Linking Instructional Intervention and Professional Development: Using the Ideas Behind Puente High School English to Inform Educational Policy

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After a review of theory supporting literacy education that incorporates the existing cultural capital of previously underserved students, this article outlines the discipline rationale behind Puente’s approach to the 9th and 10th grade English curriculum. This English program for Mexican American/ Latino students, which works in tandem with the counseling and mentoring strands of the High School Puente Project, employs literary works and writing assignments that connect directly to the lived experience of the students. It also attempts to enact a process approach to the teaching of writing and includes portfolio assessments. Crucially, this secondary school intervention begins with a carefully designed plan to train participating teachers and continues supporting them with teaching materials and strategies. Taken together, the features of Puente English support educational policy initiatives that link staff development with curriculum and teaching methods designed to build on students’ cultural background and prior experience.

THE RIGOROUS college preparatory English curriculum that anchors High School Puente merits serious attention by education policy makers because

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its core principles, which advocate the essential alliance between instruction and teacher training, apply beyond the Mexican American/Latino student population for which it was originally designed. In striving to impact the literacy development of this traditionally underserved group, the designers of Puente English began by embracing the long-standing conception that “meaning connecting” and “meaning making” are fundamental to any literacy curriculum in a democracy (Burgess, 2002; Dewey, 1916/1997; Pradl, 1996). Yet, experience has consistently shown that few teachers practice such meaning-based instruction or encourage active learning on the part of their students (Cuban, 1993). Realizing that teachers could not automatically be expected to implement such an approach on simple mandate, the Puente leadership crafted a plan for teacher training and support into their program. Puente’s documented success in California with linking curriculum intervention and professional development has since 1993 directly influenced 80 secondary English teachers who teach a Puente class (M. K. Healy, personal communication, September 23, 2001). Additionally, more than 400 non-Puente teachers have benefited from their participation in Puente training sessions. Given the scope of its efforts in 33 sites, High School Puente holds great promise for those advocating policies that support instruction based on meaning-making principles (Lee, 2001) and what Ball and Cohen (1999) have labeled “a practice-based theory of professional education.”

This article begins with a summary of current theory in literacy and pedagogy that acknowledges the role of students and their sociocultural contexts as fundamental prerequisites for designing curricular practice. If learning relationships are to flourish, especially when teacher and student enter the classroom space from dramatically different and even contrasting perspectives, a negotiated conversation of respect must be cultivated. This “conversational” approach to the English classroom (Applebee, 1996; Pradl, 1996; Stock, 1995; Wells, 1999) obliges teachers to consciously promote active and socially oriented meaning making on the part of their students. Validating what the student brings to the learning situation remains especially important given the ongoing debates surrounding multiculturalism and bilingual education (Krashen, 1996; Nieto, 1999) and phonics/whole language in reading instruction (Strauss, 2002). In this instance, the Puente materials and instructional approaches have been designed to anticipate the range of productive literacy “scripts” that Latino students will need for navigating both higher education and subsequent employment.

Next follows a survey of the discipline-specific rationale behind the key strategies and materials that constitute Puente’s meaning-making approach to high school English. Teachers initiate student responses and class
discussions that grow out of engagement with both literary and expository texts, ones chosen to mediate between the world of Latino students and the wider world accessed by academic learning. By integrating Mexican American literature with texts from the traditional literary canon, the curriculum advances opportunities for both celebrating and critiquing the conditions and values that characterize the students’ surroundings. Further, Puente teachers use writing process pedagogy, along with portfolios, in their effort to develop student writing abilities—the idea being to gradually move students from self-expression to analytic and critical writing, discourses that will be expected of them in higher education. Of particular importance is how teaching-learning strategies in Puente English form a bridge between the cultures of the Puente students and the standards that the mainstream academic curriculum requires of them.

Accomplishing these active learning goals requires an ambitious program of teacher preparation based on constructivist principles (Gergen, 1995). Through summer training sessions and ongoing workshops, Puente itself has its English teachers engage directly in genuine reading and writing experiences. This helps these teachers develop instructional practices and attitudes that will foster literacy skills within a meaning-based English curriculum while encouraging them to listen to cultural voices that may not be their own. In this way, student presence might guide instructional decisions. The teaching of literature and composition that characterizes Puente English classrooms, along with the crucial role professional development plays in implementing such pedagogy, offers an encouraging model for working with underserved students whatever their ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic origins.

The illustrative descriptions presented in this article of various components of Puente’s high school English course, along with its comprehensive approach to teacher training, are based on an extensive document review. This includes all the evaluation reports of the Puente Project, the numerous materials related to staff development, the guidelines and anchor papers that are part of the portfolio assessment in writing, sample lessons that illustrate a meaning-based approach for fostering literacy skills, and other writings that compose the English curriculum records maintained in Puente’s central office. In addition, extended interviews were held with Puente’s director of teacher training (M. K. Healy, personal communication, September 23, 2001) and with a first-year Puente teacher who completed the summer training program in 2000.
CREATING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS
WHERE THE LIVES OF STUDENTS ARE HONORED

The English-speaking dominant culture in America has a long and sad history of neglect when it comes to recognizing the achievements of minorities in its midst (Trombold, 1999). The neglect has been particularly egregious in the history of California’s education of its Mexican American residents: When not denied access to schooling, they have often found themselves in segregated conditions. (For a thorough history of this educational exclusion, see Losey, 1997, pp. 49-88). Treated separately, excluded, their identity and concerns marginalized, many Latino students become silent, withdrawing in ways that allow their own behaviors, not the schools’ failure, to be labeled as the cause of the problem (Valenzuela, 1999).

In recent years, however, Pratt’s (1991) notion of a “contact zone”—wherein opposing cultures come to struggle with and negotiate meanings—has promoted the view that students need not abandon their cultural backgrounds when they enter the classroom. Such dialogue across cultures holds great potential for energizing learning, for as Bakhtin (1986) suggests, “the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity” (p. 2). Accordingly, the professional literature in education is increasingly providing support for teachers who attempt to resist the constraints of the traditional literary canon, which, as John Guillery (1993) decisively demonstrated, “is restricted to the institutions of the materially advantaged” (p. 339). This liberalization of the curriculum includes both text selection and approaches to reading that draw on the ethnic backgrounds of readers (Brown & Stephens, 1998; Harris, 2001; Krashen, 1998; Moll, 1988). Indeed, by supporting massive free voluntary reading, which relates to students’ lives and cultural experiences, teachers can help students overcome early reading disabilities (Krashen & McQuillan, 1998).

The challenge for the Puente high school English program has been to design curricula through which Puente students gain the skills, knowledge, and understanding that will promote their functioning in an alternative interpretive community. To be successful in arenas separate from their home base, students require what has been variously labeled as instrumental knowledge, social capital, and cultural capital. Access comes, if it comes at all, when one attains sufficient understanding of systems of social operation and meaning that are not one’s own (Coleman, 1988; Farkas, 1996; Lareau, 1989; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). In the United States, unfortunately, cultural
capital is not distributed equally in terms of the skills and knowledge provided students (Gándara, 1995b; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Hinz, 1996). Yet without such knowledge, one remains within the limits dictated by one’s home background, without the possibility of entertaining cultural and employment scripts that permit entry into a wider world (Gilyard, 1991; Ogulnick, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The idea of cultural capital has particular resonance given the controversies surrounding Hirsch’s (1987) educational proposals, which uncompromisingly outlined a core compendium of knowledge that everyone should have accumulated on completing an academic education. Unfortunately, a single-minded vision of cultural capital fails the reciprocity test because it ignores the question of who gets to participate in its coinage (Pradl, 1997). In educational circumstances that honor all students, cultural capital grows out of acts of mutual barter; it does not appear magically as a list of random items nailed to a classroom door.

Finally, classrooms that work for previously underserved students are run by teachers who are aware of how labels of all kinds sabotage teaching these students on their own terms. Teachers need to be sensitive to the ways bias leads to sorting students based on negative expectations that arise from an unexamined “deficit orientation” (Serrano, 1999, p. 228). In contrast, when educators are committed to making a difference, not excluding difference, they inevitably join forces with the students’ communities (Cummins, 1986; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990). Despite prejudices to the contrary, communities with less material advantages have a stake in wanting the best education for their children, which ultimately involves students’ learning targeted skills relevant for a changing economy (Murnane & Levy, 1996, pp. 80-108). Such a view of education demands an instructional policy that is based on teachers’ knowing equally both their students and their disciplines.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PUENTE ENGLISH TEACHER

Teachers with good intentions but who otherwise do not understand about “being of color and of poverty” (Villanueva, 1993, p. xv) need to develop sensitivity to those who have previously been rendered invisible by the traditional American mainstream culture that resists acknowledging different ways of being in the world. Systematically barred from academic study of any ethnicity foreign to the status quo, members of such groups have little opportunity to develop the kind of confidence that makes it possible to venture out into mainstream society. “Without knowing the traditions, there is no way of knowing which traditions to hold dear and which to discard” (Villanueva, 1993, p. 75). As Delpit (1988) advised,
We must learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness. In other words, we must become ethnographers in the true sense. (p. 297)

Committed to a conversation among alternative traditions, the Puente leadership acknowledges that teachers must take responsibility for modeling the changes in attitude and instructional strategies necessary to bring this about (M. K. Healy, personal communication, September 23, 2001).

In an ethnographic approach to classroom instruction, teachers observe and note “in a systematic way the strengths, abilities, and needs of [the] students as a prerequisite to effective planning and teaching” (Duffy, 2001, p. 138). Employing a sociocultural perspective means academic success and/or failure is not located solely in the student. Rather, achievement is also the result of patterns of socialization, of how the student construes relationships with teachers who are vested with academic authority. From this perspective, a teacher makes “curricular decisions that [take] into account the cultural and linguistic composition of [the] class as a whole and of [the] students as individuals” (p. 138). What grows out of this sensitivity to the personal-cultural nexus, as Duffy has observed in her classroom research, is a teaching style that promotes advocacy for students. This means the teacher will provide opportunities for student expertise and strengths to emerge while ensuring that student meaning making marks the progression of any assignment.

When teachers take seriously otherwise “invisible” students, they are deliberately advocating for social justice, a position often articulated by educational ethnographers seeking to bridge the gap between teaching purposes and actual practice (Edelsky, 1999; Fecho, 2000; Gitlin, 1990; Heath, 1983). As ethnographer, the teacher sees students, whatever their apparent deficiencies, as having intentions that bear listening to (Pradl, 1988; Colsant, 1995). This effort also involves teachers’ thinking deeply about their individual encounters and relationships with students. It means studying student work with other teachers to see how students are making sense of the world (Himley, 1991), and it means doing joint assessments so that learning standards might become mutually intelligible (Sheingold, Heller, & Storms, 1997). These understandings can then be used to directly connect students’ readings with their writing assignments.

An ethnographic teaching stance locates difference in terms of cultural styles and values and then makes use of this knowledge in two ways. First, it guides how specific lessons are constructed to erect bridges between student lives and the demands of the common curriculum. Second, it fosters productive patterns of interaction between teacher and student—what Bartolomé (1994) called a “humanizing pedagogy”—to ensure that students understand
they are being heard and respected. These strategies may seem obvious; however, it is not particularly easy for majority teachers to bend in this direction. This is especially true when dominant educational forces ignore a multicultural perspective or support a pedagogy that, as many education critics contend, fails to treat students as active learners motivated to a high degree by their own natural curiosity and agency (Mayher, 1990; Rose, 1989).

Confronting cultural difference means reformulating understandings in student terms rather than remaining static within the preexisting meanings of the teacher (DeStigter, 1998). As they view the “Other,” persons in the majority generally invoke the convenient reaction of “disembodied remoteness”—the process of categorizing difference as monolithic, which in turn only requires a single, uniform response (Higham, 1984, p. 181). When teachers exhibit predetermined responses in the classroom, they greatly simplify their transactions with students and sidestep the complexities of how culture and social background are crucial ingredients in the learning mix. Engaging with real individuals, however, immediately reveals seemingly endless heterogeneity. In the case of Puente students, for example, this means recognizing that the Mexican American/Latino umbrella term covers a complex array of peoples of different origins and statuses, each with their own label preferences (Losey, 1997, pp. 6-7; Roy, 1997).

Teachers who attend to the cultural conditions of their students talk with them at length about “the changes they [are] experiencing and how they [are] adjusting to their new school’s culture” (Quinn, 2001, p. 45). Validating this particular contact zone inevitably increases the number of teachers who become engaged in the process of transforming the environment of their school (García-González, Mejía, & Porter, 1999), even as they explore what it means for a culturally competent white teacher to be working in culturally diverse schools (Howard, 1999). What is encouraging are the number of studies where teachers are now documenting the complex lives of Latino youth, both in and out of school, and how these students make use of literacy practices (DeStigter, Aranda, & eddy, 1997; Valdés, 2001). Such studies can serve to encourage education policy makers to support teaching that welcomes the students’ cultures into the process of learning.

**DISCIPLINE RATIONALE BEHIND READING AND WRITING PRACTICES IN PUENTE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH**

Given Puente’s fundamental emphasis on knowing the student, what follows is an approach to teaching and learning that centers around what Barnes (1992) labeled the “interpretation” of skills and knowledge, rather than on
their mere "transmission" (p. 140). Once this perspective becomes integral to the way lessons are conducted in a Puente English classroom, reading and writing are no longer isolated acts of deciphering or penning a text but instead become acts of negotiating and extending crucial meanings with significant partners. By providing "scaffolding" for student learning, this program attempts to enact a social or Vygotskian approach to instruction (Pradl, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Further, it underscores what research has shown to be the important role of collaboration in learning (Pradl, 1990). Viewing the curriculum as a continual site of negotiation with students (Flower, 1994), teachers, counselors, and mentors work together in order to integrate the students' interests and concerns with the content required of an academic program. Further, when they are able to work cooperatively, students can develop the kind of study habits, such as going over work with peers and frequently writing brief responses and summaries, that recent research by Light (2001) has demonstrated contribute to college students' making sense of what they were studying while retaining more information.

In high-poverty contexts, researchers have found that in the area of reading, student achievement rises when teachers focus "on meaning and the means for constructing meaning" and provide "opportunities to discuss what is read and extend knowledge" (Adelman, 1995, p. 65). Further, in a recent study (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001) which reported on the success of an instructional framework called Reading Apprenticeship, the researchers showed the importance of integrating reading intervention within the ongoing work of the class. Instead of isolating students in remedial skills programs, the researchers argued that schools

must build on the strengths . . . of young people . . . by demystifying the hidden processes of reading for understanding, by putting their confusion and difficulties to classroom use, and by helping them make connections between their strategic thinking and behavior outside of school and their academic performance and reading achievement inside school. (p. 118)

When reading literature with students, an important goal is to establish consistency by exploring parallel ideas over an extended time period. In this way, common themes begin to emerge in classroom discussions, and research has shown such a coherent approach to be the most efficacious in promoting student understanding (Applebee, Burroughs, & Stevens, 2000; Lewis, 1999; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast, 1997). A sense of purpose impresses on students the awareness that they are working within what Wells (1999) called a "knowledge-building community," a place where inquiry occurs because the group is genuinely seeking to better understand their
material conditions. What is crucial is how the students contribute to this understanding, not merely passively absorbing it from traditional authorities. Researchers who observed Puente classes have found such communities of inquiry:

Students openly shared their own responses as well as those of their parents; and some were in conflict. It became apparent that students were taking advantage of their opportunity to declare such unspoken feelings which are too often censored among their peers. It was obvious that such feelings emerged due to the "safe" environment that had been cultivated by the program. (Gándara, 1996, p. 107)

Overall, the Puente classes that were visited were seen as a "'safe place' to try out new ideas, share personal writing and take risks in learning"—students "never demurred from reading their most personal writings out loud in class" (Gándara, 1998, p. 149).

In the field of composition, beginning with Emig's (1969) early work, there has been a significant paradigm shift from a focus on writing as a fixed product to a central emphasis on the composing process from invention and planning to editing and publication (Britton, 1970; Hairston, 1982). Further, a process approach to writing begins by encouraging a student's fluency, then moves on to matters of clarity, before finally worrying about correctness (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl, 1983, pp. 36-48). This reverses years of composition neglect, in which, if there was any attention to writing, its focus was almost exclusively on form rather than function (Moffett, 1981). Central to this concern with the dynamic ways in which a piece of writing comes into being and then changes on its journey toward final draft is the idea of revision (Brannon, Knight, & Neverow-Turk, 1982). As extensive research has shown, when students are given clear guidelines within a series of tasks that tap their concerns and interests, they make excellent progress as writers (Hill-ocks, 1995). Similarly, for previously underserved students, writing develops best when it is integrated with other areas of the curriculum and connected to a student's background and cultural experience (Needels, 1995).

Puente has been especially sensitive to how the process approach to literacy development needs to be tailored to their specific population (Collins, 1998; Gutiérrez, 1992; Reyes, 1991, 1992; Samway & McKeown, 1999; Valdés & Sanders, 1999). Given Puente's emphasis on social relationships, teachers use small groups to support the response phase of the composing process. This allows students a crucial opportunity to learn how to talk through their reactions to peer texts and also how to receive responses from others. Paralleling the Bay Area Writing Project principle, which has proven so successful for 28 years, teachers themselves are encouraged to write
alongside their students. This approach has a number of advantages, including helping make each writing task more real and immediate for students. But most important, it means that the particular features and stages of any given writing assignment can be explicitly articulated for students. Instead of mechanically teaching some generic writing process, Puente English teachers are directed to focus on the various drafts that students go through during their process journeys in completing a paper.

In Puente English classes, the goal is for teachers to pay particular attention to how students approach an expository writing task. As the academy would define it, such writing demands abstract logic and the display of external information; one is to avoid any direct personal narrative that entangles the experience of the writer with any object under consideration. In recounting her experience in a writing class conducted for Puente students at a community college, Cazden (1996) was startled to find how her approach to organizing a response to a topic differed dramatically from the students'⁴. A shared routine of events shaped the experience they were discussing, value was placed on sensory details, and the writer's impressions and feelings served to ground any subsequent interpretations or judgments (p. 8). As Bernardo Ferdman (1990) argued, the cultural identity component is crucial to the development of literacy, and thus “by providing a range of literacy experiences and explicitly linking them to their cultural sources, teachers can give students more involvement and choice in their own formation” (p. 201). Valuing this focus on personal and cultural identity, Puente has embedded the exploration of narrative within the analysis and production of exposition that students must command if they are to navigate successfully the nonnarrative regions of the curriculum. This involves “writing, reading aloud, sharing and discussing narratives about the past that [serve] to validate that past” (Cazden, 1996, p. 10). In this safe cultural haven where Mexican American stories can be celebrated, the critical sharing of ethnic experience allows students to “look forward as well as back, envisioning a future and reconceiving one’s own identity in the process” (Cazden, 1996, p. 10).

A final key dimension underlying curricular practice in Puente English classrooms involves critical inquiry into the immediate physical and social environment. Such meaningful studies allow students to use literacy to explore the systems that surround them in terms of how they work for or against opportunities for their cultural group. Indeed, educators have argued that “it is a 'basic skill' for students to reflect critically on issues of schools, equity, and social justice” (Bigelow, 1999, p. 256). Independent study projects, as Kent's (2000) classroom observations have shown, are able to move students from the school-bound text to a critical exploration of sources and practices beyond the school walls. Along these lines, the Puente High School
English program works to establish the medium of the Mexican American/Latino community as a means of presenting, sharing, and negotiating the knowledge—both canonical and procedural—that will be expected of students as they progress in their school careers and imagine new social roles and economic scripts.

SEEING YOURSELF IN WORKS OF LITERATURE: CRAFTING A LEARNING CLIMATE THAT REFLECTS SUPPORT AND RESPECT

From early on in the program, most students have cited the reading of Mexican American/Latino literature as a key part of their Puente educational experience; this has been confirmed by many of the parents who have been interviewed. "Students professed to be amazed and excited by the fact that people like themselves wrote stories and books that spoke to their own life circumstances" (Gándara, 1998, p. 149). Being exposed to Latino literature serves as a role model for students who previously had not realized that there are Chicanos who are powerful and acclaimed writers. As one student commented, "I never thought there were Chicano writers. I was surprised when I heard. I think it has influenced me. The whole book of Sandra Cisneros, everything she said I could relate to." Indeed, as many of the students agreed, "they really enjoy the literature because they can relate to the characters and situations" (Gándara, 1995a, p. 40). The content of these literary works provides a personal connection for the students, unlike other texts representing the mainstream culture that they are required to read in the traditional curriculum, and this leads to more self-exploration and group discussion, which in turn provides more impetus for writing.

The list of works that connect to the culture of the Puente students is extensive: Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima, Victor Villaseñor’s Rain of Gold, Isabel Allende’s The House of the Spirits, numerous short stories, and a variety of Latino poets. Reading these texts has shrunk the time spent on core literature in some Puente classes, or as one teacher put it, “Before, we would have spent four weeks on Julius Caesar, now we spend only two” (Gándara, 1996, p. 38). This deliberate focus on ethnic literature is part of a much wider effort in the academy to support more choices in the literature classroom by questioning the legitimacy of British-American works dominating the literature curriculum in American schools (Baucom, 2001). Given their positive encounters with Latino literature, Puente teachers have been “sought after by their colleagues to help them incorporate some of this literature into their own classes” (Gándara, 1996, p. 38). Thus, as a result of using a variety of Mexican American/Latino materials with students, the Puente English teachers are
bringing these texts into their other, non-Puente classes, and some are becoming known as Latino literature experts in their schools. Gradually, however, with the pressure to conform to the standard canon in the English curriculum, such multicultural texts occur with less frequency as Puente students move on to the higher grades (Gándara, 1995a, p. 40).

Connecting with previously underserved students involves providing them with opportunities for expressing their understandings of the particular hardships, desires, and triumphs they face in worlds often dramatically separated from their adult teachers. Using creative drama as part of the classroom interrogation of both literary and expository texts, for instance, provokes students to reconstrue the particular social roles that may serve to constrain their access to participation in the wider community. This allows the classroom to be a forum for probing student understandings of how culture provides them with a lens for making meaning and how prejudice often dominates the outsiders’ view of cultures not their own. In short, beginning in spaces invited by Mexican American/Latino literature, the goal is to help Puente students become aware of how they came to believe what they believe, how such beliefs serve to govern many of their actions, and how, through careful reflection, alternatives (even those involving compromises of whatever sort) might be imagined and then devised. To achieve these goals, Puente teachers are challenged to readjust their classroom strategies so that discussion involves active student participation as opposed to an occasionally interrupted teacher monologue.

USING PORTFOLIOS TO ASSESS WRITING

A writing portfolio assessment culminates the arc of a student’s experience with the writing process each year. The details of this instructional routine reveal the degree to which the Puente leadership is committed to coherent and rigorous standards in the teaching of composition. Student portfolios contain at least five samples of writing, along with a cover letter which allows the student to introduce the chosen texts and comment on his or her development so far as a writer. In the fall, prior to any writing instruction, all Puente students across the state complete a baseline composition written to the same prompt, which provides a common anchor across all portfolio assessments. Additionally, there is a community/mentor essay, an autobiographical or biographical piece, an interpretation of a work of literature, and an issue/commentary piece. Finally, students are allowed to select additional compositions to fill out the portfolio with work that best represents how they have progressed as a writer. Each piece of writing is specifically distinguished as being poetic, discursive, mixed, or expressive. This means that teachers are
looking for students to be in command of a range of textual strategies from the direct expression of personal narratives and meanings to a more distanced and academic-sounding prose necessary for discussing abstract ideas and concepts. At the end of the school year, as the students assemble their portfolios by selecting the required samples, they have one more opportunity to edit each piece before writing the reflective essay that serves as an introduction to their portfolio.

The Puente English program has adapted a detailed scoring matrix developed by a portfolio assessment consultant. Rather than assigning the commonly used single holistic score that indicates the teacher-reader’s overall impression of each piece of writing, Puente uses a primary trait or feature analysis approach in order to profile a student’s achievement in more detail. The specific categories, outlined in the Puente Portfolio Scoring Guide for 2000, provide a comprehensive picture of the developmental dimensions that a Puente student must master on the road to writing competence: scope, sequence, development, craft, and editing. Scope refers to the difficulty of the task and the complexity and quality of the ideas, whereas sequence indicates the degree of structure and coherence present in the composition. Development points to how well the student has supported claims and offered details and illustrations. Craft opens up the area of aesthetics and style, giving the student credit for controlling language in ways that demonstrate expressive power and the creation of a signature voice. Finally, editing covers the mechanics of language use to show the degree to which a student controls the conventions of writing.

A 5-point rating scale, from outstanding achievement to serious limitations—needs special, sustained attention in this area, allows the teacher to characterize the five features of an essay. After each feature is rated, an overall score for each essay is given and then total scores are summed across essays for the portfolio as a whole. Scoring occurs during the summer after the school year is completed. At this juncture, Puente English teachers work with the Puente portfolio coordinator to gather papers that typify the range of scores that will be applied to the portfolios. Once this anchoring task is completed, all portfolios are scored and the matrix scoring sheets are sent to the Puente office. Finally, the portfolios are returned to the teachers for distribution back to the students.

To prepare for the baseline writing which takes place before any instruction occurs, Puente staff have established a detailed 3-day script so that all Puente 9th graders receive the same writing prompt, “Myself the Writer,” and are guided through the same distinct process activities. First, in a prewriting opportunity, students brainstorm lists of ideas before the teacher models possible adjectives (e.g., erratic, semiconfident, eager). The students then have a
homework assignment in which they make log entries for several questions ranging from why one might love or hate writing to how one learned to write, from writing problems to writing ambitions. On the 2nd day, after the homework logs are shared, the students have 30 minutes to write first drafts provoked by the following prompt: "Find a single focus for your essay: What one word would you use to describe the kind of writer you are? Explore your claim that you are THIS KIND OF WRITER." On the 3rd day, the teacher returns the papers and outlines what students might do to revise them by adding, taking out, or rearranging parts of their essay and also by changing words and sentences and correcting mistakes. Students then have 20 minutes to complete this task before being asked to rewrite their drafts into a final copy that will be turned into the central Puente office. The 10th graders follow a similar 3-day routine, but this time the prompt is a piece of literature ("XX" by Jimmy Santiago Baca), which the students are to describe first and then reflect on its message. As Gándara (1995a) summarizes, "These examples of their writing provide ... insights to issues important for the students, as well as yielding another measure of their skill and progress in writing" (p. 13).

Puente evaluation reports (Gándara, 1995a, p. 42) indicate that students like the portfolio process because seeing evidence of their progress reinforces for them the need to pay attention to individual writing assignments. Further, it provides them with clear markers of their overall development as writers. Students have expressed that they enjoy this monitoring of their growth and that portfolios are a way of encouraging both revision and final "editing and polishing" stages. In a similar manner, portfolios encourage the professionalism of teachers because they challenge teachers to reflect on student meaning making in relation to how the writing process is taught.

WELCOME ABOARD: PREPARING TEACHERS FOR THE PUENTE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Educational policy all too often ignores the engagement and understanding process of teachers by not ensuring that adequate time and resources for their learning will be linked with efforts to reform curriculum standards and instructional practice (Cohen & Ball, 2001). In short, as a growing body of research has now established (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cohen & Hill 2000; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Lieberman, 1995; Lieberman, & Grodnick, 1997), those who are charged with putting new knowledge and practices into place must themselves be given time and direction to rethink what it is they are doing in the classroom. The content of the discipline must be associated with appropriate teaching/learning strategies, and this often means that teachers will have to revisit their approaches to
assessment as well as their relationships with their students. Accordingly, comprehensive education policy extends beyond a vision of curriculum content and learning standards, for it realizes that implementation depends on a coherent plan for teacher development.

The guiding ideas for professional development of Puente teachers grew out of the extremely successful efforts of the Bay Area Writing Project (Gray, 2000) in helping teachers at all levels work with writing in their classrooms. This staff development approach places a premium on teachers’ actively engaging in the writing process and developing their particular areas of expertise. This means that teacher knowledge and participation become important aspects of what Puente works hard to accomplish. When involved in Puente workshops, teachers are asked to examine their practices and keep evolving them to ensure the best fit between their particular strengths and an estimation of what students bring to their classrooms (Daniels & Zemelman, 1985). This philosophy of teacher growth and professionalism greatly influenced the leaders of Puente. Healy (1998), a member of the original Bay Area Writing Project cohort of teachers, was particularly instrumental in ensuring that Puente’s work with teachers respected their understandings while offering a rich array of ideas and experiences that would help them implement the writing process and bring Latino literature into their classrooms.

Given the larger support system within which Puente English functions, it is important to emphasize that staff development often combines English teachers with counselors and community mentor liaisons in the various school teams. All members of the team need to be familiar with the approach to literacy in the English classes so that literacy can be constantly reinforced in other encounters with students, whether in counseling or mentoring. By working intensely with the counselors and English teachers who will be responsible for cohorts of Puente students, the Puente staff increases the chances that instructional practices will follow Puente’s educational principles. Just as the cohorts of Puente students that bond together over a 2-year period help to reinforce what is being learned, so too keeping Puente staff in collaborative learning relationships allows opportunities for feedback in making improvements in the program. By creating an ongoing educational conversation, Puente helps continue the professional development of its English teachers. This holds the potential that Puente’s writing process instruction and awareness of cultural difference will in turn influence the other classes they teach. In this way, Puente can serve as a change agent beyond its immediate constituency.

Staff development includes both an initial 2-week summer institute for new staff and various 2-day regional follow-up workshops that cover a myriad of ideas and practices appropriate for the Mexican American/Latino
population of students: teaching an academically heterogeneous class; pre-
paring lessons and units; assessing, evaluating, and grading student work;
teaching the writing process, including prewriting, drafting, revision, editing
(grammar and mechanics) and publishing; working with students to acquire
academic writing skills within the context of the composing process; con-
ducting a portfolio assessment; instructing students in a range of writing gen-
res; integrating Mexican American/Latino literature into the core curricu-
ulum; reading challenging non-fiction; employing community-based writing,
including mentor writing; and learning how to work effectively as part of a
collaborative team.

Duffy (2002) has documented how, by actively participating in Puente
training, teachers become part of a professional community. After complet-
ing an 8-day summer institute, Duffy took part in follow-up professional
development activities and observed the classes of three Puente English
teachers. Based on these ethnographic observations, and her surveys and
interviews with teachers, Duffy concluded that “ritual, routine, and lan-
guage” characterized Puente’s plan for influencing teacher thinking and
behavior. By actually partaking in a Mexican American ritual designed to
further self-knowledge, the teachers had an opportunity to explore some of
the inner workings of cultural spaces not their own. Because of this
lived-through experience, these teachers tended to develop a sense of individ-
ual commitment and group cohesion that results from being immersed in
a common educational enterprise. By writing every day during the summer
institute and sharing this writing with their peers, the teachers built up a posi-
tive routine that supports writing process instruction. Finally, through collabor-
ative talk, teachers learned a new professional language that facilitated
probing the cultural meanings in student work. As they came to understand
what it means to talk about underserved students on their own terms, these
teachers completed the important circle of reflection that invites them to
become part of the knowledge-generation process (Duffy, 2002, p. 35).

All Puente English teachers are trained in portfolio assessment so that the
growth of writing abilities of their students might be examined over a 2-year
period in a consistent and reliable way (Lucas, 1997). This provides assurance
that the Puente writing assessment is formalized without yielding to
some standardized testing approach. Paralleling their staff development
experience with the writing of multiple genres, teachers learn how portfolios
allow for writing across different forms, disciplines, and audiences. Particip-
ating in portfolio assessment sessions allows the English teachers to docu-
ment growth in student writing while they get a better sense of how their own
students' work compares with the larger Puente universe. Teachers surveyed
reported positively about both the portfolio training sessions and the use of
portfolios to advance the learning objects of Puente English (Gándara, 1998, pp. 66-67). These benefits are similar to what other researchers have described when teachers work together in small groups to score student written work (Sheingold & Heller, in press).

In the most recent evaluation of the Puente high school project (Gándara, 1998), average ratings of staff development fell between "very good" and "excellent," and teachers perceived that they were more marketable as a result of this experience:

In sum, the Puente English curriculum is demanding for both students and teachers and the teachers feel a need for more time to accomplish everything they must do. However, teachers expressed deep satisfaction with the training they received, were very happy with their jobs, and contended that the skills they had learned were being shared with all of their classes. Paradoxically, they were also more critical of their own performance than were other Puente team members. (p. 54)

In an attempt to build a wider base of support for their methods, Puente has also been engaged in running workshops for non-Puente teachers. The topics covered in these sessions include: the writing process, Mexican American/ Latino literature, use of editorials or newspaper items for critical writing assignments, use of local community resources, and use of small group activities (Gándara, 1998, p. 126). Teachers surveyed generally report positively about how learning such activities influences their subsequent teaching; indeed, the majority claimed they were already beginning to incorporate writing process and small groups into their classes (Gándara, 1998, p. 127).

Puente is very aware that its high school English project will only thrive to the extent its approaches influence the larger school reform agenda. Paying attention to the wider school context has had discernible results (Gándara, 1998):

- "integrating more community-based writing and other activities into the English curriculum"
- "increasing the presence of literature from underrepresented groups into the schools' curricula"
- "providing teachers with more tools for assessing the skills and needs of students through portfolio-type assessments"
- "increasing the opportunities for students to learn to work together and support each other in cooperative learning groups"
- "increasing the overall quality of teaching through staff development and collaboration"
• "Increased enthusiasm and participation of Puente students and parents had a positive impact on the overall school climate." (pp. 118-123)

By encouraging a fresh look at the relationship between teaching and learning, not only for Puente students but for all students, Puente's staff development has encouraged teachers to at least informally disseminate the Puente curriculum and pedagogical strategies to other teachers, especially in terms of including Latino literature in the curriculum.

For the majority of Puente English teachers who come to believe in the program, their involvement has been encouraged by the intense and personal attention that they receive from the Puente staff development team. This includes having access to Puente's growing file of teacher resources, which contains numerous lessons that have sparked reading, discussion, and writing for students. Being welcomed aboard represents becoming part of a community of educators who are dedicated to improving what they do as teachers. Such community building in education, as Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2000) have shown, dramatically changes how teachers think about teaching and learning. Because the Puente Project places such a premium on professional growth and self-renewal, many Puente teachers respond by inquiring into the sources and practices that constitute their own teaching presence in the classroom. This self-reflection in turn allows them to gradually transform what happens there.

CONCLUSIONS: USING PUENTE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TO GUIDE EDUCATIONAL POLICY

From the beginning, if the English component of High School Puente were not working, it would have been difficult for the program to survive and prosper. Realizing this, the Puente leadership made every effort to ensure that their English teachers received the necessary training. In developing its comprehensive approach to teacher preparation, Puente clearly heeded the warning that marks the consensus of researchers in the field: "Professional development that is fragmented, not focused on curriculum for students, and does not afford teachers consequential opportunities to learn cannot be expected to be a constructive agent of state or local policy" (Cohen & Hill, 2000, p. 330). The evidence after 10 years supports the founders' faith in helping teachers develop the capacity to deliver a culturally engaged and skill-based English program. As Gándara (1998) reported, "Puente students in the matched sample attended four-year colleges at nearly double the rate of non-Puente
students who began high school with exactly the same academic and background characteristics” (p. 155).

By focusing their students on the analytic skills of literacy in order that they might gain access to economic and social opportunities, Puente high school English provides an important model for teachers and policy makers dedicated to extending the boundaries of democratic inclusion in education. To accomplish their difficult instructional mission, Puente teachers have had to understand that academic procedures serve immediate purposes by connecting to life functions that are vital to the student’s culture and community (Rivera & Pedraza, 2000). Each teaching/learning task presents an opportunity to situate literacy activities within a student’s social and economic realities (Yagelski, 2000), even while providing teachers with insight into how students continue to evolve new literacy practices and cultural identities (Yon, 2000).

Given its commitment to strengthening professional development and encouraging reflective practice on the part of the Puente school teams, one of Puente’s greatest legacies has been educating teachers in how to make writing process and portfolios work in their classrooms, which frequently gives them something far beyond their university training (Gándara, 1998, p. 150). Prior to Puente, many of the English teachers in the participating schools gave short shrift to the teaching of writing. Now, as one teacher noted, there is a better balance between literature and writing in her classes since she joined Puente English, because the Puente staff development has in fact helped her become a writing teacher (Gándara, 1996, p. 41). In breaking the cycle of the teacher-centered English classroom and focusing on writing workshops, group discussion, and activities such as community-based writing, Puente suggests that teachers can learn to factor the powers of each student into the instructional equation.

Increasingly, teachers at all levels are attempting to integrate their planning of language arts lessons with their concern for establishing connections to the cultural lenses brought by students (Edelsky, 1999; Espinosa & Moore, 1999; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Álvarez, & Chiu, 1999; King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997). The need to mediate between a student’s language/culture and the discourses of the academy is not, of course, unique to the Latino population but is part of a general concern of all teachers attempting to develop the literacy capacity of those outside the dominant English-speaking society (Gee, 1990). Puente’s success in its English classes has in large part stemmed from its awareness that the school code must be explicitly taught, but this has never been reduced to rote, decontextualized learning. Drawing on the collaborative aspects of a caring
professional community (DiPardo, 1999; Grossman et al., 2000; Lieberman & Gronnick, 1997), Puente has been able to embed skill development within the genuine lines of communication that tie parents and the Latino community to their schools.

Inadequate and misguided resources are not alone in thwarting educational opportunity for all. It takes endless classrooms where instructional practices ignore each student's indigenous cultural symbols and ways of making sense of the world. Reversal of these practices may be slow, but little change can be expected until educational policies promote the education of both new and experienced teachers in approaches that honor multicultural realities. To achieve this goal will require policy support that extends beyond the classroom English teacher. Puente’s contribution here is thus particularly salient, for when its team component works as designed, literacy education draws on the synergy of an integrated educational partnership, one that also includes counselors, mentors, and the community in an extended conversation. Yet, regardless of where educational change begins, Puente’s model of staff development shows what can be accomplished when groups of teachers are given professional preparation and support to begin casting classroom learning in a new light.

REFERENCES


Teachers working toward critical whole language practice (pp. 37-54). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.


