"¿Me Entiendes?" Do You Understand Me?
Supporting Multilingual Teachers and Prospective Educators

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Abstract
This paper examines a Multilingual undergraduate course that was created to increase knowledge and understanding for both teachers and prospective educators in responding to language learning competencies for multilingual learners in our local community. One area considered in the design of our course has been the use of diverse resources to provide points of connection. With the ease of access to different media, the use of traditional fairy tales identified as both accessible and translated resources for drawing connections and reaching multilingual learners is considered. However, conventional fairy tales create other issues and challenges in terms of the hidden societal messages /agendas that are conveyed with the use of stereotypical representation and expectations, even within different cultural versions of the same fairy tale. The different perspectives shaped by the intersectionality of student identities are invaluable assets for learning. A Vygotskian approach to increasing language learning and competencies is integrated into the conceptual framework of this paper. Strategies that we have used for teaching multilingual learners and preparing prospective teachers are identified along with an analysis of feedback data from a survey distributed in the pilot study. The tensions that exist with integrating diverse forms of representation to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in the curriculum, for improving diversity in practice and ensuring greater representation with the contributions of diverse and/or minoritized groups in the curriculum is reviewed. The multilingual course is a deliverable to the Up-Lift California Grant from Early Educator Investment Collaborative (EEIC) to California State University, Sacramento.

Keywords: Multilingual Learners, Curriculum Materials, Language Learning

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Introduction

"¿*Me Entiendes*?", "Do you understand me?" This is a common refrain by teachers and prospective educators when communicating with multilingual learners and families. The interest to seek additional resources to help support prospective educators, and current teachers in the field, was initiated through grant funding that was secured to create a multilingual undergraduate course (i.e., *Supporting Multilingual Learners: Context and Approaches)*. The multilingual course was designed to increase knowledge and understanding for both teachers and prospective educators in responding to language learning competencies for multilingual learners. The course was offered as a special interest course that would count towards credit as an elective for a degree program in Human Development, and Child, Adolescent, and Family Studies. As part of the requirements for a degree in teaching in Early Childhood Education, the focus of the course was to ensure greater understanding of the needs and strategies that could be utilized to improve opportunities for multilingual children.

Location and Regional Context

The California State University (CSU) system is a public system of higher education, the largest university system in the United States with 23 campuses spread out across the State. Although regionally in the San Joaquim valley, the current student population is relatively small compared to the other CSUs situated along the coast, the campus is located approximately 2 hours inland from Los Angeles and is the only 4-year institution of higher education within 100-mile radius.

Our students are first generation. Our university is a designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and a Minority Serving Institution (MSI). Many of our students have limited resources and are often working several jobs to afford the cost of their education. While California is viewed as politically and socially liberal in terms of the State, Kern County is quite conservative. The major industries are oil and agriculture. Several people work in the big oil companies and can quickly earn high salaries with limited education, while a large population of migrant workers work in the fields earning very low wages. This disparity is reflected also in the students we serve.

Conceptual Framework

The guiding conceptual framework for the development of the multilingual course incorporates a Vygotskian approach with effective student learning occurring through active participation. Learner-led inquiry, negotiation, active hands-on experiences coupled with creativity embodies learning processes whereby children learn through engagement. According to Vygotsky, social interactions help children develop their ability to use language. The role of language is critical, as it serves as a tool for thought and communication. "Vygotsky's fundamental theoretical insight is that the higher forms of human mental activity are always and everywhere mediated by symbolic means" (Mahn & Fazelehaq, 2019, p.4). The basic function of speech and language acquisition is based on communicative social interaction. Therefore, simply interacting with others is not enough. Communication is essential, as children acquire language competencies there are modes that help with their thinking, voluntary attention, partitioning, comparison, analysis, abstraction, and synthesis. Therefore, as Vygotsky has contended, learning occurs through interactions with others in the community, (peers, adults, teachers, and mentors). The greater awareness that children have affects their thinking process which impacts their language acquisition.

Multilingual Learners

Multilingual Language learners refers to individual who speak and understand more than one language. According to Yoon (2023:1), Multilingual learners (MLLs), are students who are in the process of acquiring English as a new, additional language. They are one of the most increasing populations in U.S. public schools. In the United States, there was an increase of Multilingual Learners (MLLs) from 4.5 million students to 5.1 million students between 2010 and 2019. Additionally, more than 400 different languages are spoken in U.S. public schools (Yoon, 2023:1).

Second language acquisition requires not only cognitive development of the child, but also recognizing the differences of the child's specific personality and needs. Children learn their native language differently, then when they are learning a second language. Children do not study in the traditional sense, their native language or intentionally learn their native language. Rather, children acquire their native language without conscious awareness. With second language acquisition however, children are intentionally learning the language through the learning of alphabets, reading, and writing. Therefore, it is important to identify the student's home language or native language to provide the support and assistance for student learning. It is crucial for teachers therefore, to understand that there is a variation of experiences and needs of children and language acquisition. Differences in learning may also extend to how language is passed on from one generation to the next. Customs, beliefs, skills, and values of the children may also influence language learning.

Diversity- Traditional and Culturally Adopted Fairy Tales for Multilingual Learners

One aspect that was considered in the design of selected pedagogy used to be integrated into the multilingual course was the use of diverse resources to provide points of connection for multilingual learners. With the ease of access to different media, the use of traditional fairy tales was identified as both accessible and translated resources for drawing connections and reaching out to multilingual learners. The stories from the original Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tales and Hans Christian Anderson offer traditional interpretations of fairy tales. Non-traditional fairy tales from various authors provide a combination of bilingual and multicultural versions of a fairy tale based on the same original traditional stories but offer insight into different cultural values or traditions. Fairy tales have been used to explain why cultural elements in a particular society were deemed important. Fairy tales also provide children with the possibility of using play and their imagination where they can change versions of fairy tales according to their understanding.

While fairy tales were a known point of connection, there were also issues and challenges with the use of conventional fairy tales in terms of the hidden societal messages/agendas that are conveyed with the use of stereotypical representation and expectations. Unfortunately, even within different cultural versions of the traditional fairy tale, inaccuracies persist. A brief examination of traditional tales versus cultural or non-traditional tales highlights some of the patterns and concerns that were noticed with the use of fairy tales in teaching multilingual learners.

Cinderella is a popular fairy tale known around the world. It is about a young woman who becomes a servant to her step-mother and step-sisters after the death of her biological father. Cinderella is eventually rescued by the prince.

Contrast the Grimm version of Cinderella with the Mexican Cinderella Story by Tomie dePaola, entitled "Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story". In this version, Adelita has the same misfortune as the traditional Cinderella with being left in the hands of her stepmother who mistreats her after the death of her father. The difference in the Mexican version is that everyone is invited to a party at the family ranch for the homecoming of the rancher's son. Adelita attends the party, and loses her slipper. As in the traditional version of Cinderella, the son seeks to find the person who fits the slipper to marry. Adelita marries the son and lives happily ever after.

The design of the adopted tale book cover (Figure 1), displays a cultural version with the Mexican Cinderella Story. As indicated in the title of the book, the adoption simply changes the context of the tale, but the story remains essentially the same.

Original Tale	Adopted Tale
Cinderella Carl and Wilhelm Grimm	Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story Tomie dePaola (Mexico)
2018, Sterling Publishing Toronto Canada	2022, Puffin Books New York
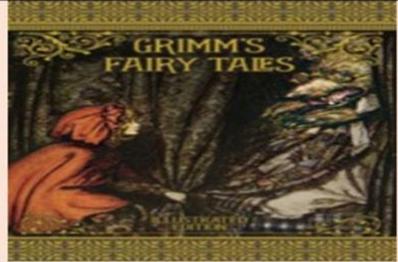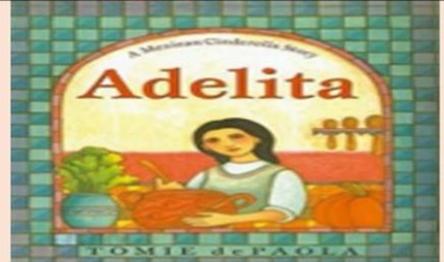
Figure 1: Cinderella – Traditional Version and Mexican Version

The premise of the non-traditional Snow White fairy tale by Jehan Jones-Radgowski also replicates a similar alignment to the traditional tale in the African American version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Whereas the traditional tale is about a young girl named 'Snow White' because her face was white as snow, the cultural version does not attribute the same meaning to Snow White's name with any physical features. Simliar to the traditional version, Snow White must flea from her step-mother who is jealous of her beauty. Instead of Snow White meeting 7 dwarfs, the African American version depicts Snow White with 7 children, yet the title of the tale remains Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Ultimately, the prince saves Snow White in the non-traditional version, but rather than marry her, the prince becomes her friend, not her husband. Some critics may consider this cultural version of Snow White reflective of more contemporary current lifesytle relationships and family arrangements with Snow White not marrying the prince. However, the 'happy ever after ending' is reinforced in this version, in the same way as is reflected in the original tale.

From the design of the cultural tale, the representation of the Snow White character and the seven children highlights the racial difference between the original Snow White tale and the cultural tale. Additionally, the coverpage of the cultural tale depicts the posioned apple which the step-mother uses in her attempt to kill Snow White. In the cultural version, when the step mother bites from the apple herself, there is no magical power to resusitate her due to her excessive vanity. Similar to Cinderella, the trope of the evil step-mother is reinforced in both versions of the fairy tale and also represented in the depicition of the step-mother on the coverpage of the book (Figure 2).

Original Tale	Adopted Tale
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs Carl and Wilhelm Grimm	Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs Jehan Jones-Radgowski
2018, Sterling Publishing Toronto Canada	2022, Picture Window Books North Mankato, Minnesota
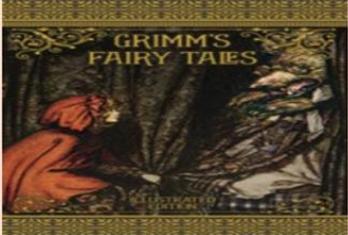
Figure 2: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

While there are attempts to alter the visual representation of the key characters in the cultural versions of traditional fairy tales, attempts to address the intersection of language and culture appears to slowly emerge in the cultural rendition of Little Red Riding Hood, entitled "Caperucita Roja" by Liz Doolittle. As in the traditional tale, Caperucita Roja is a young girl charged with the task of taking food to her grandmother. Along the way, she is tricked by the male wolf to take a longer path, so that the wolf can arrive to her grand-mothers house before her. The story and cultural context remain the same. The only difference is the use of two different languages (English and Spanish) in the cultural version.

A cursory view of the cover page of the book (See Figure 3) does not reflect any specific cultural dress, traditional markers, or visual cues to suggest a different version of the classic Little Red Riding Hood tale other than the title of the book written in Spanish. Without any visual ques to guide and highlight the intersection of language and culture, this version of the tale basically replicates the traditional version except for the use of a different language. In this case specifically, the tale is replicated, without nuancing any cultural differences or traditions which might be expected or anticipated in a Spanish language version of Little Red Riding Hood.

Original Tale	Adopted Tale
Little Red Riding Hood Carl and Wilhelm Grimm	Caperucita Roja Liz Doolittle
2018, Sterling Publishing Toronto Canada	2015 Unitexto Digital Publishing
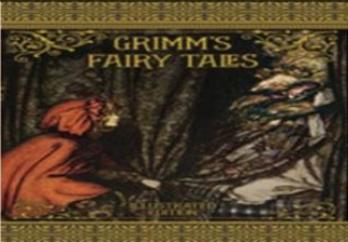
Figure 3: Little Red Riding Hood and Caperucita Roja

In the original tale of Sleeping Beauty, the curse of a spindle pricking the finger of the princess causing her to fall into a deep sleep is placed by the 13th fairy who felt slighted for not being invited to the party at the castle. The curse was placed for eternity; however, another fairy reduces the curse to 100 years. The curse or spell is broken with the prince

finding the princess and kissing her. As the prince resuscitates the princess bringing her back to life, they marry and live happily ever after. In the cultural version entitled La Bella Durmiente by Carol Ottolenghi (2009), the story and cultural setting remain the same (See Figure 4), but the language of the story is Spanish.

Original Tale	Adopted Tale
Sleeping Beauty Carl and Wilhelm Grimm	La Bella Durmiente Carol Ottolenghi
2018, Sterling Publishing Toronto Canada	2009 Carson Dellosa Publishing LLC North Carolina
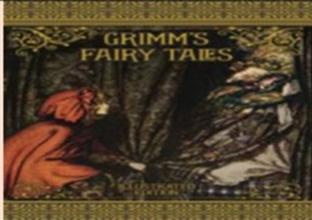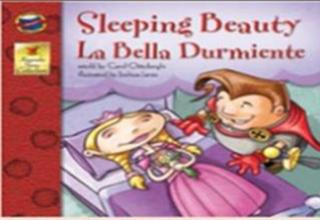
Figure 4: Sleeping Beauty, and La Belle Durmiente

The traditional version of Rapunzel is also replicated in the cultural version, but one major difference is the inclusion of Indian culture and characters, however the story line remains the same. In the original tale, a mother is punished when she asks her husband to steal fruit from another person's garden. The punishment is that the first child of the couple will be given to the witch who places Rapunzel in a tower. Rapunzel remains trapped in the tower, until a prince witnesses how the witch climbs the tower using Rapunzel's hair. When the prince hears singing and plans to rescue Rapunzel, the witch arrives and cuts Rapunzel's hair and banishes her to the forest. The witch pretends to be Rapunzel when the prince returns and proceeds to climb the tower. The witch places a curse on the prince blinding him, however the prince manages to escape and wonders through the forest, until he hears the singing of Rapunzel and explains to her what occurred. Rapunzel cries, and her tears magically bring sight back to the prince. They live happily ever after.

Although the cover page of the cultural version of Rapunzel by Chole Perkins depicts Indian culture (See Figure 5) with the use of an Indian Rapunzel character with long black hair, the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and customs of Indian people are not emphasized in a meaningful way within the story line. The cosmetic version of the cover page provides a weak form of representation of culture with the skin color of the main character, but no other significant attributes of Indian culture that move beyond the superficial level of clothing, food, music, or dance.

Original Tale	Adopted Tale
Rapunzel Carl and Wilhelm Grimm	Rapunzel Chole Perkins
2018, Sterling Publishing Toronto Canada	2017, Little Simon New York
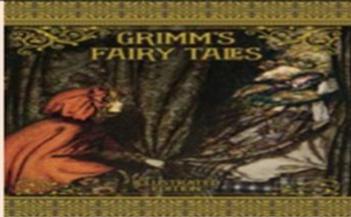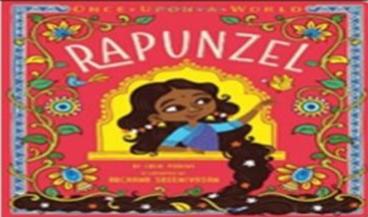
Figure 5: Rapunzel original version and cultural adopted tale version

In the African American version of the Princess and the Pea, the context is completely different from the original tale. Here, a mother initiates a competition to find a suitable wife for her son. The requirements of any of the eligible candidates is that they should be able to cook and feed her son. This requirement reinforces stereotypical representation of women in the home and domestic duties. The woman who cooks the best pot of black-eyed peas is given the blessing from the mother to marry her son.

The cultural tale in this case diverts significantly from the original tale. The addition of cultural foods and the expectations of mothers for their son's could be viewed as a closer depiction of cultural values and traditions. However, these various expectations can also be viewed as reinforcing stereotypical roles for women within the cultural group as well as the broader society. The value of being a dutiful wife is allocated greater currency than the role of the princess in the original version of the Princess and the Pea. For contemporary women within the African American culture, the focus on domestic duties alone over their intellectual abilities and contributions traps women into a single defining role. This form of representation limits the vision of possibilities for young African American girls to consider or aspire towards, if the prize of the princess is to be based on her success in the kitchen alone.

The visual representation of the Princess and the Pea by Rachel Himes reflects an African princess dressed for work in the kitchen (See Figure 6). The depiction of the Princess and the alignment of culture through food, may present some level of authenticity as reflected in past traditions, but it does not provide the breadth of abilities that the Princess may possess that would make her a suitable partner for the Prince.
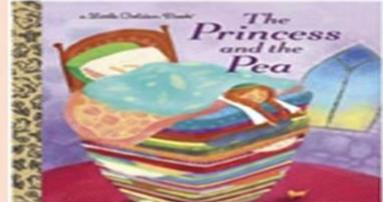

Figure 6: The Princess and the Pea, original and adopted African American Version

Culturally Relevant Course Materials – Equity Minded Teaching

As endorsed in the current educational literature, it is essential to recognize the inherent complexities and multiplicities of identities within the classroom community, as well as the value of the contributions that emanate from people with different experiences, and perspectives framed by their context and location. The different perspectives shaped by the intersectionality of student identities are invaluable assets for learning. An overview of the theoretical framework on second language acquisition necessitates that educators focus on the development of children who are Multilingual Learners (MLLs) with evidence-based teaching practices for supporting MLLs.

Some of the strategies for working with Multilingual learners that should be considered are as follows:

1. Schools should gather cultural information about the child and family upon enrollment in the class (Heffington & Cody, 2023, p. 312).
2. Educators should partner with families to provide opportunities for families to participate in the classroom (Andriaschko, 2023, p. 71).
3. Children should see themselves represented in the classroom (Heffington & Cody, 2023, p. 312).
4. The curriculum should incorporate and support diverse languages, cultures, and traditions (Mouhaya, 2022, p. 3).

Within the Curriculum, educators should ensure that the form of instruction that is utilized integrates peer to peer discussion and exploration. Educators can ensure greater understanding by adapting books when reading to encourage deeper comprehension of the material. For multilingual learners, daily opportunities to practice writing in all subjects will help increase familiarity of content areas while also accommodating for the needs of multilingual learners. As many students learn visually, educators should consider utilizing difference spaces in the classroom by creating examples that can be posted in and around the classroom to serve as reminders of the resources that are available.

Student Voices

A pilot survey was administered to students enrolled in the multilingual undergraduate course to assess student learning experiences. Findings were based on 29 students (27 females, and 2 males), in a class consisting of seniors (56.5%), Juniors (39.1%) and Sophomores (4.4%), with three major ethnic groups represented (Hispanic/Latinx 82.6%, African American 13%, and Asian/Pacific Islander 4.4%) the feedback received indicated the following results: 82.61% of students felt prepared to support the learning of children/students who are MLLs, with 86.9% feeling prepared with knowledge on children/students who are MLLs and 86.96% feeling strongly prepared with instructional skills to support the learning of children who are MLLs. Futhermore, 82.61% of the students strongly agreed or agreed that the department provided them with high-quality fieldwork experience, and fieldwork opportunities to refine their instructional skills.

Participants reflected on their career goals upon graduation and indicated that their most common career goals included becoming an early childhood care and education professional (29.41%) or pursuing a credentialing program to become an elementary education teacher with a multiple subject credential (26.47%). Additional notable goals were to work as an early interventionist (14.71%), pursue a credentialing program to become a middle/high school education teacher with a single subject credential (2.94%), and become a social worker (8.82%). Other participants indicated a desire to work in special education abroad, work as a dual language instructor, pursue a doctoral degree, and pursue roles in education leadership.

Conclusion

In conclusion, diversity of representation necessitates that educators encourage the creation of *Communities of Practice*, (Wenger, 1999) where children begin to trust their own understanding and knowledge. This exchange between students and educators fosters a space whereby children become co-constructors of knowledge where they can create stories that enable them to display their bilingual and biliterate skills. Furthermore, it is essential to not only acknowledge, but also value and embrace the different social constructions of identity of

students. As Salazar (2013) has asserted "superficial and uncritical focus on methods often privileges whitestream approaches aimed at assimilation, ultimately robbing students of their culture, language, history and values, thus denying students' humanity" (p. 4). Educators must also be prepared to respond to the dynamics of power and privilege that impact how diverse groups are often represented and differently situated within the broader context of society. Students and educators whose perspectives are shaped by their intersectionality are invaluable assets to educational institutions in response to the realities of an increasingly globalized world. There are differences within cultures, within families, and within siblings. What is appropriate in one family and/or culture may not be appropriate in another. Educators must be cognizant of the uniqueness of each child, and the impact of how their differences are shared, welcomed, and accepted in the classroom.

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