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Global Learning Community Network: Heritage Language Learning Project Using Social Interaction Software

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Abstract: This paper presents the study called "*Global Learning Community Network.*" The project promotes teaching language, culture, history and literacy through media production in teacher education. It focuses on: (1) examining cultural and linguistically responsive curriculum designed for K12 students who were in the US as heritage language learners; (2) multilingual tutoring and mentoring to K12 students about culture, language, and history of the US and Turkey using Web 2.0 technologies; (3) indentifying teacher candidates' reactions, discoveries, and experiences with the project; and (4) the process of developing learning objects such as digital storytelling projects focusing on across cultures throughout history.

Introduction

Given that nearly one in five people in the United States speaks a language other than English, by not teaching more of the languages spoken in this country in our schools, whether as HLs or CLs, or as foreign languages, we are squandering away a national resource. (Jamieson, Curry, & Martinez, 2001; Wiley, 2005b)

Struggling with new identities are significant challenges for immigrants in the United States. (Souto-Manning, 2006) Souto-Manning's case study introduces an immigrant mother from Mexico who renamed her youngest son on his first day of first grade to avoid the widespread stereotypes and academic stagnation experienced by her two older sons. Such (re)naming practices takes place among immigrant children. In our study, we found similar evidence. While children are introducing themselves, they changed the pronunciation of their names. There was indication of negative aspects of assimilation processes taking place as the family adapted to a new culture and language. For example, the misconception among parents is still exists about learning two languages rather than just one diminish a child's ability to learn

other things. However, research in language acquisition and development, points to bilingualism and multilingualism as resources rather than deficits (Souto-Manning, *2006*).

A heritage language (HL) is the language associated with one's cultural background. Studies have long recognized that maintaining one's HL, in addition to English proficiency, is beneficial. More specifically, developing the HL of ethnic minorities, in addition to English, has been shown to have cognitive, social, and cultural benefits (Garcia, 1985; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985; Krashen, 1998). Research has shown that HL development can be an important part of identity formation and can help one retain a strong sense of identity to one's own ethnic group (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Feuerverger, 1991; Tse, 1996).

Turkish American parents involved in developing the project have been actively involved in the maintenance of their HL. Research shows that parents have a strong desire for their children to retain their cultural traits while, at the same time, adopting American cultural traits. As such, Turkish parents have established ethnic schools, ethnic associations, newspapers, and professional organizations to promote culture and language. Turkish American families try to use Turkish as their primary language at home.

Despite the parents' efforts, a language shift to the dominant language is evident in immigrant families, yet the HL still plays an intricate role in the lives of Turkish Americans. Research has shown that the first-generation adults tend to maintain and preserve their language and ethnic culture, while the second generation consciously succeeds in a partial assimilation into the dominant culture. However, little empirical information is available on the effects of HL maintenance or loss among language minority groups. No previous research has explored or compared the consequences of those Turkish Americans who have or have not developed their HL. As such, this study not only examined the effects of HL competence among second-

generation Turkish American youth but also provided *Global Learning Community Network* Project to promote heritage language learning. Specifically, this study revealed the ways in which HL competence played a role in social interactions and relationships with second-generation Turkish Americans. In this way, this study provides a unique outlook on HL development, based on the perspectives of young Turkish Americans and their families. The findings of this study can be used to argue for the importance of maintaining one's heritage language, from a personal, cultural, and societal perspective.

Cultural Literacy Project

The study was conducted in Spring 2007. It was called "*Global Learning Community Network.*" This paper explores the role of new media and telecommunications in teacher education; offers creative strategies and possibilities for integrating Web 2.0 technologies into K-12 curriculum; outlines results of participatory research project based on mentoring heritage language learners; and showcases participants' projects and responses to virtual and face-to-face mentoring and tutoring.

Purpose

Purpose of the *Global Learning Community Network* was to offer K12 students and their families an environment to study Turkish Language, Culture, and History in multilingual and multicultural setting. Our primary purpose was to promote students' heritage language proficiency and their academic development by offering cultural enrichment projects and supplemental academic support for K12 students and families. In addition, the project provided an opportunity to support teacher candidates in an experiential learning and teaching opportunities with a primary focus on the needs of ELL (English Language Learners) and/Linguistically and Culturally Diverse students.

The project promoted teaching language, culture, history and literacy through media production in teacher education, offered creative strategies to teacher candidates for integrating new media and technologies for mentoring and tutoring over the internet with minimal resources; outlined teacher candidates' reactions, discoveries, and experiences with Web 2.0 technologies, digital storytelling, online mentoring and educational telecommunication, and showcases multimedia projects. The research focused on: (1) examining cultural and linguistically responsive curriculum designed for K12 students who were in the US as heritage language learners and the ones in Turkey were English as a foreign language learners; (2) multilingual tutoring and mentoring to K12 students about culture, language, and history of the US and Turkey using Web 2.0 technologies; (3) indentifying teacher candidates' reactions, discoveries, and experiences with the project; and (4) the process of developing learning objects such as digital storytelling projects focusing on across cultures throughout history. At the end of the project, K12 students co-created, co-edited and co-presented their multilingual digital storytelling projects. And teacher candidates developed activities, strategies, curricula for the K12 students and gained alternative point of view, renewed interest and commitment to multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multiliteracies.

The study examined the role of heritage language maintenance and ethnic and cultural identity such as the role of identity in self-esteem, its relationship to acculturation, and its place in the development of personal identity among the lives of 10 second-generation Turkish-American K-12 children in the United States before and after intervention.

The study also focuses on the following questions:
 (1) what is the level of heritage language proficiency and language use among second generation Turkish-American children?;

(2) which culture(s) do these youths identify themselves with, Turkish or American, and to what extent?;

(3) is there a relationship between cultural identity and heritage language proficiency?;

(4) what are the career choices these children have?;

(5) what role do multilingual out of school projects play in children's heritage language proficiency?;

(6) what is the role of new media and technologies in improving students' language proficiency?;

(7) how do we prepare teacher candidate for the multilingual, multicultural classroom?;

(8) how can teacher candidates design effective instruction integrating media education into the multicultural curriculum?

This study explored three key points: (1) the wide range of meanings that participants associated with language learning; (2) the impact of the *Global Learning Community Network* in developing self identity among Turkish American students; and (3) the ways in which they integrated Turkish language, culture, and history into their multilingual media projects.

Project

Main goal of the project is simultaneously promote students' heritage language proficiency and their academic development in English. To make that claim a reality, we piloted once a week out of school program for participants ages 8-14 during Spring 2007 term. Sessions were two and a half hours long. In the community that these students live there is no close access to heritage language courses.

In this project, lessons were taught by more than one presenter in bilingual format that did not assume that English is the language of instruction and interaction. Similarly, Turkish is

not used as a single resource for learning. We provided flexibility and opportunities in cross-language transfer.

The project took place in class during Friday nights/ Saturday afternoons, synchronous video (webcam) and chatting used for collaboration with K12 students and teachers in Turkey, asynchronous distance learning via internet occurred due to 7 hours difference btw Turkey and the US.

Teacher candidates and K12 students used various new media and technologies to research, complete and present their projects.

1) BB- for course content, discussion board, content management-eportfolios,

2) digital editing software (imovie or movie maker) for editing their digital story.

3) youtube.com for showcasing their video,

4) google pages to post their webpage/e-portfolio,

5) wikis for online collaborations

6) webcams- for online tutoring and mentoring to K12 students, first year students at WPU

7) skype.com for online chat and collaborations among each other and with the instructor

They also use word processing, presentation slides, internet search skills.

Theoretical framework

The following three bilingual strategies outlined (Cumming, 2001) are illustrative of many strategies that were pursued in the project.

(a) systematic attention to cognate relationships with and across languages;

(b) creation of student-authored dual language books, other multimedia and multilingual projects are implemented (e.g., creation of digital *multilingual* stories and slide presentations);

(c) sister class projects where students from different language backgrounds collaborate using two or more languages.

The curriculum for the *Global Learning Community Network* (http://mnyildiz.googlepages.com/plan) was based on *Language learning framework for Turkish* (http://www.princeton.edu/~turkish/aatt/pdf/LLFreport.pdf) written by a committee of scholars led by Dr. **Güliz Kuruoglu.** The project was funded by the National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages [NCOLCTL].

Data Sources

Participants filled out a language proficiency test, self-identity survey, (adopted from Suinn-Lew acculturation scale), and questionnaire. They also participated in semi-structured interviews which were audio-taped. Participants provided a copy of their Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 academic grades and test scores. In addition to field notes, online journals (blogs), email and telephony correspondences, and content analysis of students' media projects, study included parents' end of year survey and teacher candidates' responses to the lessons they created and conducted.

Semi-structured interviews used to determine the experiences and perceptions of these participants (Patton, 1987) in regard to their language and family backgrounds, as well as their social relationships in which HL played a role. The interview questions concerned personal background, language use in the family, attitude toward the HL, and personal experiences using the HL outside the family.

Using qualitative analysis procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), both the interview transcripts, and the open-ended part of the questionnaire were coded, allowing several themes to

emerge. (i.e. Sense of Belonging, changing names or the pronunciation of their names, lack of interest in learning Heritage language and culture, critical of parent's language skills.)

Profile of the research participants

A total of 5 families and 10 participants were included in the analysis. Each family had two children in the study. Of these 10 participants, there were 9 females and 1 male student, of whom 6 second-generation Turkish Americans were born in the United States and 2 came to the United States at an early age. The ages of the participants were limited to K-12 students between the ages of 8 and 14.

The criterion of second generation was broadened by including Turkish American children who immigrated to the United States before school age, in addition to those who were born in the United States. All participants began their elementary education in this country. The participants were recruited through local Turkish families in the community. None of the children had formal education in learning their HL.

Conclusions

This study examines the experiences of one language minority group in regard to the effects of their home or "heritage" language (HL) competence. The results indicated that competence with one's HL has an effect on social interactions, relationships with HL speakers of their ethnic minority group, and the individuals themselves. Having developed one's HL, in addition to English, has a number of sociocultural advantages, as well as personal and societal

benefits. Those who have developed their HL have a strong ethnic identity, are strongly connected to their ethnic group, and have greater understanding and knowledge of cultural values, ethics, and manners; this further enhances their interactions with HL speakers. Moreover, HL development is shown to provide a personal gain, eventually contributing positively to the betterment of the society.

Before the project, students in both classes were pre-tested in language proficiency, story comprehension and sentence complexity in their heritage language (Turkish). There were no significant differences in their language proficiency test after the twelve-week intervention project, except they all indicated a positive attitude towards learning their heritage language and a variety of career options (graphic novel writer, scientist, and business administrator) in post-self identity survey comparison to the pre-self- identity survey included 8 "I have no idea" or "I do not know", and one teacher and one housewife. Especially, it was nice to hear that our youngest participant, who asked me "are you going to Hell?" looking no head covering on me and comparing it with her mother three years ago, told me "I would like to be just like you, aunt [professor]" in Turkish.

These results indicated important outcomes. First, authentic global learning partnership was appealing to students, with their web pals assistance, they wrote, illustrated, and created digital stories, which help retain more vocabulary and improve their sentence structure.

Second, their comprehension on understanding and recalling Turkish poems, events, or stories were increased. Third, through the use of new technologies, participants received audio visual stimuli through still pictures, videos, animation, music, sound effects. These stimuli not only provided access to native Turkish speakers but also improved students' motivation learning Turkish.

Outcome

Participants will be able to argue the challenges and advantages of media production in curriculum; develop skills in deconstructing existing curricula and communicating media messages; examine the process of producing documentaries as classroom tools for teaching and learning; integrate the use of media in an instructional context; explore lesson plans, assessment tools, and curriculum guides that incorporate new media across grades and subjects.

The selected learning objects, digital stories, and e-portfolios created during the project and evaluating educational media resources were posted on a website.

(http://mnyildiz.googlepages.com/plan

Teacher candidates who volunteered to present for the Global Learning Community Learning Project outlined in their journals the challenges and advantages of using new media and technologies in curriculum; developed skills in deconstructing existing curricula and communicating media messages; examined the process of producing learning objects such as digital documentaries as classroom tools for teaching and learning; integrated the use of media in an instructional context; explore lesson plans, assessment tools, and curriculum guides that incorporated new media across grades and subjects.

In conclusion, the main goal of this research was to draw on the important link between multilingualism and multiliteracies in teacher education programs. We explored how a critical approach to the study of language learning in a community based programs combines knowledge, reflection, and action to promote educational equity and prepares the new generation to be socially responsible members of a multicultural, democratic society.

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