student

cases. The main question of my project intends to discover whether previously learned methods could be used as a positive way to teach new learning strategies. Although finding the strategies that fit this particular student is the main and most important goal of this study, there is another motive for this work, which is to find a connection with the family, and understand and show the value of the ethnic traditions.

In the next chapter I will introduce my project participant and the methods that I am planning to use during my research. I will explain why these methods, that I chose, are appropriate for my project. I will describe the way the data will be collected and analyzed.

CAPTER THREE: METHODS

The Purpose of the Study

I am writing about a young child from a Chinese cultural background identified with a learning disability, in order to understand if her home culture teaching technique that was used by her parents can be used effectively in school. I want to find out whether with the use of a familiar teaching method this child will be able to learn new techniques more easily. I would like to compare the two ways of teaching: culturally traditional and commonly used in American schools methods in order to find out which way works for this child.

Research Design

Action research, which I chose to do, is a type of study that enables me to find an answer to my question by reflecting on my teaching practice, and using different methods for collecting data. It gives me an opportunity to analyze the data from different points of view and possibly helps with the solution to my questions. Action research (Mackey & Gass, 2005) is an on the spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. Because this is action research, it is imperative that I will be in close communication with my subjects – my student and her mother and will make changes to the research as needed as the time goes on. Questions usually surface from concerns of practitioners, who are searching for the answers. In an action research the data is collected, analyzed, and then communicated to other interested educators and possibly followed by a solution to the problem, which was studied. One of the important components of the qualitative research including action study is triangulation, which presupposes gaining the data from different sources. This allows the researcher to gather information from different angles and points of view (Mackey, Gass, 2005). Because the information I will be collecting from the three sources: mother of my subject, Chinese teacher, and the subject, I can tell that triangulation will be a component of my research. My project will focus on investigating a student who grew up in a nurturing and caring family from a Chinese cultural background. I would like to gain some knowledge about the methods that were used by the parents to teach this child, and to understand if the methods were culturally inherited. My intention is to find out whether or not I can teach the child new strategies by applying her previously learned ones. By observing this student's work and learning skills, I hope to shed some light onto a question about cultural implications on a child labeled LD. Action research gives me an opportunity to reflect on my teaching, gain some knowledge about traditional methods of teaching and learning in a Chinese culture, and possibly come up with the most effective strategies, which could be used with the particular student in my class and the mainstream classroom. I also intend to broaden my knowledge about Asian culture and traditions in teaching and use this knowledge in my future work with students and parents.

The Subject

The participant in my study is a second grade girl with a Chinese background. In order to protect her identity I will call her Susie. Susie was born in the United States and lives with her mother, father, and her younger brother in the western suburbs of Minneapolis. When she attended pre-school she was referred to a child study team and after an assessment was identified with a learning disability. Susie arrived at our school as a kindergartener and at first glance did not have any obvious signs of a learning disability. As one of just a few children in her class she knew almost all letters and numbers, had noticeably developed fine motor skills, and had no difficulties communicating with the teachers. She seemed to be comfortable following the teacher's

directions; however her comfort level went down as soon as she had to leave the classroom. Although Susie easily socialized with adults, her connection with her peers was not developed yet. It was a challenge for her to remember other kindergarteners' names, and she needed some guidance while playing with her classmates.

My contact with Susie began in September of her kindergarten year, when I assessed her for ESL services. She appeared to be a very delicate little girl always talking about being a princess. Her English oral skills were at a fluent level, but vocabulary was lower than expected from a native English-speaking child at this age. Susie's parents were very supportive about her participation in an ESL program, so she started coming to my class right away. Since our school is located in a quiet and non-diverse suburb of Minneapolis, ESL classes are very small. Susie was in my class with another kindergarten girl and had my close attention. Over the year I noticed how her interactions with this girl have changed, from a shy "hi" to a bubbly chatter. With the caring assistance of her teacher and support at home, Susie learned her classmates' names, and little by little began making friends. By the end of kindergarten she knew all her letters and sounds and started reading. As I understood from communicating with her mother, Susie's success in reading comes in part from constant practice at home. It was very nice to see Susie read; sometimes she was even quicker than the other ELL without a learning disability. It surprised me and drew my attention to the question as to why this child, who appeared to be a very good reader, had difficulty with some tasks that involved sequencing, creativity, and critical thinking. I wondered if by continuously working on these tasks we could improve her performance.

The next year she showed steady progress in reading and math. Her social skills went up drastically—she became even a little “bossy” with her peers. Even though Susie had no difficulty reading her grade level books, she was able to count to one hundred, and had beautiful and neat handwriting, I had noticed that she had a hard time with retelling stories, predicting, sequencing, and problem solving. Occasionally I worked with Susie in her mainstream classroom during math and saw that she was not able to come up with the solution on some word problems. During the spring parent/teacher conference I was listening to a special education team review Susie’s progress and realized that most of the characteristics from our language therapist’s observations were very typical for a second language learner. For instance she was omitting plural –s, and past tense endings, had some errors with subject – verb agreement, and also had limited vocabulary. My question was how much did cultural and linguistic differences influence this girl’s appearance as learning disabled? I would like to emphasize that my intention is not to question whether this girl is identified incorrectly, but understand the connection and correlation between these two concepts: learning difficulties and learning disability. However the important outcome from this project would be a possibility of finding the effective way of teaching by combining the most valuable strategies in Chinese and American traditional schooling. During my teaching practice in the United States I have been asked to compare the American schools and the schools in my home country, and I can say that certainly there are positive and negative points in both schools. Thoughts about gathering all valuable features in schooling around the world lead me to this project. Of course, it is just a small step toward it, but hopefully will bring some positive outcomes.

Data Collection

In order to understand the cultural influence on the learning style of my participant I would like to start my project with the interview of a Chinese culture representative, who is a Chinese exchange teacher. Interviews are ordinary techniques used to obtain some data for a qualitative research. Mackey & Gass (2005) describe different types of interviews. Standardized or structured interviews are designed as a questionnaire, which is offered to different participants and could be compared and analyzed. Semi structured interviews are more open ended and allow the researcher to guide the interview in a free manner and obtain more information while having a set of questions. Unstructured interviews are conducted as a discussion and usually involve more than one participant. Even though unstructured interviews might predispose interviewees to be more comfortable, they also can be difficult to conduct. It may not be easy for beginner researchers to conduct unstructured interviews without practice and training in encouraging participants to express themselves and gathering valuable data on the area of interest (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Taking into consideration the fact that I am not a skillful interviewer and having come from a different cultural background, I anticipated some obstacles that might lead to misunderstandings and biased conclusions. Therefore I developed a questionnaire and decided to use it as a structured interview expecting to gather more precise data.

Samples of the interview questions are introduced here:

- Please explain how you were taught while going to a primary school. What methods were used predominantly a) lecture, b) interactive group work, c) visuals.
- What methods did you use while studying? a) work alone; b) work in a group; c) memorization of the material; d) did some experiments; e) used charts and lists to remember material.

The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A (for the Chinese teacher) and Appendix B (for the mother).

I have decided to take the interview with the Chinese teacher first because I thought this would be a good introduction to Chinese traditional teaching, and that way I would be better prepared for the interview with the mother of my subject. I would like to obtain some information about methods of teaching that are used in the Chinese schools traditionally in the past and now. I asked my interviewee about her thoughts on the parent's role in their children's success in school. I wanted to know if there was a connection between the teaching methods in Chinese schools described by the presently working teacher and the mother of the child, who studied in Chinese school in the past.

The next step in my project was to be meeting with the mother of my subject. I called her Jenn. The purpose of this meeting was a discussion of the way my study was to be conducted, and gaining some information about the mother's cultural and educational background. I hoped to find out how much time and effort Jenn gives her daughter daily in teaching her or helping with the homework, and what methods she uses while teaching her. I was recording our discussion in a written manner.

At the end of the meeting, I asked Jenn if I can observe her teaching Susie some vocabulary words. This observation brought some understanding of how this mother works with her daughter, what methods she uses, and which ones she strongly believes are the most helpful. Knowing that Jenn is a well-educated person, and has been working with the school staff (while meeting for conferences with Susie's teachers) for a few years now, I expect that her teaching technique will be influenced by multiple suggestions of our schoolteachers. Particularly during our last IEP conference, I shared some of my methods of work on teaching vocabulary with Jenn. At the same time I think observing mother and daughter working together in their usual environment gave me a chance to get a deeper understanding of the way their teaching/learning process goes at home. During my observation I took notes.

After the observation I asked Jenn to continue working on the vocabulary that she started teaching during my visit, and in a week I assessed Susie in order to see how many words she remembers. The assessment consisted of the list of the words Susie was taught and the definitions, which have to be matched (See Appendix D).

The next week was my turn to demonstrate my teaching vocabulary to Jenn. I planed to choose vocabulary words from a similar content area (geography) and about the same difficulty level. I think this placed Susie in a similar position, and it gave possibly more comparable results. During this week of teaching I was recording the way Susie reacts to different strategies that I used. A similar to the first one assessment was given to Susie after a week of teaching vocabulary. I hoped to find out which way is working better for Susie's learning. The final step was my meeting with Jenn where we discussed the things we learned from each other and what we think works for teaching Susie.

In the next chapter I will discuss the findings of my research project. The information retrieved from the interviews will be presented and analyzed. The results of the assessment tests will be reviewed and compared.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of my study was to learn more about Chinese cultural teaching and learning styles in order to understand whether teachers could use that knowledge when teaching students with this cultural background. In order to do that I worked closely with the family that helped me understand if the home culture teaching technique, which was used by her parents, can be used effectively in school. I wanted to find out whether with the use of a familiar teaching method this child would be able to learn a new technique more easily. Going through the process of choosing questions for my study I changed my focus from learning disability to cultural differences in teaching and learning. The questions of my study were:

1. How different from those used in school are the strategies that parents are using to teach their child?
2. Does this fact impact the child's learning at school?
3. Is there a way of teaching the child new strategies by using familiar previously learned strategies?
4. Which strategy works for this child?

Interviews

Interview with the Chinese teacher

I began with the interview of a Chinese teacher, who was visiting our school district from China. The purpose of this interview was to learn more about traditional teaching techniques that are used in China, and understand whether the parent of my study subject is using traditional methods of teaching or it was their family style.

The interview with the Chinese exchange teacher was very interesting and essential for my project. Because she has presently been teaching English language in a

Chinese school, the information I was able to retrieve was especially valuable.

Traditionally in a Chinese family, parents expect their child to get a good education in order to be able to ensure their living in the future. Taking into consideration the fact that the family is limited to one child, parents do their best to provide all they can to ensure their child's best education. The school system in China is very different from the American school system. All schools are subdivided into "A" (very good) and "B" (lower quality) schools. "A" schools are prestigious, and very competitive. Ability to get into these schools ensures the students' future college entrance. This set-up motivates the students to be very competitive in order to get into an "A" school.

Another interesting side of the Chinese schooling is the way it is organized. First, the class size is very large. It could vary from 40 to 50 students, and because of this, teachers can not possibly give as much attention to each student as they do in US schools. Students are motivated by their parents, and have to put all their effort to be able to keep up with the higher achievers.

Secondly, the school day is divided into 6 –7 periods for different subjects. Each period of an English language class is 45 minutes long, and 30 minutes of it is set for teacher lecture time. Normally, after that (for about 7-8 min.) the students listen and imitate the audio taped dialogs, another 7-8 minutes is given to the students for interacting and working in groups. Memorizing different texts makes up a big part of the learning process. The interviewed teacher thinks that it plays an important role in the student's successful learning.

In addition, I think that it would be fair to mention that adults in an average Chinese family are very respected, and that factor influences the way the children treat

their teachers and parents. Because a very important part of my study is work with the parent who has a child with a learning disability, I asked this teacher if there are students with learning disabilities in their regular schools. She said that students with severe impairments attend special schools, however children with little deviation from norms go to standard schools. I inquired if LD students have special help in school, and how parents usually support their children. The answer was that well-educated parents work with their children at home whether they have a learning disability or not, but if they can not help, they hire tutors.

Information obtained from this interview brought me to understanding of the Chinese traditional schooling. I saw that parents and students take education very seriously and this explains persistence and effort they apply to their learning. Because Chinese children are taught to respect parents and teachers and recognize their authority since their early childhood, I came to understanding that parents' and teachers' role in child's education is essential. Another very important piece of information I obtained from the interview was that repetition and memorization is a vital element in a learning process of the students in Chinese schools. This knowledge prepared me for my next interview with the mother of my research subject.

Interview with the mother

The next interview was conducted with the mother of my subject-student. I have to say that the mother was very nice to agree to commit so much time in order to participate in my study. It confirms the fact that she was involved very much in her child's education. Jenn is an intelligent and well-educated woman. She received her two MA degrees in Chemistry and Computer Science. She had her Bachelor Degree in China,

and continued her education in the United States. At the present time she stays home with her two children.

During the interview, Jenn told me that she remembers how she used to learn new words when she was in school. She would repeat new words until she remembered them. She also had to memorize one to two page texts and then retell them in class. In addition she had to write sentences with the words that she was studying. She spent approximately one - two hours a day on her homework in elementary school.

Jenn: "I had to write the new words many times until I remember them."

T. F. "Did you use the same method while studying Chinese? Is this because the Chinese characters have to be learned only by memorization?"

Jenn: "You use a lot of memorization when studying Chinese, but now it also includes the phonic system. The older generation, like my parents, didn't use the phonics, they had to memorize all the characters."

This conversation confirms my knowledge gained from the Chinese teacher interview and the literature review about East Asian learning styles that rote learning or repetition and memorization was an integral part of the schooling process in China.

Jenn continued by telling about the work with her own children. In addition to Susie, she has a younger son, who is going to kindergarten next year. Her philosophy about helping her children with homework is based on consistent work to ensure their success in school. Jenn explains that she had to work a lot with Susie while she was in kindergarten. For instance, helping Susie with learning letters, she would ask her

daughter to write a whole page of letters a day, and repeat the same exercise three to four days a week. No learning games were played at that time. I remembered what the Chinese teacher said about school lessons that there is barely time for a lecture and rote exercises and no time for games. When I asked Jenn about her work on reading comprehension with Susie, she named the most effective technique that works for her daughter, breaking a story in small parts, and reading a difficult sentence many times. When I asked Jenn if she does anything differently working with her son than with Susie, she said that yes, Susie needs more time in order to understand what happened in the story, and more detailed explanations. She says that Susie would need to read the same sentence a few times until she understands it. I told Jenn about my thoughts of Susie possibly being misinterpreted for LD, however she said that Susie did not speak until the age of four and that was an important piece of information that convinced me that Susie was identified correctly.

Learning From Each Other

Following the interview I asked Jenn if I could observe her teach Susie some vocabulary words, and she was kind enough to invite me to her house for an observation. A couple of days prior to the observation, I emailed Jenn the word list that I chose for Susie from a second grade Rain Forest unit. The list of words was: *layers, considered, damp, decompose, dim, fern, dense, vegetation, lofty, and emerge*. I decided to send just the words with the definitions and no other helping materials in order to give her more freedom in her teaching options.

We met in about half an hour after Susie arrived from school. We set at the table in the dining room. Susie's younger brother was sitting by us playing with his toys. Jenn

started by reading the first word and asked if Susie knew the meaning. The word *layers* was familiar to Susie, and she gave some examples of layers such as layers in a cake, or layers of clothes that you wear in a cold day. The next word *damp* was explained as moist, giving an example of clothes taken out of the washing machine. For the word *fern* she showed a picture of a plant on the computer. Jenn introduced five words first, and then asked Susie to read the words out loud and tell the definition. The next five words Jenn introduced the same way, by using everyday life (prior knowledge) that is familiar to Susie. After finishing talking about all ten words, Jenn placed ten flash cards in front of Susie and asked her to pick a card and define the word. Susie read four words at the time and explained the meaning. If she didn't remember the definition, Jenn would tell her to read the words again. Out of ten words Susie remembered five. Jenn said that she had already known three of the words from school.

We decided that Jenn would continue working on the words with Susie during the week and I would assess her in a week. I made sure that this is not a spelling test and Susie was not required to remember the spelling of the words.

In a week I gave Susie a worksheet where she had to match words with the definitions. She did it very well, and got ten correct out of ten.

The next step in my project was to invite Jenn to my vocabulary lesson. I had to show her my way of teaching vocabulary. My intention was not to teach her how to do it the right way, but collaborate with Jenn about what works better for her daughter. For my lesson I chose a geography unit, which is similar to the one that Jenn had to teach. My vocabulary words were taken from the Desert unit. There were also ten words, and I

had a week to work on them until the assessment. The difference was that I saw Susie three times a week for thirty minutes a day, and she had no help at home with the words.

My lesson plan was prepared based on my recent readings about teaching vocabulary to English language learners and students with specific learning disabilities. According to the recent studies on vocabulary intervention involving students with learning disabilities, one of the positive intervention tools was named “ multiple exposures to words across time, including contextual exposure(Bryant, Goodwin, & Higgins, 2003).” It was pointed out that teaching vocabulary words should be in combination with conceptual relationships and prior knowledge. For example Cummins (2007) emphasizes the fact that activation of prior knowledge and building background knowledge should be one of the essential methods used in teaching academic language to the ELLs. Activating and extending students’ background knowledge should not be used only as a pre-reading activity. Teachers should always search for ways to link the academic content with what students already know or what is familiar to them from their family or cultural experiences.

I planned to teach my vocabulary words in three lessons. (See Appendix C) Because I normally see this student three times a week for 30 minutes a day, the unit was divided into three parts. Five words were introduced to the student on the first day, they were: *desert, adapt, riverbed, climate, and flood*. I decided to pre-teach the new vocabulary before reading the book. The words were written on the whiteboard. I read the words and asked if she knew what each word meant. She said that she knew two words – *desert and flood*. Susie described a desert as a sandy and hot place. I said that the most important feature of a desert is that it is a very dry place, where little rain falls

during the whole year. She compared the word *flood* with a sink that was clogged and water flooding the floor around it. Listening to her example I thought that somebody gave her this explanation before and she remembered it. I pointed this fact out in my anecdotal notes because I think it shows that Susie retains the information better if it connects to her daily life and experiences.

We continued by comparing the climates of deserts to Minnesota, where we have rain much more often. Looking at a calendar, we counted how many weeks there are in a year, and how we get rain more frequently here. Next, we talked about the word *adapt*. I described the word as “live in”, saying that all living things get used to living in a certain environment by having special features, like ducks have webbed feet for swimming, or camels have humps for storing fat. I reminded her of our prior reading about a platypus, and we talked that its webbed feet and leathery bill helps it to live in water. After going over the last word I read the book Desert. I chose this book for reading because the text was very appropriate for a second grader, and it had nice pictures and a glossary. While reading I asked Susie to pay attention to the words we just talked about. At the end of the lesson I asked Susie to tell what new words she had learned about the desert, and she was able to say that a desert could be hot or cold, sandy or rocky, but she forgot to mention that it does not have much rain.

Susie’s mother observed the second lesson of this topic. Since Jenn was not able to see all three lessons of this unit I decided to talk with her about the methods I used on day one and day three. This helped Jenn understand the whole purpose and the way of applying each method. Our discussion after the observation had very important meaning

for my research project. I wanted to see if a parent and a teacher could come up with a realization about an effective way of teaching a culturally diverse child.

I started this lesson by asking the student if she remembered what we learned last time she was in my class. Susie remembered that we were talking about deserts and she was able to come up with a definition for the words *desert*, *flood*, and *riverbed*. The newly introduced vocabulary for this lesson were *dune*, *evaporate*, *drought*, and *cactus*. Since the words *cactus* and *dunes* were encountered in the book we read in the first lesson, I decided to check if she recognized the words without actually learning them. I placed a plate in front of Susie and poured some sand on the plate. I asked what it looked like and she said that it looked like *dunes*. The next task in the lesson was to read the text “A North American Desert”. Susie had to read two parts of the text What Is a Desert? and Desert Plants, and highlight the new vocabulary words. She highlighted the words: *desert*, *evaporates*, *drought*, *adapt*, *cactus*, *dunes*. The worksheet with the text included pictures of dunes, rocky desert, and different types of cacti. The reading was followed by the discussion about the highlighted words. To make sure that Susie understood the word *evaporate*, two days prior I poured some water into a small jar, and let Susie make a few marks to show the level of water in the jar. During this lesson I brought the jar back and asked Susie to check the level of water. The mark showed that the water level was noticeably lower than it was two days ago. Susie said that it *evaporated*. Another word that I wanted to bring to her attention was – *drought*. I explained that a *drought* could also happen in places other than deserts. For example there are *droughts* in places where people plant their crops. In order to save the crops, farmers have to water or irrigate their fields. The lesson was finished with flash cards when Susie had to read the vocabulary

words she learned over these two lessons and try to come up with the definitions. The flash cards had a vocabulary word on one side and a definition on the other side. Susie knew that she couldn't flip the card before she says the definition. She remembered the words: *desert, dune, evaporate, flood, riverbed, and cactus*.

The third lesson's objectives were to reinforce the vocabulary words that she had learned by engaging her to think critically, and introduced two new words: *dew*, and *predator*. Susie's first task was to read the last part of the text "Desert Animals" where she found two new words. We talked about *predators*, named a few animals, which eat other animals. The explanation of the word *dew* was found in the context. I asked Susie to read the sentence again and see if she understood the meaning. The sentence said: "Other animals get water by licking the dew that collects on plants and rocks during the night." I also showed a very good picture of *dew* on the grass. It was clear to me that she understood the meaning. In order to reinforce the knowledge she gained, I offered Susie to compare and contrast two climates, the Minnesotan and North American Desert. She had to fill in a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences about the climate in those areas. There was a big Venn diagram chart in my class with the pockets, in which she had to place a paper strip with her characteristics of Minnesota climate, North American Desert's climate, and the features of both places. I was pleasantly surprised that Susie was able to name quite a few characteristics that were similar and different for the regions. For example she placed the sign "often rains" under Minnesota, and "rare rains" – under desert. The similarity she named "people and animals live there"

The following step was an assessment. Susie had to match words with their definitions. It was the same type of assessment that she had after Jenn taught her the

rainforest unit words. She scored 8 words correct out of ten. As I have noticed before, Susie had a hard time with understanding the word “adapt” even though we discussed the meaning of the word several times. Is that the moment when I should have used the rote method?

Two identical vocabulary tests (rainforest and desert words) were given to Susie again in approximately a week, in order to understand how many words she retained in her memory. (See Appendix D) To my surprise Susie scored absolutely the same. In both tests she got 8 out of ten words correct. See the bar graph where test 1 is a test for assessing the words Susie learned from her mother, test 2 is a test for the words that she learned in my lessons, and review 1 and 2 are the test that I gave the second time to check the words retention.

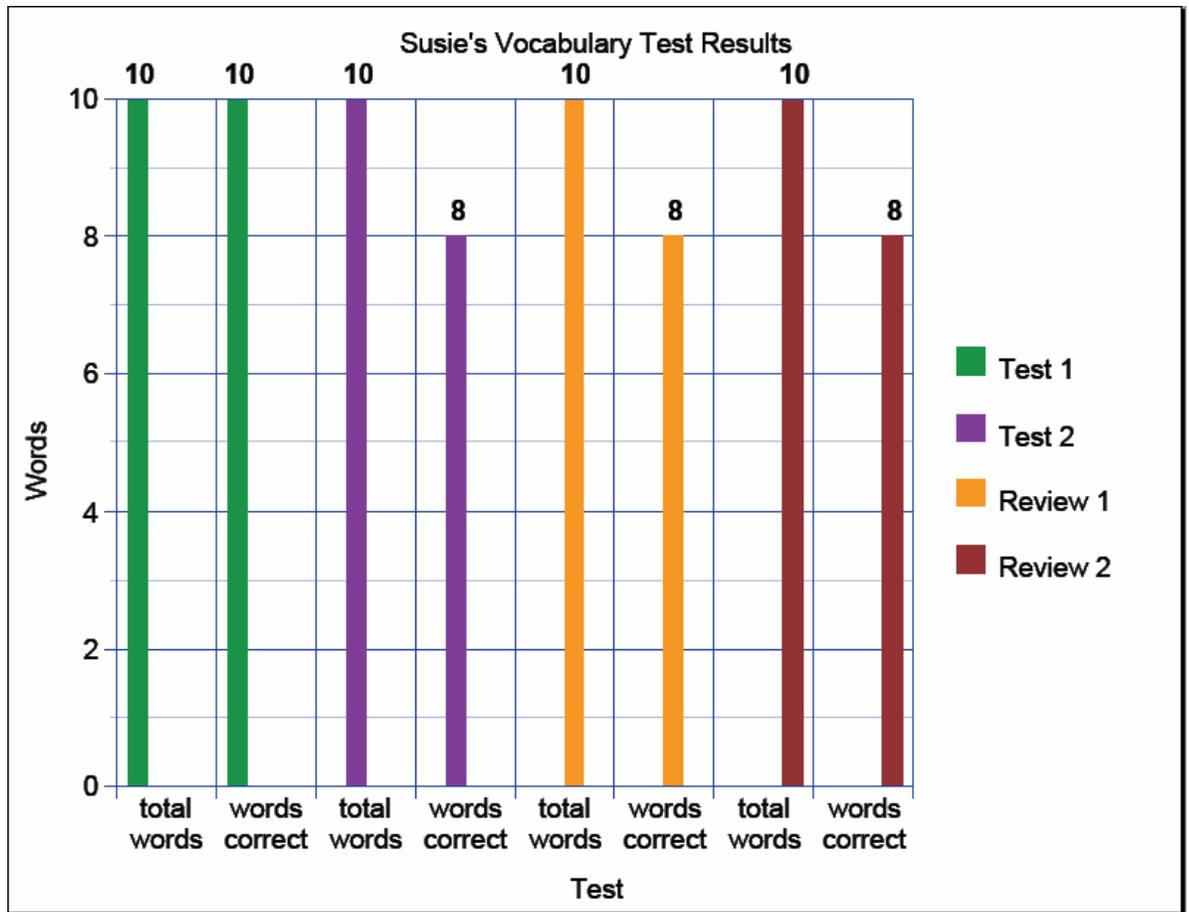


Figure 4.1 Susie's vocabulary test results.

The results led me to a question: Does it mean that she responds to both, her mother's and my teaching equally? I have to say that since I tested Susie the first time on the rainforest words about three weeks have past, as oppose to the desert vocabulary test that she had only a week ago. I wondered if the different intervals between the tests might have been played a difference in her performance. However it was clear that my teaching worked for her also. I think visuals, hands-on materials, multiple exposures to the new words, and context based learning works for Susie. I can see myself using flash cards with Susie multiple times, but taking into consideration the fact that the time in ESL class

is very limited I would use my usual methods of teaching vocabulary and make the flash cards and send them home with Susie to practice.

After the assessment I invited Jenn to meet again and talk about Susie's test results and her style of learning. Jenn was appreciative about my attention to Susie's learning and she expressed her gratitude for participating in my project. She truly is a devoted mother, and uses any chance to learn about different ways of teaching her child. Jenn said that she agrees that visuals, and hands-on materials work well for Susie. Discussions about the words applying her prior knowledge are also working, but she believes that repetitions and multiple exposures to new words are very effective methods in teaching her daughter.

While I was finishing working on my project I discovered a very interesting paper, written by Xiuping Li (University of Sunderland), a linguist with over 20 years of teaching English and Chinese experience. She wrote this thesis paper for seeking the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The focus of this paper is Chinese foreign language learners' beliefs in traditional rote learning (RL) strategies as opposed to other memorization strategies. Li gives a detailed historical explanation of the use of rote learning in Chinese schools for centuries. Some researchers imply that RL is based on Confucianism. More than 2500 years ago the Chinese scholars had to memorize Four Books and Five Classics of Confucian doctrines. They demonstrated their knowledge by retelling it by heart without expressing their opinions, or using creative thinking. However Li comments that no studies were conducted that confirmed the relation between the rote learning and Confucianism. Over the years the Chinese schooling went

through some transformations, but traditional methodology is still practiced by many teachers and learners.

Another significant component that influences learning methods in China is a very distinct written language. Li states that because written Chinese language is not based on letters and sounds, and thousands of characters have to be learned, many teachers and parents encourage the students to recite the characters multiple times. In the Chinese language each character represents a picture or an idea and by combining them in different variations of strokes people convey their messages to each other. It is important for students to have it mastered in order to be good readers and writers. Li points out that Chinese people while studying English tend to memorize the spelling of each word in the same way as they do combining the strokes in their language.

She emphasized in her paper that according to some researchers, learners who are used to memorizing ready given facts, usually lack the ability of applying the knowledge to real life problems and creativity. On the other hand, other researchers think that RL is very appropriate for teaching the basic knowledge to the early learners. They also support rote learning because they believe that it is not a meaningless repetition, it is usually learned in a context, and it leads to a deeper understanding of a subject. Another important point they give is that vocabulary should be easily accessed for fluent speakers, readers, and writers, and that is why meaningful repetitions play an essential role in learning vocabulary (Li, 2004).

After reading this study, a thought came to mind. I decided to talk to Jenn again and ask her about her way of teaching in detail. While Susie was in kindergarten and first grade Jenn was working on teaching Susie to read. Jenn said that since Susie has a

learning disability she could not understand how the sound system worked, and was not able to sound out the words. So she gave up on teaching Susie decoding and started using a different method, which is a very familiar - the rote learning. This is the same method that her parents used to study the Chinese characters. She decided that her daughter might learn to read if she just looks at words and repeats them many times. For instance, Susie would read one paragraph in a book many times until she remembered all the words by heart. Jenn said that it took her a week to memorize that paragraph. Then they would get to the next paragraph and so on. Jenn thinks that Susie stores each word just like a picture in her brain and multiple repetitions help with retaining the words. That meticulous and constant work was rewarded, Susie became a fluent reader - the same level, if not better, than her classmates. Jenn was also very excited to tell me that after our work together she took Susie to a private testing center where she was assessed for reading fluency and vocabulary. I asked her permission to include the results in my paper.

Jenn wrote that Iota Sight Word Test shows that Susie's reading level is 3.8, which means it equals a third grade and eight months' child. Slosson Oral Reading Test revealed that Susie's sight word reading level is 3.6. Finally, the California Achievement Test shows Susie's vocabulary is at 66%. Jenn was proud to say: "So I believe my way of teaching Susie words works!"

I agree that Jenn's method of teaching Susie vocabulary by multiple reading and writing repetition, persistence, and effort brought to Susie and her mother success, however I think that rote learning could be effective at the early elementary level because at this level students are learning basic reading and writing skills. In higher grades they

would need to apply more complicated skills, such as: analyzing, compare and contrast, reasoning, and problem solving, and that won't come with the rote learning.

It is amazing how much hard work and time a mom can dedicate to her child to ensure her success in school. Jenn believes that the Chinese way of teaching is better as opposed to American. Chinese schools teach students to work harder, the work is intense, and the students learn that hard work leads to success. I was happy to be a part of this child's success, because I felt like my work was shown there also.

I will discuss the success of this parent and my contribution into this child's achievement in chapter five. I will reflect on my learning during the work on this project, and introduce my recommendations for the future researches.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The focus of this project was a child from Chinese cultural background identified with a learning disability. I investigated whether culturally inherited methods of teaching this child by her mother could be used effectively in a classroom. The questions of my study were:

How different from those used in school are the strategies that parents are using to teach their child? Does this fact impact the child's learning at school?

Is there a way of teaching the child new strategies by using familiar previously learned strategies? Which strategy works for this child?

During my work on this project, I interviewed the EFL teacher from China, and the mother of this child in order to understand the way English language was taught and learned in Chinese schools. I also observed the mother teaching vocabulary to the child using her techniques, and demonstrated my teaching to the mother showing the

strategies that are widely used in our schools to teach vocabulary. The subject of my study was assessed after both teaching lessons. The results of the project were shown and discussed in chapter four.

In this chapter my reflection on the study, ESL implications of the study, limitations, and recommendation on the future studies, will be discussed.

Reflections on my Learning

During the time of my work on this project I was worried about the results of the study. I often thought what if my subject would not do as well on the assessment as I expected, or the mother would not agree with my plan, or I would not be able to find something valuable, but finally I understood that the most important finding of this project is my learning. I grew up as a teacher. I have learned about teaching methods of one of the richest and oldest cultures in the world. I understood that to most immigrant families their children's education is very important and they do their best to achieve that. I reflected on my own past experience of the adjustment to a new country, culture, and the language, and my effort to making sure that my children are successful in school. All immigrant families go through a very difficult time of stress, shame, hard work, ups and downs, a constant inner battle with the moral norms they knew and norms they encountered in a new country. I would like to emphasize the fact that parents, who grew up in a different culture might have difficulty understanding the way we teach here, or simply believe in their cultural way of teaching and we, as teachers, have to understand and respect that.

I came to a deeper understanding of the strategies I used in teaching before the project. I see that for many ELLs the use of a wide variety of the strategies work best. I also learned that the rote learning is an effective method especially in the early stage of

learning a language. It appears to be that RL may work for students with a learning disability as well. As to the questions that I intended to answer, I confirmed that the parent was using a rote drill strategy to teach the child, which was a traditional Chinese way of teaching. Both final test scores, after the parent's rote teaching, and my teaching, showed the same results, and it advises that the child retained eight words out of ten (the last two tests were conducted with a week interval after the first assessment). Although it is obvious that RL strategy works for Susie, I understood that the use of a variety of strategies, such as hands-on activities, visuals, charts, class discussions, flash cards, and multiple exposure to the new words, work effectively as well. I think that the use of different strategies gave Susie a better understanding of the content that she studied. It also made me realize that it takes some time for a child to learn how to deal with all the strategies a classroom teacher uses, especially if there were different techniques used with a child prior to his/her arrival to an American school. Because I have known Susie since kindergarten, I have seen her improvement in cooperation with different strategies that teachers use in school.

A close communication with the parent allowed me to understand how the mother's diligent work supported her daughter's learning. Susie's good test scores in learning vocabulary and reading the sight words confirm the fact that it works well in reading and learning vocabulary. However Susie still shows some difficulty in problem solving and reading comprehension in the mainstream class. Knowing that rote drills work for Susie, and that her mother is willing to work with her during the school breaks, I offered them some practice books with reproducible activities for the summer. The books include short stories with the comprehension questions following each story. I hope that

answering the why and how questions after reading a story Susie will practice responding to the same questions many times. This way multiple repetitions will train her critical thinking, and will help her with comprehension.

While I was working on my project I wondered what made this child successful in learning - the techniques that the parent used, or determination of the parent. Most likely, hard work, high motivation toward learning, and good, respectful relationship between a mother and a daughter made it work.

Working closely with the parent I learned that the teacher – parent relationship is very important and makes a difference in our students' learning. By building a trusting and understanding relation with immigrant parents we learn from their experiences, their cultural backgrounds, and they become more open to learning about American life. We have to remember that in different cultures, the reaction to the stress related situations could be different and learning about these traditions would be necessary. As it was pointed out by Ip, et al that in Chinese culture it is not common to share their problems with people who are not related to them or with close friends, and this factor should be considered when establishing relations with the families with the Eastern Asian cultural background.

The parent, who I worked with during this study, had a good education and spoke very good English, however in our practice parents with different level of education and English proficiency might be encountered, and our patience and respect would make a solid path toward good parent-teacher relationship. I don't think that this is a new discovery, but I hope that it will impact the decision making for teachers when they hesitate about making a phone call to a culturally diverse parent. I know that it is hard for

some teachers to talk to a parent who speaks “broken” English, and it puts both of them in an awkward situation, but meeting with a parent and using an interpreter (when it is needed) is very appropriate.

Limitations

There are few major limitations of my study. The first was that my study is focused on only one child and her family. Because the school district where I conducted my project is located in a non-diverse suburban town, the groups of ELLs are small and include a variety of different cultures. It would be helpful to have a group of students from a Chinese cultural background where some of the students would be with and some – without a learning disability. That way it would be possible to compare if the RL strategy works effectively for both groups. Also, it would have given me the opportunity to find out how the other parents assist their children with learning.

The second limitation is time limit. Since my project took approximately six weeks it was not enough time for repeating my tests, or to observe the child in learning math, or some other subjects. It would be interesting to see how different strategies work for this child in learning math problem solving.

Since the subject of my study was diagnosed with a learning disability, however she has progressed very well over the years of schooling, at first my intention was to understand whether this child’s cultural background impacted the way she was perceived as learning disabled. While I proceeded with my study I realized that the important question right now is how I can make my work with this child more effective, and the matter about her diagnosis with a learning disability became less important. A completely

different study would have to be conducted in order to investigate the way she was diagnosed with a learning disability.

Recommendations for Future Study

As it was stated earlier, I was not able to find the answers to some of the questions in this study, particularly the question about how a child that was taught with the use of culturally different strategies may be perceived as learning disabled. The literature review shows that there is not enough study done on the way culture affects language learners. Because it is very easy to mistake difficulty with learning a language and a learning disability, studies of many different individual cases will be helpful in learning about the way ELLs are assessed for special education.

I have mentioned previously that a limitation of my study was the fact that I focused on only one family. In order to be able to generalize the outcomes from the study, I would recommend including more families from the same cultural background in the investigation. This type of study will give a researcher an opportunity to compare and contrast the strategies different families use, their work habits, and see how the students adjust to the new methods in American schools. Furthermore I would suggest studying two groups of children with and without a learning disability, to see what difference make a change in strategies for both groups. I would also suggest to use more complicated vocabulary assessments including more than matching words to their definitions. However this type of assessment would be appropriate for the group of older students.

Research Implications

Work on this research paper gave me an opportunity to learn about Chinese cultural styles of teaching and learning, schooling traditions, and work habits from the literature review and communication with the representatives of the Chinese community. Even though the rote learning strategy is played a very important role in student learning in Chinese schools in the past, nowadays more and more teachers use a variety of strategies while teaching their students. Thus, parents from younger generations know how to apply different methods in learning and teaching to their own children. For instance a mother of my student subject found that pure memorization works for her daughter. I agree that it did work very well in a primary school while teaching her to read and learn words, however in higher grades her child would need to use her ability for solving problems, critical thinking, and analyzing. I have to give credit to this mother, who participated in all parent-teacher conferences with her daughter's classroom teachers, special education teachers, language pathologist, and ESL teacher, and used every opportunity to learn about methods of teaching her daughter, and teachers' expectations. The mother believes that only because her daughter has a learning disability she is using repetitions and memorizations. Although she applies RL technique in helping her daughter with her homework, at the same time she is asking for some extra material to teach her daughter about answering comprehension questions. She has been doing this work over the past two years, and it brought some improvement in her child's reading comprehension. This fact gives me an idea that repetitive work on the same task teaches her daughter to be prepared for the questions about each story, and makes her analyze the events in the stories. This piece of information somewhat answers the question whether

we can use the parent's method to teach a different strategy. I think we can, but it depends on each individual child how effective it would work. Of course it is hard to generalize this finding because it is based on one family practice, but it gives an idea on how to teach a new strategy to a child for some families. My project gave me a great opportunity to establish close relationship with a parent of my student and I consider it as a privilege to learn from it. I think we both learned from each other and gained valuable experience from our time working together.

Parents play a remarkable role in every child's learning and teachers have to maintain a good relationship with them, especially if the parents are from a different cultural background. Teaching parents how to participate in their children education is giving them a power of control and the ability to guide their children, which is vital at the time of the adjustment to a new country. It is known that many immigrant parents lose their parent authority because they don't know the English language and the way the education system works here.

Once again I was convinced that our teaching goals that we work toward each school year should be connected with an essential task – making a connection with every child's parents not excluding ESL students. As an ESL teacher I should promote this idea in my school. This project made me a better teacher, and a stronger advocate for my ESL students.

APPENDIX A

A Chinese Teacher Interview Questionnaire

Name _____

Date _____

1. What is your language background?

2. What is your occupation?

3. Please explain how you were taught while going to a primary school (what methods were used predominantly such as: lecture, interactive, or group work, visuals...)?

4. What methods did you use while studying?

a) Working alone?

b) Working in a group?

c) Memorization of the material?

d) Did some experiments?

e) Other (please specify)

5. What methods listed above do you use in your teaching practice?

6. If you do not use any of the above methods, what methods are most commonly used in your schools?

7. How independent are the students while learning in your classroom ?

8. Do you instruct your students always while giving them tasks to do or leave the options open and let them decide how to complete it?

9. Do you play educational/learning games with your students? What type of games?

Specific Subject Techniques

10. When you read stories with your students do you

a) ask her inferential questions or

b) ask her to make predictions?

13 If you teach your students vocabulary words, do you

a) use flash cards?

b) repeat the words until she remembers them?

c) use the words in sentences?

d) play games with the use of these words?

e) tell a story with these words?

f) Other (please specify)

APPENDIX B

Parent Interview Questionnaire

Parent Interview Questionnaire

Parent's Name _____ Date _____

Student's Name _____

11. What is your language background?

12. What language do you primarily speak at home?

13. What language do you use when speaking to your child?

14. Please explain how you were taught while going to a primary school (what methods were used predominantly such as: lecture, interactive, or group work, visuals...)?

15. What methods did you use while studying?

b) Working alone?

b) Working in a group?

c) Memorization of the material?

d) Did some experiments?

e) Other (please specify)

16. What methods listed above do you use with your child?

17. If you do not use any of the above methods, does your child work independently while doing homework?

18. Do you recognize something different in your child's way of learning to compare to your own learning?

19. Do you instruct your child always while giving her tasks to do or leave the options open and let her decide how to complete it?

20. Do you play educational/learning games with your child? What type of games?

Specific Subject Techniques:

21. If you are helping your child with math what do you do?

a) tell her whether she needs to add or subtract?

b) draw a picture to explain a problem?

c) have her repeatedly solve similar problems ?

d) other (please specify)

22. When you read stories with your child do you

a) ask her inferential questions or

b) ask her to make predictions?

13 If you help your child study vocabulary words, do you

a) use flash cards?

b) repeat the words until she remembers them?

c) use the words in sentences?

d) play games with the use of these words?

e) tell a story with these words?

f) Other (please specify)

APPENIDX C

Lesson Plan: Desert

Lesson Plan
ESL Class, 2nd grade
Topic: Desert

Objectives: Students will be able to: - understand the concept of desert as a climate area;
- learn the new vocabulary words;
- use the new words in sentences;
- recognize the new words in a text.

Vocabulary words: desert, drought, adapt, evaporate, dunes, climate, river bed, cactus, flood, dew, predator.

Materials:

Day 1

Direct instruction:

Pre-teaching the new words: show the words and the definitions on the white- board.
While introducing each word show the pictures where it's appropriate. Words: **desert, adapt, climate, flood, river bed.**

Read the book from the series "Geography Smart", Deserts. Ask the students to stop and point out the word that was just introduced.

Comprehension questions:

What is a desert?

What kinds of deserts do we know?

What animals and plants, if any, live in a desert?

How do animals and plants adapt to the life in desert?

Describe the climate in a desert.

Reading a short passage The Desert, and answering the questions.

Place an empty jar on the table, ask a student to pour some water in to the jar, and then mark the level of water with a marker. Tell the student that we will come back to that experiment next time.

Day 2

Discussion about deserts.

What did we learn about deserts?

Guide the students' answers encouraging them to use the new vocabulary words. Are there rivers in deserts? When can we see rivers? (During heavy rains.) What happens to them when there is no rain? (Rivers dry out.) What can we see in the sand deserts? Place a plate in front of the student and pour some sand on the plate making a sand hill. Ask the student what it looks like. (The purpose is to see if the student can come up with the word **dunes**).

Do people live in a desert? Why do people think that desert is not the best place to live in?

Introducing the new words: **drought, dune, cactus, evaporate.**

What word do we use when we want to say that there was no rain for a very long time? (drought) Are there droughts in the other than desert areas? People water their crops in the areas with frequent droughts.

Bring back the jar that we marked the water level two days ago. Look at the water level now and ask if the student knows why the water level is lower. Use the word **evaporate**.

Reading part of the text A North American Desert. (What is a Desert? Desert Plants)

Using hi-lighters students are asked to hi-light the word that we are working on. Ask the students if they understood what kind of plants live in a hot desert. Talk about the way desert plants adapt to the dry climate.

Writing:

Answer the first two question in the worksheet (What is a desert? How do desert plants survive without much rainfall? Give at least three examples.)

Day 3

Start with the flash cards (one side shows the word and the other side – the definition). The student can flip the card to check the answer. (Cards include only the words that we already learned).

Introduce the words: **predators, dew.**

Reading the second part of the text A North American Desert (Desert animals)

Talk about predators. Show pictures of desert animals.

Continue working on the worksheet that we started last time. Answer the question 3:
How do desert animals survive without much rainfall? Give at least three examples.

Complete the crossword puzzle (READ AND UNDERSTAND SCIENCE p.123)

Day 4

Assess the students on vocabulary definitions.

APPENDIX D:

Susie's Rain Forest and Desert review tests

Rain Forest

Directions: Match the words with the definition.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Damp ^c | a. one thickness lying over or under another, sections |
| Considered ^b | b. to think to be |
| ✓ Emerge ^d | c. moist |
| Dense ^g | d. to break down in decay |
| Lofty ⁱ | e. not bright, limited light |
| Vegetation ^f | f. any of large group of plants, have big feathery leaves |
| ✓ Decompose ^j | g. compact or crowding together |
| Ferns ^f | h. plant life |
| Dim ^e | i. tall |
| Layers ^a | j. to rise, come into view |

$\frac{+8}{10}$

Match each word to its meaning.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| ✓ 1. adapt <u>d</u> | a. the bottom of a river |
| 2. desert <u>j</u> | b. to turn into a vapor |
| 3. dew <u>h</u> | c. a meat-eating animal |
| 4. flood <u>f</u> | d. a long time without rain |
| 5. cactus <u>i</u> | e. to become used to; to adjust to conditions |
| 6. river bed <u>a</u> | f. a great flow of water over the land |
| 7. evaporate <u>b</u> | g. hills made of sand |
| ✓ 8. drought <u>e</u> | h. water drops that collects on plants over night |
| 9. predator <u>c</u> | i. a desert plant with a thick stem and spines |
| 10. dunes <u>g</u> | j. a place getting less than 10 inches of rain a year |

$\frac{+8}{10}$

Baker, S., Simmons, D., & Kameenui, E. (1995) *Vocabulary Acquisition: Curricular and Instructional Implications for Diverse Learners*. Technical Report No. 14 produced for the National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, University of Oregon.

Boyd, F. (2002). *Language Differences and the Special Education Referral Question: Points of Consideration for Teachers*. West Virginia University, Morgantown. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 8471).

Bruner, J. (1966), *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, Pages x-xi

Bryant B. Bryant D. Goodwin, M. & Higgins K. (2003). Vocabulary instruction for students with learning disabilities: A review of the research. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 26(2), 117-128

Cheng, Li-Rong, (2003) National Symposium Speech on Learning Disabilities on English Language Learners, October 14-15, 2003. Retrieved on August 17, 2006 from http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:JflpQ_bcsdkJ:www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/products/ld-ell/ldell.doc+LiRong+Cheng,+language+learners&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=us

Collier, C., & Hoover, J. (1987). Sociocultural Considerations When Referring Minority Children for Learning Disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Focus*, 3(1), 39-45. http://www.crosscultural.com/articles/Sociocul_ebd.pdf

Collier, C., Separating difference from disability: What every educator should know & do. *Crosscultural*. Retrieved August 17, 2006, from <http://www.crosscultural.com/articles/whateeryeducator.pdf>

Facella, M., Rampino, K., & Shea, E. (2005) Effective Teaching Strategies for English Language Learners. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 29(1).

Garcia, S. B., & Ortiz, A.A. (1988), Preventing inappropriate referrals of language minority students to special education. *The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education: New focus*, (5)

Greenspan, A., (2006) China vs. America? Learning strategies in the 21st century (part 2). *The Globalist Journal*, April 20, 2006. Retrieved August 11, 2006 from <http://www.theglobalist.com/storyId.aspx?storyId=5265>

Ip, B., Kwok, S., Leung, S. & Wong, D., (1996). Enhancing Learning Effectiveness of Mature Students. Hong-Kong: City University of Hong-Kong. Retrieved from <http://www.aancart.org/Resources/Chinese/Chinese%20Learners.pdf?search=%22chinese%20learning%20styles%22>

Kennedy, P. (2002). Learning Cultures and Learning Styles: Myth-Understandings About Adult (Hong Kong) Chinese Learners. *INT. J. of Lifelong Education*, 21(5), 430-445 Retrieved from

<http://www.aancart.org/Resources/Chinese/Chinese%20Learners.pdf#search=%22chinese%20learning%20styles%22>

Littlewood, W. (1996). Hong Kong students and their English: LEAP report. Hong Kong: Macmillan Publishers (China) Ltd.) Retrieved from

<http://www.aancart.org/Resources/Chinese/Chinese%20Learners.pdf#search=%22chinese%20learning%20styles%22>

Mackey, A. & Gass, S. M.(2005) *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, Mahwah, New Jersey, London.

McCardle, P. Mele-McCarthy, J., Cutting, L., Leos, K., & D'Emilio, T. (2005). Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners : Identifying the Issues. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20(1), 1-5.

Ortiz, A., Garcia, S. Holtzman, Jr., W., Polyzoi, E., Snell, Jr., W., Wilkinson, C., & Willig, A., (1985). *Characteristics of limited English proficient Hispanic Students in Programs for the Learning Disabled: Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research*, Austin, TX: The University of Texas, Handicapped Minority Research Institute on Language Proficiency.

Rao, Z.(2002). Bridging the Gap Between Teaching and Learning Styles in East Asian Contexts. *TESOL Journal*, 11(2)

Shrader, V. How to Distinguish Learning Disability from Language Acquisition. Retrived on July 27,2006 from

www.crosscultured.com/articles/how_to_distinguish_ld_from_language_acquisition.pdf#

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary, National Symposium on Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners, (2003) Retrieved from

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/products/ld-ell.pdf>

Wagner, R., Francis, D., & Morris, R. (2005). Identifying English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities: Key challenges and possible approaches. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20 (1), 6-15.

Watkins, E. (2003) SLD Companion Manual, MN Department of Education. 94-142 Retrieved from <http://education.state.mn.us>

Woodward, M. (1981). Indiana Experiences with LEP Students, Primarily with Indochinese Refugee Children. Report to the Indiana Department of Instruction. (unpublished) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 203644).