Exploring English Literacy Development in a Multilingual and Multicultural Elementary School: Debate Club as an Academic Outlet for Language Development

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Abstract

"Ideally, the types of identities that teachers should be encouraged to build are ones that help ELs navigate language, the content, and the school context, in ways that move them to success."
(Langman 2014, p.199)

From January-March 2018 I investigated the possible influences that a debate club could have on the English literacy language development of 5th grade students in a culturally and linguistically diverse school setting. The lessons on debate forums served as an extra-enrichment activity for students that was ungraded. The goal was to create a classroom environment that supported learning through dialogue. To accomplish this, I worked to gain deep understandings of the lived experiences of students. Using a critical ethnographic case study approach, I worked closely with two focal participants, who will be pseudonymously referred to as Raphael and Camila. Both of whom are classified as English Learners (ELs) or students who classified as not fluent in the four modalities of English. I share their progress or changes that may have occurred in their language development throughout the entire process.

Background

I'm at the front of 5th grade class going over the agenda for the day's science lesson. I encourage participation from all students by first reviewing with students past learning and the objectives for that day. I ask a question to the whole group to informally assess students' knowledge and notice that the same students are raising their hands to participate. Most educators are familiar with those students who are more confident and sometimes well-versed, commonly labeled as "academically or intellectually gifted", and who may also be associated with being more eager to share with the rest of the class how much they know. I feel comfortable to talk about *those kids* since I used to be one of them. Thinking beyond those advanced students,

any students who may have been day-dreaming, or students absent from class sessions, how will

I reach those students who are present but never volunteer in whole group learning? More

specifically, how does any teacher manage to acknowledge everyone in the classroom and give

equal opportunity to students to share their knowledge in a whole group format.

While there should be an equal and simultaneous assessment of each student's progress

in the classroom, my focus for the past two years in my academic concentration has been on

researching methods to support the English Learner (EL). These students are described as

possessing a limited English proficiency, but are diverse in their linguistic repertoires,

educational and cultural backgrounds, and differ in their parents' education and English

proficiency levels (Echevarria 7). EL students are also commonly referred to as English

Language Learners (ELLs) or English as Second Language (ESL) students. Creating a space and

learning environment where ELs can take part in the exchanges of knowledge has become an

even more prominent goal of teachers since the start of the 21st century. The enactment of the

Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and it's subsequent education reauthorizations catalyzed the

implementation of standards that focus attention on the education of ELs. A key example

includes the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), which intensified the demand for

accountability amongst public education systems to be inclusive to English Learners. I want to

highlight the home state of my own schooling and teaching experiences, North Carolina, which

has seen a continuous growth of EL students over the past ten years (see figure 1.1). It is

important to note that not all English Learners are apart of the Latinx South community but my

research has primarily focused on the Hispanic population since they make up over 80 percent of

the EL population in NC public schools (2).

The method of data analysis for this study is discourse analysis, which allows for the examination of students' language choices, including but not limited to using all their linguistic resources, which is also referred to as code-mixing/switching/meshing (Canagarajah, 2013) or translanguaging (García, 2009). In this work, I examine how different discursive choices can possibly affect their daily participation in mainstream class settings (e.g. tasks with partners, in group work, call-response with teacher prompts). I also explore how multilingual practices were encouraged but plays a much less significant role in this school. It was my intention this semester to formulate a multilingual ecology that opened possibilities for students of multilingual backgrounds to come together with their peers in our multicultural school and use their full linguistic repertoires. I planned to meet with students during a portion of their specials-instructional period, serving as an additional enrichment period. The purpose was to create an environment where students could learn, practice, and develop essential and effective communicative skills through means of argumentation and debate in a smaller group format.

Looking at high school graduation rates on a national level, only 63 percent of ELs graduate from high school compared to the overall graduation rate of 82 percent in the United States. In North Carolina, that disparity is even larger, as 52 percent of ELs graduate high school compared to the state's overall graduation rate of 83.9 percent . These statistics are additionally alarming because the Latinx population in North Carolina has seen a continuous growth of EL students over the past ten years (see figure 1.1). It is clear that educators must continue to critically examine framing of student learning that is often portrayed as the achievement gap by revisiting the curriculum and implementing strategies within the classroom to support the skills EL's need to develop to navigate toward their goals and aspirations. It is important to consider

the factors that affect students and their consistent English language development and literacy, such as poverty, under-resourced schools, lack of access to different learning opportunities, and the erasure of the assets and skills that they have. Although circumstances vary and each student's circumstance is individual, I believe there are research-based opportunities that teachers can make available to students during the school day that may counteract various socioeconomic or sociocultural factors that may negatively impact students' academic achievement.
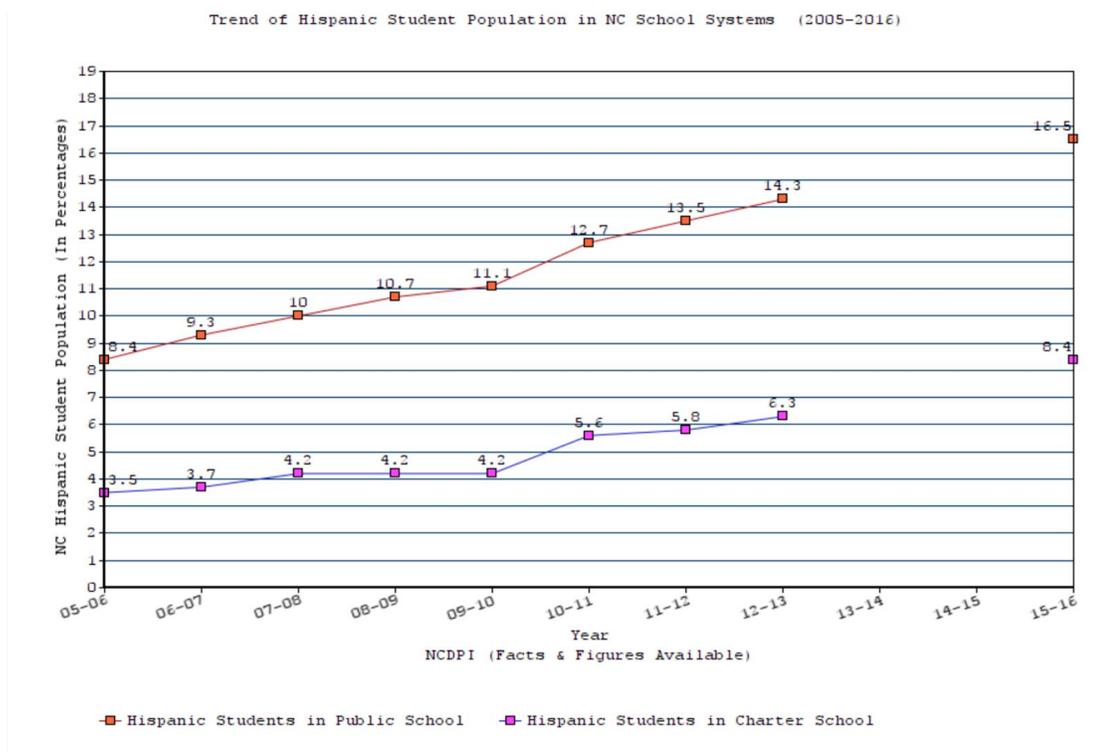
Figure 1.1 (NCDPI 2017)

The demographics of the classroom and the project site, Maple Tree Elementary School, illustrate how the increased number of Latinx students statewide is concentrated, in particular when compared to the demographics of the city, which distinguishes this site from other schools and the general population of Low Valley, NC. Maple Tree Elementary School is a Title I school that located in a low-income area where all attending students receive free breakfast and

lunch meals. According to StartClass by Graphiq, Maple Tree's largest ethnic group is Hispanic/Latinx (48%), second largest population is African-American at 25%, third largest is Asian at 13%, Caucasian at 11%, and the remaining 3% identify as belonging to another category (e.g. 2 or more races, pacific islander). Having 24 students in the class, the ethnic distribution is almost parallel to that of the entire school, with some differences. The entire class includes 12 Hispanic/Latinx, six African-American students, four Asian students, one Caucasian student, and one biracial student. This ethnic distribution is contrary to what is found throughout the rest of the city, where the percentages for Hispanic/Latinx and Caucasian students are reversed. (E.g. The majority of students in schools and residents of Low Valley are Caucasian at 47.8% of the population and Hispanic/Latinx being 9.2%, according to DataUSA) (4).

The students in the debate group represented a diverse group of students representing different multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. The group included five Hispanic/Latinx (three of whom are considered ELs), two African-American students, and one Asian (Nepali) student. Two students did not wish to participate in the study. Having multiple ethnicities and cultures represented in the group was crucial since this project was an extension of my previous honors work on analyzing elementary-aged students' concept of language in their own lives and how I as a rising teacher can support their linguistic cognisance as it is an extension of their developing identities. Raphael and Camila are Hispanic/Latinx, both classified as ELs, and have scored grade-level in reading. Although they share these academic labels, their contributions to this research were quite different.

My initial course of action was to have students realize the power of language and message delivery through various linguistic tools including, *code-switching*, *code-mixing,* or

code-meshing (Canagarajah, 2013) but a greater focus was placed on a distinct relative, *translanguaging,* all which include some form of combining language variations (languages or dialects). Although I will describe how modes of communication seem to be evident amongst students in schools, this debate space was formed with the idea of translanguaging at the forefront. *Translanguaging,* looks at how people use their entire linguistic repertoires (and other semiotic devices) to communicate meaning, identities, and ideologies, by viewing bi-multilingual speakers practices as valuable in general and specifically to leverage these dynamic communicative practices in teaching and learning spaces (García, & Kleyn, 2016). At Maple Tree Elementary School, it was difficult to gain a full picture of students' translanguaging in their regular school schedule because all of their classes are taught in English, with emphasis on the academic dialect of the vast language. When it comes to the translanguaging component, I observed that Camila performed this throughout the day in her inner circle (including partner work, group work, or assisting a friend), which will be highlighted in this paper.

Another objective of the project was to understand how students' affective filters could be impacted by this debate forum that embraced translanguaging. This smaller group format was designed to lower students' affective filter. According to Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis [9], the affective filter disrupts student achievement due to the set of emotional and psychological factors that can interfere with the communicative processes that occur in the classroom. These impeding factors can include struggles like anxiety, self-consciousness, boredom, annoyance, or alienation [3], which I have found to be more prominent during whole class instruction. Attending to concerns around students' affective filter, I argue it is possible to see more participation in-class and build more conversations that support everyone's learning in

the classroom. Although it is expected for teachers to possess the knowledge that students must acquire to be academically successful, conscious teachers will find that student-centered learning must become a part of the pedagogical practices. Interviews served as my entry point to understand the backgrounds students bring to the classroom adds value to teacher's credibility as they prepare and execute lessons. Moreover, students respond positively when content is made relatable or inclusive to their personal experiences and such practices sustain safe and progressive learning environments. The next section will describe in great detail all of the factors that contributed to this project.

The Process: Interviews, Lesson Preparation and Debate Meetings

It is important to first understand that in a formal academic debate, there is a topic that two teams must discuss in a formal and civil matter, meaning no harsh or vulgar language, nor are personal attacks permitted. There is the proposition (pro), who is in favor of the topic, and there is the opposition (con), who must refute or is against the proposition. Usually there are four members on a team and so that influenced my decision to have eight students involved. In the debate, each team has one speaker give the opening statements to explain whether they are for or against the chosen debate topic. There are two members who offer rebuttals from each side, and during these times members are able to explore their argumentative creativity by offering a Point of Interruption (POI), which is a chance to fact check an opponent in an effort to disrupt their argument to reestablish one's own. A POI is only allowed if the current speaker accepts, so it is interesting that a POI can be denied. Finally, the debate ends with a closing statement from the final member from each side. I will now explain the investigative practices I used at my internship site and my approach to crafting student-centered lessons for our small group. I will

also explain how I incorporated instructional activities with three different forms of debates as part of our meetings that lead up to the fourth and final, and most formal, debate experience.

My knowledge of the debate experience comes from a course I completed while abroad at Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola in Lima, Peru (2016). From themes of that course, I decided to create four points that contribute toward a successful debate club (team) experience, and they include: Accessing prior knowledge, researching the topic from credible sources, collaborating with peers, and practicing thoroughly for the debate.

To gain more information about the students' backgrounds I conducted informal interviews with eight students from my cooperating teacher's homeroom. The students were semi-randomly selected based on my previous knowledge of their cultural background, ethnicity, and language background. Rather than sitting and asking questions, I met with students in settings that they commonly went to. I made myself available for a range of times and locations where they could sign up to meet and talk (e.g. cafeteria, recess, homeroom). In the interviews, all students stated that they thought that school was necessary. Seven out of the total eight students were unfamiliar with debates. Yet, they all expressed excitement to be apart of this debate club. I will return back to how the interviews impacted my relationships with students and understanding their thought processes later in the focal students section.

Although EL research is geared toward students who come from non-English speaking homes, there are specific techniques that benefit all students' learning experiences. For example, visual aids are helpful to all my students, but especially Raphael and Camila (note: pseudonyms). Things such as handouts, powerpoints, written and oral vocabulary practice were used to make the content more accessible for students and served as a tool to instruct students on how to make inferences and draw necessary conclusions. This project allowed for me to investigate new instructional approaches and embrace academic standards in a way that was

learning-centric rather than test-centric. A part of measuring student learning was to connect my instruction to North Carolina State Standards:

> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 5 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Based on the informal interviews, I chose prompts that were connected to the topics and interests that they had expressed to me. During the interviews, I learned more about each student, including much resistance to chores at home and homework in school. To be a receptive educator, I then made sure to incorporate these topics as debate prompts to use in our debate meetings.

To begin our debate lessons I accessed students' prior knowledge in a whole group format before giving them more explicit instruction on the structure and expectations of debates. I posted the prompt, "Should it be illegal for parents to make their children do their chores?" on a powerpoint and allowed students to discuss in small groups. During these interactions, I made observations of their communicative strategies, with particular attention to the use of their full linguistic repertoires that could include translanguaging. In my observations, I noted that the conversations appeared to be done in English. Following the small group discussions, I led a discussion on debate formats and how debates are different than unstructured conversation, which can sometimes be dominated by a single person and not allow for everyone involved to contribute to the discussion. Unfortunately, there was a schedule conflict and my two focal students were absent for half of this meeting. However, we reviewed our discussion when they were able to join us and I then used this as an opportunity to develop

a similar conversation with a different activity on another day. Displaying a humorous cartoon

of two characters arguing about an image (see Figure 2.1), I gave students a couple minutes to

state who they agreed with and why. I provided words and phrases we could use to disagree

with another speaker's thoughts and also nonexamples to stress how we should understand

perspective or different viewpoints. Establishing these group norms toward the beginning of our

time together and ensuring that everyone understands that each person involved can contribute

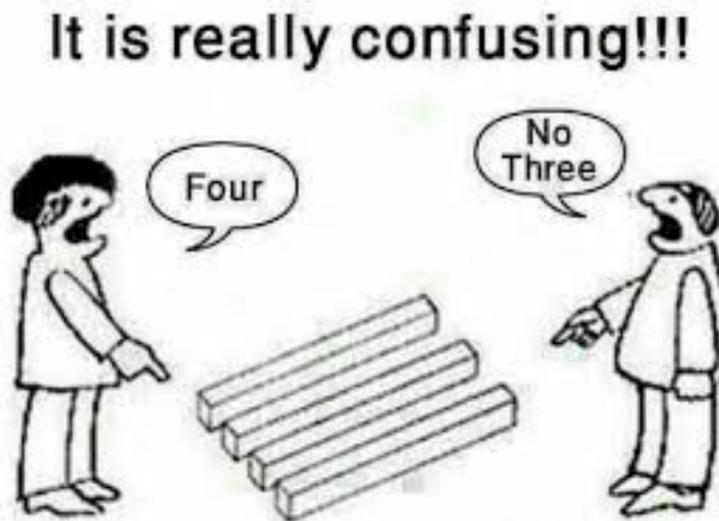in some meaningful way was important to reach my goals for this project.

Figure 2.1 (5)

To access prior knowledge I informed students that you should ask yourself simple

questions such as, *How does this relate to me?, What do I know about this?,* or *Have I*

experienced this or something similar? We also reviewed what conducting research means and

the appropriate methods to stay focus and choose information from credible sites. To explore

this, we first watched a video via Youtube. I chose the video because it was short, had great

information, and included both captions and animation. Since there was no audio of the text that

appeared on the screen, I made it interactive by reading key terms aloud and stopping to check

students' comprehension by call-response techniques. In order to review some key points from the video, students viewed the projected computer screen as I navigated the mouse and pointed out different websites and their level of credibility based on things such as the website's name, web address/URL, and author/writer's name (or lack thereof). To elicit responses from my focal students during such whole (small) group discussions in these beginning stages, I had to say things like "Raise your hand if this has happened to you" or "If you agree with____". Instead of calling on just those students who eagerly participated, I made sure to explain that everyone would share and give a reason why. What I noticed for both Raphael and Camila, specifically, was that they initially gave one or two word answers. I wanted to understand what their brief responses meant with respect to their learning and the comfort level in sharing with the group.

Collaboration is a skill that was also necessary for our debate club. To explore this element, I began with a image containing pictures and words on the board, which we will refer to as the Memory Game. Students were told to memorize as much as they could from the illustration in one minute, and then they were given another minute to write down as many as they could on their own. *What?* and *That's gonna be hard* are just a few of the responses I heard when the time allotments were stressed. The students faces were filled with what looked like a mixture of shock, excitement, and nervousness after I told them no writing after I have stated "pencils are down". I had them give a self-assessment based on what they were able to do, and many students felt like they didn't do too good.

The next slide on the powerpoint revealed a twist to our activity, one that would allow students to work with their debate team members from the previous activity. Students discussed what they were able to remember and share answers. Next, I gave them an additional minute to

study the illustration and collectively write down what they were able to remember with only thirty seconds. Students were more excited to accomplish this task within their groups and the number of pictures and words they were able to recall increased tremendously. They agreed that this task was easier to accomplish with the help of peers and they offered thoughtful responses when I informed the students based on what I observed that some of us were initially drawn to the pictures, others were drawn to words, or some were making connections between the two. The key component that students responded well to was our shared understanding that listening to and considering others' thoughts helps a group accomplish the task set before them. I shared with them, "I want you to plan and prepare your arguments, making sure everyone has an opportunity to share the group's collective thought, and speak however you feel comfortable- as long as it is appropriate and does not make anyone else feel bad.*" - *Kirby* (field notes, 3/2/2018). This quote shows my effort to teach aspects of translanguaging in a comprehensible way to students and support the interpersonal skills needed in a small group learning environment that disrupt Krashen's idea of the affective filter.

As the project continued, I planned activities that would challenge students to retrieve previous learning and apply the new skills we were practicing to new scenarios as they prepared a collective argument within their debate teams. Students were divided within their teams and were presented the well known mystery riddle, "Who Stole the Money?". This includes a scenario where employees at a hotel are questioned about the whereabouts of a man's missing one-hundred dollar bill and the task is to figure out who actually stole the money based on the evidence provided. In their groups students had to work together and come up with an argument in the format of a debate to present their answer and written explanations to support their

reasoning, ensuring that every person stated at least one detail. I emphasized writing out points and making notes as a way to clarify one's understanding and developing a strong argument. The students accomplished the task, yet I observed that Raphael and Camila were less active during the whole group presentation; however, while in their groups preparing their argument I observed them speaking confidently to their peers on their team.

Our final debate required students to incorporate all four elements of debate practices to argue their team's position on the issue, "Should homework be banned from schools?". Students were given time to discuss this topic and then began researching. We began in the computer lab with the time remaining following a review of the debate formats and roles of the team and students finalized their arguments by using their iPads. I conferenced with Raphael and noticed he knew what his role was on his team but it was challenging for him to explain in so many words what he was finding on the internet. Camila showed adequate skills with researching the content once directed to appropriate sites, and though her ideas were clear she stated her findings with ambiguity. I recognized this as a moment to address all students to be confident in themselves and their capabilities, and to use each other as resources like we did with the memory game activity. There was a slight shift of reassurance in some students' posture, saying *Yeah, okay. Maybe I can do this* (field notes, 3/9/2018).

At the end of the week came our final debate. Students were given five minutes to review their roles and their argument with their team members. I reminded students that they have worked really hard to keep their role on the debate team in mind, and that they are able to communicate as they see fit. The beginning of the debate was very quiet. After the first rebuttal from the proposition, a student called a POI (Point of Interruption) and more students began

engaging with each other and defending their team's argument. A POI was called while Camila

was up from a very ambitious student, and Camila accepted with "*Sure*". She navigated the first

POI, but when another student interjected with a POI I noticed Camila stopped speaking, and so

I interrupted to remind students that *there may be only one POI at a time* and *to remember that*

you can accept or deny in order to make your argument clear (field notes 3/16/2018). It

appeared that Camila did not get a chance to finish her argument before I called time, since one

of her opponents was still giving their rebuttal. The students continued through the other roles

with several POIs and more conversation lead by those *advanced* students described in the

beginning, and finally it was time for the closing statement from the proposition, presented by

Raphael. I saw him go up with what appeared to be confidence and when he opens his mouth to

speak, he states, "*These are the reasons that homework should not be illegal",* and then goes to

take his seat (field notes 3/16/2018). In the moment I chose not to comment and waited until the

closing statement from the opposition. The last speaker is actually another student who

struggles with expressing his thoughts and will actually shut down at times; however, he

powered through and used his notes collected from his other team members and did his best to

close his team's argument.

I congratulated all students on a great job staying focused and working together to

contribute toward a successful debate experience. I could tell all students at first had mixed

emotions when I called the debate to order and they took their seats, but as time went on their

nervousness subsided and most became more comfortable engaging in the debate forum. I also

gave some general things everyone could work on based on the different roles that make up the

debate, including using as much time allotted, knowing it is okay to deny a POI, and ensuring

that you really practice listening to the other team if you are one of the last people to speak so

that you can defend your team's position using appropriate details. I will now describe with

more detail into the background of Raphael and Camila as I present my analysis of the

discourse in my follow-up interviews with each of these students.

Raphael

Raphael: Mr. Kirby, are we going to debate today?
Me: No, not today. Our last meeting might have been our last.
Raphael: Oh ok. Bye Mr. Kirby!
(field notes, 3/27/2018)

Raphael is understood in the school setting as an English Learner, and he also receives

additional services to meet his learning needs in regards to his reading comprehension and

speech disfluency. I had the opportunity to attend his Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

meeting and learn more about this student prior to our one-on-one interview, with permission

from his teachers and the student's mother. A characteristic that became evident he shares

across subjects in and outside of the general education classroom was being confined in his

thought processes to what he has access to. Compiling one's thoughts to think beyond what is

on the page is a problem-solving skill that many students struggle with, but this student in

particular shows a hard time explaining his thought processes clearly, in written and oral forms.

In the science class where I interned, and the couple of weeks I taught in math and science, his

interactions in the whole group discussions were limited though he was active in pair and small

group work. In contrast to the deficit positioning of Raphael, I also noticed his initiative to

apply the knowledge he learned to solve a problem. In particular activities in science that were

done in partner or groups, I can recall several times where I heard him engaging with his peers

and offering ideas on his own.

There was a time mid-way through the project when I had the opportunity to speak with Raphael during after-school dismissal. I asked if he was enjoying debate, and he asked me which one. I was then reminded that he was participating in a debate on the book, *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio*,* in his reading class and he confided that he preferred our debate team since it was more challenging in reading. Later in the semester when we conferenced with an interview about the entire experience, I was interested to know if my instruction on the debate itself was suitable for his learning. Raphael was able to recall some of the suggestions that I gave to the entire group and commented that he could have "gave more details" in his closing argument . I noticed that much of what he remembered were terms, such as *pro* and *con*, and he was able to very briefly explain what those meant in debate as part of what he learned. When I asked him to recall our conversation about his debate experience in reading, I asked him what was the difference and why was one more challenging than the other. He shared that he enjoyed working in small groups more than just partners because "you get to come up with more reasons with the people you work with" (field notes 3/27/2018).

Camila

I did not develop the same rapport with Camila like I had with Raphael and I knew that interviewing with her again at the end of the semester could be tricky. I went to Camila during our regular morning routine and asked her was it a good time to interview about her debate experience, and I saw a slight reluctant shift in her response. I told her that she did not have to meet at that time or ever, but she then insisted that it was "okay". Considering this, I offered her to choose a place in the room or school and she said that the front table (where I regularly meet with students) was "fine". Camila is a student that I noticed enjoyed speaking to her friends in

class during downtime and I saw her interact more openly during social times (e.g. recess, lunch, etc.). I felt that Camila opened up to me during our interview, which contrasted with the rapport I had with her during my classroom instruction and during our initial interview at the beginning of the semester. Camila recalled much of the big themes of the debate experience and described the dynamic of the different "opinions" (or arguments) that exist within a debate that people defend. When asked about specific parts that she enjoyed, she described the beginning as being the most enjoyable. Camila shared that she liked the debate because it was like a team, and when asked to explain that she described it as being a group of people working together to win. I wanted to understand her perspective and asked if it is *still winning* if there is no prize. She replied, "Yes, [it is winning] because you feel good [about accomplishing the task that you were given]" (field notes, 4/10/2018). I did not discuss the previous interaction between her and her classmate around their POI statements. Instead our conversation centered on evaluations of her team members who "did a good job" because they "argued good". I asked her was there anything she would have done differently, and she mentioned she could have given more details to support her team's position. She explained that she enjoyed the opportunity to work in groups, especially in partners.

I was familiar with this student being bilingual and so I asked her did she ever use Spanish in the classroom with a partner or friend and I asked does she ever feel comfortable to speak Spanish in class. She shared that it was uncommon but she uses it more while outside of the classroom (e.g. including non-academic environments like recess, lunch, etc.) Since I am able to have a more open conversation with Camila, I asked her to rate her debate experience from 1-10 and explain what I could have done more as the instructor. She voted the experience a

6/10 and said that she would have liked more time to work in groups and debate. Camila also informed me that she would like to participate in more debates with our club but only shrugged when I suggested there may be opportunities for her in future grade levels. And to expand upon what the student opened up to me about, it is important to note that Camila finally shared that she does not like to speak and that she would rather write out her thoughts.

Conclusion: Why Debate for English Development?

I am very fortunate to have met both Raphael and Camila, and all the students I worked with during the completion of this project, as part of my student-teaching experience. Still I ask myself, *Where does all this work lead me to?* Fifth grade is the beginning of the preadolescence years where students begin to craft their own opinions about others and where they fit into society, and so it is my belief that the earlier students become aware of the power of language and communication then the sooner they will be expected to engage responsibly. Particularly for this group, I was able to observe the ways in which students engage in conversation when planning for a debate and how they conducted themselves while in the debate. I gave more time for discussion and exploring work with groups and partners and did not do much lecturing, making most of our time together student-centered. In accordance to the 21st century classroom strategies, to the best of my developing teaching abilities, I provided direct modeling of the content, allowed students to practice the content, provided necessary scaffolding, addressed misconceptions, and assessed them with ticket out the doors, KWL charts on index cards, verbal prompts to listen to students' reasoning, and a final debate to see how everyone would express their knowledge. However, it was both Camila and Raphael that showed me one thing that I could have improved and/or been more consistent with, and that is allowing adequate time for

students to process the content we are covering. Time was limited with this activity, school assemblies and inclement weather impacted some of our meetings, but transitions between tasks is a skill that I am still working on as I prepare to enter into my first year of teaching.

Appeal To Teachers

Fellow teachers will understand how crucial vocabulary is to language development and as a result vocabulary is taught more extensively to EL students. As part of the debates, I introduced debate terminology from simple to complex to allow students at various levels to be exposed to the same content but have a way to express their learning with what they felt comfortable utilizing. For example, to describe the sides of a debate you have the pro and con, more formally known as the proposition and the opposition. Instead of limiting students to the first words that were used amongst my focal EL students, I also exposed students to Tier 3 vocabulary and reiterated the higher-level vocabulary each time they would use lower tiered terms. This was an effort to celebrate the accomplishments they made by remembering content being covered but also to show students that there is always room for growth.

"Everyone's thoughts and input to our group mattered when we were all looking at the puzzle" is something I told students after the Memory Game activity (field notes, 2/27/2018). In short, I explained how the defense or rebuttal of someone else's thought is affirmed by expressing your thought or opinion in a way where you realize your own thoughts are not "right" or "facts", but as an important addition to the dialogue taking place. This is a crucial communication tool that students must be able to access since listening is just as important, if not more crucial, than speaking. It is my hope that I am just one of many teachers who wishes to develop a critical ear to actively listen to our students and what they are saying, even in the

absence of words. I am learning the importance of allowing students appropriate time to process

their own thoughts about any concept in words they choose, to offer suggestions and clarify

misconceptions but allow the exchange of language expression to occur ((Creese, Blackledge

2010, p.106) Langman 2014, p.186).

I hope that this project and my qualitative findings inspire other educators to investigate

and discover an outlet that supplements their students' learning and language development.

Especially with language development, which includes the ability to read, write, listen,

comprehend, and speak any language, debate and similar activities truly embrace and enhance

such linguistic skills. Some educators may not be able to find time in their normal schedule to

have such a debate club, but it may be possible to form a debate club as an extracurricular,

enrichment activity or imbed it as part of tutoring instruction with the assistance of volunteers

from the community (e.g. local high schools, universities). If not a debate club, maybe

like-minded activities like facilitating a paideia seminar [7] or organizing a series of fishbowl

discussions [8] would be more conducive for those involved. Ideally, the activity or project

should celebrates students' background knowledge and abilities but also challenge them to meet

a particular learning target that not only meets but goes beyond the standards provided by the

state mandated curriculum. With all the demands that teachers face, it can be easier to limit the

opportunities we expose students to based on what they have been able to exemplify, which

only fuels the deficit approach many educators are trying to dismantle. As a rising tenacious

educator, I will strive to create and provide opportunities that allow students to express their

intellectual abilities in new ways and then measure students' progress and alter instruction

accordingly.

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   ● Hispanic population: 16.5% in public schools, 8.4% in charter schools
   NCDPI.Facts and Figures 2012-2013. (2013, January). April 10, 2017, from
   http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/fbs/resources/data/factsfigures/2012-13figures.pdf
   ● Hispanic population: 14.3% in public schools, 6.3% in charter schools
   NCDPI.Facts and Figures 2011-2012. (2012, January). April 10, 2017, from
   ● Hispanic population: 13.5% in public schools, 5.8% in charter schools
   NCDPI.Facts and Figures 2010-2011. (2011, January). April 10, 2017, from
   ● Hispanic population: 12.7% in public schools, 5.6% in charter schools
   NCDPI.Facts and Figures 2009-2010. (2010, January). April 10, 2017, from
   ● Hispanic population: 11.1% in public schools, 4.2% in charter schools
   NCDPI.Facts and Figures 2008-2009. (2009, January). April 10, 2017, from

- Hispanic population: 10.7% in public schools, 4.2% in charter schools
NCDPI.Facts and Figures 2007-2008. (2008, January). April 10, 2017, from
- Hispanic population: 10.0% in public schools, 4.2% in charter schools
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- Hispanic population: 9.3% in public schools, 3.7% in charter schools
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