

Culturally Responsive ESL Instruction for Young Chinese Immigrant Learners: A Reflective Practitioner Inquiry in a Community-Based Program

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Abstract. Young Chinese immigrant students are in a foreign country and need to learn English in a new environment; however, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) courses often do not utilise their own cultural and linguistic foundations to help students learn better. This paper reports on a retrospective reflective practitioner inquiry in a community-based ESL program in a northeastern US city, where the teacher-researcher taught ten Chinese immigrant learners aged 7-12 over two weekly instructional sessions. Based on the teacher's dated field notes and journal excerpts from six sessions, the inquiry explores how culturally responsive pedagogy promoted participation, language use, and a sense of classroom belonging in teacher-recorded episodes across three dimensions. First, culturally relevant materials linked the new linguistic concepts with familiar experiences and thus motivated students to learn them willingly. Second, translanguaging served as both a linguistic support system and a source of identity affirmation to help students build a bilingual meaning framework for their English production. Thirdly, according to students' cultural knowledge, differentiated instruction was used to create multiple learning paths for different-ability students. Based on the above results, culturally responsive pedagogy can serve as the foundation for equitable English-language instruction rather than a supplementary method, and practical implications for community-based ESL programs for new immigrant children are offered.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, translanguaging, differentiated instruction, Chinese immigrant students, English as a second language.

1. Introduction

Culturally responsive teaching should be applied to develop fair English as a Second Language (ESL) curricula for young Chinese immigrant students in the United States [1, 2]. These learners often come from different educational backgrounds and have weak English skills, but they are rich in culture and life experience. Most arrived in the United States within the past one to three years and had to learn English and adjust to life in America at the same time, as documented among newcomer students [3]. When teachers acknowledge the resources that students bring in the form of teaching materials and methods, the students are more willing to learn actively and develop language skills; at the same time, they will have a positive self-concept [1, 2]. Instruction that treats such backgrounds as obstacles rather than assets may not use these assets.

Community-based programmes are relatively different from the rest. Operating outside of formal schooling, they are often able to give more space for students' home language and culture, and they serve many newcomer children that school ESL services do not reach. Classroom-level accounts of culturally responsive teaching for young Chinese immigrant learners in such settings are still relatively scarce [4], and practitioners have few concrete models of what this pedagogy looks like in daily teaching decisions.

This paper reports a retrospective reflective practitioner inquiry from one such programme, where the teacher-researcher taught ten Chinese immigrant learners aged 7 to 12. Three questions have appeared sequentially during the course of teaching and organise this account. First, how do culturally relevant materials motivate these learners to participate in class and produce language? Second, in what ways can translanguaging serve as both a language support system and an identity resource in this classroom? Third, how can differentiated instruction be based on learners' cultural knowledge to

help students of different proficiency levels learn effectively? The following sections will review the literature that provides the basis for these questions, describe the teaching environment and data collection sources, present the research results according to the three questions, and finally conclude with practical suggestions and limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

Three bodies of work provide a reference for this study, and in turn explore the cultural foundations of instruction, the function of learners' full linguistic repertoires, and the organisation of instruction in mixed-proficiency classrooms.

2.1. Culturally Responsive and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings [2] put forward the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy to promote the simultaneous achievement of academic success, cultural competence and critical consciousness; she believed that teaching that respects students' culture could help them study well. Gay [1] extended this line of research to culturally responsive teaching, which is based on the idea that one can enhance the effectiveness of learning by connecting it with the cultural knowledge, prior experiences and frames of reference of diverse students. Authentication and a sense of belonging for the students are not side effects of teaching, but the means by which engagement and learning take place [1].

Empirical studies of second-language reading provide support for the above claim. Droop and Verhoeven [5] found that reading materials anchored in culturally familiar content enhanced second-language reading comprehension for young learners, especially when the text language was relatively simple; they believed that cultural familiarity provided background knowledge to reduce the interpretation burden of new language. Therefore, culturally relevant materials can help young Chinese immigrant ESL learners grasp the language better and motivate them to learn through a sense of culture and identity.

2.2. Translanguaging and Emergent Bilingual Learners

A second body of work is on how emergent bilinguals use their full linguistic repertoires. Sociocultural theory proposes that learning is most effective in the learners' zone of proximal development and is supported by culturally and contextually meaningful interactions [6]. Krashen [7] also believed that input is for acquisition and must be meaningful and rich in context. Identity scholarship adds that language learning is also about how learners continuously construct their identity in new linguistic and social environments [8]. Liang [9] specifically documented the above dynamics among Chinese immigrant students and showed that their code-switching in ESL classes had both communicative purposes and identity problems.

Translanguaging theory incorporates the above threads. García and Li Wei [10] consider translanguaging to be the use of one's full language system by speakers, and they believe that classrooms that recognise this system can view bilingualism as a strength rather than a deficiency. García and Kleyn [11] believe that translanguaging is a way to help students learn, but it is also a type of teaching that values multilingualism and places learners' lived linguistic experiences at the centre of classroom teaching. Recently, some research has been conducted in the Chinese-heritage context. Cun [4] reported translanguaging behaviours in a community-based Chinese heritage early childhood education centre, and Sun [12] found that intentionally organised use of Mandarin aided Chinese undergraduates' learning of English grammar in a digital environment and was positively received by the learners.

2.3. Differentiated Instruction for English Learners

A third body of work studies how teachers organize teaching when students have very different levels of ability in the same class. Tomlinson [13] provided the original framework and suggested that teachers can differentiate the content of learning, the way in which students are taught, and the products of learning based on students' readiness, interests and learning styles. Díaz-Rico [14] has proposed that, for English learners in particular, teaching should be flexibly organized to consider both their linguistic readiness and the cultural knowledge they bring to the classroom. Santamaria [15] joined the two threads and thought that differentiation works best when it is culturally responsive, so students can see themselves in the curriculum both in terms of ability and identity.

The three bodies of work share the same foundation. Culture should be the foundation of language instruction, not an add-on. The inquiry reported here investigates that premise in classroom practice.

3. Context and Method

3.1. Setting

The investigation was conducted in a community-based ESL program for children aged 7-12 of Chinese immigrant backgrounds in a Northeastern US city. The program hopes to create an all-encompassing and supportive environment for young children to boost their English abilities, adapt well to new cultures and schools, and perform well academically in the long run; at the same time, it respects all kinds of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the time period studied, the teacher-researcher held two classes per week, which were a reading and writing session on Fridays and a speaking and listening session on Sundays. The episodes in this paper were derived from the author's daily teaching experience. The program has not been named, all student names below are pseudonyms, and direct identifiers have been excluded.

3.2. Participants

The ten students in the class were evenly split between boys and girls and came from grades 1 to 5. Most had been in the United States for less than a year and were dealing with both the problems of language learning and cultural adaptation. One student was born in the United States but lived at home speaking Chinese, and the others had moved from different areas of China in the past one to three years. Given their different linguistic backgrounds, the students had varying levels of English ability and thus required different teaching methods. Some focused on basic literacy and oral language development; others aimed to extend reading comprehension and writing ability. Table 1 is the participant information.

Table 1. Participant information (all names are pseudonyms)

Pseudonym	Background	Years in U.S.
Andrew	10 years old, relocated from Beijing	0.5–1
Jason	10 years old, relocated from Chengdu	0.5–1
Anna	8 years old, relocated from Beijing	0.5–1
Demi	12 years old	0.5–1
Joe	7 years old	0.5–1
Monica	8 years old	0.5–1
Kate	8 years old, relocated from Chengdu	0.5–1
Jennie	7 years old	0.5–1
Alan	8 years old	More than 3
Charles	11 years old, relocated from Shanghai	0.5–1

3.3. Instructional Approach

Both weekly sessions of the curriculum aimed to foster all-round English language ability among students with different levels of exposure to English. Three commitments ran through the instructional design. Lessons used culturally relevant materials to help students link the new ideas with their own cultural lives. Task-based activities promoted genuine communication and use of language. Scaffolded language instruction supported learners of different proficiency levels. Lesson topics during this time included smart technologies and robots, regional animals of China, traditional narratives such as the myth of Chang'e, Chinese and U.S. holidays, daily routines, and hometown geographies.

3.4. Data Sources and Analysis

The account draws from the teacher-researcher's dated field-note and teaching-journal excerpts of six instructional sessions held from March 2 to March 30, 2025. Notes recorded classroom dialogue, such as bilingual exchanges, descriptions of student work, and instructional decisions made at that time. The account 23rganizat these recorded episodes according to the three themes of the paper, namely culturally relevant materials, translanguaging and differentiated instruction, and presents them as illustrative vignettes. It is a retrospective interpretive practitioner's account rather than a formally coded qualitative study, and the implications of this position are mentioned in the limitations. Quoted utterances retain the wording recorded in the teacher's notes, such as developmental grammar, because these forms are themselves evidence of the learners' English at that time; punctuation of quoted material is lightly 23rgанизation. Mandarin utterances, translated by the teacher-researcher, are shown in tone-marked Pinyin with English glosses.

4. Findings

4.1. Culturally Relevant Materials and Language Development

Culturally relevant materials served as bridges to help students connect their existing knowledge with new language concepts and thus enhanced their interest and learning motivation [2]. The clearest example was shown in a lesson called Robots and Us. In the first talk about pictures, students had different ideas of what a robot was and some mistook them for ordinary electronic equipment. Given this conceptual deficiency, the teacher-researcher provided a contextualized definition and, in addition, used visual aids and real-life examples that directly referenced students' prior experiences with smart technology in their home country; thus, the instruction adhered to the model of learning in the learners' zone of proximal development [6].

The adjustment changed the mode of participation. Initially, one student was confused by the abstract concept of automation, so she furrowed her brow and asked, "Is it like a robot vacuum?" After the teacher-researcher confirmed that it was so, another student eagerly added, "In China, we have fridges that can speak!" A lively discussion then took place, and students compared smart technologies in China with those in the United States. A student described a smart home system in her family's life and said that when they said "turn on the light", it did. It was a command. She used the word 'command' she had learned in class, and such meaningful, context-rich input can help facilitate learning [7]. As more students volunteered examples, such as "My grandma has a smart rice cooker" and "I see a robot cook in Beijing Mall", they negotiated meaning by drawing on their linguistic and cultural repertoires and practiced vocabulary such as automation, sensor, and command in authentic ways.

A follow-up activity had invited the students to design a robot of the future, and they were noticeably more enthusiastic. The first was "I want a robot to help me with my homework. It said, 'Hurry up and do your homework!' and 'no phone now!', just like my dad did." This made the other children laugh and recognize that it was the same at home. Another student imagined a cooking assistant robot that would "tell me when the rice is cooked and say, 'It's time to eat!'" A previously

shy student described a robot that could “wake me up for school and say ‘go brush your teeth!’ in both Chinese and English.” In the same design activity, one student explained how a domestic robot would help her parents with daily life, an idea based on her knowledge of family responsibilities, and another imagined a translation robot to help her grandparents communicate in English, showing that she was aware of the language barriers in her own family. Students used the words “homework”, “write” and “ready” in their own lives and often switched between English and Mandarin naturally.

A discussion of animals around the world also showed similar dynamics. Students applied their regional knowledge of wildlife in China to create English-language works and sometimes used Mandarin to recall specific animal names or regional terms. A student said that Sichuan has pandas. They eat bamboo all day. Another added that there are camels in Inner Mongolia, which have two humps. Shuāngfēngtuó is a Chinese word for a two-humped camel. A student who was not willing to participate at first was motivated when asked to describe animals in her home area of Yunnan and then began to speak, “We have Asian elephants. They live in the forest.” Sometimes, these elephants go near the villages, and although dangerous, it is also quite wonderful. Another student added that there are spotted deer in North China. These are animals in the forest and they are herbivores. People want to protect them. New words such as habitat, endangered and region spread through these exchanges, and students moved beyond rote 24rganization to use English to share knowledge based on their own lives.

These cases are also examples of the identity dimension of language use. Learners continuously negotiate their sense of self in new linguistic and social environments [8], and choices about which language to use at various times hold deeper meanings for Chinese immigrant students [9]. When the classroom accepted home experiences as legitimate academic content, students were more confident and willing to speak; therefore, frequent, unforced code-switching showed that their bilingual identities had found a place in the room. Culturally relevant materials thus also made the lessons more interesting. When the students saw their home culture reflected in the class, they were more willing to participate and take an interest in learning English.

4.2. Translanguaging as a Scaffold and an Identity Resource

Translanguaging in this classroom was not a response to limited proficiency but a teaching approach [11], and the teacher-researcher intentionally modelled it. In the lesson on Journey to the West, the students were unable to understand a cultural reference in the English-dubbed video. The teacher-researcher switched to Mandarin for a short time and explained the character’s culture. The two-language explanation helped the students 24rganizat the reference and made them want to study in both languages. Some people added comments spontaneously in mixed codes, such as “It is like Sun Wukong in a magic duel” and “He has magic clouds, just as in other stories!”. They added some conceptual clarity and showed that Mandarin could also be used to construct knowledge. The first language may help Chinese students learn English better, as shown by recent research [12]. In the following classes, the students used Mandarin more freely during small-group brainstorming and then worked together to discuss how to present their ideas in English. Translanguaging is now common in the classroom, and it is used as a shared learning resource rather than a cause for confusion.

Student-centered collaboration extended the application. In a paired storytelling activity, the teacher-researcher gave English keywords, such as “mysterious cave”, “lost map”, “river”, and “ancient animal”, and asked each pair to write a short story including them. Students quickly used Mandarin to clarify some words and talked about the story in groups. One asked her partner, “‘Ancient’ bùshì gǔlǎo de yìsi?” (Does ancient mean old?), and the partner replied, “Dùì, shì nà zhǒng hěn jiǔ yǐqián de, bǐrú kǒnglóng.” (Yes, like something from long ago, like dinosaurs). Another pair debated the phrase mysterious cave, one suggested “Kěnéng shì xiàng Xīyóujì lǐ nà zhǒng shāndòng?” (Perhaps it is the kind of cave in Journey to the West?) and the other added “Wǒmen kěyǐ shuō tāmen zài dòng lǐ zhǎodào dìtú!” (We can say they found a map in the cave!). Some exchanges reached the level of grammar; for instance, a student rehearsed a whole sentence in Mandarin before trying to say it in English and asked, “Tā shuō ‘tāmen diào jìn le hé lǐ’, 24rgan zěnmē shuō? They fall into the

river? Háishì ‘They fell’?” (He said they fell into the river; how do we say that?), a moment of emerging metalinguistic awareness.

Bilingual negotiation did not reduce the use of English; rather, the students helped each other study, created more imaginative and interconnected narratives, and gained the confidence to speak. By the end of the class, the ten students had worked together to create five original and well-structured stories in English, which they were happy to present to the next class, with several quietly practicing in Mandarin before reading aloud in English. One group presented a story about two friends who find an ancient animal in a cave and return it to its home “because they want to protect the old life”; although not strictly grammatically correct, it conveyed an idea and demonstrated creative thinking by taking a linguistic risk. In accordance with the above content, when students are given the opportunity to use all their language-learning abilities in cooperative learning, they can learn more effectively through interaction and also gain a sense of social belonging [11]. Similar negotiation occurred beyond storytelling; for instance, when a group was creating a poster of regional animals, one student asked in Mandarin whether to write that camels attacked people, and another replied in English, “Maybe not attack... ‘scare’ or ‘damage’ are better,” and thus initiated a brief, student-led discussion on verb selection.

Translanguaging also supported identity. In a unit on storytelling, students wrote short stories about meaningful events or places in their childhood, and several chose hometown celebrations from different parts of China. A student from Beijing described the Lantern Festival in her neighbourhood in Mandarin, “Wǒmen chī yuánxiāo, hái qù Dítán miào huì kàn wǔshī,” and translated it into English as “We eat sweet rice balls and go to the Ditan Temple Fair. I like the red lion dance.” A student from Sichuan told her partner, “The rice balls at my house have sesame seeds inside; my grandma often puts a small secret in them, and only whoever finds it knows this year’s good fortune,” and her final English version read, “We eat sesame rice balls. One has a coin inside. If I find it, I will be lucky.” A boy from southern China wrote about the Dragon Boat Festival and his father’s participation in the traditional race, telling his classmate in Mandarin, “Wǒ bàba měi nián dōu dài biǎo cūn lǐ chū zhàn huá lóng zhōu, tè bié jiāo’ào,” and drafting in English, “My father rows a dragon boat. He races for our village. Only strong men are allowed to join.” These sentences are grammatically simple, but they carry the weight of pride, family tradition and local identity, and these may have been lost without the space to explore them in both languages. The bilingual path from emotional memory to English narration shows how meaning built across linguistic boundaries creates a space for identity expression and a personal voice [10], and it is in line with other community-based Chinese heritage classrooms that have been documented for translanguaging practices [4].

At these times, students used translanguaging to find meaning and were more motivated to learn English. The episodes also showed a condition for success. Translanguaging could not be permitted freely. It had to be designed deliberately to use Mandarin for idea generation and discussion, and to have an easy path for English expression. Thus, the students were able to learn in the two languages more flexibly and achieve their learning goals.

4.3. Culturally Grounded Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction was effective in this class because it was culturally grounded and viewed linguistic and cultural diversity as strengths in curriculum design, not as problems [15]. In a class on daily life, students used picture cards of common activities, such as eating breakfast, going to school and taking a shower, to engage in a sequencing activity. A beginner hesitated at a card labeled “take a shower” and looked at her partner, then asked in Mandarin, “Xǐ zǎo shì shower ma? Nà bath ne?” (Is xǐ zǎo the same as a shower? What about bath?). Her question showed that she lacked some vocabulary and did not know how to apply hygiene in Chinese culture to the English words. Therefore, the teacher-researcher organized a short class-wide comparison of washing customs at home and in China. The students spontaneously talked to help them understand what they had been taught and share their own lives. At that time, the course of study was spontaneously adjusted to an open

discussion based on culture, and students used both Chinese and English to compare cross-cultural understandings.

Then tiered expectations provided students at different proficiency levels with a path to the same task according to differentiation of content, process and product [13]. Some students only used a single word for the pictures, such as eat, sleep, and wash. Others wrote full sentences, such as “I eat noodles at 7 a.m.”, and some were still explaining their sequences out loud to a partner. As the teacher-researcher modified the cognitive and linguistic requirements of the task rather than altering the material itself, students with different language abilities were able to learn the same content in a meaningful way according to their cultures and lives. Some of them added culturally specific foods and customs to their replies, and one even drew an extra picture of his breakfast labelled “youtiao (fried dough sticks)’ and soy milk”.

A comparative writing task on holidays extended the same design to oral instructions. Students compared a well-known Chinese holiday, such as the Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival or Dragon Boat Festival, with a holiday in the United States. For beginners, the teacher-researcher used simple, slow instructions in English with gestures and repeatedly used essential verbs and nouns in both English and Mandarin. Intermediate learners were asked to write three to five sentences using transition words such as also, but, and because. Advanced students were given open-ended prompts to elaborate on what they thought the holidays meant, and then they shared values, customs and food. The gradual prompts helped the students know what was expected and motivated them at a suitable cognitive and linguistic level, which was a flexible organization of teaching for English learners [14]. A set of written skills developed and many types of culture began to spread. A student wrote, “Spring Festival is noisy and happy. We stay up late. People eat turkey on Thanksgiving.” Another said that during the Mid-Autumn Festival, his grandmother told him that the moon is round because they are all together. Many children are outside alone during Halloween. It is not the same. Students often used Mandarin in the planning stage to remember specific food items, customs or family words and then, in cooperation with others, translate their ideas into English and create meaning through their first language, transferring this meaning to the second language through intentional support.

Cultural narratives provided support for the most divided state. In a lesson based on the traditional Chinese myth of Chang’e flying to the moon, the teacher-researcher used visual slides and key vocabulary support to present a simplified English version of the story, including terms such as immortal, elixir, moon palace, and lonely, paused regularly to explain difficult words in both English and Mandarin, and invited students to share versions they had heard from grandparents or regional customs. Many people had different versions to share, and the stories provided a common cultural reference point for students to learn vocabulary and narrative structures freely. To connect the myth with modern times, a short video of China’s lunar exploration was added to the lesson, featuring the Chang’e spacecraft and the Yutu rover, which are also derived from this narrative system. One student exclaimed, “I saw Yutu on TV! It is noteworthy that China has also used story names.” Another student’s response, as recorded in the notes (English translation), connected it to the nation, “Our country has also reached the moon; it is not only the U.S.”. The combination of heritage narrative and contemporary science stimulated further discussion, during which students employed academic language across different periods and fields to connect the stories of home with the subjects of school. Then, according to different language levels, the students completed various tasks. Beginners matched vocabulary with pictures and wrote short character descriptions, such as “Chang’e flies to the moon. She is alone but brave.” Intermediate learners sequenced story events and wrote captions. High-achieving students wrote opinion essays on whether Chang’e was a hero or a victim, and how modern technology still embodies ancient culture. One thought that she was brave but also sad. Like the moon, sometimes it is light and sometimes it is dark. A culturally familiar story, through tiered tasks, generated emotive, creative and thoughtful language use at all proficiency levels, and is in line with the evidence that culturally familiar content reduces the comprehension load of second-language texts [5].

The last episode added new modes of expression for differentiation. In a unit on community, space and direction language, students drew maps of their hometowns and orally described how to get from their homes to school or other familiar places with the help of a model map of the local city and sentence frames of different complexities. Beginners worked from frames such as "My house is near ____", and more advanced students were asked to use compound sentences and add landmarks or personal memories. A student from Xi'an drew the city wall and a ròujiāmó (meat-stuffed flatbread) stand, explaining, "My school is next to the small gate. I buy food here before class." Another from Fujian described the long walk down a hilly road to her grandmother's house and added, "I go up the hill, then turn right at the mango tree." Some students first described their routes in Mandarin, one mentioning "Wǒ jiā hòumiàn yǒu yì tiáo xiǎo hé" (There is a small river behind my house), and then rehearsed aloud in English before presenting. Students who usually had difficulty with written work were more willing to express themselves when supported by pictures and oral practice, and frequently added detailed descriptions of their paths. To allow all students to participate, they could work in pairs and use gestures or point to their maps to express their choices without the pressure of accuracy; thus, the goal would shift from correctness to communication. Peer support emerged spontaneously, as when one student whispered to another, "You can say, turn left at the river, then go straight." By integrating drawing, speaking, gesturing and bilingual rehearsal, multiple pathways into the academic content were created, allowing each student to present their knowledge, memory and developing English in the mode that suited them best; it was an enactment of students seeing themselves in the curriculum in terms of both ability and identity [15].

These episodes also revealed a problem. Sentence frames and translanguaging promoted participation; however, too much use might limit opportunities for genuine English expression and thus needed to be moderated by teaching.

5. Discussion

The three questions all have the same root. Culturally responsive pedagogy was used as the foundation for equal and high-quality English-language teaching, not added on as an extra measure. Engaging these young Chinese immigrant learners required more than simplified language or repeated vocabulary. It needed to coordinate the development of identity, culture and language in the classroom [1, 2].

As for the first question, culturally appropriate materials motivated students to speak more confidently by providing a platform for new language learning through real-life experiences. Lessons on smart technologies, regional wildlife and traditional festivals were used to transform prior knowledge into a comprehensible context for new vocabulary, in line with background-knowledge and input-based accounts of second-language development [5, 7]. Secondly, translanguaging was used to combine Mandarin and English cooperatively in order to create meaning, promote fluency development and affirm bilingual identity; otherwise, a norm of English-only might have emerged [10]. Based on the latest research on Mandarin-English classroom environments [4, 12], observations have found that, when organised properly, the first language can act as a catalyst for participation in the second language rather than hindering it. As for the third, differentiation did not exclude students from all linguistic backgrounds from participating in the learning activities visually, orally or in writing, and provided intellectual stimulation and cultural inheritance [13, 15].

The patterns in all three dimensions are postures that respect the individuality of the students rather than enumerating their faults. Culturally responsive ESL pedagogy in this classroom began with an awareness of the students' prior knowledge, offered support without lowering expectations, and increased participation by making learning relevant and meaningful. The posture did not remove the difficulty. Combining scaffolding and challenges, and exercising flexibility, required continuous judgement. Sentence frames and first-language planning empowered emergent writers but risked restricting English expression through overuse; thus, differentiation for English learners must maintain a high standard while remaining inclusive [14]. Tiered planning and the evaluation of

various outputs also incurred actual costs in terms of preparation time. As a result, the teacher-researcher provided clear task structures, used Mandarin initially and gradually introduced English output, and added short metalinguistic cues to make students more deliberate in their language selection. The above tensions do not harm culturally responsive differentiation. These are the circumstances in which it functions normally.

6. Implications for Practice

Four practices from this case study are worth learning in other community-based ESL settings for young immigrant learners. First, ground new language in culturally familiar materials. Vocabulary introduced through artifacts and narratives that students are already familiar with, such as household technology, local animals, festival food, etc., has a certain context and is more appealing to learners. Second, organise translanguageing rather than allowing or prohibiting it. Designate the first language for the generation of ideas and peer discussion, provide support for switching to English output, and thus turn it into a scaffold rather than a sanctuary. Third, tier tasks around a shared, culturally significant anchor. When all students engage in the same story, map or comparison at different levels of linguistic demand, differentiation can maintain the class community instead of dividing it. Fourth, expand the forms of participation. Drawing, gesture, oral rehearsal and paired presentation can help new writers show their understanding of written English. These practices require few special materials, but they do need bilingual staff and preparation time, which are practical considerations for community programs involving people of different generations.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

The scope of proof in this inquiry is intentionally limited. It uses one classroom of ten learners in a single community-based programme and observes for six sessions over a month. The teacher-researcher acted as both the instructor and the analyst, and the account was interpretive rather than formally coded; there was no independent analyst or reliability test. No standardised proficiency assessments were conducted; thus, claims of language growth in the classroom cannot be verified through standardised gains. The teacher-researcher translated the Mandarin expressions. The dual role of instructor and analyst also shapes the record to some extent. Students may behave differently in the presence of a teacher compared to when they are alone, and the teacher selected, recorded and translated the episodes shown here. Therefore, the findings are best regarded as a recorded account of classroom episodes observed under culturally responsive instruction in a single location rather than generalisations. Future work can follow these classrooms longitudinally, combine field notes with systematic discourse analysis or proficiency measures, and compare the practices of community-based heritage programs serving different immigrant populations.

8. Conclusion

How to use culturally relevant materials, translanguageing and differentiated instruction in a community-based ESL program for young Chinese immigrant learners is the subject of this study. Culturally relevant materials used in the classroom effectively unlocked students' prior knowledge to learn new English and, as a result, students were more willing to participate. Intentionally organised translanguageing simultaneously served as a linguistic support system and a platform for identity, enabling students to bring their stories, festivals, and family voices from home into their English classes. Differentiation based on cultural knowledge provided all-level learners with an honouring starting point for joint study. Based on the above observations from a single small classroom, it can be concluded that culturally responsive ESL pedagogy is more than just a way of teaching English. It is an affirmation of identity, a nurturing of voice, and a kind of pedagogy rooted in humanity.

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