

World Generation Vignette A

As you read the following vignette, please consider the following questions:

- In what ways did the World Generation curriculum help teachers address the challenges that emergent bilinguals face in middle school social studies classrooms? In what ways did it not?
- For teachers and school leaders who saw the benefits of the World Generation curriculum, what are some ways to support the sustainability of this study, to expand the use of the evidence-based instructional practices with these teachers in their regular practice outside the study and to other non-participating teachers?
- What other issues does this vignette raise?

In the World Generation study, a team of researchers and teachers modified four middle school social studies unit plans to incorporate these key practices to support adolescent emergent bilingual students:

1. Provide daily opportunities for purposeful language use.
2. Deliberately link historical content to students' lived experiences.
3. Utilize team-based learning to provide structured interactions.
4. Structure lessons' architecture so principles of teaching and understanding language are embedded throughout the unit.
5. Scaffold to provide access to appropriately challenging texts and tasks.

The teachers who participated in the study serve a diverse student population. They have emergent bilingual students who range from recent arrivals to advanced English speakers and US-born speakers of heritage languages. Their classes also include a wide range of reading comprehension and disciplinary knowledge.

Teachers were provided with one day of professional development on the World Generation practices and the four units of study, including the state standards for content knowledge related to the unit topics and the disciplinary skills of perspective taking, identifying and stating claims, arguments, and counter arguments, and using text evidence to support an argument or claim. Participating teachers used the World Generation materials with randomly selected classes, and their regular school or district curricula with their other classes.

Andrea Palma is an experienced social studies teacher, having taught middle grades in her district for over 15 years. She is used to working with advanced level students, but more recently has had classes with emergent bilinguals mainstreamed into some classes.

In typical instruction, Ms. Palma gives students a fun and engaging bell ringer activity to settle the students while she takes attendance. Then she begins the lesson, using a variety of materials she has collected over the years, from handouts with short articles and questions or matching activities to video clips and slides with images and notes for students to copy into their notebooks. Ms. Palma adds to the information with extensive anecdotes and stories about the historical content. Students are asked to answer questions in writing or in a whole-group discussion. She gives emergent bilingual students the option to respond by drawing pictures in their notebooks or pointing to answers, when possible. If her emergent bilingual students don't pass the summative assessments, she will give them the opportunity to do a hands-on project to make up the grade.

In her World Generation classes, Ms. Palma implemented the curriculum with fidelity and shared how surprised and pleased she was with how much her students talked about the social studies content in the pair and group activities. She acknowledged that the emergent bilingual students had been able to participate more in the summative tasks than in the past, but that their use of the academic language in the debate and the essay, even after the lessons preparing statements for the class debate and the modeling of how to write an essay, were “basically reformulations of the sentence frames provided in the lessons” and were not as elaborated and personalized as she expected from her students. They did pass these assessments, though, and did not require an extra assignment. Though she acknowledged the students enjoyed and benefited from these unit plans, Ms. Palma expressed doubts about being able to continue to provide instruction with the World Generation practices after the end of the study; “I don't have the time to teach those English language arts lessons or do fun activities like the debate — there are so many social studies [content] standards to cover before the state exam.” She said if she were provided with more unit plans on additional content, she would use them because the students really like them, but maybe do some activities at the end of the year, after the state test.

John Boscaput is in his second year as a teacher — students call him Mr. B. He describes himself as a historian who teaches, having entered public school teaching through an alternative certification program at the nearby university after working at a local museum during his graduate studies. He was eager to participate in the study to learn more about how to teach middle school students and get them interested in history.

Mr. B's students typically start class by taking out their notebooks and copying the notes that are on the board. They do this on a left-hand page of their notebooks. As Mr. B lectures about the topic, he will suggest additions or highlighting of the notes. Sometimes students are asked a more reflective question about the topic and asked to use the right-hand page to write their response. A few volunteers read their responses, and students do a shortened version of this — one sentence, 6 or 10 words — on an Exit Ticket before leaving class. Most students respond with a paraphrase of something interesting Mr. B shared or from the volunteers who read their reflection from their notebook. He feels strongly about students thinking about history but acknowledges that the district benchmark and state test focus on the facts, so he tries to focus on the events and people students need to know about.

During the World Generation professional development, Mr. B expressed concerns about the group activities in the curriculum. He said he knew that this approach was a good one but was not sure how to manage the logistics and was concerned about off-task student discussions. Based on some tips from the research team about managing student groups, he started with pairs to get students used to the routine of Turn and Talk before moving to groups of four later in the unit. Though the transitions were a little disorganized, students stayed on task and accomplished the group assignments. Mr. B had to change the student pairings in a few cases, but overall students worked well and became adept at the Turn and Talk procedure. "I noticed that some students engaged more with classmates from their own language background, and when I put them together, they did better on their assignments and were more active in the mixed group of four. Sometimes they were talking in their language during the partner time, and I didn't know what they were saying. They got the work done, though so I hope that is okay."

Mr. B shared that he was pleasantly surprised at how well students did on their summative tasks, and his unit tests, even considering that the students in the World Generation classes did not receive the history lectures and notes he gave to his other classes. "During the debate, some students didn't really 'debate' as I would call it — they read their prepared statements at the given time. So I don't know if that really counts as 'student discourse' but I wanted everyone to participate one way or another." He said that he learned a lot from using the World Generation curriculum but feels unsure how to embed the practices into his own teaching. He asked if the research team could provide additional unit plans to use for other topics during the year.

Valerie Quintos is also a novice teacher participating in the study. She completed her education degree, including an internship working with a veteran social studies teacher. She joined the World Generation project going into her second year as a full-time social studies

teacher because she recognized some of the practices from her education classes about meeting the needs of diverse learners.

Ms. Quintos is often the last teacher to leave her building at night, as she works after school to create glossaries and visual aids for her emergent bilingual students. She has a word wall in her classroom that the students revisit and add to over time. She also spends time finding videos and other engaging materials to supplement the textbook her district requires her to use. On weekends, she grades student notebooks and assignments, sometimes regrouping her students to provide more support for struggling students. Students frequently work with a partner in her classes — to read the text, respond to questions, and complete outlines and notes.

During the World Generation lessons, Ms. Quintos' students quickly picked up the routines of Turn and Talk and the formative assessments in their Thought Book entries. Many students really coalesced with their pairs and groups; Ms. Quintos noted the depth of their discussions about the debate question and praised them for the supportive and on task behavior in their groups. Students asked to keep their partners and groups for future units.

In debrief sessions, Ms. Quintos shared that it was a relief that World Generation lessons didn't require the extensive adaptations she was used to doing with her regular textbook. She said these units felt aligned with her philosophy of teaching — the kind of lessons she would like to teach, if she had the time and experience to develop them. What was different, she said, was having lessons where the students prepare their debate statements and where they all worked together to write a class essay, to prepare them for the summative essay they would write on their own. Ms. Quintos remarked, "I never learned about how to set up units like this, where students learn along the way all they need to know to do well at the end. Like, including how to say what they want to say. That was a game changer with my students."

The district Social Studies coach, Tony Martin, asked if the research team had additional units they could use throughout the year. "I hear kids — all the kids — debating and talking deeply about history and then see them doing well on our summatives. The teachers want to teach like this, but without this kind of curriculum, I am not sure how we can help them do that."

The research team would like to support these teachers (and others) in embedding the practices of World Generation into their practice, to extend the success that they saw with students in the treatment classes in this study.