

Little Things That Made a Big Difference: Trust and Empathy on the Path to Multiculturalism

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Abstract

This paper reports on the collaborative IU-Unityville Outreach project aimed at creating a positive learning environment for recently arriving English Language Learners. The findings of this paper focus on little things that resulted in positive differences at one American high school in the Midwest. Specifically, the authors discuss school-based needs for trust and empathy along with activities aimed at increasing these.

Introduction

In fall 2002, Unityville Schools contacted Barbara Korth with a problem. The problem was this: There was an increase in the number of non-English-speaking transnational, immigrant, and migrant students in the district, and local educators were unprepared. A small number of faculty in the district approached Korth with the hope that she would be able to “fix” the students. Notice the disjuncture between these two different characterizations of the problem (local educators unprepared and students needing to be fixed). Our¹ IU-Unityville Outreach project emerged from this initial request for assistance despite divergent conceptualizations of the problem. IU members felt the highest level of *simpatío* with those teachers who sought professional growth, though it was easy for all of us to empathize with the frustrations teachers expressed when their successful practices turned into failure with ENL students.

Through collaborative means and integrated purposes, Unityville personnel (like Yoko Martin), a team of university students (like Naomi Sotoo), and Barbara Korth (IU faculty) began a critical project aimed at creating a multicultural school corporation for whom the benefits of a transnational student community were educationally mined.

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It was our hope that new possibilities could replace old problems (Freire, 1974). The project consisted of research efforts, program development, support services for students, and training for teachers. We describe one very small but significant part of the overall project — the way small, somewhat ordinary, efforts have marked progress toward the project's goals.

The little things we did together seemed to bring about some of this undoing of patterns that contributed to the problems. This was not a singular, uncomplicated process, but rather a series of contentious and difficult moments stitched together through tenuous sets of possibilities, intentions, frustrations, ethics, legal impositions, hopes, and fears. We decided to write on the little things that have made a big difference at Unityville's high school because we want to honor the partial outcomes of a difficult and rewarding process. Also, by sharing these small efforts we hope to document the possibility of making advances in a situation that has seemed too overwhelming to tackle. The changes we describe here are uneven and do not reflect agreement at the site, but instead expose work at the intersection of education and difference. In this paper, we reflect specifically on changes related to (1) establishing trust and (2) developing empathy.

But what can we learn from looking closely at one school in one district? A new report indicated that from 1990 to 2005, there was an increase of 150 percent in the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) attending U.S. schools (Waters, 2007). Indiana was recently named one of the nation's "new Growth states" (Capps, Passel, & Fix, 2003). When we examine these numbers (more than 5 million total in schools now nationwide) in light of the pressures of *No Child Left Behind*, we find many schools in the situation that Unityville found itself. Even states with longer histories of a more international school population, like California, have reported that teachers are under-prepared and under-skilled for meeting the needs of ELLs (Jacobson, 2006).

Why should we look at the three domains of change (trust, empathy, and expectations)? These priorities definitely reflect the needs and priorities of the site. That is, these are the three areas that we experienced as most pressing and that garnered the greatest motivation for those of us working on the project. These needs, however, are not peculiar to Unityville. Numerous studies have demonstrated the educational value of caring in schools (Valenzuela, 1999; Noddings, 1992). The language terrain itself is so complicated that extra measures of trust and empathy are required while at the same time being compromised by language difference.

A quick look at classroom interactions demonstrates this. Active verbal classroom participation is highly valued in American education. Students who do not speak out in class are devalued and penalized by teachers (Vandrick, 2000). Many ethnic and language minority students who felt pressured to participate in the classroom failed to do so and then felt upset, embarrassed, and ashamed. ELL students reported (a) feeling

insecure about their ability to express themselves clearly in English and (b) feeling afraid of making mistakes or not being understood (Woodrow, 2006). Some of these minority students come from cultures in which the educational traditions are different, and in which students are required to listen respectfully to the professor rather than speaking out (Vandrick, 2000). Accordingly, some ELL students interpreted their own verbal participation in the classroom as disrespectful misbehavior. Studies revealed that ethnic and language minority students felt isolated and excluded from the daily life of their peers because they did not understand what was taught and because they were not able to participate in class discussions (Shaw, 1994). Their feelings of discouragement had deleterious effects on their performance in school. The evidence suggested that if trust and empathy contributed to positive educational experiences for all children, then an extra dose was both required and put at risk with language-minority children. More research is definitely warranted.

In the next section of the paper, we provide a description of site and the methods. That section is followed by the lengthiest section of the paper, Relevant Literature and Findings, which is organized according to these three main categories of change. Each subsection introduces relevant literature and describes relevant findings. This is an unusual way to report on research, but we wanted to find a way to keep the findings in close proximity to the scholarly literature because this was a better reflection of our experience.

Newcomers in Our Midst: Site Description and Methods

Unityville is the site for a consolidated school corporation in the Midwest. Certainly, by the accounts of people who preceded this recent infusion of newcomers, Unityville was thought of as monocultural. Even the few African Americans who lived in the area were described by white people as “practically white.” People of the town and in the schools also thought of Unityville as monolingual. Once newcomer students started arriving at schools in the corporation, principals began practicing an English-only policy. This policy supported an unquestioned set of beliefs about monolingualism, language learning, and the function of schools. Few school employees throughout the corporation were recognized as proficient in any language other than English, and few claimed any cross-cultural expertise. Actually, as the project progressed, we discovered that these assumptions stifled the use of Spanish and Japanese amongst Euro-American students and teachers who had taken several years of languages in school. Moreover, the assumption of monoculturalism was so deeply embedded in the stories Unityville folks told themselves that valuing monoculturalism formed a “legitimate” rationale for strong insider/outsider dynamics. For example, white folks often bragged to interviewers that their European ancestors had to give up their languages and cultures to become Americans and if these newcomers did not want to do likewise, they should return to their homelands.

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The IU-Unityville Outreach project worked through an integration of inquiry and service/program implementation. Three years' worth of observation notes, tape recordings, interviews, and focus groups have produced a corpus of data about the change process and everyday experiences of schooling including contestations, needs, hopes, and tensions. The data were naturalistically obtained through everyday educational activities, project strategies, and program implementation collaboratively obtained with both Indiana University and Unityville community members. These activities were responses to locally identified problems and involved a cadre of people interested in promoting the well-being of newcomer students disadvantaged in the schools through myriad of policies, practices, and attitudes. Such critical values (Carspecken, 1996) were the fuel that drew people to the project. The project was also critical in the sense that together we raised questions about the power relations and distortions to consciousness that seemed to influence the way we did schooling (Carspecken, 1996). Moreover, the study was a close fit for the ethnographic design typically requiring long-term engagement in the field, emphasizing participants' perspectives and describing naturalistic experiences in order to reconstruct the way members understand themselves and others. The problem-solving focus with local-level generation of solutions gave the project its action-orientation (Kincheloe, 2006). Thus, the qualitative design of the project was a hybrid version of critical ethnography and action research.

During the past eight years, the population of English-as-a-New-Language learners² has grown significantly. In fact, until 2000 there was no English-as-a-New-Language teacher designated for newcomer students. Then, a secondary English teacher was partially reassigned to teach two classes for ENL students. This began the district's efforts to address the needs of ENL students. According to the Department of Education (2006), during the period from 2000 to 2002, the white student rate of the overall high school population decreased from 95 to 90 percent while the Asian student rate increased from .5 to 1 percent and the Hispanic student rate increased from 1.2 to 1.4 percent.³

In 2005 Yoko Martin was hired as an ENL classroom aide, and in January 2006 a second ENL aide was hired. In 2006, 1,027 students enrolled in the high school. Of the language-majority students, 91 percent were self-identified as white and 1.4 percent as black. Of the language-minority students, 6 percent were self-identified as Asian, 4.6 percent as Hispanic, and 3.1 percent as multi-racial (a group that does include language minority students) (DOE, 2006).

In 2002 most of the teachers at the high school expressed frustration and confusion. Many seemed unable to relate to the newcomer students. The newcomer student problem seemed insurmountable given the teachers' lack of preparation and limited cultural knowledge coupled with the high demands that teachers regularly faced. In our first set of focus groups with educators, teachers persistently talked about ENL students

in non-empathetic terms. Most teachers talked about ENL students according to their language abilities and their participation in the ENL class. These same teachers did not identify the ENL students as their own, even when such students were enrolled in their classes. These characteristics are not atypical of other districts (Valenzuela, 1999; Delpit, 1999). Fear and lack of understanding depicted most of the teachers' talk about ENL students. For example, when teachers mentioned sanctioning children for speaking a language other than English in the classroom (something most teachers seemed proud of doing), that same teacher would justify this by saying that the students were likely to be cheating or saying things they shouldn't if they were using a language other than English. Teachers expressed exasperation and frustration with the students' inability to learn. Teachers tended to blame the victim. In other words, it was perfectly acceptable within the school community to blame ENL students for the academic failure. Again, this was not peculiar to Unityville (Ryan, 1976).

The newcomer students were also frustrated. At the start of the project, all of the students we interviewed expressed concerns about the school and indicated that they were struggling to reap educational benefits. In fact, many kids described their lives in terms that are usually associated with depression, including a student who talked of not wanting to live if life was going to continue this way. ENL students were skipping school, crying in the bathrooms, avoiding interactions, and feeling afraid because of bullying both inside and outside the school. When ENL student experiences have been studied, negative accounts of schooling have prevailed (Davidson, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). For these reasons, it seems plausible to interpret the experiences at Unityville within a broader set of reports of similar phenomena.

It is important to provide some description of insider/outsider dynamics experienced at the schools in Unityville. Most fundamentally, Unityville has not readily welcomed those who were not raised here. One member of the high school staff told us that although she lived in Unityville for 18 years, she was still not considered "from" Unityville by locals. Being an insider was also linked to being white, Christian, and English-speaking.

In the current times, being patriotic was another mark of being an insider. In the past, being associated with the Ku Klux Klan was a mark of being an insider. People who were considered outsiders were not easily included in school activities, talked with, or acknowledged. Yoko Martin faced this personally as a Japanese person employed in the school. She was ignored by other faculty (not in a seemingly purposeful way, but more as a manner of people paying attention to who they thought was important). Teachers who resisted the "extra" demands of teaching ENL students also expressed the idea that their students (the white insiders) should not have attention diverted away from them for the sake of these newcomers (outsiders). A few teachers (and this marks one extreme) actually

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voiced the wish that the newcomer students and their families would leave the town. People at the site seemed keenly aware of these dynamics as they were openly talked about. One ENL student put it like this, “I changed everything about myself and still I am not accepted.”⁴ A district administrator told vague stories about ancestors who came to the country and learned English. This was the administrator’s way of distinguishing insiders from outsiders. It is important to realize that these insider/outsider dynamics formed part of the context for the findings presented below.

Relevant Literature and Findings

The project was about change and it seems fitting that our first publication should report on some of the tentative, contested, promising changes that have come about as a result of the Outreach project. We discuss changes in two categories of school-related activities: (1) establishing trust and (2) developing empathy. Each subsection begins with a brief review of the relevant literature. This is followed by a report on the findings related to change and a description of the little things that made big differences. While these changes cannot be assumed to characterize the school at large, they offered promise and direction to a school in flux. We realize that this is an unorthodox presentation, but it best depicts the *zeitgeist* of the project with its reciprocal and recursive relation to action, findings, and literature.

Establishing Trust

According to the literature...

Basic trust between teachers and students is important for facilitating learning in the classroom. Rogers (1969) argued that facilitative learning depended on teachers recognizing the basic trustworthiness of students. Since trust is a relational construct (Roessingh, 2006) it seems plausible to extend Rogers’ (1969) argument to suggest that students should also recognize the basic trustworthiness of teachers. Congruent with our intuitions, research tells us that it is even more important for trust to infuse the teacher-student relationship when the students are newcomers. For example, according to Roessingh (2006), new immigrant students and their parents have to trust and rely on the teachers to help them navigate their new lives in America. At the same time, many of the structures usually involved in establishing trust (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005) were not found functioning in the teacher–newcomer student relationship. Not enough studies on trust have been published for us to have a full account of the role of trust in the education of newcomer students.

Putnam (2000) identified two outcomes of trust in social relationships: (1) building or bonding social capital and (2) bridging social capital. Putnam explained that when people who are quite similar to one another form trusting relationships, they build and

bond their social capital. Trust in these relationships provides a mechanism for looking inward. Moreover, when trusting relationships develop amongst people who are quite different from one another, those involved will bridge social capital. Trust that bridges social capital supports people looking outward. Roessingh (2006) furthered this point by arguing that it also takes bonding and bridging social capital to develop trust. Trust is both the structure and outcome (Giddens, 1992) of bonding and bridging cultural capital. Trusting relationships between teachers and newcomer students/families has not developed easily (Clemons-Brower, 1997). Nevertheless, educators like Roessingh (2006) claimed that teachers inevitably played a key role in developing high levels of trust with ESL students and their families. It was especially important for the teacher to take the lead in bridging cultural capital and in finding ways to bond with ESL students whose cultural capital would be strained in the new setting.

What we found in Unityville...

On no particular day, work as usual, Yoko Martin had one of many “aha” moments. In this one, Martin realized that the teachers and students did not trust each other and that the lack of trust was a barrier in the teaching/learning process. Indeed, we found that at Unityville Consolidated High School, issues of trust formed an understated tension in teacher-student and school-home relations. There was an expressed lack of trust on both sides of the relationship, and this seemed to confound breakthroughs.

Early in the life of the project, distrust was openly and continually expressed in a way that made it seem as if the distrust was a sensible and appropriate response to the situation. One teacher said, “Well, how can I know [that] they’re doing their own work [if they are speaking Spanish]?” Several teachers said, “If they are speaking Spanish, they might be cheating or talking about me. So of course I don’t allow it.” Many others echoed these sentiments when talking about newcomer students and their potential for dishonesty or illegal activity. The local papers reported on police activity and many teachers informed us that their most valuable source of information about the new immigrant families came from those reports. Educators also intensely speculated about which Latino families might be legally residing in the country and which ones might not (while not expressing the least bit of interest in discerning which local employers were willing to hire undocumented workers).

Negative attitudes about language differences fueled the distrust that school officials and Euro-American students felt for newcomer students. Many of the white students who were interviewed said that they did not trust their “foreign” classmates because those students had bad attitudes. When probed about how this bad attitude showed itself, the Euro-American students said that students “who did not speak English had a bad attitude and were not to be trusted.” Not all students felt this way, but those who didn’t feel this

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way knew that they were in the minority. One such student wrote a note to the principal voicing his disgust for the way one particular newcomer student from Israel was treated by peers. In the note he said that he had tried to stand up against his peers' prejudiced actions toward the newcomer, but he was unsuccessful. He said that even the teachers do not stand up to those who bully the newcomers, leaving him with the idea that they must condone such negative activities.

Not all newcomer groups were treated equally bad with respect to establishing trust. Latino students were talked about in much more suspicious terms than students of other groups. For example, longtimers tended to explain Latino presence in the community differently and more negatively than they explained the presence of other groups. We heard many teachers and Euro-American students claim that "Latino families were here to take their jobs," but on the contrary Japanese families were welcomed to town because their commerce was welcomed. Latino children were often referred to in criminal terms, and this just didn't happen for Japanese youngsters (Brantmeier, 2005).

Remembering that trust is a relational activity, it is important to also acknowledge that new immigrant and transnational students experienced some distrust for teachers and peers. The students did not know how to interpret their teachers and peers, plus they felt harassed and bullied. Their primary experiences early on included alienation and fear. Several students reported hiding in the bathrooms in order to avoid the lunchroom where they experienced serious amounts of taunting, such as "Beano, go home." They very quickly developed a shared network of information that touted which teachers and students could be trusted. This limited list was primarily constituted of the teachers, aides, and project members that they spent the most time with and with whom they could converse in their home language.

Parents of new immigrants initially expressed a basic form of trust for teachers and school officials with respect to their children. The parents did not always understand what was going on, but they expected the teachers to behave in a trustworthy manner and they seemed to trust that their children were being treated well. All of the parents we initially interviewed expressed this basic trust. Their concerns had mostly to do with their own limitations and complications related to language, cultural, and economic differences. Their children realized this and tended to act in ways that kept their parents' trust in the school up. One student told us that he could not bear to tell his parents how he was treated like a criminal at school because his parents made great sacrifices so that he could be educated in a U.S. school. There were implied limitations to the trust parents expressed for the school. Namely, parents did not have enough information about the school or its staff to be able to enter the school, participate in its activities, or raise questions about their children's experiences. This produced something like a ceiling in their capacity to trust the teachers. They did not **DISTRUST** the school, but they also

were not drawn into it. We suspected that increasing their trust could facilitate greater motivation and expectations for involvement in the life of the school community.

What we did in Unityville...

Many of the activities we engaged in to build trust utilized and complicated the insider/outsider dynamic. We found hope in those who could straddle the insider/outsider lines as we began the process of building trust. For example, Naomi Sotoo and Yoko Martin made themselves easily accessible to Japanese parents, and being Japanese themselves, were able to help establish interactions between parents and schools. Doing this helped parents to better understand teachers and administrators so that it became more likely for parents to think of teachers and administrators as trustworthy. Sotoo and Martin were relative outsiders in Unityville, but were interpreted as partial insiders by newcomer Japanese parents because they acted on behalf of the school.

There were four main ways that Sotoo and Martin were involved in building trust with parents personally. This personal trust translated into parents trusting school personnel more. First of all, Sotoo and Martin, along with other members of the project team, hosted “Parent Nights” where newcomer parents were invited into the school to raise questions and get information. These events were held in the home languages with only members of the team meeting with the parents. Refreshments were served and an informal atmosphere was created.

Secondly, Martin’s everyday presence at the school and Sotoo’s scheduled presence there served as an invitation for parents to come to school with questions. If they came to school when Martin or Sotoo was working, they had someone they could talk to, someone with whom the community of newcomers was developing a relationship. The third activity was something that Martin did. Martin made a serious effort to begin learning Spanish. She enrolled in classes, found opportunities to speak Spanish at school, and thereby demonstrated to parents the importance she placed on being able to reach out to newcomers and their communities. Soon after Martin started speaking Spanish with students, she started receiving phone calls from Latino parents concerned about their children’s English skill development and their academic success.

Fourth, members of the Outreach team created welcome brochures for newcomer students in both Japanese and Spanish. These were developed for each school in the district. The high school brochures were being used, though this had not yet happened at all the schools. Each of these activities provided opportunities to bridge cultural capital and to heighten the capacity for trust.

With students, building trust was a more intense, conflicted process. Martin was immediately accepted as “one of the newcomers,” an outsider to Unityville but an insider to the newcomer, non-native English-speaking community. This created some

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opportunities that would not have been as readily possible without her dual role as “newcomer insider” and “ENL classroom aide.” This “insider” image enabled Martin to help students bond with native-English-speaking educators and with the content of schooling. For example, Martin was able to facilitate positive connections between the students and Holly (pseudonym), the newly hired second ENL classroom aide (who was a longtime member of the Unityville community).

When Holly was hired, many ENL students, at first, experienced a problem trusting her despite her nice, passionate, and inclusive personality and her skills at teaching (a retired English teacher with the district). Martin suspected that the primary reason newcomer students had difficulty trusting this new aide was because of her “American”ness. Holly was, so-to-speak, a local, white, monolingual, veteran (formerly retired) English teacher, and as might be expected, we observed that many ENL students associated those features with “untrustworthiness” or trauma from their past experiences with other teachers. Martin and Holly formed a strong trusting relationship with each other and this proved heartening for students who identified with Martin. Martin consistently encouraged students to get help from Holly, implicitly letting them know that they could trust Holly because Martin trusted her. Holly also followed Martin’s lead and began learning Spanish in order to talk with Latino youth. Students eventually become acquainted with her and sought her help. Here we see that Martin’s trusting relationship with the students became a source of bonding and bridging cultural capital in relation to this new ENL aide. Similar connections were forged with other educators at the school. This also worked in reverse. Holly openly demonstrated respect for Martin’s language skills and academic expertise. Because Holly was an insider with school personnel, her respect influenced many teachers to start trusting Martin.

Additionally, Martin was thought of as the “safe” foreign-language-speaking figure to American students. When we started collecting data, we did not observe any cases of American students greeting ENL students in languages other than English. This began to change as students felt safe approaching Martin. The hallways became the site of a conversion: Quite a large number of students began speaking in Japanese or Spanish to Martin. Because the students knew she was an educator, they felt safe enough to try out their “fledgling” language skills where Spanish and Japanese were two of the languages offered by the foreign language department. Occasionally, this happened when Martin was with ENL students. Euro-Americans speaking Spanish and Japanese in the hallways impressed and amazed ENL students. The linguistic exchanges, even at a very early level of conversational skill, served to bond non-native and native English speakers for a moment. Such experiences chiseled away at the seemingly static insider/outsider divide. It became more and more common to hear Spanish and Japanese languages being spoken. Monolingualism was tacitly called into question.

Sotoo facilitated one of four bi-weekly “socialization connections,” in which groups of four to six high school students met with an IU project team member via videoconferencing “courses” in home languages. These connections took place for one hour every other week and occurred during the students’ scheduled ENL class. During the connection, students raised questions about school culture and about their experiences in the United States. They discussed their similar and varied experiences, their concerns, feelings, and ambitions. The IU facilitators, like Sotoo, helped the students understand their experiences while also learning about the perspectives of educators and the norms and values common in American schools. Sotoo and the others bridged cultural capital and empowered students in a way that made it possible to break through the distrust.

Later in the life of the project, Sotoo began meeting once a week, face-to-face with a Japanese female support group. Sotoo, who is earning a degree in school psychology with a minor in counseling, used the support group format to wrestle with challenges, celebrate successes, and empower potential associated with being a Japanese newcomer. Both the socialization connections and the support group provided opportunities for bonding with cultural capital (as newcomer, non-native English speakers with skills unacknowledged in the schools) and bridging cultural capital (as newcomers who were gaining varying expertise with the new culture). Sotoo, like Martin, straddled the insider/outsider line.

We must also report that Sotoo and Martin experienced challenges in their efforts to build trust. For example, both of them (along with other members of the project team) served as translators between parents/students and educators. On occasion educators would ask team members to translate a message to the parents when that team member (because of their “inside” connection to the newcomers) knew the message would be interpreted as insulting or unwelcoming. Sometimes project team members did not agree with the perspective of those educators for whom the translation was being offered. To express the disagreement might result in creating a fissure of trust. To align with something to which one did not agree, was also problematic. Resolving this was not an easy task.

Also, because the newcomer students trusted Martin over and above other educators at the high school, they put pressure on that trust. For example, when they were unhappy with another teacher, they expected Martin to side with them. If the coursework seemed too difficult, they hoped Martin would do it for them. Sometimes they hoped Martin would cover for them. A particularly poignant example involved a couple of students who skipped a class and then reported that they had been working with Martin when actually they had not. Martin was asked to verify the students’ accounts. In this situation, the newcomer students expected Martin to be loyal to them, even though it involved

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misleading the administrators. Martin had to convince the students that her concern for their best interest involved securing their attendance in class while simultaneously working to see that such attendance was in their best interests. Using Martin as a cover did not promote their best interests so she was unwilling to go along with that. Martin handled this with the students, trying to use the already established trust as a foundation for working through challenges.

Other efforts that benefited trusting relationships between teachers and ENL students involved helping teachers develop skills for supporting the learning efforts of ENL students. One of our ENL students told us about a teacher who nonchalantly held up a protractor when using the word “protractor.” Our student was convinced the teacher was trying to help him in a way that did not embarrass him or call attention to him. When teachers did things like this, the students interpreted them as caring and this became a cornerstone for the development of trust. This kind of teaching activity helped to bridge cultural capital, contrasting with those activities that isolated students or blamed them for being different.

We did several things that were specifically designed to develop teachers’ skills as bridging cultural capital. First of all, we offered professional development ranging from teaching basic phrases in languages that newcomers spoke (and we invited the ENL students to provide leadership for these sessions) to exploring their own misconceptions about “outsiders” through Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1985). Secondly, Martin worked individually with willing teachers to modify their classroom practices so that they were more inclusive. Thirdly, Martin and a cadre of other teachers/staff members created and implemented an integrated peace curriculum that focused the inclusion of newcomer students into the Unityville community. The process took nine months of inquiry and development through weekly meetings led by an IU graduate student (Brantmeier, 2005). The peace curriculum effort demonstrated how the inclusion of newcomers could become a source of substance for learning rather than just something to be overcome.

Lastly, Martin became an advocate for youngsters with the administrators and other teachers. This helped the administrators take a more supportive stance, which seemed to promote trust. For example, in 2006 there were nationally organized rallies regarding immigration policy. Unityville high school administrators offered excused absences to newcomers for participating in the rallies. Martin was able to advocate for this with administrators and the result was that students entertained the possibility that administrators might be trustworthy.

We began the section with literature that said it was important for teachers to recognize the trustworthiness of students. And in our description of Unityville we portrayed a starting scene that was generally marred by teacher distrust of newcomer students. Teachers did not even trust Martin. This problem was traversed a bit because of

the trusting relationship between Holly (who was a Unityville insider) and Martin. Small steps in establishing trust within the school began to dismantle teacher mistrust, however, we found that a key element involved in fostering teachers' trust in students involved developing their compassion and empathy for newcomers.

Developing Empathy

According to the literature...

Empathetic understanding (Rogers, 1969) is the attitude of putting oneself in the other's shoes to view the world through the other's eyes and try to understand an experience from the other's perspective. Rogers (1969) argues that

when the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then again the likelihood of significant learning is increased. (p.111)

Various research findings have suggested that teachers tend to have negative views toward culturally different students and they tend to have lower expectations toward minority students including newcomers (Franquiz, 2004; Thompson, et.al, 2004). Without examining their own prejudices and stereotypes toward students, it is unlikely that teachers will develop high levels of empathetic understanding. Setting up an effective and positively affective learning environment in the classroom is the teachers' responsibility. The affective learning classroom welcomes all students and validates and celebrates each person (Fischer, 1990).

There are some published exercises for developing empathy among students and teachers. Linse and White (2001) wrote about fostering empathy among monolingual English speakers toward ESL students. Their strategy promoted perspective-taking skills among monolingual students by listening to ESL students' stories in their native languages. The monolingual students momentarily experienced the isolation, confusion, and rejection that their non-native English speaking peers faced on a daily basis. At the same time, the ESL students become more confident as their multilingualism (being able to read their own stories in two languages) was displayed as an accomplishment not a deficit (Linse & White, 2001).

Nieto (1992) reported that negative attitudes of teachers toward ethnic and language minority students resulted in unintentional discrimination by well-intentioned teachers. Over time, negative teacher attitudes and low expectations developed "learned helplessness" among ethnic and language minority students (Gay, 2000). Studies indicated that educators who are not sensitive to the needs of minority students often are unaware of the cultural conflicts that cause barriers in the learning processes of minority students (Larke, 1990).

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In the Context of Unityville...

Students and teachers did not talk about each other in empathetic terms. Neither teachers/majority students nor newcomer students could easily understand what their relationships and experiences with one another were like from the Other's perspective. Strong evidence of this on the part of teachers and majority students surfaced during our first interviews and was further evidenced a year later during some professional development work. Specifically, the teachers participated in Theatre of the Oppressed led by Barbara Korth and another IU member of the project team. Teachers were asked to act out the parts of newcomer students. The teachers' struggles with doing this were evidenced by their avoidance of the first person when acting the role of newcomer student, their inability to act the newcomer roles authentically, and the way they questioned why newcomer students tended to act in certain ways.

The difficulties these teachers experienced extending their empathy had a lot to do with their lack of relationships with newcomer students and their concomitant inability to position-take with much confidence. Teachers did not know how to identify with newcomer students. In much the same way, many participating teachers did not seem to understand Martin or other personnel who seemed "close" to the ENL students. Difference was experienced as a barrier to understanding and empathy. For example, teachers said, it was good that the students had Martin to relate to, as if it would not be possible for those same students to relate to them as white, English-speaking folks. Of course, it was good that the students had Martin to relate to, but this did not, in principle, mean that others were exonerated from the responsibility of getting to know the students.

Teachers and majority students who claimed general unfamiliarity with culture shock and language immersion could not relate to the challenges of such an experience (at least this is what they believed). So, for example, they interpreted newcomer students sitting together in the cafeteria as an indicator that the newcomer students were behaving stand-offish in this obvious refusal to "mix in." No one questioned why the Euro-American kids all sat together in the cafeteria. Furthermore, teachers and Euro-American students did not immediately identify with the comfort newcomers might feel in each others' company or the relief that might be found in having an hour to converse in a language of proficiency or the compounding of pain that builds up when one is expected to go through the day unable to express herself. Such ideas held by teachers and Euro-American students worked against them extending empathy to these new "outsiders."

Teachers and majority students also tended to operate with a set of assumptions about newcomers, their own school, and language learning that seemed antithetical to empathy. One particularly strong assumption was that the "sink or swim" approach to language learning was "proven" to work best for transitioning students into English

schools. Another strong assumption was that assimilation was the most desirable outcome of education for newcomer students. Lastly, teachers and students believed that having newcomers in the school was a “problem” that could only weaken and compromise the historically strong educational programs at the high school. This last assumption capitalized on the idea that change was negative. These shared assumptions provided rationale for relating to newcomer students on majority cultural terms alone. So long as ENL students were unable to do this, relationships were tenuous at best. This was a very different basis for relationship than empathy or trust provide.

There was another reason for resisting empathy. Teachers, in particular, viewed empathy as something that would keep them from treating kids “fairly.” One teacher put it like this, “I am not going to do anything different for them [the newcomer students] than I am doing for my regular students.” Many teachers said things like this: “What would my students [these were the mainstream students] think if I started giving advantages to these students [the ENL youth]?” Still others expressed it like this: “Why would I want to waste more of my time and energy on these students [again referring to the ENL students] when I could invest that [energy] in my students where it might really make a difference?”

Teachers associated empathy toward newcomer students with being too soft. They resisted providing too much “help” to transnational students without providing that same level of accommodation and support for their other students. This produced an interesting tension because empathy was placed in a zero-sum gain economy of “support” with teacher attention and effort as the primary good to be distributed. When teachers did put in what they thought of as extra effort to support the learning needs of ENL students, they wanted to be able to see the pay off. Many teachers reported not feeling successful with newcomer students and this had to do with the extent they saw tangible benefits. Moreover, improving one’s teaching skills so that ENL students had better learning opportunities demanded more of teachers. While some teachers sought out opportunities to improve teaching so that they were more successful with newcomers, they also wanted to do this in a way that did not detract from meeting the needs of their more “traditional” students.

In contrast, there were teachers who pondered what it must be like to be thrust into a foreign community with little support. This usually led to teachers feeling guilty. Another rather unskilled attempt toward empathy involved teachers making sense of the ENL student experiences by relating them to earlier experiences of other minority groups, like Latinos are the new blacks. This racially premised comment was an attempt on the part of those who offered it (and actually this was a common phrase around the school) to say “We can understand that Latino students might feel discrimination” and “We know it was difficult for black students, and we imagine that it must be at least that difficult

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for newcomer students.” So while these notions of empathy are themselves limited, they reflect some awareness that ENL students faced challenges that the more “traditional” students did not face.

Newcomer students were not easily empathetic toward teachers and Euro-American students. While teacher empathy is discussed in the literature, we found no publications that looked at the student empathy for teachers. We were interested in developing mutual empathy and reciprocity, though we recognize that the effects teachers could wield made their empathy crucial. Also, as we reported above, we found that limitations in empathy blocked the establishment of trust. We found that ENL students were bullied, punished, and excluded at a higher rate than their white classmates. These experiences made it difficult for them to empathize with white students. When asked if he wanted to develop friendships with white kids, one ENL student said, “They are mean to us. Why would I want to be friends with them?” This was a common sentiment among the newcomers. ENL students did not seem to grasp how vulnerable the “traditional” students felt around groups of students who were different. Also, the ENL students were not able to describe how it might feel to be a teacher who lacked the skills to teach some students. For example, newcomer students interpreted teaching inadequacies as intentional not skill-based. There were exceptions to this. For example, when one student told us that her teacher insulted her every day, she conceded that maybe the teacher did not realize she was doing this.

The insider/outsider dynamics constrained empathy. For example, teachers saw empathy as something that was asked of them on behalf of newcomer students, but they did not realize that they were already empathetic with Euro-American students in effortless and taken-for-granted ways. All of us do this. To extend empathy to people who are different from us can require more effort and so we might notice its demands more.

What we did in Unityville...

Developing empathy was an important goal for project participants. We wanted to develop our own empathy as well as seek opportunities for this to become a more general area of growth. This goal inspired several project activities.

Several teachers participated in our Theatre of the Oppressed workshop (Boal, 1985). After a slow beginning, the teachers began to see their own teaching actions from the perspective of newcomer students. We acted out bullying scenes and though the teachers would immediately denounce the bullying of newcomers with their words, they were initially unable to act out scenes that resulted in effecting the bullying behavior. Eventually, they began to see how the newcomer students might feel different if teachers greeted them in the hallways using both the home language and their names.

This empathy was an impetus for some of the teachers to change how they interacted with newcomer students. Teachers also realized the lack of emotional and cultural resources ENL students had for dealing with bullying and this inspired the teachers to provide support for the disempowered students. Toward that end, there was an increase in homemade, anti-bullying posters hanging in the school along with more explicit conversations within the school community about bullying.

Another effort involved translating policies into empathetic responses. At the beginning of fall 2006, one of the assistant principals held a meeting with teachers regarding the governmental policies on ENL education. The administrator explained that giving ENL students equal learning opportunities as other students in class was **not** enough to meet the mandate for accommodations. Teachers were told about the lawsuit in California in which a Chinese family sued a teacher for not accommodating for the student (*Williams vs. State of California*, 2004 cited in Sacramento County Office of Education, 2007). The family won that case. Though many teachers looked frustrated, they took it very seriously. To follow up on this meeting, Yoko Martin and Holly met with each teacher to discuss the accommodation options. At first, some teachers were disconnected with Martin because of Martin's outsider status; however, Holly, who was an insider, extended a lot of effort sharing her own empathy towards the ENL students and describing the ENL students' struggles. She demonstrated a kind of empathy for the students to which the teachers related. She was heard by teachers when Martin wasn't.

Another activity that helped to develop empathy within the school community involved fostering a special relationship between a Euro-American student and ENL students. During Martin's study hall hour, an American student worker helped her work with the ENL students. This American student was an honor student who wanted to go to Mexico to teach English after her graduation. Martin's Latino students built good relationships with her through the class and these good relationships gradually extended outside of class. A few Euro-American students who were friends of the student worker visited Martin's ENL study hall during their time off. The students started greeting each other even in hallways. Martin was very happy to witness that. This kind of person-by-person contact offered hope for empathetic relationships among students. Similar things happened when students were paired in language classes.

Using newcomer student names was another way to extend empathy. Often, ENL students were not called by name. Turning this around involved helping administrators and teachers learn to pronounce student names. Using the students' names raised the human aspect of the relationship which opened the door for empathy. This was important to newcomer students. In fact, one boy told us that he liked playing soccer with the Euro-American boys but what he didn't like was that they did not call him by his name. They called him "Mexico" and he was not even from "Mexico."

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And The Story Goes On

Although we cannot conclude the story, we would like to use the final few paragraphs to reflect on our engagement with the project and with these findings and look toward the future. Together, we represent three of many constituent actors working collaboratively to learn from, benefit from, confront challenges in, and share with a diverse community of scholars, practitioners, and students. The IU-Unityville Outreach project has experienced uneven support, modest success, disappointment, persistent resistance, and friendship. When we walk through the halls in 2007 (four and half years after the inception of the project), we smile. Many of the small efforts have become mainstay in the life of the school. Newcomer students are happier. They are finding some academic success. Some have entered college. Teachers have become new. Euro-American students have started to find ways to appreciate and enjoy their ELL counterparts. Trust and empathy are consistently more prevalent day by day. The school culture is changing and multiculturalism is developing.

As for us, we have developed friendships, colleague-ships, and circles of caring. We are in touch with each other, students, and parents. Frankly, all of our work on trust, empathy, and expectations has benefited us as individuals in ways that would take volumes to express. These little things made a big difference on our lives as students, practitioners, and scholars. Peter McLaren (2006) argued that really inquiry occurs when the researchers are willing to be wounded in the field. All of us, wounded and healed, have been affected by the experience in ways neither foreseen nor calculated when we entered this scholarly partnership.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, first person plural references include Unityville employees, IU graduate students, and Barbara Korth who were counted as team members. This was not a monolithic group, but members were united through the goals and activities of the project.
2. English-as-a-New-Language is the specific name of a kind of program serving English Language Learners (ELLs). We use the terms ENL students, ELLs, and newcomers to refer the same population of students at the high school in Unityville.
3. These labels are the ones the school uses.
4. All student quotes were translated from the home language into English by team members.

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