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Learning English through critical thinking: Helping parents interact with their children's schools and learning

Introduction

This curriculum is designed for a beginner multi-level Community-Based English Tutoring (CBET) class of Spanish speakers. CBET is a state-funded adult education program in the state of California that provides free or subsidized programs of English language instruction to parents or other adult members of the community who pledge to tutor English learners in the public school. I've developed the curriculum around the theme of *Helping learners' children succeed in school* in response to CBET's mandate to support public school instruction. The content of the curriculum is divided into four thematic units:

- Navigating the world of school
- Communicating with your child's teacher
- Tutoring and reading with your child.
- Communicating with the school administration

CBET classes are expected to devote a portion of the instruction to addressing English Language (EL) Civics objectives, which are state developed objectives that aim to integrate civics education content within ESL teaching. EL Civics objectives are based on community/family themes and come with assessment plans that teachers are required to administer to the students. In EL Civics Objective 13.4 for 2007-8, *Interact with schools for children* (Appendix 1), the objectives are language-based and framed around competencies that include providing personal information, finding campus locations, and reading and writing correspondence with the school such as excusing an absence or relating problems. Given the strong emphasis on EL Civics objectives in CBET classes, this curriculum will teach to these objectives. But it also includes transformative aims and critical thinking objectives meant to develop the active and critical engagement of parents both in the context of the EL Civics competencies as well as in their interactions with their children's schools, their own learning and each other.

I have chosen Latino learners as the target population because that is the population I am currently teaching in my present CBET class and also because it is the population I see myself working with in the future. This curriculum could also be used by immigrant-advocacy organizations that have developed ESL programs. It's becoming increasingly more apparent that internal ESL programs can provide a powerful hook for attracting and retaining members for organizations with program goals that may include providing health services, political organizing, and family literacy. Ana Raiz, Director of Family Literacy at Unity Council in Oakland, says that their ESL class is what keeps their parents (and children) enrolled in their community-based program. Maria Pilar Tudela-Vasquez at Clinica de la Raza in Oakland says that the number one need that the clients consistently name is the learning of English.

Situational Analysis

The major players in the situational analysis are 1) the CBET program and State Adult School programs across California, 2) the teachers, 3) the neighborhood and school community and 4) the learners in context.

The CBET program and State Adult School programs

The CBET program is briefly described earlier in the introduction. Though the program was created out of anti-bilingual legislation, there seems to be at least some teacher and administrator support and acceptance for L1 use in the classroom (Menard Warwick). The CBET programs statewide probably vary greatly in how much support they provide their teachers. My two different CBET class assignments are case in point. In the CBET program at Oakland Adult School, teachers are encouraged and paid to attend teacher meetings and peer trainings, do community collaboration and develop curriculums and collaborate with other teachers. There are no such incentives in the CBET program at SF United School District, though hourly pay is significantly higher.

At Oakland CBET, teachers are expected to do a basic needs assessment during one day at the beginning of each semester where the students are given a list of 8-10 contexts (Health, Crime, Housing, Emergencies, etc.) through which to study English. Teachers are then supposed to pick the three most popular themes according to the students. There is no formal evaluation of individual classes or teachers – although every five years, an administrator is supposed to visit each teacher's class to observe them for 1 hour. ESL-subject CASAS tests are required to be administered to measure and document student progress. These multiple choice-based tests, designed to assess competency-based ESL skills of adults, serve to meet state and national initiatives and legislation that influence education, training and welfare systems. As the CBET program is still a young program, the State has yet to require documentation of student learning (with the exception of the CASAS tests) or of improved performance of their children. But it is only a matter of time. For that reason, the director and teachers at CBET in Oakland are currently trying to develop our own methods of documentation before the State imposes its own criteria on us.

The teachers

Less than half of the teachers in the Oakland CBET program have full time contract positions. The rest are part-time hourly who often work second jobs/classes to make ends meet. Many of the teachers at the Oakland program are reaching retirement age, which means that a new flux of young teachers will likely be entering into contract positions. Teaching approaches and methods, values, teacher training and attitudes towards L1 vary among the teachers. A small minority of the CBET teachers consistently attend meetings and trainings, but many teachers do not – some because they are too busy, others because they do not find them particularly useful. Despite the low turn out, I find the teachers to be very supportive of each other.

Teacher attitudes toward having to administer EL Civics curricula and assessments range from those who are pleased at having ready-made activities, objectives and assessments to use in class to those who resent having to teach objectives and use assessments they don't agree with and which they consider too time-consuming. The assessments are simply based on a pass/fail option. Teachers never want to fail a student with the result that students rarely -if ever - fail to pass, which puts into question the whole rationale for assessing the students. Additional sources of conflict are the distrust and resistance many teachers have towards administrative attempts at developing ways of assessing and documenting students learning. Many teachers believe that will translate into more work for the teachers without any additional compensation.

The neighborhood and school community

The learners at my CBET class, as well as many other learners in monolingual-Spanish ESL classes, live in neighborhoods where Spanish is predominantly spoken. English is still necessary in a variety of environments, such as hospitals, police stations and most importantly, public K-12 schools. But most day-to-day interactions with family, shopping and neighbors are in Spanish. That along with a growing Spanish language media means that students get little English input and even fewer opportunities to practice English outside of the classroom. Their only immediate source of English input is often their older children, but many of my students bemoan their children's lack of interest in speaking or helping them in English.

The CBET class is located on a site shared by two middle schools, Roots Middle School and Coliseum College Prep Middle School. The two school principals are supportive of the ESL class, and both schools have paid parent support workers who are incredibly supportive of the class and who are Spanish-speaking immigrants and mothers themselves. According to my students, rarely can their children's teachers speak Spanish.

The students in context

The demographics of the Spanish-speaking students in my class are probably fairly representative of the CBET classes statewide. According to the Department of Education in California, over 85% of K-12 students are Spanish-speaking. (Data on the demographics of CBET students statewide is neither available through Oakland CBET nor listed on-line.) Most of my students are Mexican mothers in their 20's, 30's and 40s with little formal educational background (perhaps averaging around 6-9 years of elementary and middle school). I estimate that over half of them are undocumented with arrival dates as recent as 6 months ago but also extending as far back as 15 years. The fact that many students have had little formal education in school settings as children in their native countries may compound their alienation from their children's schools in the US where language and cultural differences, their immigration status and racism and anti-immigrant sentiment serve to further exclude them. Though the K-12 schools at my class site do a lot to encourage participation among my Latino student parents, other K-12 CBET sites around the state might not be so friendly. Historically, Latino parents have explicitly or implicitly been told that they are to blame for their children's poor school performance and then further blamed for not attending school meetings intended "to teach" them how to be good parents (Cummins, 1996). Relations between Latino immigrant parents and schools can be so strained that one successful school/parent partnership program (Pajaro Valley)

consciously decided to hold their initial meetings in the public library because of the parents' negative associations of their children's school (Cummins, 1996). It is important to note that though many parents feel hugely inadequate in their ability to help their children succeed in school, they consistently (at least every student in my Oakland CBET class) identify helping their children in school as their most pressing reason for learning English.

One final key factor is the multi-level nature of a CBET class. Unlike normal ESL classes at Oakland Adult School where students are assigned to classes based on their language proficiency, students in a CBET class are only linked together by their living in the same neighborhood and their children attending the same schools. Teaching a multi-level class of learners presents a special challenge to the teacher and will be explored and addressed more fully in later sections.

Needs Analysis

The needs analysis will look at what needs the students, or parents, perceive themselves as needing and what needs their children's school personnel (teachers and administrators) believe the parents' needs to be. One important component of this curriculum is that parents and teacher will jointly develop, carry out and interpret the needs analysis through a series of projects that are described more fully later in the Course Content.

Purpose of needs analysis

To find out:

- What knowledge, language skills and practices the parents need to participate in the school community and help their child with homework
- What knowledge, language skills and practices the parents already have that can help them participate in the school community and help their child with homework
- What problems the parents are having with helping their child and interacting with their school
- What expectations and suggestions the schools have for the parents about helping their children with homework and parental involvement in the schools
- What expectations and suggestions the parents have for the schools in providing for the parents and their children

Method for the needs analysis

The needs analysis will be designed and carried out by the teacher in collaboration with the parents. Most of the methods will be ongoing. The exceptions will be the questionnaires (for parents, teachers and administrators) and the collection of school materials (report cards, progress reports, etc.), which will be developed/gathered and carried out by the teacher at the start of the curriculum. With the ongoing needs analysis, the teacher will assume a more facilitating role while the parents assume the roles of investigators and pilots of the needs assessment.

Method for determining the parents' perceived needs:

- Teacher-designed questionnaires for parents
- Collection of K-12 school documents and forms (report cards, progress reports, etc.)
- Parent led class interviews and surveys of other parents
- Class discussions
- Parent stories
- Parent generated role-plays around problematic interactions they have experienced around their child's homework or school.

The goals in carrying out questionnaires, interviews and surveys will be to determine the needs that the parents are already aware of. They may be conducted in Spanish and/or English. Besides helping to determine needs, they can also serve – especially the parent led ones – to help develop the investigative skills of the parents before they begin to develop their own methods for obtaining information from their children's schools. The goals in carrying out class discussions and role plays are to help flush out additional needs that parents might not be consciously aware of or unable to articulate.

Method for determining school's perceived needs of the students:

- Teacher-designed questionnaires for K-12 teachers and administrators
- Interviews
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Inviting principals, administrators, teachers to visit the parents' English class
- Examining and discussing examples of homework, report cards, administrations forms and slips that the parents encounter with their child's school

Parents and teacher will collaborate in designing questionnaires for their children's school administrators and teachers. Parents will be grouped according to their child's school (parents of a particular school, grade or type of school) and each group will design its own questionnaire. They will administer the questionnaires/interviews through letters, face-to-face interactions, parent-teacher conferences, etc. This portion of the needs assessment will be carried out through student projects that will be described later under the course content.

Problematizing

Questions	Elaboration and possible solutions
<p>How will I maximally address and engage student learning across the board when my students are at widely differently levels of proficiency?</p>	<p>I know that designing versatile activities and tasks that allow students to engage at different levels is one solution. But easier said than designed. Another solution is to promote more self-directed learning and develop more self-directed activities/tasks so that I can divide the class more often and work separately with the advance or beginning students. How do I go towards teaching self-directed learning – both in and outside the class?</p> <p>One positive result of my CBET mixed level population is that because the students come from the same neighborhood and their children the go to the same schools, the students already know each other. They have stronger relationships with each other or are connected through “multi-stranded” networks to use the words of Moll (1992). Unlike a typical level-based Adult ESL class that groups students irrespective to where they live, a CBET class may provide for a more conducive environment to community building as the students are more likely to know each other as “whole persons”.</p>
<p>How can I conduct the class so the students assume roles as leaders, investigators and generators rather than becoming passive parrots?</p>	<p>One issue I had with the EL Civics curriculum on <i>Helping your child</i> that Oakland developed last year was a component where students were told 8 strategies they should use with their children (limit TV, provide a study place at home, check their h.w., etc.) with an accompanying assessment where they were given the corresponding pre-studied images and then were to write down each of the eight strategies. In my curriculum I don't want the “right strategies” just presented to my students. I want them to interpret and evaluate the information using their critical thinking skills. I want them investigators in the needs analysis.</p>
<p>What does a critical approach to teaching ESL mean?</p>	<p>Explored later in the content section. I have my own critique of the school system and how it fails children of immigrants. And I know the parents have their own. But, how do I get at them? How do I synthesize the multitude of varying issues? How do we explore them? It's not as easy as putting chairs around in a circle and talking about racism. Pennycook claims that a critical approach must</p>

Goals and Objectives

“The more a parent or guardian is involved in the education of his or her child the better the child will perform in school”

--- CBET Statue and Regulation

Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/cb/cbetregulations.asp> on March 26, 2007

This curriculum attempts to facilitate a critical approach to learning ESL, reflecting my belief that EL Civic objectives (or any other school-based competency that does not introduce critical thinking) do not go far enough in fully preparing parents to be truly “involved” in their child’s education. The EL Civics objectives (listed in appendix 1) do not require critical thinking or related skills or attributes such as agency, collaboration or problem-posing. Yet, I believe that these are the very qualities that parents need in order to truly engage with their child’s schools, teachers and learning in order to help their child succeed.

But first, it’s important to define clearly what I mean by critical thinking. Teaching critical thinking has been criticized from opposing views in ESL literature (Benesch, 1999). On one side critical thinking has been criticized by traditional educators as being a “uniquely Western or U.S. middle-class phenomenon” that can not be learned by non-native ESL speakers due to their socialization during childhood in non-Western schools (Benesch, 1999). On the other side, the teaching of critical thinking has been criticized by Freire-inspired and other leftist educators as being apolitical and espousing a white middle-class humanism that obscures the structures of inequality (racism, sexism, etc.) and does not empower learners to act on and transform them (Pennycook, 1999). Perhaps I disagree most with the premise that both views converge on – that critical thinking and the teaching of critical thinking reflect a white middle-class orientation. My experience living in Latin America and working with Latino immigrants in this country leaves me no doubts that critical thinking (and the teaching of critical thinking) cuts across culture and class. This doesn’t mean that everybody does it equally well (not in this country either), or that it is always taught in schools (In Latin American it is predominantly learned outside of the classroom), or that it is a skill that one has or doesn’t have (it can always be developed further). However, in the case of many Latino immigrant students, it is not their different cultural background that limits their critical thinking; rather I believe it’s their poor understanding of the context of the U.S. public schools (Valdez, 1996), their inability to speak English which further impedes their understanding of the U.S. school culture and codes and finally their status as immigrants (documented or not) and resulting lower self-efficacy.

As such, this curriculum does not seek to teach critical thinking, but rather enable the parents to use and develop the critical thinking skills that they already possess and provide opportunities for them to act on them. But what are critical thinking skills? Benesch (1999) posits a definition I like which she calls dialogic critical thinking, or “a form of dialogical discourse in which the taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions that lie behind argumentation are uncovered, examined, and debated (p. 576)”. Hidden assumptions and presuppositions abound behind the do’s and don’ts that characterize much of the K-12 discourse including but not limited to what constitutes learning and succeeding at school, presumed

responsibilities and abilities of both teachers and parents, the tacit rules regarding parent-teacher conferences, and what constitutes parental involvement in their child's school. Benesch also cites logic as a critical thinking skill. But I would expand critical thinking to include my own understanding of Freire's term conscientization: that critical thinking also involves self-reflection, an awareness of the impact institutional and cultural systems of power have on oneself and the ability to both apply theory and learning to one's own life and also act on it.

The critical thinking objectives in this curriculum are designed to enable the parents to critically engage in these four school-based competencies and fully carry out the EL Civics objectives. In addition, they are intended to provide contained and measurable steps for carrying out the transformative aims of the curriculum. In addition, the critical thinking objectives in this curriculum serve more specific functions. They are intended to engage parents in self-reflection such as in Unit 1 when the parents critically compare their own school experience with their children's. They are also meant to enable the students to uncover, examine and discuss hidden assumptions, presuppositions, and implications behind the target competencies of this curriculum. For example, in Unit 1 (Navigating the world of school), parents will explore the implications of answering or not answering personal information questions. And in Unit 2, parents will develop strategies for following up with more critical questions at parent-teacher conferences. In Unit 3 and 4 the critical thinking objectives provide the parents opportunities to apply their own learning from the needs analysis to their own personal situations and act on it.

I've devoted a lot of time to defining and redefining critical thinking objects (and a couple still need redefining!), but they alone do not constitute a critical approach to teaching ESL. Critical thinking, by its nature, leads to learning outcomes that are unpredictable and therefore difficult to measure. In the attempt to define critical thinking objectives so that they can be measured, they inevitably lose a degree of authenticity and flexibility that limits learners from really applying them to their own unique situations. Both Benesch (1999) and Pennycook (1999) stress that a true critical approach pervades a teacher's total engagement with the students. Pennycook writes "Taking a critical approach to TESOL does not entail introducing a "critical element" into a classroom, but rather involves an attitude, a way of thinking and teaching. And change in our students is not about mastery, but about the unpredictable effects of a changed relationship to our histories and desires (p. 340)."

Goals

1. Parents will be able to communicate better in 2-way communication in both informational and critical contexts with their school district, their children's schools and their children's teachers.
2. Parents will connect their children's learning and school experience to their own learning and knowledge.
3. Parents will take increased ownership of both their children's schools and also their own learning and their children's learning.

4. Parents will increase their confidence and active collaboration in participating in their children's schools and learning.
5. Parents will have more experience, confidence, tools and socio-cultural understanding to investigate assumptions, presuppositions and implications hidden behind the rules and structures that define the interactions between them and their children's schools.

Objectives

Thematic Unit	Functional	Language	EL Civics	Critical Thinking
<p>Unit 1</p> <p>Navigating the world of school</p>	<p>Parents will be able to fill out the major components of a K-12 school registration form.</p>	<p>Low-Beg parents will understand the basic vocabulary (name, date, phone number, address, children, birthdays, signature) on a school registration form from their public school district and provide the info legibly.</p> <p>High Beg parents will understand the relevant vocabulary needed to completely fill out a school registration form from their public school district and provide it legibly.</p>	<p>#6 #10</p>	<p>Parents will recognize and be able to articulate the similarities and differences between the problems they faced as children in schools and those their children face.</p> <p>Students will be able to identify unnecessary, inappropriate and illegal questions and employ basic strategies to determine if they want or need to answer a question based on personal, cultural and legal considerations.</p>
<p>Unit 2</p> <p>Communicating with your child's teacher</p>	<p>Parents will be able to formulate questions in oral and written form for parent-teacher conferences.</p> <p>Parents will be able to scan report cards for relevant information.</p>	<p>Low-beg parents will be able to produce correct <i>do</i>-auxiliary question formation.</p> <p>High-beg parents will be able to produce correct <i>do</i>-auxiliary and <i>be</i> question formation.</p>	<p>#2</p>	<p>Parents will be able to produce clarification and/or follow-up questions in simulated parent-teacher conferences.</p>
<p>Unit 3</p> <p>Reading to and helping tutor your child</p>	<p>Parents will be able to identify strategies from a provided list of images of ways to help their children in school</p>	<p>Low-beg parents will be able to make suggestions with <i>should</i> and <i>can</i> when prompted with visuals and given verb phrases.</p> <p>High-beg parents will do the same when only prompted with visuals.</p>	<p>(#5)</p>	<p>Parents will define their own arrived upon strategies for helping their children based on their own investigations and needs assessment.</p>

Thematic Unit	Functional	Language	EL Civics	Critical Thinking
<p>Unit 4</p> <p>Communicating with the school administration</p>	<p>Parents will be able to report their child's absence to a school.</p> <p>Parents will understand and correctly place the basic components of a letter including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date • Address • Body • Signature 	<p>Low-beg parents will be able to identify themselves and their child and state their child's illness both orally and in written form when the information is elicited.</p> <p>High-beg parents will be able to identify themselves and their child and state their child's illness both orally and in written form.</p>	<p>#2 #3 #7 #8 #10</p>	<p>Parents will be able to recognize and evaluate key components of a letter written to a school administrator about a problem or issue such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying yourself • Stating the issue • Stating a request • Closing

Course Content

The content of this curriculum is structured around four basic competencies that parents need in order to interact with the K-12 school system and their children's learning. It is driven by the aims listed above and will prepare parents to achieve both the language and literacy objectives for EL Civics Objective #13 (Children's schools) and also the critical objectives listed above. The central piece of the syllabus is a needs analysis that the parents will carry out throughout the four thematic units, culminating in a final assessment that they will develop at the end as their final project. The purpose of the needs assessment is for the parents to determine what they need to know in order to help their children succeed in school. In each of the first three units, parents will carry out a project that will serve them in carrying out the needs analysis. The goal of the first unit, *Re-entering the world of school*, is for the parents to reflect on their own experience as children or adults and for them to compare and contrast these experiences with the experiences they see their children having. In the second unit, *Communicating with your child's teacher*, the project (preparing for parent-teacher conferences) and in-class activities (examining school materials such as report cards, progress reports and samples of children's homework) are meant to help the parents develop a needs analysis of what they need to know in order to help their children. In the third unit, *Helping your child with their homework*, the project will be the culmination of the needs assessment with the parents creating large visuals that list the strategies they've developed for helping their child succeed at school. In the project for the fourth unit, *Communicating with the school administration*, the parents will problematize and analyze the learning environments at their own school(s) and articulate any problems or issues they discover. They will then collaboratively write a letter that either defines the problem or issue they may have found or explains what they have learned. They may choose to send it to the administration.

The purpose of this needs analysis is threefold. First, it is intended to provide them with a better understanding of how they can help their children succeed in school. Secondly, it is intended to make their learning of English as motivating, meaningful and authentic as possible. Thirdly, it is intended to engage the parents actively, collaboratively and critically with their children's schools and education and cast them into the role of active investigators rather than passive recipients of information.

Each thematic unit will take anywhere from 15 to 30 hours of instruction to complete.

Syllabus

Thematic Unit	Functions	Needs assessment projects	Enabling Language Skills
<p>Unit 1</p> <p>Navigating the world of school</p>	<p>Filling out forms</p> <p>Understanding simple oral personal information questions</p>	<p>Parents will create a class book in which each parent includes a story about a defining interaction within an educational institution as a child or adult.</p>	<p>Form vocabulary and use</p> <p>Wh-questions with copula <i>be</i></p> <p>Modal verb <i>have to</i></p> <p>Review of simple past tense</p> <p>Stating similarities and differences using <i>and</i> and <i>but</i></p>
<p>Unit 2</p> <p>Communicating with your child's teacher</p>	<p>Scanning children's progress reports and report cards</p> <p>Asking questions at a parent-teacher conference</p>	<p>Parents will be grouped according to their child's school or grade and each group will design a questionnaire for their child's teacher to be used in a parent-teacher conference.</p>	<p>Report card vocabulary and codes</p> <p>Scanning strategies</p> <p><i>Do</i>-auxiliary inversion question formation</p> <p>Making clarification questions</p> <p>Structures for asking questions</p>
<p>Unit 3</p> <p>Reading to and helping tutor your child</p>	<p>Making suggestions</p>	<p>Parents will create large visuals that list the strategies they've developed for helping their child succeed at school</p>	<p>School work vocabulary</p> <p>Suggestion modals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Should</i> • <i>Can</i> <p>Imperatives in negative and</p>

Thematic Unit	Functions	Needs assessment projects	Enabling Language Skills
	Trying out reading and tutoring strategies with your child		affirmative form Using reading strategies Possessive pronouns
Unit 4 Communicating with the school administration	Excusing a child's absence by phone or in writing Writing letters to a school official Making requests and expressing concerns in written form	Parents will write group letter(s) to a school administrator to either express class concern(s) or request suggestions for helping their children succeed in school.	Names of illnesses Conjugating <i>have</i> School staff and institutional vocabulary Basic parts of a formal letter Structures for articulating a problem Making requests Using formal letter-writing registers

Materials Review

I've chosen the *Sharing English together* (Oakland Adult School, 2002) series for the materials review since that is the standard text book that Oakland CBET uses and the one that I will be using (though perhaps only occasionally) during the curriculum. The series was developed by the Oakland CBET Program and is composed of 5 books (called units) that are each similarly thematically organized around family and school related activities such as getting children ready for school, meeting the teacher, using the school library, and going on school field trips (See appendix 2 for the format of the first book in the series). Each book, with an accompanying video, follows a different Oakland immigrant family through a standard structure of 5 chapters (called lessons). I used Unit 1 (The Santana Family) last year and have just started Unit 2 (The Lee Family) for my class this year. My review is based on Hutchinson and Water's method of comparing and contrasting a subjective analysis with an objective analysis. I've structured the analysis around their same major categories - learners, aims, methodology and content.

The learners

Sharing English together is targeted towards my students. The book is intended for beginning ESL immigrant parents with children in the public schools and with little formal education. My students, just like the target learners, have both expectations and positive attitudes towards learning English in the context of their child's school.

Aims

The stated aim of *Sharing English together*, just as my curriculum's aim, is to provide ESL instruction to adults so that they can help their children become more successful in school. There are many activities and exercises in the book that encourage the parents to reflect on their own lives and practices. The principle difference is that my curriculum also aims to be transformative. The content and exercises in *Sharing English together* "encourage adult ESL learners to talk and write about their own experiences" (*Sharing English together* website), but they don't support collaboration, problem-posing or critical thinking.

Methodology

The book is primarily composed of controlled exercises/activities with accompanying sections containing questions for learners about their own child raising practices. This controlled learning focus fits with my own wants in a text book since I prefer to develop my own communicative activities on my own and/or from authentic sources and rather appreciate having ready-made controlled exercises in a text book.

Content

Obviously, the subject matter basically matches my curriculum. There are lessons in the first two books based around helping your child read. There is a lesson in the fifth book based

on communicating with your child's school. Yet, since the books are designed to be used from front to back and in order (Unit 1-5), it would be impossible to match their lessons with the sequencing of my curriculum. Interestingly, the four thematic units of this curriculum would be easily adaptable to the basic format of the series as lesson within one unit if anyone wanted to develop a book around it, though I think it would make more sense to build the story around an ESL class or group of parents rather than a family.

Overall assessment

The story and dialogue of the video drives the content of *Sharing English together*. This listening component is generally what I value most in ESL materials since it is hard for me to find recorded listening material comprehensible to beginner learners. Since a large part of my curriculum will involve wide and unpredictable oscillations between authentic English and L1 use, *Sharing English together* – with its story, comprehensible listening input and controlled activities might provide a useful anchor and complement to my curriculum.

Assessment Examples

Assessment for Unit 2: Communicating with child's teacher

Forming questions

Functional objective: Parents will be able to formulate questions in written form for parent-teacher conferences.

Language objectives:

Low-beg parents will be able to produce correct *do*-auxiliary question formation.

High-beg parents will be able to produce correct *do*-auxiliary and *be* question formation.

Assessment for Unit 4: Communicating with your school

Functional objective: Reporting an absence

Language Objective:

Low-beginner parents, responding to eliciting questions, will be able to identify themselves, name their child, state their child’s illness and respond affirmatively that he/she won’t come to school.

High-beginner parents, without any elicitation, will be able to identify themselves, name their child, state that their child has an illness and say that he/she won’t come to school.

Procedure:

The parents will make a simulated phone call excusing their child from school for an illness. To begin, the assessor will point to one of the images below (depicting an illness).

Low-Beginner: The score will then ask the following questions and score their answers accordingly:

Eliciting questions	Give 1 point if student:	Points
What’s your name?	Says their name	_____
What’s your child’s name?	Says child’s name	_____
What’s the matter?	Says the illness that was indicated	_____
Will he/she come to school?	Responds negatively	_____
Thanks for calling. Bye.	Says good-bye	_____
	Total	_____

High-Beginner: The assessor will greet the student as if he/she were a school receptionist (Roots Middle School. How can I help you?”) The student will identify themselves, name their child, state that their child has an illness and say that he/she won’t come to school. The scorer will score them accordingly:

Give 1 point if student:	Points
States clearly who she and her child are	_____

States the indicated illness....	_____
...and uses correct subject and form of <i>have</i>	_____
States clearly that child won't come to school	_____
Says appropriate opening and closing phrases	_____
Total	_____

Rationale:

This performance-based assessment is designed to measure the parents' ability to report their child's illness to the school. The assessment checklist closely parallels the components of the objective providing for content validity. The simple checklist and brief test duration help make it practical even though each student must be tested separately. The individual checklist items are fairly simple and clearly defined, providing for good reliability - though some items (such as appropriate opening and closing statements) leave some room for interpretation and rater inconsistency. The assessment has high face value in that it tests a competency that schools and parents will usually recognize as important. The individual attention and performance focus provide immediate washback to the student as they perform the assessment.

Authenticity is somewhat questionable; as parents may not call in to report their child is sick. Furthermore, as is the case at my host school, the office staff may include a bilingual speaker. Additionally, the low-beginner procedure lacks authenticity in that the tester elicits one-word responses from the learner – which does not naturally occur in a real-life illness call-in. However, the assessment's focus on listening and one-word response is more appropriate for low-beginner learners, and thus provides a higher construct validity.

Assessment for Unit 1: Navigating the world of school

Language objective: Parents will be able to answer personal information questions.

Critical thinking objectives:

1. Parents will be able to identify certain personal information questions that are inappropriate and/or illegal in certain contexts (i.e. talking with a police officer, a boss, a stranger, and filling out a school registration form).
2. Parents will be able to employ basic strategies in determining if they want/need to answer a question based on personal, cultural and legal considerations.

Procedure

Parents will engage in 1 on 1 role plays with the rater. At the beginning, the context and role of the parent will be revealed to the parent. The possibilities will be:

Situation	Role
Job interview	Parent applying for a job
School registration session	Parent registering for school
Police stop on the road	Parent driving to school
Meeting a neighbor	A neighbor

The rater will assume the role of boss/school administrator/police officer/neighbor and ask the parent 10 personal information questions. The parent must answer all questions that are legal and appropriate. The parent must not answer any questions that are not legal or appropriate – unless they feel comfortable answering the question; and if so, they must signal that they are choosing to answer the question. If the parent is not sure about the legality of the question, they can ask the rater if they must answer it.

Scoring: Parents will be scored 1 point for every question that:

- Is legal/appropriate and they answer correctly
- Is not legal/appropriate and they don't answer
- Is not legal/appropriate but the parent signals they are choosing to answer it

Assessment for Unit 3: Reading and helping tutor your child

Critical thinking objectives:

Parents will define their own arrived upon strategies for helping their children based on their own investigations and needs assessment

Procedure: ESL Teacher-parent conference

In Unit 2 parents will have completed the needs assessment for what they need to do in order to help their children succeed in school. Then in Unit 3, parents will create large visuals that list the strategies they've developed for helping their child succeed at school based on the needs assessment. The parents will conference with the teacher, exhibit their needs assessment and arrived upon strategies and show how the strategies address the findings in the needs assessment.

Alternative procedure: Parents exhibit their findings and strategies in class presentations

Sample lessons

Unit 1 Navigating the world of school: Helping students determine what questions to answer on a school application form

Goal: Parents will have more experience, confidence, tools and socio-cultural understanding to investigate assumptions, presuppositions and implications hidden behind the rules and structures that define the interactions between them and their children's schools

Functional Objective: Students will recognize what questions they need/want to answer on a school application form and what questions they do not need/want to answer.

Enabling objectives:

Language objective:

Low-beg parents will be able to produce and understand the modal verb *have* in affirmative, negative and question forms.

High-beg parents will be able to produce and understand the modal verb *have* in affirmative, negative and question forms. And students will be able to produce and understand the modal *must* in affirmative and negative forms.

Socio-cultural objectives:

1. Students will understand that certain personal information questions are optional, inappropriate and/or illegal in certain contexts (i.e. talking with a police officer, a boss, a stranger, and filling out a school registration form).
2. Students will have a basic understanding of the appropriateness and legality of questions in these contexts according to U.S. cultural and legal norms.

Critical thinking objectives:

3. Students will be able to identify certain personal information questions that are inappropriate and/or illegal in certain contexts (i.e. talking with a police officer, a boss, a stranger, and filling out a school registration form).
4. Students will be able to employ basic strategies in determining if they want/need to answer a question based on personal, cultural and legal considerations.

Rationale:

The objectives and content of this lesson plan are structured around the premise that determining what questions to answer on a school application form require more than just functional and/or language skills. In addition it requires socio-cultural awareness and critical thinking. One obvious example would be a question that leads someone to expose their legal standing, but even understanding a neutral bureaucratic language command such as OFFICE

USE ONLY also requires a certain socio-cultural competence concerning the function of an application form and critical thinking skills that enable one to analyze the reasons behind a question or request. **Rather than teaching students what questions not to answer on a school registration form, this lesson plan provides students tools and practice in analyzing the implications and reasons behind these questions and requests so that they can employ strategies in determining which questions they do not need/want to answer.**

This lesson plan enables students to analyze the personal, cultural and political implications of personal information questions in four very different contexts – talking with the police, a boss, a stranger/acquaintance and filling out a school application. The rationale for including three contexts in the lesson plan that are very distinct from the target context a school registration form is the following:

1. The target portions of the assessment (determining what questions need to be answered on a school registration form) will reflect higher cognitive skills as the students will be transferring their learning from a multitude of contexts and applying it to the context of the assessment (rather than practicing on other school application forms - or the same - to prepare for the assessment).
2. The other contexts provide opportunities for the students to be practicing the language skills of the overall objective (comprehending and analyzing personal information questions).
3. The student will get to practice overall target language skills (answering questions on a school application) in critical contexts allowing them to use higher-level cognitive skills.
4. Connections between critical situations (talking with the police and a boss) and “neutral” situations such as filling out a school application will be made more explicit.

Because of objectives 2 and 3, this lesson plan would probably be most effective sequenced near the end of the target instruction for the assessment.

Procedure:

1. Grammar focus: Modals for expressing necessity

Have to
Do/don't have to
Do you have to?

Must/Must not (Intermediate)

Grammar pre-activity

What do you have to do today?
What don't you have to do today?

2. Students circle necessary questions and unnecessary questions on Worksheet A and B and discuss them in pairs/ groups and then as a class.
3. Students circle and add their own questions that they think are appropriate for asking a stranger (Worksheet C) and discuss them in pairs/groups and then as a class.
4. Students fill out a school application form, only answering the questions that they think are necessary (Worksheet D) and then discuss their choices and reasons in pairs/groups and then as a class.
5. Introducing structures for asking if questions need to be answered

Do I have to answer this question?
What does this question mean?
Can I leave this blank?
Can I take this home?
Why is this information important?

6. Role play with students taking on roles of the police officer, boss, stranger, teacher, and immigrant

Worksheet B

Do you always have to answer the question?

A police officer wants to talk with you. Which questions do you have to answer?
Which questions don't you have to answer?

Circle the questions that you don't have to answer

What is your name?

What is your phone number?

Are you a US citizen?

Do you have a green card?

Can I see your identification?

Are you a legal resident of the U.S.?

What is your social security number?

Look at the questions you circled. Why don't you have to answer these questions?

How would you feel if a police officer asked you one of these questions?

**If a police officer in your country asks you these questions, do you have to answer them?
Why or why not?**

Worksheet C

Do you always have to answer the question?

You have a job interview with an employer. Which questions do you have to answer? Which questions don't you have to answer?

Circle the questions that you don't have to answer

What is your name?

What is your phone number?

Are you a US citizen?

Do you have a green card?

What is your religion?

Can I see your identification?

Are you a legal resident of the U.S.?

What is your social security number?

How old are you?

Look at the questions you circled. Why don't you have to answer these questions?

How would you feel if your boss asked you one of these questions?

If a boss in your country asks you these questions, do you have to answer them? Why or why not?

Worksheet C: Is it always ok to ask a question?

You are meeting someone for the first time. What questions do you ask? Are there questions that are ok to ask? Are there questions that are not ok to ask?

Circle the questions that are not ok to ask.

Are you single?

What is your job?

How much money do you make?

How old are you?

What is your religion?

Who do you support for the president?

Do you have children?

Why aren't you married?

Do you have a boyfriend

What other questions are ok to ask?

What other questions are not ok to ask?

Discuss these questions with your partner. Explain why some questions are ok and some questions are not ok.

Are some questions ok to ask in your country or in the U. S., but not ok in the other country? Why?

What do you say if someone asks you a question and you don't want to answer it?

Worksheet D

Which questions do you have to answer on a school application?

You are given a school application with these questions. Which questions do you have to answer? Which questions do you not have to answer? (Which questions must you not answer?)

Write down your answers to the questions that you will answer. Don't write anything for the questions that you will not answer.

School Registration Form

Name _____ S.S. # _____

Home address _____

Phone number _____ Date of birth _____

What is your ethnic identification? (Optional) _____

What is your family's annual income? _____

Were you born in the U.S? Yes / No

If yes, what state were you born in? _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Office Use Only

School _____ Student # _____

Counselor _____ Entry Date _____

Compare your answers with a partner.

Which questions did you answer? Which questions did you not answer? Why or why not?

Unit 2 Communicating with your teacher: Understanding the report card

Goals:

- Parents will connect their children's learning and school experience to their own learning and knowledge.
- Parents will take increased ownership of both their children's schools and also their own learning and their children's learning.

Objectives:

1. Parents will understand key codes on the report card such as:
 - Academic assessment (A-F)
 - Assessment of citizenship and work habits (O, S, N, U - Outstanding, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, Unsatisfactory)
 - Other abbreviations such as SEM, PER, WORLD HST, PE, GEN SCI, etc.
2. Parents will understand and be able to interpret key assessment measures on their children's report card such as GPA, grades, conduct and comments.
3. Parents will be able to assess their own work habits and strategies in their ESL class using the same assessment codes used in their children's report cards (O, S, N, U)

Materials:

2 real report cards (See section after appendix 1 on the paper copy of this curriculum) from the local K-12 school(s) with the personal information of the student whited out, but with the grades, GPA, conduct and comments visible.

Procedure:

Understanding the report card genre

In groups of 4, students will be given copies of 2 or 3 copies of report cards. Each group will be assigned 3-4 codes and abbreviations from the report card (see objective 1) to figure out and report back to the class. Each group will give back a report back. Afterwards, the following 4 questions will be written on the board and each group will work out the answers (and interpretations).

- Which is each student's best grade? Which class is it?
- Which is each student's worst grade? Which class is it?
- What is a positive comment that a teacher made?

- What is a negative comment that a teacher made?
- In what class does each student need most help?

Groups report back as a whole group. The teacher will clarify the different assessment measures and difficult terms. Then the teacher will write and ask:

- What would you do if these children were your children?

The teacher will elicit different suggestions from the class. Then the groups will return to their groups and discuss the following questions.

- What kind of positive comments does your child get?
- What kind of negative comments does your child get?
- What can you do to help your child with their conduct or work habits?

Groups will report back and teacher will write various suggestions on the board.

Parents using the report card genre to assess their own learning

The teacher will select items for the parents to assess themselves on their in-class habits and they will be told to use the same report card code (O, S, N, U). The last item will be something that they think is important to self-assess. Example items are:

- I always try to speak in English in class. _____
- I practice English outside of class. _____
- I ask my teacher or classmates when I'm confused. _____
- _____.

Program Evaluation

The program evaluation is modeled on Bailey, Freeman and Curtis's (2001) goal-based evaluation because it facilitates student-centered evaluation and encourages critical thinking and analysis by the parents as they reflect on how well that curriculum supported their learning.

Procedure

At the beginning of the curriculum the teacher will introduce the goals of the class. Before each thematic unit, the teacher will refer again to the curriculum's goals and also introduce the functional, language and critical thinking objectives of the unit. Then, at the end of each unit, the teacher will put (elicit) those objectives on the board and ask the parents in groups to discuss the activities they did during the unit and lump them under which category they felt each activity supported (they could choose to put an activity under more than one category). The teacher could also ask students to categorize the activities under curriculum goals. Afterwards, the class will come together and write down their categorizations on the board and discuss the effectiveness and relevance of the learning activities. One particularly important unit may be the second, *Communicating with your child's teacher*, if it truly coincides with parent-teacher conferences. If so, parents will evaluate how well the unit prepared them for the conference, what they learned from it, what the teacher learned from it. Parents could be asked how successful they were at employing the critical thinking objective, *asking follow-up questions*. As the critical thinking objectives are particularly hard to define and evaluate, special attention will be given to these. Parents could be asked to think of other critical thinking skills they feel are more important for future changes to the curriculum.

This evaluation will provide both ongoing and formative feedback for the teacher because the units are linked through the needs assessment project and because the feedback on critical thinking objectives in each unit will be relevant to other units.

Evaluating K-12 instructors and parents' children

If feasible, the teacher can also administer an interview or simple evaluative form to the teachers of the parents' children that evaluates the parent-teacher conferences. Parents could also develop their own evaluative assessment for their children to respond to. Obviously, the children may not provide the most illuminative feedback to their parents, but the process of designing the evaluation might provide critical reflection for the parents on their own effectiveness on helping their children.

Appendix 1

<p>Interact with educational institutions including schools for children and schools or agencies with programs for adult learners.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. *Using a map, find essential physical locations on a school campus, at a district office, etc. 2. Interact orally with school personnel (such as a child's teacher, one's own teacher, or a school counselor) in a conference, at an open house, on the telephone, etc. 3. Read and write school correspondence with content such as excusing an absence or relating problems, stating issues etc. 4. Deleted 5. *Label pictures, identify vocabulary, and/or describe some things that adult learners can do to help their children or themselves be successful learners. 6. *List children's names and birth dates. 7. *List the names of teachers, classroom numbers, and school name and phone number. 8. *Demonstrate the ability to call the school and report an absence. 9. *Read a simple school calendar and recognize minimum days and days when there is no school. 10. *Fill out a school form such as a registration form or permission slip. <p>Retrieved on October 13, 2007 from https://www.casas.org/home/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewFile&MapID=1178</p>
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Appendix 2

The Santana Family:

The parents are Tony and Adela, the children are Maria and Eduardo. Both children are in elementary school.



Lesson 1 Getting Ready for School	Lesson 2 At School	Lesson 3 At the Library
<p>Summary:</p> <p>Tony and Adela help the children get ready for school. They help them get dressed, give them a good breakfast and check homework.</p>	<p>Summary:</p> <p>Tony takes the children to school. He meets the teachers, sees the classrooms and helps the children be on time.</p>	<p>Summary:</p> <p>Adela takes the children to the library after school. They check out books and videos. Eduardo gets for a library card.</p>
<p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing • Rooms 	<p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School staff • School rooms 	<p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library materials and terms

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food 		
Grammar Practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plurals 	Grammar Practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present tense • His/Her • Yes/No questions 	Grammar Practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions with "can"
Skill Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorizing • Checklist 	Skill Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorizing • Checklist 	Skill Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal data • Dates
Word Patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -ock, -ack 	Word Patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -eet, -eep 	

Lesson 4 Homework	Lesson 5 Reading Together	Lesson 6 Family Outings
Summary: Tony and Adela help the children with their homework. They provide a place for homework and have school supplies available.	Summary: The Santanas read together in the evening. The parents read to the children, the children read to the parents, and they talk about books.	Summary: Adela and Maria explore their community. Maria tries a new dance class, then they go on a ferry trip.
Vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School supplies 	Vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book terms 	Vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance terms • Market terms
Grammar Practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions with 	Grammar Practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who/What 	

<p>"is"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present tense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do/Does • Questions 	
<p>Skill Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressions of praise • Days of the week • Maps • Ordinals 	<p>Skill Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Meet the author 	<p>Skill Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body parts • Telling time • Schedules
<p>Word Patterns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -ap, -op 	<p>Word Patterns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -uff, -ug 	<p>Word Patterns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -um, -un

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