Offering or Limiting Opportunities: Teachers' Roles and Approaches to English-Language Learners' Participation in Literacy Activities

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Teachers can act as supports or constraints on ELLs' active participation in the mainstream classroom, depending on their teaching approaches.

In one classroom, Mr. Brown (all names are pseudonyms) wrote on the board, "What happened to our team?" when the local football team lost a game. While many of their classmates began a lively discussion about the reasons, such as a quarterback's mistake, Natasha and Jun kept silent. In another classroom, Ana responded to Mrs. Young's encouragement and talked softly: "I wrote a letter in Russian under the candlelight and mailed it to my friend." Mrs. Young responded to Ana by saying, "Cool," and added, "It is impressive that you can write in Russian and in English." Ana showed a light smile on her face.

During my observation of Mr. Brown, Mrs. Young, and the English-language learners (ELLs) in their regular classrooms over one semester, I noticed that the two reading and language arts teachers' pedagogical approaches and interactions with the students were played out in very different ways. The ELLs' participation in both classes fluctuated according to how the teachers approached them. The ELLs were usually quiet and silent in the class of Mr. Brown, who often excluded them unintentionally from learning events by employing U.S. popular culture. However, the ELLs in Mrs. Young's classroom participated more actively when she used multicultural topics and attempted to provide different learning opportunities by including the students in literacy activities. The ELLs in Mrs. Young's class worked well with the native English-speaking classmates, who appeared to follow Mrs. Young's model of interaction with the ELLs. The ELLs in Mr. Brown's classroom, however, did not interact well with their mainstream peers, who held a sort of "hidden power" over the ELLs and resisted working with them. Although the two teachers shared the same lesson plans, the classroom dynamics were entirely different. This observation made me wonder about the teachers' roles and approaches to the ELLs' participation in literacy activities.

Background of the Study

As more ELLs spend time in the mainstream classroom, reading teachers' concerns to better support their students' participation have increased. Research indicates (e.g., Harklau, 2000; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995) that ELLs' English proficiency is a major indication of their participation in literacy activities. Although this implication helps reading teachers focus on meeting the students' linguistic needs, it may not help them understand that more complex issues are involved in ELLs' participation in literacy learning (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006).

Several studies (e.g., Miller, 1999, 2000; Norton, 2000; Pappamihiel, 2002; Yoon, 2004) suggest that ELLs' participation in literacy learning needs to be understood from cultural and social aspects. Miller

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(1999, 2000) noted that mainstream contexts can create social tensions for ELLs. These students' anxiety level is much higher in the mainstream classroom compared to the ESL classroom (Pappamihiel, 2002). ELLs perceive themselves as members of subordinate groups in the mainstream classroom (Yoon, 2004). In this context, ELLs are more sensitive to a teacher's approach to them and their mainstream peers' attitudes. For teaching success, it is essential that reading teachers carefully consider and understand ELLs' cultural and social positioning in the mainstream classroom.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) provides a framework for reading teachers to meet ELLs' cultural and social needs and to better support the students' participation in literacy events. Ladson-Billings (1994) noted that the concept of cultural relevance "moves beyond language to include other aspects of student and school culture. Thus culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it" (p. 17). Culturally relevant teaching emphasizes teachers' attempts to have culturally and linguistically diverse students sustain their own cultural values instead of assimilating mainstream cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994).

Culturally relevant teaching focuses on the way teachers teach. It holds that teaching influences the way that students perceive the curriculum. Ladson-Billings (1995) explored effective teachers who realized culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. Some teachers were stricter and some teachers were more casual in their teaching methods. One common feature among these varied teaching styles, however, was that all the teachers offered, rather than limited, students' opportunities to participate in literacy activities. They included all of the students as learners in meaningful contexts rather than excluding some of them as outsiders. The teachers demonstrated a connectedness with *all* of their students by building a trusting relationship and accommodating each student's academic, cultural, and social needs through their teaching approaches. Instead of devaluing individual students' differences, the teachers respected them. By valuing students' cultural and social needs, the culturally relevant pedagogy implies how English-language learners need to be served in order to be engaged in learning and be successful in the classroom.

Under the lens of culturally relevant teaching, I present the dynamics of two classrooms in which the reading and language arts teachers interacted with their ELLs. The central purpose of this article is to discuss the teachers' approaches to teaching, with a special focus on offering or limiting opportunities for the ELLs' participation in literacy learning. By looking at four focal ELLs' participatory behaviors and interaction with their teachers and mainstream peers, this article aims to help reading teachers become aware of their roles and teaching practices as supports or constraints on ELLs' active participation in the mainstream classroom.

The Process of Data Collection and Analysis

As a researcher, I collected data at a middle school in western New York, USA. When I first contacted the English as a second language (ESL) teacher, I found that there were four teachers with ELLs in their reading and language arts class. Mr. Brown and Mrs. Young were among the teachers willing to participate in my study. I visited the teachers' classrooms for observation almost every day, Monday through Friday, over one semester, staying about two hours in each class. The teachers taught reading, language arts, and social studies in a block schedule, with each block lasting about two hours. At least four one-hour long formal interviews and several informal interviews with the teachers were conducted. Two formal interviews and several informal interviews were completed with the four focal ELLs. All formal interviews with the teachers and the students were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

After I observed the ELLs in Mr. Brown's and Mrs. Young's classrooms, I observed all of them again in the ESL class in the afternoon to speculate on the degree of their participation. My role as an observer differed according to the situation. I functioned as a nonparticipant observer when the teachers were conducting their lessons. I wrote field notes while sitting in the corner of each classroom. However, I was a participating observer when some students asked for help by looking at me and raising their hands while the teachers were busy helping other students. I observed my focal students from a distance when they did small-group work or pair work, sitting to the side of the group or pair. Sometimes, I observed them from farther away to watch their interaction with their peers and the teachers.

I also collected the teachers' lesson plans and the ELLs' projects to triangulate the teachers' teaching approaches and the degree of the students' participation. Because I was attempting to capture the dynamics of the classrooms, focusing on the teachers' practices and the focal students' participatory behaviors, I took field notes during the teachers' class. I audiotaped classroom observations and cross-checked them with the field notes that were typed on a daily basis. The audiotaped classroom observations were transcribed, focusing on the interactions between the teachers and the focal students.

I analyzed my data based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding strategies, Spradley's (1980) taxanomic analysis, and Merriam's (1998) case study analysis. In particular, I attempted to search for more inclusive domains to explain the teachers' pedagogical approaches in relation to ELLs' participation in the classroom. Culturally relevant teaching contrasted with an assimilationist approach and offered a lens through which I could analyze the teachers' approaches toward "American monoculturalism" or "multiculturalism." The observation data of the students' participation were constantly analyzed by comparing the interview data. When the interview data supported my observation data, I added them to the categories of my study. For example, one of my focal students' behaviors and participations were markedly different, depending on the context. Sometimes he looked confident and spoke with a loud voice and a big smile. But sometimes he looked isolated, such as when working alone when he could not find a partner. I analyzed the student's participation as active or passive when the student disclosed his feelings during an interview as "I was excited" or "I just don't feel like it."

The Profiles of the Teachers and the ELLs

Mr. Brown, who is in his late 20s, and Mrs. Young, who is in her late 40s, are European Americans. Both of the teachers had many commonalities: They were sixth-grade teachers and shared the same lesson plans. Mr. Brown and Mrs. Young had six years of teaching experience and received their bachelor's degrees in elementary education (K–6) and master's degrees in reading. All sixth-grade ELLs were assigned to Team 6—the same team to which the teachers belonged. Mrs. Young and Mr. Brown had no professional development regarding ELLs after they were hired. Both of the teachers had two English-language learners in their reading, language arts, and social studies classes.

Mr. Brown worked with 25 students in his classroom: 20 European American, 3 African American, 1 Korean, and 1 Russian. Natasha was from Russia and Jun was from South Korea. Natasha, who had been in the United States for one year, was in the beginning/intermediate ESL class. Jun had been in the United States for two years, and he was in the advanced ESL program. Mrs. Young had 26 students: 18 European American, 6 African American, 1 Korean, and 1 Russian. Among them, there were 6 special education students and 2 English-language learners: Dae and Ana. Dae was from South Korea, and Ana was from Russia. Both students were in the intermediate ESL class. Except for Jun, who received one period of the ESL program, the other three students received two periods of the ESL program a day. Outside of these one or two periods the students stayed in the mainstream classroom and received the same instruction as other children.

The Dynamics of the Classrooms

Mr. Brown's Teaching Approaches: Unaware of ELLs' Needs

Mr. Brown, who viewed himself as a teacher for general education students, focused on American monocultural approaches (See Table 1). He rarely played an active role to assist ELLs' participation in the classroom. In an interview, Mr. Brown mentioned that he wanted his ELLs to view him as a model English speaker:

> I have never seen myself as an ESL teacher. I don't do a lot of special things for my ESL students. I don't. I don't know how bad it is [laughs].... I work hard with them [ELLs] as much as they are willing to, but I don't teach specifically for them.... I think the ESL teacher's job is to make their time beneficial.

Mr. Brown did not assume full responsibility for teaching ELLs. The English-language learners were simply there in Mr. Brown's classroom listening to what he was saying. Mr. Brown rarely approached the ELLs in his classroom unless they asked for help. He

Table 1
Mr. Brown's Classroom

Teacher's view of role	Teaching approaches	Classroom dynamics	ELLs' participatory behaviors	Mainstream students' participatory behaviors
Teacher works for general education students.	Teacher is unaware of ELLs' cultural and social needs.	Mainstream students are highly interactive with one another.	ELLs are passive, isolated, and powerless.	Mainstream students resist ELLs' participation.
Teacher does not have full responsibility for teaching ELLs.	Teacher uses discussion-based approach focusing on American culture.	Mainstream students have hidden power.		

seldom called on them to share their experiences or ideas in a whole-group discussion. Mr. Brown led his class in a student-centered, democratic way. (I define *democratic* here generally, such as following the opinion of the majority and allowing individuals a choice and respecting it.) Mr. Brown provided students with choice. His students could choose what partners to work with and express their opinions when they wanted to. This teacher rarely forced his students to answer questions that he posed. To talk or not to talk was the student's choice, and Mr. Brown respected it.

The teacher conducted a number of whole-group or small-group discussions throughout the semester. He focused on discussion-based approaches with an emphasis on American culture. During a whole-group discussion, Mr. Brown usually started the week with topics popular in American culture, such as television shows and football games. For example, Mr. Brown mentioned in class on Thursday morning that "Today is *Survivor* Thursday." The majority of the students raised their hands to show him they were going to watch *Survivor*. However, the two ELLs, Jun and Natasha, did not raise their hands.

The next day, after Mr. Brown wrote, "Drake vs. Morgan" on the board, he brought out a piece of cardboard that had the pictures of each individual on the *Survivor* teams and crossed off the players who were eliminated from the team. Putting the picture on the board in front of the classroom, the teacher and the students speculated about which team members were going to survive until the end. While most of their mainstream peers were highly interactive and excited about the issues, Natasha and Jun did not engage in the dialogue and simply listened to their peers' talk. Natasha appeared to be bored, touching her hair and rolling her eyes.

Again, when Mr. Brown brought up American football games for a whole-group discussion, Natasha and Jun did not participate. Both of the students said that they did not watch the game. Jun said he was not interested in American football games and did not know the rules. Natasha mentioned that she did not have time to watch television programs due to her heavy load of homework every day.

Mr. Brown focused on American culture during other classroom activities too, using supplementary materials such as a local newspaper and a magazine for middle school students. For example, Mr. Brown initiated a discussion by asking his students in his reading class on a Monday morning, "Did you read Sunday's paper?" Many of his students shared what they read. Several students talked about "abuse." The issue of domestic abuse was lively discussed among the students. Natasha and Jun, however, did not participate in the dialogue. Natasha appeared puzzled while listening to her classmates. Natasha asked, in an interview with me, "What is the Sunday's paper?" Jun said that his family did not subscribe to the local newspaper.

Mr. Brown also encouraged his students to bring in bottle caps from popular beverages because they contained "facts" on the flipside. The students who brought the caps could read the facts to the whole class. Two examples of the facts that his students read included, "Hawaii is the only U.S. state that grows coffee" and "The state of Maine has 62 lighthouses." Although many of the students did have opportunities to share the facts with their classmates, Natasha and Jun had no opportunity to read in front of their

classmates over the semester. They never brought in any of the caps. Both of the students mentioned they had never drunk the beverages from which the caps came.

The unintentional consequence of using American cultural references was that it disengaged the ELLs from the lessons. In any of the contexts—whether Mr. Brown used the U.S. cultural references in warm-up activities or in main activities—he did not offer the ELLs opportunities to share their own cultural references. Mr. Brown's teaching approaches targeted American culture to interest students and did not open possibilities for the ELLs to participate in the learning events. In other words, he limited opportunities for the students to be engaged in the meaningful dialogue by accommodating the mainstream students but excluding the ELLs.

ELLs as Passive Participants

The ELLs positioned themselves as quiet and isolated in Mr. Brown's classroom—a place in which he allowed his students unrestricted interaction with one another but did not elicit ELLs' interactions with their mainstream classmates. The mainstream students resisted accepting the ELLs as legitimate partners.

The two students, Jun and Natasha, looked nervous and uneasy throughout the semester. They rarely presented their ideas in whole-class discussions. Even when they did, they spoke with soft voices. While many of their American peers sitting on a rug exchanged their ideas, these two students usually listened at their desks without coming down to the rug. Jun, in particular, showed a very different attitude toward participation in Mr. Brown's class as compared to the ESL class. Mr. Brown and the ESL teacher's comments about him were entirely different. Mr. Brown commented, "Jun is very quiet. He seems to be shy. He rarely participates." The ESL teacher expressed different opinions. She said, "Jun is very active. His participation is great. He is very funny." An ESL student teacher also described Jun as an animated student who never lost his smile in the ESL classroom. Jun supported these teachers' comments. His statements illustrated his different participation in Mr. Brown's class: "I don't want to talk in this class. Why? I don't know. I just don't feel like it. In ESL, I talk a lot, as you know. I feel more comfortable there, but not in this class." Jun emphasized, "Not in this class." He did not state clearly the reason behind his silence, but his different participation provides an explanation for his differing comfort zones in Mr. Brown's class and the ESL class, which, in each case, affected his participation level.

The ELLs' different participation in the class appeared to be connected to their American peers' resistance. The non-ELLs positioned them as unacceptable members of the classroom community. Both students looked much more comfortable in a small-group than in a whole-class discussion. However, they were not confident enough to overcome some of their mainstream peers' resistance. Natasha was sitting with two boys and two girls for small-group work. After the group read about famous Egyptian leaders, they were busy writing the important characteristics of them. Natasha could not write a sentence, but nobody seemed to care about her difficulties. When Natasha showed her frustration by saying, "I could not follow you," one of the American girls said bluntly, "You didn't say you didn't understand," as if blaming Natasha for not being able to follow the conversation. Natasha did not challenge her status as an incapable person and remained quiet. She looked powerless. During the break, while most of the students went out to the restrooms, and Mr. Brown was in the hall to monitor them, Natasha approached me in the corner and disclosed her resentment by saying, "I don't like this group." She did not reveal her anger to the group but rather suppressed it. This incident shows that she sensed the mainstream students' hidden power over her. Natasha was usually viewed as an unwelcome partner. Another student sitting next to her (academically strong and characteristically nice, according to Mr. Brown) usually went to work with other friends. Natasha was usually unable to find a partner, and she often worked with special education students or the students who did not associate with other mainstream peers.

Jun also appeared to have difficulties working with his classmates. One day in September, Jun was looking for a partner to work with him. He was supposed to find a partner who had a similar interest in reading, such as the same favorite author. After he looked at his list, which had all of the students' reading preferences, including favorite authors and genres, he found two peers whose favorite author was Roald Dahl. Realizing one of the girls was absent that day, he slowly approached the one remaining girl, only to find out that she already had a partner to work with. Showing disappointment, he strolled back to his desk. Finally, after looking around the whole classroom, he

Table 2
Mrs. Young's Classroom

Teacher's view of role	Teaching approaches	Classroom dynamics	ELLs' participatory behaviors	Mainstream students' participatory behaviors
Teacher works for all students. Teacher has a strong responsibility for teaching ELLs.	Teacher embraces ELLs' cultural differences. Teacher encourages ELLs' participation. Teacher builds a community of learners.	Mainstream students support and encourage ELLs.	ELLs are active, confident, and powerful.	Mainstream students accept ELLs as legitimate members.

went to work with a boy (often cautioned by Mr. Brown for not turning in his homework) who was working alone. In an interview later, Jun expressed his frustration:

> I cannot find a partner. Everybody has a partner. They already have friends who they work with. Here is a pair, and there is a pair. It is hard for me to cut in. I don't have a friend to work with. The boy who I worked with did not have the same interest in reading with me. He likes R.L. Stine's Goosebumps, which is a scary story. I don't like that type of story. But I had no choice but to work with him. I wanted to work with one of the two students who likes Roald Dahl.

Jun said that he was fascinated by Roald Dahl's writing style and had read 22 of the author's works. Jun wanted to share his enthusiasm with someone who had the same interest, but he had to partner with a boy who had a different interest. By talking about an author that he had outgrown, Jun did not have opportunities to be involved in a more meaningful learning activity.

It was hard for Jun to be acknowledged by the mainstream students, who did not wish to treat him as a knowledgeable peer. For instance, during one of the reading and language arts classes, students were revising a piece of writing. I was looking around each group to see what they were writing. When I approached Jun's group, one boy asked me how to spell *deserves*. As soon as Jun heard it, he spelled it clearly and with confidence, *d-e-s-e-r-v-e-s*. The first boy looked at me with a doubtful face and asked whether it was right. I said, "Yes, it is correct." Referring to this incident, Jun later stated, "They don't trust me. They don't think I know a lot of words."

As shown in Natasha's and Jun's examples, some of the mainstream students' attitudes toward these students were not welcoming. Although Mr. Brown's class appeared to be highly interactive and student centered, the two ELLs were isolated during whole-group discussions and small-group work, even when working with a partner. ELLs' attempts to participate in literacy activities were often inhibited by the mainstream students' hidden power in Mr. Brown's classroom.

Mrs. Young's Teaching Approaches: Embracing ELLs' Needs

Mrs. Young's notion of her role and her teaching approaches contrasted directly with those of Mr. Brown (see Table 2). Mrs. Young demonstrated a strong responsibility for teaching ELLs. She engaged in many multicultural approaches by celebrating her ELLs' cultural and linguistic differences and by encouraging their participation by calling on them to share their experiences. Mrs. Young modeled through her teaching how the mainstream students should position ELLs as important members of the learning community.

Mrs. Young was a person who firmly believed that many of the world's problems could be solved through education, and she believed that teaching ELLs was her responsibility:

> I am a teacher of children. I don't care whether they are ESL, special ed., regular ed., gifted, or talented children. I did not sign on to be a teacher only to work with the brightest and the best. I signed on to work with all of

them.... I am supportive of their learning. They have to know I am approachable. They have to see me as someone who is willing to help them and able to move them forward.

Because Mrs. Young believed that teaching ELLs was her main responsibility, she attempted multiple ways of supporting the students' diverse needs in the classroom.

My close observation of her classroom showed that Mrs. Young used many intentional approaches to include ELLs in learning activities, to embrace their cultural differences, and to help them sustain their culture. When she noticed that her ELLs looked quiet and silent, she often invited them to join in classroom activities by allowing them to share their experiences. For example, Mrs. Young was reading aloud *The Leaving Morning* (Johnson, 1992) to her students to show how important it was to add feelings in their writing. The picture book was about a boy's sorrow and anxiety before departing for a new home. After reading aloud, Mrs. Young encouraged her students to share their experiences of moving. Some students talked about how scared they were when they moved from elementary school to middle school. One student said, "I had a butterfly in my stomach." Noticing that Ana was quiet, Mrs. Young encouraged her to share her feelings: "Do you want to share, Ana? How did you feel when you moved from Russia to the United States?" Ana replied, "I was OK. I wasn't scared." Mrs. Young responded to her, "Wow, you're so brave, Ana."

Mrs. Young's attempts to embrace her ELLs' cultural differences were consistent throughout the semester. She asked her ELLs questions such as, "How do you celebrate that? How do people feel about this? What are your traditions?" For instance, as Thanksgiving Day approached, Mrs. Young asked her ELLs whether they celebrated a similar holiday in their countries before she shared the story *The Thanksgiving Visitor* (Capote, 1997). Dae, who is from Korea, said "Yes" in an excited voice and talked about how Korean people eat a rice cake called *Songpyun*. Mrs. Young responded with a smile and added that she wished to have one.

During one of her language arts classes, Mrs. Young was modeling the process of revision for her students by using her own writing about her husband. After this process, many of her students showed interest in her personal story and asked several questions. One of the questions included the change of her last name. After Mrs. Young answered how she changed her last name, she added, "I understand that women in some countries don't change their family name." She asked Dae whether women in Korea followed their husband's last name. Dae, who had been quiet, responded, "No, they don't change it." Dae also added how his mother and father have different last names. These examples show how Mrs. Young provided Dae with opportunities to share his cultural differences and how Dae responded to her invitation. Mrs. Young's positioning of Dae as an important member of the class community offered him the right to participate in the activities.

Mrs. Young consistently worked to build a strong community of learners through pairing an ELL with a native English-speaking student who she knew would be supportive. Because her ELLs had to go to the ESL class in the middle of her two-hour block class, the ELLs missed many lessons. The classmates who were sitting next to Dae and Ana often explained to them what they missed. Sometimes, the classmates reminded Mrs. Young that the ELLs need the handouts that were distributed during their absence. The classmates were also willing to share their notebooks so the ELLs could copy what they missed. My interview transcripts indicate that Dae and Ana appreciated their peers' help. Dae said, "I ask Andrew when I need help and he help me." Ana told me, "Sandy is my second best friend. She is nice."

Mrs. Young emphasized that having ELLs feel as though they are part of the group in a class could not be accomplished by her alone. She believed that prompting English-speaking peers' understanding about other cultures was a way to help ELLs be a part of the community. To accomplish this, Mrs. Young usually talked about her experiences in another culture. For example, after reminding other students how hard it would be if they had to go to another country and study a language that was entirely new, she shared her experience in England, where she could not understand one man's heavy accent, even though he spoke in English. Mrs. Young also talked about her sister's experience in Japan. Her sister, who could not understand Japanese, was afraid to go outside. Mrs. Young provided these types of stories in the hope that it might be helpful for native English-speaking students to understand other cultures and the ELL's situation in a new environment.

The teacher's intention of having her ELLs share their opinions and positioning them as intellectual was not only for the benefit of ELLs but also for non–ELLs:

I want non–ESL kids to know that their beliefs and their cultures are different. I want them to understand and to

> enjoy and appreciate those things. If we don't, we are in big trouble. I don't want American children to think that Americans are better than Iraq or Iraqi children. Because that is not true.... I really enjoy having all the ESL kids on our team. It adds a dimension that we would not have otherwise.

Mrs. Young's teaching approaches allowed for all the students to benefit along with the ELLs. To Mrs. Young, teaching ELLs was not a frustration. ELLs' cultural differences were benefits for her class. Through her practices, Mrs. Young attempted to accommodate the ELLs' different cultural references rather than have them conform to American monoculture.

ELLs as Active Participants

The ELLs participated actively in Mrs. Young's classroom. They looked more comfortable and worked well with their mainstream peers. Given that the ELLs in her class were very quiet and rarely participated in their learning activities in the beginning of the semester, their altered participation feature was distinctive. The students' changed participation level appeared to be related to their peers' attitudes toward them. The mainstream peers were friendly to the ELLs. They asked the ELLs questions about their culture, praised their efforts, and helped one another. Encouraging and complimenting statements by their American peers, such as "It is cool," "Tell me more about your school," "Wow, you did a good job," and "Interesting," were commonly heard in Mrs. Young's class. For instance, Dae received 83% on a social studies test. He usually got under 70%. His American partner, who received 98%, encouraged Dae by saying, "Wow, you did a good job." Dae responded to the boy's encouragement with "Thank you." When I asked the boy later to explain his comments, he said, "He is Korean. English is not his language, but he did a wonderful job. It is amazing." The boy understood Dae's difficulties as a non–English-speaking person. Instead of viewing Dae as a poor student because he earned a lower grade, the boy saw Dae as a capable student.

The ELLs were engaged and participated more when their American peers showed interest and offered encouragement to them. Before reading aloud from the first chapter of the book *My Name Is Brain Brian* (Betancourt, 1995), which deals with students' school experiences, Mrs. Young asked about school differences in Korea and the United States. Responding to Mrs. Young's request, Dae talked about his school in Korea. He explained that school fighting is not taken seriously in Korea. Korean teachers do not deal with fighting, and they expect the students involved to solve the issue by themselves. After hearing that, Mrs. Young said, "That's interesting!" and some students said, "Wow, that's cool. I want to go to Korea." Excited by his peers' interest, Dae talked exuberantly to the group sitting with him, who wanted to hear more about it. After letting him talk for a while, Mrs. Young moved on to read aloud from the first chapter. Dae mentioned this incident when I asked about his feelings in an interview: "I was very happy they wanted to hear about Korean school.... I think Mrs. Young likes other cultures." Mrs. Young's encouragement of Dae to share his experience and her students' positioning of Dae as an important member of the group allowed him opportunities to participate in learning activities.

Ana, who was from Russia, also received friendly gestures from her peers. For instance, Ana's partner, who was sitting next to her, saw that Ana did not securely tape her 20 vocabulary cards on the file folder as part of her homework. As soon as Ana's partner saw this, she brought tape from the teacher's desk and helped Ana tape the cards firmly. In addition, one day, one of her American peers approached Ana and asked if she could come to her birthday party. Ana responded with a smile and told her that she would ask her mother. Ana's interview responses, which I obtained at the end of the semester, illustrated her comfort level working with her peers in Mrs. Young's class: "They are friendly and nice. Even though they don't understand me, they say, it's OK. They don't laugh at me." Her professed perceptions of her peers in Mrs. Young's class contrasted with those of peers in other classes. Ana disclosed her anger about one boy in her math class who kept calling her "Hey, Russian" on the school bus instead of calling her by name.

Ana's comfort level was also shown in her participation. Ana, who was quiet in the beginning of the year, frequently raised her hand to present ideas. Sometimes, she almost stood up from the chair, waving her hand, to be called on by Mrs. Young. For example, Ana shared her writing about her mother. Ana read her story about how her mother screamed at her because Ana did not want to eat too much so she could keep her slim body. Her mother was concerned about Ana, who, she thought, only cared about her appearance without considering her health. During a

Figure 1
Approaches That Facilitate ELLs' Participation in the Mainstream Classroom

- Showing interest in ELLs' culture
- Encouraging ELLs to share their cultural experiences
- Including ELLs as full participants
- Modeling how the teacher appreciates and embraces ELLs' cultural differences
- Encouraging mainstream students to support ELLs' learning in the classroom

break, while most of her peers left the classroom, Ana approached Mrs. Young and continued the story about her mother. Both Mrs. Young and Ana laughed while they were talking.

These examples indicate that the ELLs acted as powerful participants when they were accepted as a part of the community. The American peers appeared to follow Mrs. Young's model of interacting with the ELLs. In Mrs. Young's classroom, the ELLs improved their interaction with mainstream peers without losing their identity as powerful English-language learners. Mrs. Young's teaching approaches expanded the ELLs' participation in learning events.

What Have We Learned From the Findings?

In this article, I have attempted to report on the opportunities that Mr. Brown and Mrs. Young provided for the ELL students' participation rather than the direct impact of the teachers' pedagogical approaches on these students. These examples suggest the teachers play a vital role in offering them possibilities to participate in learning events. Although the factors that influence ELLs' participation are very complicated and cannot be explained with one single factor, this study suggests that teachers can promote the process by responding to the students' cultural and social needs in a more active manner.

As Ladson-Billings (1994) reminded us, students are influenced by the way that the teachers approach them. The ELLs' participatory behaviors were different according to the approaches used by their teachers. Mrs. Young invited the ELLs' active participation. Her practices reflected several basic characteristics that culturally relevant pedagogy suggests (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). First of all, recognizing that she is the teacher for *all* students, Mrs. Young assumed a strong responsibility for the ELLs' learning. Instead of relinquishing her responsibility, the regular classroom teacher played an active role in addressing ELLs' needs in the mainstream culture. She attempted to accommodate ELLs' social and cultural needs by building a trusting relationship. Mrs. Young's understanding of their social and cultural needs was the foundation for the students' active participation.

By modeling how she appreciated and embraced the ELLs' cultural difference, Mrs. Young's culturally relevant pedagogy influenced the mainstream students' understanding of the ELLs' strength and their difficulties. The active involvement on the part of the teacher played a role in the mainstream peers' positioning of ELLs as acceptable and legitimate members of learning communities. Mrs. Young and her English-speaking peers' continual attempts to embrace ELLs as important members in the learning community offered the ELLs chances to participate in the learning activities. Figure 1 provides the approaches that facilitated the ELLs' participation.

The other teacher, Mr. Brown, approached his ELLs in a very different way. The ELLs in his class were provided few opportunities to be recognized and accepted as legitimate members of the learning community. Mr. Brown paid little attention to the students' cultural and social needs and supported them in a passive way; that is, although the students had difficulties in their classrooms, the teacher did not attempt to understand what the ELLs needed. When American monoculturalism was particularly promoted in the classroom, it rendered the ELLs almost powerless because there was little room for them to participate in the cultural discourse. This class, which appeared to be highly interactive and student centered, inadvertently isolated the ELLs. No matter how democratic and student centered the teaching was, it did not help the ELLs participate in the classroom because the teaching was conducted without considering equal power distribution.

As Gee (1996) noted, individuals need to be recognized and accepted as group members in order for

them to become active participants in learning. By being recognized as unacceptable members in their mainstream classroom, the ELLs in Mr. Brown's class could not join their learning community in an active manner. The ELLs' agency—the desire and motivation of being in action (Johnston, 2004)—to participate in learning activities as legitimate members was often inhibited by the mainstream students' power in what appeared to be a democratic and student-centered pedagogy.

The implication of this study is that reading teachers need to be aware that they, not methods, are the most important factors in promoting ELLs' participation. Mr. Brown's student-centered teaching did not work for the ELLs' active participation in literacy events. While Mr. Brown's use of a student-centered approach appeared to accommodate the needs of mainstream students, it created distance between the mainstream students and the ELLs. What ELLs need is not just specific methods, even if they are scientifically proven as effective, but teachers who are sensitive to their cultural differences and needs, as shown in Mrs. Young's classroom.

Considering that by 2020 almost half of the public school population in the United States will be from families whose native language is not English (Nieto, 2002), and that many ELLs spend most of their time in regular classrooms, it is critical to better prepare reading teachers to address ELLs' cultural and social needs in regular classrooms. Teaching ELLs is not only the responsibility of ESL teachers but also of reading teachers. ELLs should be provided adequate support in all classrooms. They need to be included in all learning events (Boyd et al., 2006). The findings from this analysis suggest that the ELLs' participation was promoted when the teacher practiced culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom.

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