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What About Sam—The Kid in the Corner Whose Voice Doesn't Come Out?— Tensions Between Open Discussions and Inclusive Educational Opportunities for English Learners

This article identifies a tension between a teacher's intention and an English learner's interpretation of his experiences in a US high school English class for native users of English and English learners. The tension highlights two issues. First, democratic classroom practices, frequently advocated by second language acquisition theorists, may be misunderstood or misused in general education classrooms. For example, respecting students by giving them the choice to speak or be silent can negatively affect English learners' opportunities to acquire language, subject-area content knowledge, and social status as knowers. Second, many general education teachers believe they are unprepared to help English learners develop English or subject-area content skills and knowledge. Their lack of preparation can present obstacles for English learners. The author contends that structured, inclusive discussion can benefit English learners' cognitive, academic, linguistic, and social development, while unstructured, open discussion compromises learning opportunities for all students.

Anne:	*In classes I've had before, it is like a class run by a certain group of kids and everybody else just kind of sits back and watches. But—(does not finish her thought).*
Interviewer:	*Does that describe this class?*
Anne:	*No, everybody in the class has spoken up about their feelings and their thoughts at one point.*

Interviewer: (looking at Sam) Do you agree with that?
Sam: No. … It's like people who talk like Tom and Elwood and OJ and John and some girls, but … [the teacher] doesn't talk to everybody, it's just like the kid in the corner, you don't hear him with his voice out. … I'm thinking about it [topics of discussion]; I just don't raise my hand and say what's going on. (Gourd, 1998, p. 270)

Anne and Sam (quoted in the epigraph) were classmates in an urban ninth-grade English language arts class in the US. The dialogue between Anne and Sam (pseudonyms) was extracted from a study investigating a teacher's use of democratic practices in an untracked English language arts class in which one third of the students used a language other than English at home and two thirds of the class were native users of English. This type of class makeup is not uncommon in the US and is due, in part, to increased numbers of English learners (ELs) throughout the US and increased awareness that language is best acquired in language-rich settings structured to use English for real communication purposes (Gibbons, 2002; Himmele & Himmele, 2009). However, general education teachers receive little preparation to ensure the needs of ELs are met (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). Indeed, general education teachers often are unclear about their roles as teachers of ELs when these students are assigned to their classes, and the ELs may or may not receive necessary support beyond the general education classes.

Armed with a master's degree in TESOL and doctoral course work in bilingual education, I spent a semester in Sam and Anne's ninth-grade English language arts classroom in a US Northwest, urban school district. In addition to daily observations and informal interactions with students and the teacher, I formally interviewed the teacher a total of 22 times, with the interviews running 45 to 60 minutes each, and I formally interviewed all students either individually or in groups of two or three, resulting in more than 45 hours of student interviews. In 1998, my research focus was not on ELs. However, my use of a phenomenological approach to understanding critical pedagogy in a specific classroom opened the door for further investigation into the experiences of ELs in general education classes.

The joint interview with Anne and Sam invited a critical investigation guided by the question: How inclusive is open discussion when English learners are studying with English-dominant peers? Sam convincingly noted that open discussion was not benefiting students who were not aggressively involved in the discussion (White, 2011). Yet the teacher was intending to create an inclusive democratic classroom.

What was going wrong? Why were not all students feeling included or empowered?

Two decades later, observations in classrooms, teacher candidates' reports, and reflections of students for whom English is an additional language confirm that ELs are still sitting in the back and their voices are seldom heard by teachers or peers. Sam's words, "the kid in the corner, you don't hear him with his voice out," are still frequently true. Teachers in *all* disciplines and at any level of education remain well positioned to support ELs' academic success and social inclusion, and in so doing, greatly increase the educational opportunities of all their students.

This article is organized around these two concerns: the silencing of students who are not native speakers of English and the missed opportunities of teachers to use their classroom authority to benefit all students by ensuring the voices of students who are not native speakers of English are heard. In the following section, I draw on the work of Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) to present a theoretical foundation of inclusion as a democratic principle, and then I connect the concept of inclusion to Freire and Macedo's (1995) discussion on teachers' use of their authority to ensure all voices are heard.

Inclusion: A Democratic Classroom Practice

Inclusion is a term most often connected to special education and frequently used to define special education as a service provided for identified students rather than as a place where students with identified needs go to have their specific needs met (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). The distinction between special education as a "service" or "place" reflects the differences between "inclusion" and "mainstreaming" by acknowledging that the rightful home for *all* students is in general education classrooms. However, educators are likely to assume that a designated special education teacher is primarily responsible for educating students identified with special needs and that a teacher of English as an additional language (EAL) is primarily responsible for the education of English learners.

Theoharis and O'Toole's (2011) definition of inclusion as a principle (rather than a place or service) and their explicit extension of inclusion to all students, particularly those frequently marginalized because English is an additional language, provide an ideal base from which all educators can begin their work: All students should have "an authentic sense of belonging to a school classroom community where difference is expected and valued" (p. 649).

Applying the principle of inclusion to English learners does not imply they have the same academic needs as students with identified

special education needs or as English-dominant students. Instead, the principle of inclusion emphasizes the need for educators to recognize, first, their responsibility to teach all students in their classes and, second, that English learners have needs beyond acquiring English. A sense of belonging is foundational for their linguistic, academic, and social achievements (Cummins, 2001; Nieto, 2010; Ovando & Combs, 2011).

Even though full-class discussions are being promoted as good pedagogy and are becoming more common in high school classrooms, in part to ensure inclusion of diverse student voices and to empower students (White, 2011), English learners are often left out of the discussions. Many educators equate an open-discussion format, in which the teacher's role is not elevated above the students' role, with democratic classroom practice (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Indeed, many texts identify open discussion as a foundational component of democratic classroom practice (Rivera & Poplin, 1995). Yet open discussions may exclude, rather than include, English learners.

Indeed, Freire and Macedo (1995) expressed frustration with educators' misinterpretation of Freire's connection between dialogue and democratic, pedagogical practice. They explained that *dialogue* is different from classroom conversations in which students are invited to express their views without a context for critique or critical reflection. In contrast to the decontextualized conversation, Freire and Macedo defined *dialogue* as "a process of knowing and learning" (p. 381) and cast *conversation* as "a vacuous, feel-good comfort zone" (p. 379). Dialogue can ensure that a full range of issues (e.g., racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and discriminatory language practices) are included in the curriculum and can invite diverse perspectives that can help students develop complex, rather than simplistic, understandings of human experiences (Freire, 1998). However, according to Freire and Macedo (1995), when educators, intending to show respect for students, remove themselves from classroom discussions, they are abandoning their role of teacher and act as facilitators who avoid teaching.

Macedo (Freire & Macedo, 1995) explicitly asked Freire to address the common misconception that mediated discussion in classrooms is undemocratic while unmediated discussion is democratic. Freire responded to Macedo by stating, "What I want to make clear also is in being a teacher, I always teach to facilitate. I cannot accept the notion of a facilitator who facilitates so as not to teach" (p. 378). Freire continued by distinguishing between a teacher who merely facilitates to "de-emphasize the teacher's power" (p. 378) and a teacher who uses his or her authority to teach.

According to Freire, teachers who merely facilitate act disingenuously and create (rather than reduce) barriers to real dialogue. For example, teachers assess students' understanding and give grades, and these responsibilities do not disappear even if the teacher claims to merely facilitate discussion (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Without the teacher's intervention, many students remain silent in classrooms and are not recognized as knowers by their peers (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Freire and Macedo (1995) intentionally contradict conventional wisdom that classifies open discussion as a democratic practice because it allows students, rather than teachers, to have the authority to determine who will speak and which topics will be discussed. Consequently, an "open-discussion format" can be defined as a practice in which teachers attempt to remove themselves from a discussion, and, in contrast, an "inclusive-discussion format" can be defined as discussion guided by teachers' introduction of topics in contexts and that includes structured turn-taking. Inclusive discussions ensure that diverse voices are heard, theorized, and authentically valued (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Teachers have the responsibility to establish an environment in which students learn to critique while also learning to respectfully listen to views different from their own and to listen with an openness to change.

All students can benefit from inclusive discussion; however, English learners and other students who may be hesitant to volunteer comments in an open discussion will have increased opportunities to be heard and known when teachers use their authority to include those students' voices. Inclusive discussion requires teachers to use their authority to disrupt conventional wisdom, the status quo, and uncritiqued positions. In contrast, in open-discussions formats, whether intentional or not, many English learners are expected to replace their languages, cultures, and identities by adopting the norms of white, middle-class peers (Faltis, 1999; Nieto, 2011).

English Learners in General Education

English learners are the fastest-growing group in US public schools and are among the lowest-performing students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Walqui, 2006; Wolf, Herman, & Dietel, 2010). Most English learners spend most of their school day in general education, in classrooms with their English-dominant peers (Faltis, 1999; Harklau, 1999). However, general education teachers often feel unprepared to support English learners and assume that "special" teachers of English learners and/or paraeducators have the primary responsibility for educating English learners (Himmele & Himmele, 2009; Ovando & Combs, 2011). Educators often assume English learners

need to learn English before they can benefit from instruction in subject-specific content and often fail to recognize that subject-area content can be an important means for acquiring language. English learners need to learn English, but they also need to develop cognitive and academic skills and develop meaningful relationships with their peers (Cummins, 2001; Nieto, 2010).

For most of English learners' education in US public schools, general education teachers, not English learner (EL) specialists or paraeducators, are the teachers these learners see regularly (Genesee, 1994; Hakuta, 2011; Thomas & Collier, 2002). The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) reports that "only 2.5 percent of teachers" (p. 16) teaching English learners have degrees preparing them specifically to teach English learners, and only 30% have had *any* preparation in the area of teaching English learners. If English learners' needs are met only during the time they are with EL specialists or paraeducators, most of their school time is not effectively used.

These data also suggest that *specialists* prepared to meet the needs of English learners are not typically found in K-12 programs in the US. It is common, especially in districts with low numbers of English learners, to have paraeducators, rather than ESOL-certified teachers, work with English learners (Echevarria, 2006; Rueda, Monzó, & Higareda, 2004). Although some paraeducators are bilingual and can serve as linguistic and cultural negotiators for English learners, many do not have expertise in teaching English *or* in specific subject areas. Since the designated EL teacher or paraeducator may have little specific training in language acquisition and is unlikely to have in-depth expertise in all subject areas, he or she is likely to be less prepared than general education teachers to support English learners' academic, cognitive, or linguistic needs.

An additional concern is that many English language programs set minimum standards for competence in English as exit criteria and few consider the English learners' readiness to learn content without support (Hakuta, 2011; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Even in districts that provide strong programs for English learners, students are often exited from them before their language skills reach levels necessary for academic success in English-only classrooms (Genesee, 1994; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005; Hakuta, 2011; Himmele & Himmele, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 2002). A lack of support beyond English language classes is associated with high dropout rates for English learners (Thomas & Collier, 2002), and those who graduate often do not have the skills comparable to their English-dominant peers (Hakuta, 2011).

A number of studies have demonstrated that the time required

for English learners to gain oral competence in English under ideal conditions ranges from three to seven years (Cummins, 2001; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). However, many states limit English language support to two or three years. English proficiency, especially if the focus is only on oral proficiency, is a low bar for high school graduates (Hakuta, 2011). An equitable education for English learners would address their cognitive, academic, and social needs as well as their development of English reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Genesee, 1994; Ovando & Combs, 2011).

Many experts in second language acquisition theory point out the benefits of offering interesting, contextualized academic content in language-rich classrooms designed to serve English learners and their English-dominant peers (Gibbons, 2002; Himmele & Himmele, 2009; McKeon, 1994; Rigg & Allen, 1989; Walqui & Lier, 2010). Instead of a "sink or swim" approach or waiting to have English learners join their peers after achieving strong proficiencies in English, English learners can simultaneously acquire English and subject-area knowledge and skills while also developing authentic relationships with English-dominant peers. Language-rich classes provide opportunities to use English for real purposes and for positive interactions with people who speak English well—powerful motivators in support of language acquisition (Cummins, 1994; Rigg & Allen, 1989; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Contradictory to their beliefs, general education teachers are in the best position to educate English learners effectively. General education teachers are the subject-area experts and are in positions to use their authority in ways that meet the needs of English learners and English-dominant students in the same classrooms. General education teachers do, however, need exposure to theory, research, curriculum, and instructional practices that support, rather than impede, English learners' progress.

Good Intentions Are Not Enough

The purpose behind a semester of observing in Sam's class was to gain insight on how a teacher might transform Freirean beliefs into democratic classroom practices. I interviewed the teacher weekly for a semester, observed the class daily, and interviewed most students in the class. Sam's teacher had more than 25 years of teaching experience, regularly challenged stereotypical thinking about teaching and learning, and prioritized listening to students. He chose to teach ninth graders during the first semester because the department's policy to not track English language arts classes until the second semester ensured he would have a diverse group of students.

He preferred to teach classes with English learners studying with

English-dominant students because of the different experiences the English learners could contribute. He valued their knowledge and regularly used open discussion as a means to create space for students to share views without intervention from the teacher.

> Students come up and lead the discussion, and I get to sit in the back of the room. And generally students do a very good job, and kids will raise their hands. They'll talk: the conversation is spontaneous, and I get to sit and think. (Gourd, 1998, p. 251)

Indeed, students' comments were generally favorable. For example, "He's an above average teacher because he keeps you interested" (OJ in Gourd, 1998, p. 266). "You can say what you think, and you don't even have to raise your hand" (Nicole in Gourd, 1998, p. 266). "He gives you a lot of freedom" (Sid in Gourd, 1998, p. 266). Yet Sam and many other English learners sat silent in the classroom.

Sam's teacher wanted to respect students and to provide greater learning opportunities for students by removing himself from discussions as much as possible. He allowed students to speak without raising their hands and prized the times students responded to their peers' comments rather than waiting for him to respond or to select which students could respond to a point. To ensure a respectful, trusting setting for dialogue, the teacher intervened *only* when a student was being disrespectful to another student during oral exchanges.

According to some students, particularly the three students most frequently identified by students as "talkers" in the class, the teacher's approach positively affected their participation in class and consequently increased their learning. John, a student with mixed heritage (Japanese/European), summarized that in this class "we learn; in other classes we get taught" (Gourd, 1998, p. 265). However, Sam rarely participated in class activities and talked (in a whisper) to only a couple of his peers before, during, or after class. He sat in the back of the room, usually in the same corner. His voice was not heard, and Sam's voice was not the only voice *not* heard during open discussion. Kailin, a Vietnamese American member of the class, praised the open environment, yet did not speak in class. "You don't feel pressured to think one way … I don't talk in this class but I feel I could" (Kailin in Gourd, 1998, p. 266).

Sam's teacher chose to use an open-discussion format as a means to empower students. He cited three principles based in democratic education that supported his curricular and instructional decisions related to open discussion:

1. Centering issues related to race, class, and gender in the curriculum;
2. Respecting students by giving them choices in order to develop trust; and
3. Building community as an important first step in teaching. (Gourd, 1998)

Among the choices Sam's teacher regularly gave students was the choice to decide to speak or not speak during class discussions. If he called on students, he always allowed them to "pass"—to choose not to respond.

Most students interviewed from this particular ninth-grade language arts class overwhelmingly claimed that the open-discussion format created opportunities for student learning by establishing an atmosphere of trust. They reported that student trust led to greater student participation, and student participation affected the curricular content, student and teacher relationships, and students' relationships with each other. Indeed, most students (including English learners and English-dominant students) spoke positively of the class, describing it as more open and inviting than other classes.

Students also overwhelmingly agreed that the *same* students *volunteered* to be the first to respond to the teacher's questions and points. Other students, often those sitting in the back, were not obviously involved in the class discussions. Many of these students (but not all) were English learners and they realized that not volunteering affected how the teacher and peers viewed them. Many students also had concern that their "not talking" would have negative consequences, even though the consequences were not made explicit. For other students, the open-discussion format appeared to be inclusive. The contradiction in perspectives is represented in the epigraph at the start of this article.

Sam dropped by just as I was beginning an after-school interview with Anne, and she invited Sam to join us. Anne was a high academic achiever who daily sat near the center front in class. Although she was not generally the first person to respond to prompts, she regularly made comments and was recognized by her peers and the teacher as an active participant. Sam and Anne had been classmates for nearly two months; however, they had not spoken to each other until the unplanned, joint interview. Indeed, Anne literally had never previously heard Sam's voice. She did not know he could speak English.

Tom, a European American male, and OJ, a mixed-heritage male (both mentioned by Sam in the epigraph), could be counted on ev-

ery day to be among the first to speak in a discussion. Other students (English learners and native users of English) easily identified Tom and OJ as "people who talk." Because they often spoke first, they generally set the direction of class discussions. Tom, OJ, and a few others enthusiastically participated in discussions without raising their hands. They appeared not to notice their classmates' raised hands.

Tom and OJ, who also interviewed with me, described remaining quiet as a freedom. They respected the rights of other students to remain quiet, implying that they did not think less of others for making choices different from their own and implying that the situation of some students participating more than others was normal and to be expected. In fact, Tom and OJ appeared magnanimous as they emphasized it was a right of individuals to not participate. Tom and OJ, from their perspectives, were taking up the slack without complaining.

Tom and OJ also stated that their participation in class discussions increased their learning. However, they did not connect their enthusiastic behavior during open discussion to their peers' lack of participation and, therefore, to reduced opportunities for their peers to learn. They appeared unaware that their behavior compromised their peers' "choices." The teacher regularly emphasized "students' choices" as important to their education. However, when interviewed, students who were quiet in class presented alternative views to Tom's and OJ's views.

For example, Roger and Barbie, both native users of English, voiced concern that their lack of participation in class discussions affected their relationships with the teacher, which in turn could affect their grades because the teacher clearly valued participation in discussions. "Sometimes I worry that the class is a lot on participation because I don't—sometimes I won't … sometimes I'm not feeling like saying something. … I'm kind of worried that sometimes grades are based on that" (Barbie in Gourd, p. 279). Roger also had concern about his grade but mentioned "trust" as well. "I don't know if he trusts me. I don't know because I don't talk much in class so I'm not sure if he trusts me" (Roger in Gourd, 1998, p. 267).

Although Roger and Barbie did not mention missed opportunities for learning, they identified possible negative consequences connected to not participating in class discussions. They also appeared to accept the dominant ideology that it was their "choice" to participate or not; they, not the teacher, had the responsibility to ensure their voices were heard. They did not articulate why they did not participate in discussions. In contrast, several English learners (not all but clearly the majority) described their lack of participation as due to the lack of opportunity to participate *because* the teacher did not call on them.

Sam liked the teacher and thought this language arts class was better than his other classes. However, Sam pointed out that open discussion was an insufficient strategy if we want to hear diverse perspectives. The open-discussion format allowed the same participants to determine what was discussed, what perspectives were shared, and consequently, who would be understood to be knowers.

Had a larger range of students started or participated in discussions, perhaps a larger range of issues would have been discussed. For example, I observed that gender issues were discussed frequently in Sam's class, but issues related to race, culture, language, or socioeconomic status were seldom discussed, and when one of these issues surfaced, it did not become a focus despite the fact that the class was racially, culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse. My observations were confirmed when I asked students to name the topics they discussed in the class. They mentioned gender, siblings, and learning. The teacher also acknowledged that these were the topics most frequently discussed. He was not concerned because the students, not he, had determined what the relevant issues were in their lives.

But who had determined which issues were relevant for discussion? Many voices were not heard, and consequently, the content appeared "sanitized" and "minimized" (Cummins, 2004, p. xvii). Rather than critically considering diverse perspectives, students who felt entitled and empowered by the open-discussion format dominated the discussion and reinforced the status quo (Cummins, 2004; Fairclough, 1989; Freire & Macedo, 1995). Rather than a robust curriculum, some students experienced a "feel-good comfort zone" as described by Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379). Sam did not make a single comment during class for the entire semester. In contrast to Roger and Barbie, however, he was adamant that it was the teacher's responsibility to ensure all students were included in discussion.

Students who did not speak during discussions were not known by either the teacher or by other students (White, 2011). Sam's concern was not focused on his course grade but rather focused on his status in the classroom as a "not knower" (Freire, 1998). Sam pointed out that the teacher and his peers did not know him because he did not raise his hand to say what he was thinking. They thought he was *not* smart or did *not* know how to speak English. They thought he had nothing to contribute to class discussions.

Sam stated that because he was not known, his peers and teachers were forced to rely on stereotypes. However, these stereotypes did not describe who he was. Sam explained that he was not just a boy from Laos, or a boy who did not know English, or a quiet boy who sat in the

corner. Sam clearly understood the complexity of his identity and how he could have positively contributed to classroom discussions. He was disappointed in the teacher because he had not taken responsibility for ensuring all students were included in the discussions. When asked why he had not raised his hand or spoken up, Sam explained that he could not volunteer because in school the teacher calls [should call] on students to speak. Sam and the teacher were operating from different cultural views, and despite the teacher's good intentions, Sam's choices were compromised by the class's participation structure. The teacher's good intentions silenced and excluded Sam.

Sometimes English learners may *choose* not to participate because they are not skilled or confident in English. However, some students' cultural or familial backgrounds do not support an open discussion in a classroom setting and they remain silent, and sometimes the structure of the school or class prevents them from participating (Nieto, 1995; Nieto & Bode, 2011; SooHoo, 1993). Some students, particularly English learners, need to be specifically invited by the teacher to speak. Bud (Vietnamese American female) explains,

> In my history of school, I'd sit there and I would know the answer, but there's all these other kids who are so eager to answer it, so I let them answer it and the, you know, because of teachers not calling—see, teachers see that you don't raise your hand, and they don't call on you, and they think that you don't know the answer, or you don't have an opinion. And sometimes when a teacher would just call on you at random, I would answer the questions and they would be really surprised. But here, the teacher knows that everybody has an opinion, it's just that not everybody can raise their hand, and he can't call on everybody. So when you like hold up Nicole or me at random, I like that, because I don't want to raise my hand all the time. (Gourd, 1998, p. 135)

Even when they have something to say, are capable of saying it, and recognize the negative consequences of their silence, some students are unlikely to speak unless pushed to do so. Several students, in addition to Bud and Sam, pointed out that they wanted to speak but did not want to volunteer. The act of volunteering was a deterrent to participation, and consequently, Sam, an adolescent with a keen mind, was allowed to sit not known for an entire semester.

Empowering Student Voices Through Inclusive Practices

Fairclough (1989) connected turn taking to language, power, and critical consciousness. Language is a primary social function that both

reflects and creates power relations. We expect the person or persons who have the most authority or social capital to use language to control a discussion, further increasing the speaker's or speakers' authority or social capital. Fairclough pointed out that positions of power are earned through the use of language, not by a greater level of wisdom; however, what is most frequently espoused is likely to become conventional wisdom. When teachers attempt to equalize power relations in the classroom setting by removing themselves from discussions (e.g., intending to transfer power to students), power will not automatically be distributed evenly to all students (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Yosso, 2005). The students who volunteer may have misinformed knowledge or limited views that, if left unchallenged, may be adopted by others.

According to Fairclough (1989), recognizing the reciprocal relationship between language and power is evidence of the human capacity for critical consciousness, and, once we are critically aware, we can use interventions such as imposed turn taking during discussion to distribute power to group members. When teachers ensure shared opportunities for voices to be heard, opportunities to disrupt dominant ideologies such as stereotypes or misconceptions are created (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Explicitly addressing issues of power among students also provides opportunities for students' critical consciousness to be raised—that is, they can learn to reject discrimination and limiting preconceptions of others based in racism, sexism, classism, and ability (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Freire, 1998; Mulcahy, 2008). For example, in the video *Off-Track* (Fine, Anand, Jordan, & Sherman, 1998), teachers provided an inclusive, discussion-based curriculum, and students learned to see the brilliance of their peers and to recognize that "there are different kinds of smarts." On the other hand, if teachers deny their authority, instead of supporting democratic practices and educating students to think differently about critical issues, they support dominant ideology by creating a "feel-good comfort zone" for some students while ignoring topics of immediate relevance to other students (Fairclough, 1989; Freire & Macedo, 1995; Yosso, 2005).

Some teachers acquiesce their authority, as Sam's teacher did, assuming that if they prioritize giving students choice and developing a safe community, Freirean *dialogue* will emerge. Others may avoid inclusive discussion because the more diverse voices included in a classroom, the more likely controversy will emerge. To many people, controversy signals disrespect and discomfort. However, others (e.g., Cummins, 2004; Hess, 2010) have argued that controversy is a typical component of a democracy. If educators do not prepare students to talk across differences, they fail to prepare students for life in a democ-

racy (Hess, 2009). Because US citizens are more likely to live, work, socialize, and attend religious ceremonies with people who have views similar to their own, they are unlikely to gain communication skills necessary for a democracy outside a classroom setting (Hess, 2009).

Furthermore, Cummins (2004) argued for a curriculum that trusts students to be critical thinkers able to understand themselves, their peers, and world issues and to gain the skills necessary to communicate and act with respect despite differences in perspectives. Cummins explained that individual educators have a "central role … in nurturing and shaping the lives and identities of our youth" (p. xvii). Democracies are not free of controversy. Avoiding controversy in classrooms is synonymous with avoiding responsibility as a teacher to educate: Only individuals who represent the dominant group will be heard (White, 2011). Dominant ideologies will be supported, not challenged. Rather than providing an environment open to all, an open-discussion format is likely to further marginalize voices (Nieto & Bode, 2011; White, 2011).

In Sam's class, controversy seldom emerged, not because it did not exist but rather because students could keep their views to themselves, and those who spoke with authority were not challenged as long as they were not hurtful to others. All students missed opportunities to hear diverse perspectives, to challenge oppression, and to act as allies to peers who have specific needs—all components of an inclusive curriculum based on equity (Sapon-Shevin, 2003; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Without structured turn taking, students missed opportunities to acquire skills fundamental to a democracy.

Strategies for equitable participation opportunities include using structured small-group work in which all students have important roles (Allport, 1954; Cohen & Lotan, 2014). As Cohen and Lotan (2014) pointed out, teachers can raise the status of English learners and other students frequently marginalized in general education classrooms by designing complex group work that addresses subject-area content *and* power relations within the group. Teachers can publicly acknowledge an English learner's expertise (e.g., as a cultural informant or as having specific content knowledge) and thereby disrupt the dominant ideology that those who speak languages other than English have less to offer than those who speak English.

During large-group discussions, teachers can use systems (e.g., using equity sticks) to determine who will speak next, or the teacher can restrict speakers from making second comments until everyone else in the class or group has contributed. Teachers can also insert their voices by saying, "I'd like to come back to a point made that may not have gotten the attention it deserved" or "I am not sure I under-

stand your meaning. Can you say more?" A teacher may intervene by asking everyone to question who is represented by the ideas being expressed.

Teachers can also create opportunities to point out the value of bilingualism and multiculturalism, structure activities in which English learners' knowledge is critical to an activity (Cohen & Lotan, 2014), and provide students opportunities to teach their peers (Palincsar & Klenk, 1992). Strategies of this type address a full range of skills supportive of individuals' development of English, subject-area expertise, a sense of belonging, and skills required for active participation in the classroom community.

Research by Cohen and Lotan (2014) and Palincsar & Klenk (1992) found that as teachers explicitly model strategies to include all students in meaningful discussion, they convey expectations that students will develop and use inclusive skills themselves. Although initially, structured participation may feel awkward or stifling, with practice inclusive discussions can lead to high levels of authentic participation (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Palincsar & Klenk, 1992).

Democratic Classrooms

Sam reminds us that democratic classrooms are built on dialogue (Freire, 1998; Freire & Macedo, 1995) and require communication that includes active listening (Freire, 1998), negotiation (Nussbaum, 1997), questioning (Freire, 1998), and deliberation (Hess, 2009). Open discussion is insufficient to achieve the goal of raising a range of issues or of having diverse voices represented. Indeed, unstructured, open discussion may increase stereotypes or cause individuals to rely on stereotypes (White, 2011). Treating all students with respect should mean all students have opportunities to participate in class discussions.

Many preservice and experienced in-service teachers silence student voices because they worry that requiring students, especially those who may not be comfortable using English, to speak in front of their English-dominant peers will embarrass them and make them uncomfortable (White, 2011). Of course, it is important for educators to gauge students' level of anxiety, but silencing students in order to support their level of comfort in the class is a contradiction. As Sam and his peers point out, students who are silenced are not likely to feel respected by teachers or peers.

Sam and his quiet peers recognized that they needed to participate in class for their own good. It was the teacher who had not yet understood this. In addition, students who tend to dominate class participation, such as Tom and OJ in Sam's classroom, can benefit

from learning a full range of communication skills rather than merely dominating talking opportunities. Students need help from their teachers to become active in classes and to be inclusive of others, and many students appreciate teachers who challenge them to acquire a full range of participation skills (Cushman, 2003).

However, traditional beliefs, such as "students have the right to not participate" and "English learners will be embarrassed by their English," will continue to underpin practice unless these beliefs are subjected to critical examination. Questions that acknowledge the complexity of status, power, authority, language, and identity need to be asked daily. Who is talking? Who is not talking and why? Whose perspective is missing from the conversation? Have all students been heard? What assumptions have we made? How can we value and support the language and content knowledge of all students? To provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, teachers need to reconceptualize their role in the education of English learners.

The open-discussion format did not result in all students' inclusion in class discussions. Including *all* voices could raise the consciousness of peers and teachers, while also opening the space for views to be challenged. Initially, students may be reluctant to share their experiences, perhaps concerned that others will not be interested in them, or they may believe that sharing their experiences will further isolate them from peers (White, 2011). Yet once students start hearing the voices of others, they can gain a greater sense of themselves and their peers (Shor, 1992). Anne's response to Sam's comments serves as an example. Rather than defending her earlier position that "everybody in the class had spoken up," Anne shifted her position and acknowledged that many students had not spoken up. Hearing Sam speak up for the first time helped her recognize the inequity in the class structure. Her perspective changed through the course of the joint interview.

The goal, of course, is that the teacher's control of participation structures can be relaxed as the group members acquire sensitivity, critical awareness, and self-monitoring skills and regularly apply these skills without the guidance of the teacher (Palincsar & Klenk, 1992). However, acquiring these skills takes years of practice and effort in various contexts. Teachers need to be persistent in holding students and themselves accountable to principles of inclusion.

Sam's description of his experiences in an intentionally progressive, general education language arts class provides a compelling argument from a student's perspective. By understanding Sam's experiences, we can more fully understand how curriculum and instructional strategies affect status and power relations in small- and large-group discussions. However, assessment of student learning is an additional

reason for teachers to recognize their responsibility to ensure all students are heard in the classroom (White, 2011).

When teachers are not systematically hearing from particular students, fair, ongoing assessment is compromised. Teachers have less accurate data and, therefore, are less able to meet the specific needs of students. If an English learner sits quietly throughout class, the teacher is not getting clues about what he or she knows or has learned relative to content or language. In contrast, when a teacher directly asks an English learner to make a comment relative to a point made by a peer, an exchange of information results.

For example, if an English learner is asked to respond to a peer's point but did not understand the comment, the teacher is made aware of the need to have the point repeated or further explained. The English learners and other students would learn that English learners are valued by the teacher and that needing to hear points repeated or more fully explained is OK, while the teacher can become more aware of the students', including English learners', skills and needs.

When English learners' voices are not heard during discussion, teachers also miss opportunities to more fully understand the students' discipline-specific knowledge. Discipline-specific knowledge is most often assessed through writing and in context-reduced formats, making it difficult for some English learners to convey what they understand. When writing is the only, or the primary, means for assessing subject-specific knowledge, three other skill areas (listening, speaking, and reading) that might provide additional information are overlooked. Learners can be shortchanged because what they actually know may be missed by the limited approach to assessment.

Conclusion

The participation structure for discussion in classrooms is a valuable tool that can either support or undermine students' educational opportunities. Participation structures affect all students and all aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and educators must guard against seemingly good intentions that produce outcomes contradictory to those intentions (Milner, 2006). We need to ask questions about who is benefited and who is hurt by classroom policies and practices and take the necessary steps to ensure all voices are regularly heard and respected (White, 2011).

Reconceptualizing the role of the teacher in a democratic classroom discussion acknowledges the authority of teachers to ensure that English learners are academically and socially included in general education classrooms, while also ensuring that all students acquire skills fundamental to a democracy. The skills necessary to ensure eq-

uitable participation of students in class discussions are basic skills for leading discussions, not esoteric, specialized practices that only a few experts can acquire. Indeed, these skills are most valuable in general education classrooms.

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