

Staying on Topic

Teacher: Martha Duran-Contreras

Years Teaching: 22

School: Will Rogers School, Santa Monica, California

Grade: Second

Class Size: 22 students

Lesson Dates: October 16 and 17

“Creating a community of learners is the most important thing I do all year long. Because in establishing a community for them I make the students responsible not only for their own learning, but for their classmates’ learning.” —Martha Duran-Contreras

Overview

Video Summary

In her second-grade classroom, Martha Duran-Contreras creates a community of learners—including herself—by establishing predictable routines, mutual respect, and clear expectations. In writing tasks and guided-reading groups, students are encouraged to solve problems together and share understandings, to stay on task and contribute at all times, and to articulate and celebrate their achievements. Ms. Duran-Contreras comfortably uses both English and Spanish to support individual students and to provide explicit instruction. The Author's Chair, a time when students read written work aloud, appropriately ends a day of shared learning and individual accomplishment.

Ms. Duran-Contreras' classroom demonstrates the following:

- Culturally sensitive teaching that addresses students' personal experiences and feelings
- Explicit instruction that helps students understand why they are learning, and builds metacognitive awareness
- Strategic use of dual language response and instruction
- Established routines and clear expectations that create a safe environment for risk-taking
- Spoken and unspoken belief that every child can learn, and has something to contribute
- A community in which the teacher and students work and learn together in meaningful ways

"Children benefit from the use of both languages in a classroom and from being able to validate many of the words and experiences that they bring from their homes—whether they're English-language experiences or Spanish-language experiences. My using either Spanish or English makes them feel comfortable. Giving a language status is very important. I'm not going to take their language away. I'm going to use it when it's best for them."

Literacy Teaching Practices

Guided Reading

Independent Reading

Independent Writing

Putting It in Context

The Teacher and the Class

Martha Duran-Contreras teaches second grade at the Will Rogers School in Santa Monica, California. A neighborhood school, Will Rogers draws a diverse group of students, including many English language learners. Of Ms. Duran-Contreras's 22 students, nine are ELL students. Her students' reading levels range from kindergarten to fourth grade.

While English proficiency is a clear goal, Ms. Duran-Contreras speaks Spanish often in class to explain important concepts or clarify differences between Spanish and English. Believing that students should continue to develop skills in their first language, she provides Spanish-language books for students to read independently, and opportunities for them to write in Spanish.

Ms. Duran-Contreras communicates with students in a clear and straightforward manner. In her opinion, explicit feedback and instructions help students understand what they're doing well, and what goals they should set to improve. "I give them some ideas for their next steps. I try to be specific with them. Instead of saying 'you need to be way over here,' I give them little steps—the whole notion of scaffolding."

Starting at the beginning of the year, Ms. Duran-Contreras carefully establishes a classroom atmosphere of appreciation and respect, stressing that everyone in the community is important. Often referring to students as brother and sister learners, she emphasizes the value of students' contributions to their own and their classmates' learning, and communicates high expectations for student participation and behavior.

Day at a Glance*

8:30	Arrival/Attendance
8:35	Word Activities (Hanging Spider)
8:40	Writing Activity Introduction
8:55	Independent Writing
9:40	Guided Reading
10:00	Recess/P.E.
10:45	D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read) Time
11:15	Author's Chair
11:30	Read-Aloud
12:30	Lunch

*In the video, you see excerpts from Ms. Duran-Contreras's class on October 16 and 17. On a typical day, other content areas are also included in the schedule.

Analyzing the Video

Before Viewing

The following activities prepare you to observe this classroom video, whether alone or with a group.

Prepare To Record Your Observations

Make a copy of the Observational Checklist (found in the Appendix) to record your observations, reactions, and further questions that come up throughout your viewing. Copy the KWL Chart (also in the Appendix) and record what you already know and what you would like to learn about creating and supporting a learning community of English language learners. Groups can use the KWL chart to generate discussion and questions to consider while viewing.

Consider Key Questions

Consider these questions as you view the video:

- How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?
- How are the diverse needs of learners (language in particular) met in this classroom?
- What forms of assessment are apparent in this classroom, and how does assessment guide instruction?
- How are reading and writing connected in this classroom?

Review Important Terms

Review the definitions of the following Literacy Teaching Practices (page 4): read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, and independent writing.

Review the following definitions of the Essential Components of Literacy Development (page 2): oral language, phonological awareness, word study (vocabulary/concepts and word identification/phonics), comprehension, composition, and fluency and automaticity.

First Impressions

Use the following activities to reflect on the classroom video.

Watch the Video

On your first viewing, use the Observational Checklist to note how Ms. Duran-Contreras implements the Literacy Teaching Practices. In particular, consider how she supports native English speakers and English language learners and how she helps them become independent readers and writers. When does she use English and Spanish to “scaffold” learning for all students?

Review What You Saw

After watching the video, review the Observational Checklist and reflect on what you saw. How do the practices you just watched compare to your own? What do you think about the ways these practices apply to the students you teach?

Relate the Key Questions to Martha Duran-Contreras’s Classroom

How are the diverse needs of learners (language in particular) met in this classroom?

Consider Ms. Duran-Contreras’s comment: “It’s important for children to think about the reasons why we are doing what we are doing in order to understand something in depth. I purposely tell children what they just did and why they’re doing it—I’m very explicit because I don’t want them to be confused.” What examples did you see in the video of specific explanations, questions, and scaffolding that Ms. Duran-Contreras provides for different students?

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?

While Ms. Duran-Contreras's teaching includes explicit instruction and modeling for students, she also believes strongly in students' capacity to learn independently. "Every child is capable of learning and every child should be respected," says Ms. Duran-Contreras. "As teachers, one of the things that we're here for is to guide them on this little journey. And not always as the sage on the stage, but really as their guide on the side." How does Ms. Duran-Contreras act as a "guide on the side" to foster independence in her students? How would you describe her manner in addressing students?

Looking Closer

Take a second look at Ms. Duran-Contreras's classroom to deepen your understanding of specific literacy strategies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.

Writing: Video Segments

Find the first segment 2 minutes and 30 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 3 minutes and 59 seconds. Find the second segment 5 minutes after the beginning of the video. Watch for 5 minutes and 31 seconds.

Ms. Duran-Contreras plans varied writing assignments for students throughout the week. In the first segment, Ms. Duran-Contreras confers with a student about a piece of creative writing, clearly communicating observations about the student's progress.

- How does Ms. Duran-Contreras guide the conversation with the student? What kinds of questions does she ask? What elements of writing does she encourage the student to focus on?

In the second video segment, Ms. Duran-Contreras emphasizes the theme "staying on topic," giving students small objects to write about. She confers individually with students as they write independently.

- What is Ms. Duran-Contreras's approach to supporting students' writing? How does she use oral rehearsal to elicit background knowledge with both native English speakers and English language learners? How does she encourage students to help one another, and to monitor their own learning?
- What lessons about writing does Ms. Duran-Contreras encourage students to internalize?



Independent Reading: Video Segment

Find this segment 16 minutes and 49 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 4 minutes and 14 seconds.

During independent reading time, an important part of Ms. Duran-Contreras's literacy curriculum, students read self-selected books. Ms. Duran-Contreras reads silently herself, or confers with students individually.

- What explicit directions does Ms. Duran-Contreras give to students as they get ready to read? What does she learn about students during independent reading time?
- As you watch, note the different kinds of reading materials used by students. Why might it be important to provide English language learners with reading in their own language? How do Ms. Duran-Contreras and the aide work together to make the independent reading time successful for everyone?
- What do you think about the timing, structure, and management of Ms. Duran-Contreras's independent reading? How would this work in your classroom? What role would the teacher and the students have? What do you think about the use of DEAR with English language learners?

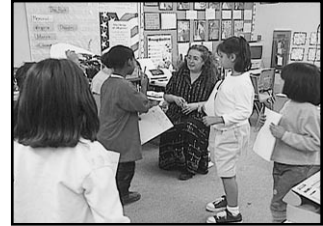


Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Author's Chair: Video Segment

Find this segment 16 minutes and 49 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 4 minutes and 14 seconds.

Students share their written work with the whole group, and then in pairs. Students develop oral expression while celebrating their role as authors. Ms. Duran-Contreras is explicit about the purpose of this exercise, making it clear that writing is to communicate to an *audience*.



- How does Ms. Duran-Contreras keep everyone prepared and engaged?
- How does this Author's Chair activity compare to approaches used by other teachers in the *Teaching Reading* library? To approaches of other teachers you know?
- How would you organize an Author's Chair? What other components of literacy might you want students to focus on in addition to oral expression?

Summing Up

Wrap up your impressions of the video with a final reflection.

Reflecting on Your Viewing Experience

Review your completed Observational Checklist and other notes such as your KWL chart.

- What surprised or interested you?
- What did you find that affirmed what you already knew or had been doing?
- What new approaches or ideas will you try?
- What questions do you have?
- After watching the video, do you think differently about your own practices? About the students you teach? About how young students develop literacy?

Making Connections

Apply and Extend

Here are some opportunities to apply and extend what you've seen.

Read This Article

The debate about the best teaching practices for English language learners is ongoing. Should ELL students be immersed entirely in English, or is there room for maintaining and building on the student's own language? Read this article and compare what you read with what you observed in Ms. Duran-Contreras's classroom.

Flood, J., et al. "Literacy Instruction for Students Acquiring English: Moving Beyond the Immersion Debate." *The Reading Teacher* 50, no. 4. (December 1996): 356–369.

This reading is available as a downloadable PDF file on the *Teaching Reading* Web site. Go to www.learner.org/channel/libraries/readingk2/.

Watch These Videos

View "Building Oral Language," another video in the *Teaching Reading* library, and think about the different approaches to teaching English language learners. In the "Building Oral Language" video, how does Cindy Wilson value and validate her kindergarten students' language through use of children's literature and support from her bilingual aide? How is her instruction different from or similar to Ms. Duran-Contreras's second-grade instruction?

View "A Writer's Journal" and "Promoting Readers As Leaders," and compare the methods for fostering a strong sense of community used by Ms. Duran-Contreras and the teachers in these videos. What has been done to create a community? What might you try?

For more information on these videos, see the chapters for "Building Oral Language," "A Writer's Journal," and "Promoting Readers As Leaders" in this guide.

Take It Back to the Classroom

Identify one element or strategy from Ms. Duran-Contreras's lesson that you would like to try in your classroom. List any supports or resources you would need to implement it. Use the Classroom Strategy Planner (found in the Appendix). If you are participating in a study group, share what happened when you tried out the new strategy. Or keep a reflective journal of your experience, focusing on the benefits for you and for your students.

Selected Resources

Resources Used by Ms. Duran-Contreras

Fountas, I. C., and G. S. Pinnell. *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996.

Routman, Reggie. *Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners K–12*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991.

Sitton, Rebecca. *Increasing Student Spelling Achievement*. Scottsdale, Ariz.: Egger Publishing, Inc., 1998.

Books for Students in Ms. Duran-Contreras's Classroom

Chang, Heidi. *Elaine and the Flying Frog*. New York, N.Y.: Random Library, 1991.

Dr. Seuss. *Green Eggs & Ham*. New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1960.

Klass, Sheila Solomon. *Shooting Star: A Novel About Annie Oakley*. New York, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1998.

Williams, Linda. *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything*. New York, N.Y.: HarperTrophy, 1988.

Yolen, Jane. *Owl Moon*. New York, N.Y.: Philomel Books (Penguin Putnam Inc.), 1987.

Additional Resources

Books and Articles

Altwerger, B., and B. L. Ivener. "Self Esteem: Access to Literacy in Multicultural and Multilingual Classrooms." In *Kids Come in All Languages: Reading Instruction for ESL Students*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1994.

Brisk, M. E., and M. M. Harrington. *Literacy and Bilingualism: A Handbook for All Teachers*. Mahwah, N.J.: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 2000.

Cary, S. *Second Language Learners*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1997.

Flood, J., et al. "Literacy Instruction for Students Acquiring English: Moving Beyond the Immersion Debate." *The Reading Teacher*. 50, no. 4 (December 1996): 356–369.

International Reading Association. *Second Language Literacy Instruction: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2000.

Rigg, P., and V. G. Allen. *When They Don't All Speak English: Integrating the ESL Student into the Regular Classroom*. Urbana, Ill.: National Association of Teachers of English (NCTE), 1989.

Rueda, R. and G. E. Garcia. *How Do I Teach Reading to English Language Learners?* Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2001.

Schirmer, B. R., et al. eds. "Diverse Learners in the Classroom: Innovative Literacy Practices for ESL Learners." *The Reading Teacher* 49, no. 5 (1996).

Spangenberg-Urbschat, K., and R. Pritchard. eds. *Kids Come in All Languages: Reading Instruction for ESL Students*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1994.

Selected Resources, cont'd.

Web Sites

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Ability (CIERA): <http://www.ciera.org>

International Reading Association: <http://www.IRA.org>

National Council of Teachers of English: <http://www.NCTE.org>

National Association of Education of Young Children: <http://www.naeyc.org>

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE):<http://www.nabe.org>

For more resources on literacy, see the General Resources section of the Appendix.

Notes
