



Context:

Southeast Asians in California

Volume 13, Number 99, October, 1992

Folsom Cordova Unified School District
2460 Cordova Lane,
Rancho Cordova CA 95670
(916) 635-6815
Judy Lewis, Editor

Competence:

The Teacher's Role in the Acquisition of Language, Reading and Culture

Refugee Educators' Network meetings:

September 17
November 19
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March 20, 1993
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Henry Ho arrived in 1980 as an eleven-year old, a refugee from the rural fishing islands off the coast of Vietnam, unable to write his name and unfamiliar with the school setting. We plunked him into a fifth grade class, with one or two others who spoke his language, and waited a couple of years for him to absorb the language. By the time he reached eighth grade, he could read and write at about a second grade level, could understand and speak fairly well, and fought regularly with other students. His parents hoped for the best, but gave him very little direction and few restrictions on his activity. Henry became very good at being very bad; this was his chosen area of competence.

His parents moved the family to Oakland, where there was a large Chinese community. After a year the family returned to our area because Henry and his brothers had begun to run around with thugs. Henry was very likely recruited by older gang members, and continued his association with the Oakland roving gangs while in Sacramento. Henry ended up shooting a waiter in a Chinese restaurant during a robbery, and went to the Youth Authority for six years.

Causes

Henry's outcome was not caused solely by his impoverished rural background, nor the fact that his parents had never been to school, and could not read or write Chinese, Vietnamese or English. It was not because his parents had been raised under a communist system that removed personal initiative, nor because major cultural values in Asia reflect the fatalism of Buddhism. It was not because of the gap between the children and parents, nor because there was a lack of reading material in the home. Henry's first cousin, son of his father's brother, a couple of years younger than Henry, went on to graduate with a 4.0 GPA, one of the first rural Sino-Vietnamese to accomplish that remarkable goal.

Henry's tragic outcome was likely the result of a number of factors in combination, including very poor choices on his part. I know that we did not give Henry the best start in school, although his cousin had the same sort of start. For whatever reason, Henry never found an area within the school setting in which he could see himself as competent, or even with the hope of becoming competent.

We didn't know enough at that time to pair him up with an adult mentor or a well-respected peer buddy, to structure his learning tasks so he could see his own progress; or even to know him well enough to know what his interests and (socially acceptable) strengths were. We benevolently ignored him, expecting little but compliance. Much to our surprise, while he was acquiring oral language he was also acquiring a second culture—the unwritten rules that govern interaction with others in American society. He learned about confrontation, competition, and peer recognition; he developed areas of competence in fighting, intimidation, and survival.

Because of Henry, we have come to believe that a newcomer arrives here with an expectation of success, but that experience teaches powerful lessons about the available choices. If better choices are available—if there is a person who knows the student and has realistic, progressive expectations of him (or her), one who can help him see the goal and work towards it, one who helps him understand and surmount obstacles—few will make choices that turn them into outcasts. Apparently some are more “disadvantaged” than others: Henry required more from us than did his cousin.

Model for Acquisition of Language— Oral, Textual, Cultural

In California, over the past ten years, the theoretical model for second language acquisition has been driven by Chomsky's “language acquisition device,” a label for the neural activity that turns input into generalizations that structure output. The theory is interpreted and applied to the classroom by researchers like Jim Cummins and Stephen Krashen, and the outcome is an emphasis on methods that call for understanding and communicating ideas rather than rote output drill.

Rule-driven production

Linguistic research refines and validates the basic mechanism of language acquisi-

tion—that neural processes of some sort equip the brain to sort out input, decipher regular patterns, form generalizations about how the pieces are put together, and then produce output that conforms to the generalizations. Feedback then becomes additional input that allows a shifting of the patterns and revising of generalizations. The classic evidence of rule-driven production, rather than memorization and recitation of patterns, is the way in which children overgeneralize when first acquiring English (one car/two cars; one cat/two cats; one man/two mans), and the way in which pieces can be produced in novel arrangements.

Reading & writing is acquired, not learned

Krashen most recently has been publishing and lecturing on the way in which reading and writing skills are acquired, not learned. Not surprisingly, reading—a receptive skill like the comprehension of oral language—is acquired when there is comprehensible input; we learn to read by reading. Writing—an expressive skill like speaking—is output that represents the end result of the textual language acquisition process. To write well requires sufficient reading input.

Virtually everyone learns to understand and speak a language (or in the case of the deaf, to understand and sign a language), but not everyone learns to read and write. There is some front-end direct teaching required before the language acquisition device can operate in reading acquisition: recognizing two-dimensional shapes, association of written symbol with a unit of sound (or a unit of concept, in the case of Chinese), left-to-right organizational rules (in the case of English), breaking apart words into component sounds and blending them back together. Once the fundamental skills are in place, reading well is the result of reading enough, and writing well is the result of reading enough. Direct learning of writing generalizations is also necessary, but it helps the editing process rather than the initial writing process.

LAD underlies culture acquisition

Why should the neural language acquisition device be limited to generalizations derived from input through only the ears and eyes? Why not assume for the moment that it also operates on other kinds of input: touch, space, smell, heat, pupil size, duration of eye contact, gesture, facial expression, and so on. If we can assume that the language acquisition device is a construct for the neural process of deriving generalizations from input, no matter what kind of input, then it makes sense that second cultures are acquired in much the same way second languages are acquired. (See the chart.)

While great attention is paid to skill in second or third languages, little attention is paid to skill in second or third cultures (the unwritten rules by which we behave and interact). There is very little educational research on acquisition of culture, yet hundreds if not thousands of studies focus on the most minute details of the acquisition of language and spell out the rules that underlie various

languages. We accept that “culture” is all that is learned, the knowledge that passed from one generation to another, all that portion of ourselves that we are not born knowing, but we don’t know exactly how such knowledge is acquired, nor how our cultural maps are changed by contact with others. We understand what we need to do to speak or write a second language, but not what we need to do to operate “fluently” in a second culture. However, we do now know that newcomers are actively acquiring second cultures from the moment they first encounter the new culture. In Henry’s case, I can only assume that the kind of input he received resulted in generalizations that led to generally combative and anti-social output (behavior).

IBM: Macintosh = learning; acquisition

I had brief experience with IBM-like computers, and found myself frustrated by not knowing the rules for input; a misplaced space, a capital letter in the wrong

Using Krashen’s Model for Language Acquisition for Acquisition of Culture

Krashen’s Hypotheses	Implications for Language Acquisition	Implications for Acquisition of Culture
Input Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide exposure to English. •Make input comprehensible. •Oral Language: listening produces speaking. •Textual Language: reading produces writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interact with persons from other cultures. •Use information or analysis of conflicts to bring implicit rules of culture to awareness. •Non-verbal input produces generalizations about how people interact. Use discrepant events to force change in generalizations.
Natural Order Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Language is acquired in stages; rich language input provides the necessary structures. •Avoid teaching grammar without plenty of English input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Universal human categories of behavior. Differences exist in ways behavior is expressed in different cultures. Hall’s ten areas of human activity: interaction; association; subsistence; reproduction; territoriality; temporality; adaptation; recreation; protection; exploitation. •Avoid teaching cultural facts without interaction.
Monitor Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Receptive before expressive. Expect a “silent period.” •Editor hampers expressive process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use interaction to drive “need to know” then provide information that helps understand how each way of doing things makes sense. •Teach, model process for becoming aware of underlying cultural “rules”; else tendency is to either ignore or destroy differences.
Affective Filter Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Anxiety blocks input. •Focus on message; provide interesting input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Respect and non-judgemental curiosity allow interaction, input. •Arrange interaction in pursuit of mutually desirable non-threatening goal.

place, or a colon used “illegally” resulted in a message that basically said, “I don’t understand.” Compare this to interaction with a Macintosh computer, in which input is given directly by moving an arrow, clicking on icons, or double-clicking on key verbs. When an “illegal” operation occurs, it’s because the process is wrong, not the format of the input. Some people unpack a new computer, plug it in, then sit down and read the manual—this is the grammar-translation method of learning a new language. Others plug in the computer, turn it on, and begin clicking on various icons until something happens. There is a basic belief that the computer operates according to a logical set of rules, and that it is possible to figure out what to do. Trial and error revises generalizations until they are confirmed and internalized; actions then become automatic, and the generalizations interconnect and build upon one another, pushing the level of communication with the computer to a new level.

Teacher’s role: scaffold and coach

What, then is the teacher’s role in the acquisition of language, literacy, and culture? Put very simply, the first is to make input comprehensible. The second, which is closely related to the first, is to arrange events so that a student realizes competence. The first role is sometimes called *scaffolding* in the process of acquiring a first language; the second role is that of *coaching*.

Scaffolding

In first language acquisition, scaffolding refers to simplification of language, repetition of key elements, responding in predictable ways, altering the input so that it just a bit more difficult than the current level of output, and so on. It also refers to pulling meaning from what output is produced. “Oh, ‘di-di’...you mean ‘kitty’. Yes, there’s the kitty.”

Teachers who use what are called “sheltered English” methods are scaffolding aural and textual input. They provide simplified text, drawings, models, real objects; they tell stories that have a sequence and can be located in space; they demonstrate actions. They make input more compre-

hensible in a variety of ways.

Persons who act as cultural interpreters or cultural brokers make the unwritten rules of culture more comprehensible. Sometimes this takes the form of explaining why, of making the implicit explicit, of pointing out the connections between things. At other times, it means accompanying people into unfamiliar cultural situations and letting experience itself provide the input. Scaffolding, then, is making input—aural, textual, cultural—more comprehensible. The teacher’s role—like a parent’s role in first language and culture acquisition—is to provide scaffolding.

Coaching

The other major part of a teacher’s role is arranging conditions so that the student is successful. Good parents do this with children: they understand, they follow directions, they respond to requests. They give choices that are consistent with the child’s level: do you want cereal or oatmeal? do you want your egg scrambled or fried? will you put your toys away now or after dinner? do you want to do your homework in the kitchen or in the den? Parents encourage toddlers to test out their walking skills, then step back just out of range, but not too far. Teachers, ideally, would know their students as well as good parents do, although this is very difficult when there are 35 or 150 students for each teacher, changing every semester or every year.

I used to think that football was an over-rated expense in the school district’s budget, but after watching coaches and players’ responses to the them over the past two seasons, I have changed my mind. When my son comes home exhausted and demoralized, I ask him why he continues. He says that he likes the camaraderie of the team, the admiration of peers, and the fact that he has tackled something difficult and overcome the seemingly impossible.

The coaches can be foul-mouthed, rough, hostile, quick to criticize, and they single out favorites; all the things a teacher is cautioned not to do. On the other hand—and this seems to be the key—they devote tremendous time and energy to the pursuit of football, associating with thirty-some

adolescent boys rather than doing something else from June to December every year. The players understand that the adults' sacrifice requires sacrifice on their parts.

The coaches are very clear in their expectations, and they have inspiring slogans they repeat every day, in every huddle, at every practice. There's no need for empty compliments, only to recognize correct play. When a boy does make a mistake, the coaches analyze the wrong moves in very clear terms. They draw mistaken plays on boards and then draw in the correct plays; they videotape the plays and go over the mistakes (and the correct plays) frame by frame. Once a mistake is clearly identified, they show the boys how to do it right; then the players try it again and again until they have it right. Clear goal; point out mistakes; clear instruction; try it again.

There are a variety of situations in which a child can enter into a coaching relationship with an adult. The key elements appear to be: 1) choosing to participate; 2) seeing clearly the goal and the steps leading up to it; 3) valuing the goal and the rewards that success will bring; 4) shared sacrifice and reciprocal obligation between the coach and child; 5) willingness to try; 6) not "lowering the bar" but finding a way to get over it. Various summer camp self-esteem programs that have children walking tightropes are an example of this: accomplishment, not praise, engenders self-esteem.

Scaffolding, coaching and computerese acquisition

Let's look at the Macintosh again, in terms of scaffolding and coaching to competence. We have Macintosh computers in the office for people to use, with fonts for Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Lao, Armenian, Russian, and so on. When a person first begins, I have to start the computer, open the document, choose the font and type size, and click the cursor on the page where the typing will begin. After the person is finished, I have to save the document and print it. In this way, the very first time, the person produces a page of wonderful type, in various sizes and styles.

As time goes by, I don't have to turn on the computer or open the document any more, but I have to set up the footer so a

page number is automatically printed, break the document in various places, or place a graphic in the document. "Teacher Sam", our Chinese aide, began this way, but since I couldn't read the Chinese operating system, he had to experiment on his own. It took hours of perseverance. He took the computer home on weekends and over vacations; eventually he learned three completely different Chinese word-processors (which required learning Pinyin encoding as well as figuring out three different keyboard input methods). He now faxes messages to Taiwan for technical advice, and has worn out the reference manual to Pagemaker, looking for solutions to problems and seeking out new things to do. He has become competent, and has acquired Macintoshese (in Chinese).

Implications

In summary then, what are some practical implications of the proposition that oral skills, reading and writing skills, and cultural interaction skills are all the result of the "language acquisition device" (perhaps better renamed a "generalization-formulating device")? The following are specific practices that have had promising results in our district.

Gatekeeper & Transition Specialist

A Gatekeeper has experience with other languages and cultures. A Transition Specialist is selected from the group least likely to succeed in the district. They serve as co-workers (sharing power, making budget and program decisions) whose responsibilities include:

1. Learning the names and backgrounds of each student.
2. Establishing connections with parents.
3. Providing access to information.
4. Resolving problems and conflicts.

Teachers

Teachers provide scaffolding and coach to competence in any one area.

Scaffolding

1. Choose any interesting materials (this requires knowing the student well enough to know what is interesting).

2. Mix and match methods, selected to fit with background of students. (For example, audiolingual methods work well with Hmong, and grammar-translation works well with Russians, Armenians, and Ukrainians. Realize that these methods provide a level of “security” consistent with beliefs about learning English; acquisition takes place during the communication that surrounds the activity at hand.)
3. Provide impetus to interact with text (minimum of 30 minutes per day). Anything interesting with English words will do: comic books, magazines, Nintendo hints, newspapers, encyclopedias, Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy* book(s), computer-based libraries on CD-rom, question-and-answer books; fashion magazines.
4. Teach the most frequently occurring words directly; teach basic analysis and blending techniques directly. (Dolch words or any other frequency-based sight reading word lists; explicit phonics methods; word families; sound blending charts and recitation, dictation; IBM-based *Discover Intensive Phonics* courseware for students in 4th grade and above who have some experience with literacy.)
5. Arrange learning situations that require interaction: computer work, cultural journalism teams. Teach and model the process of making implicit rules of culture explicit. (Use materials from *A World of Difference*, conflict resolution resource books, Simon’s *Values Clarification*, and so on. Teach psychology at secondary levels.)

Coach to competence

1. Choose any progression of skills (Barnell-Loft, SRA reading or math, computer-based hierarchical programs like WICAT) and make the steps clear. Let students know where they stand on the progression (tell them their scores on reading tests for example), and ensure that they accomplish the next step.
2. Point out mistakes; show how to correct mistakes, keeping in mind differences in background and cross-cultural cognitive differences.
3. Know who the students are, and have expectations of them.
Begin by recognizing ethnicity of names and knowing sibling and other familial connections.

Bilingual aides

1. Hire aides from the same backgrounds as students. Make selection criteria group-specific.
2. Have aides explain key vocabulary and summarize lessons’ main ideas in the native language (“preview-review”, not concurrent translation).
3. Have aides help students deal with the grief-like stages that precede acculturation.
4. Realize that aides help parents understand American schools’ expectations.
5. Aides provide role models, especially if they share a perceived common background with students and parents.

Rhythms to Reading (Hmong)

6 small books, teachers’ notes, cassette, storage bag—\$38

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Contact Jan Bednarz for information, JMB Communication Services, Ltd., PO Box 748, Lake Zurich IL 60047. (708) 438-4249, fax (709) 726-7626.

Barnaga: A Simulation Game on Cultural Clashes

Thiagarajan, S. & B. Steinwachs, 1989

In this simulation participants experience the frustration of realizing that in spite of many similarities, people from another culture differ in the way they do things. Players learn that they must understand and reconcile these differences if they want to function effectively in a cross-cultural group. Barnaga is a card game in which similarities and differences among cultures are simulated by different versions of the game rules. Communication problems are simulated by requiring players to interact only through gestures or pictures. This game helps its players understand that unless they recognize and respect the different assumptions underlying their interactions, they run into interpersonal conflicts. This insight—that cultural differences may bring more of a “clash” when hidden amidst apparent similarities are therefore unexpected and unprepared for—is a source of intensive interaction and rich follow-up discussion. The rules are few and simple and the number of players flexible (any number over nine).

SIETAR International, 1989, Intercultural Press No. 850, \$15.00. PO Box 700, Yarmouth, ME 04096, (207) 846-5168.

A Manual of Structured Experiences for Cross-Cultural Learning

Weeks, W.W., P.B. Pedersen, R.W. Brislin, 1977

Fifty-nine exercises designed to stimulate learning in multicultural groups. Sections include: Clarification of Values, Identification of Roles, Recognition of Feelings and Attitudes, Community Interaction.

Intercultural Press No. S002, \$9.95. PO Box 700, Yarmouth, ME 04096, (207) 846-5168.

Silent Temples, Songful Hearts: Traditional Music of Cambodia

ISBN 0-937203-36-x, \$22.95 book and cassettes.
World Music Press, PO Box 2565, Danbury CT 06813, 203 748-1131.

Farmer Boy

Mathews, Peggy & Va Vang

32 pages, hc, 15 color illustrations, 15 b/w illustrations. English only \$13.95; Hmong/English \$14.95; add 8.25% tax for California orders, \$2.00 s/h. Multicultural Distributing Ctr, 800 N. Grand Avenue, Covina CA 91724. 818 859-3133, 818 859-3136 fax.

Hmong for English Speakers (Level 1)

by Yang Dao and Jeanne Blake, 1992

Workbook-textbook used in Hamline University's six-unit graduate course on Hmong. Contains ten or twenty lessons. Teaches Romanized Popular Alphabet, sounds of White Hmong, sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary. Conversations and dialogues teach the elements of courtesy and how to get and give personal information. Tapes will be available in 1993.
Worldbridge Associates, PO Box 29204, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429. \$30.00 plus \$3.50 s/h.

Older Generation of SE Asian Refugees: Annotated Bibliography, Occasional Paper No. 11

by Laura Boyer, CSU Stanislaus Order from SARS, \$4.00, CURA, Univ of MN, 330 HHHumphrey Ctr, 301 19th Ave. S., Mnpls, MN 55455. (612) 525-5535, fax (612) 626-0273. Checks to "University of MN".

Bibliography of Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese Americans

Special Publication No. 3. By Joel M. Halpern and Lucy Nguyen-Hong-Nhiem, eds.

English language works contained in SARS' database on the culture and migration of Hmong, Khmer, Lao and Vietnamese.
Contact Asian Studies Occasional Papers, c/o Dept of Asian Languages & Literatures, Thompson Hall, University of MA, Amherst MA 01003. \$7.00. Checks payable to "Univ of MA".



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- #9201 *Minority Cultures of Laos: Kammu, Lua', Lahu, Hmong, and Mien.* Lewis; Kam Raw, Vang, Elliott, Matisoff, Yang, Crystal, Saepharn. 1992. 402 pages. \$12.00 (carton discount \$10.00)
 - #S8801 *Handbook for Teaching Hmong-Speaking Students* Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, Yang, 1988. \$4.50 (carton discount for lots of 58: \$3.50)
 - #S8802 *Handbook for Teaching Khmer-Speaking Students* Ouk, Huffman, Lewis, 1988. \$5.50 (carton discount for lots of 40: \$4.50)
 - #S8903 *Handbook for Teaching Lao-Speaking Students* Luangpraseut, Lewis 1989. \$5.50 (carton discount for lots of 42: \$4.50)
 - #S8904 *Introduction to the Indochinese and their Cultures* ~~Chhim, Luangpraseut, Te, 1989.~~ \$9.00 (~~carton discount for lots of 32: \$8.00~~) Out of print; a few with scuffed covers: \$5.00
 - #S8805 *English-Hmong Bilingual Dictionary of School Terminology* *Cov Lus Mis Kuj Txhais ua Lus Hmoob* Huynh D Te, translated by Lue Vang, 1988 \$2.00 (no carton price)
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 - ___ #R007 Hmong dict. (Xiong) \$25.00
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Grandfather's Way (Vang &
Lewis, revised printing 1990)
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