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# Monolingual Teachers in Multilingual Settings: Changing Attitudes and Practices

**This article describes a 6-year, districtwide staff-development project that was implemented in an attempt to change teacher attitudes and practices as they relate to English learners (ELs). The specific goals of the project were (a) to help the district's teachers develop the knowledge base, pedagogical skills, and professional attitudes required to provide the English learners enrolled in their classrooms with effective English language development and academic subject matter instruction, and (b) to enable the teachers who still needed it to earn a Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate. Reflective journal entries and classroom observations were both learning tools and methods of data collection. Results indicate that the project had a positive impact on teacher attitudes and practices.**

## Introduction

According to recent demographic data, more than 1.5 million English learners (ELs) attend K-12 schools in California. This number is expected to exceed 2 million by 2015, thus greatly increasing the number of students in need of language and literacy development in English (CBEDS, 2009). This situation is similar to those in many other states where changing immigration patterns have brought nonnative speakers of English to schools in growing numbers. In fact, half of all teachers nationally may expect to have a culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) student in their classrooms at some point in their careers (Menken & Antunez, 2001). Consequently, the provision of English language and subject matter instruction to English learners is one of the most critical challenges confronting teachers and teacher educators today.

Further exacerbating the situation is that while the number of English learners enrolled in K-12 schools continues to grow dramatically, only a fraction of those students are in bilingual or ESL classrooms. Thus, the majority of English learners receive most, if not all, of their instruction from mainstream classroom teachers, many of whom have limited training in the learning needs of CLD students (AACTE, 2002). In response to this disparity, many educators have advocated for increased preparation for mainstream teachers to work

with CLD student populations (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2002; Vavrus, 2002). For more than a decade, one recurrent suggestion has been to provide all teachers with specific content and pedagogical knowledge related to working with CLD populations (Clair & Adger, 1999; Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2002; Fillmore & Snow, 2000; González & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Olmedo, 1997; Zeichner, 1996) as well as with multiple opportunities to apply this knowledge to classroom practice (Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2002; Zeichner, 1996).

Recent changes in California credentialing requirements have had some impact on this disparity. Nonetheless, there are still districts in the state where teachers who have earned an EL authorization as part of their basic credential program are struggling to adapt to changing demographics, lack of resources, and an inability to implement in the classroom the instructional methods they learned in their teacher-education programs. Working alongside these teachers are colleagues who earned their credentials long before their classrooms began to reflect current demographic patterns and the EL authorization became a required part of basic credential coursework. Both types of teachers are typically monolingual speakers of English who are struggling to be effective in the multilingual settings in which they teach.

In collaboration with a small, rural school district in central California (7,500 students in 15 schools), a colleague and I developed and implemented a 6-year, districtwide staff-development project designed to address this need by working to change teacher attitudes and practices as they relate to English learners. More specifically, our goal was twofold: first, to help the district's teachers develop the knowledge base, pedagogical skills, and professional attitudes required to provide the English learners enrolled in their classrooms with effective English language development and academic subject matter instruction, and second, to enable the teachers who still needed it to earn a Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate offered through the California Commission for Teacher Credentialing. (See Appendix A for the sequence and topic of each staff-development session.) An analysis of reflective journals kept by the participants throughout the project, and observations of the participants' classrooms by principals, the district ESL specialist, and ourselves indicated that teacher attitudes and practices regarding their English learners were modified in positive ways. Preliminary evidence based on classroom observations also indicates that these changes in attitudes and practices have had a positive impact on student learning.

## How Did We Do It?
### 1. By having the requisite professional experience and academic preparation to work collaboratively with a wide range of K-12 teachers

At the time of the project my colleague and I were both professors of Education at a state university in California where we taught in the department that offered the courses required for the CLAD certificate. We each had extensive public school teaching experience as well as advanced degrees in second lan-

guage acquisition, literacy development, and linguistics. More important, we had a great deal of respect for and understanding of the tremendous challenges teachers face daily, particularly when working in settings in which the primary language(s) of their students differed from their own.

### 2. By providing long-term staff development

Because one goal of the program was to provide teachers with the requisite number of hours they needed to earn a CLAD certificate, we knew from the outset that our target was 150 hours of instruction. We also knew that the instruction needed to address the specific areas mentioned above. We negotiated with district and school site personnel that one Friday per month for 3 consecutive school years would be designated as nonstudent days and be devoted to the project at each school site. By conducting professional-development sessions at different schools on Fridays each month, we were able to reach every elementary and high school teacher (*N*=331) in the district in two 3-year cycles.

### 3. By securing the support, cooperation, and participation of district and school site administrators, teachers, and parents

The district superintendent approached us about developing the staff-development program because he had concerns about his teachers' willingness and ability to respond to the sudden and dramatic demographic changes that were occurring in his district. (EL enrollment increased from 300 to 2,000 in the 7 years before the commencement of this project.) His own commitment was evident early in our discussions, and by approving such a significant number of nonstudent days and lobbying parents for their support, he went far out on the proverbial limb to get this program up and running.

At the initial planning stages, everyone realized that getting support for nonstudent days from parents and for intensive professional development from teachers would be critical to the program's success. Toward that end the superintendent arranged for my colleague and me to attend PTA, school site, and school board meetings where we introduced ourselves, outlined the goals of the program, and ultimately convinced each group that the project was worth undertaking. After initial approval was secured, the superintendent, who had worked his way up the district hierarchy and was generally well respected, made the strategic decision to begin the program at the two elementary schools with the strongest administrative staff and most receptive teachers. He believed that this was the best way to assure early success and generate positive word of mouth, an assumption that proved to be correct.

School site administrators were also very supportive. The principals and vice principals at each school site attended most sessions. By being present, visible, and engaged they set an example for their teachers to follow while expanding their own knowledge bases and skill sets. Thus, administrative support and leadership at the district and school levels were instrumental in developing a sense of purpose, maintaining a spirit of unity, and achieving the program goals.

### *4. By carrying out a variety of carefully planned, task-oriented activities*

Most Fridays were divided into two parts. In the morning my colleague and/or I led a series of instructional activities that generally began with 60-90 minutes of direct instruction related to the topic of the day. That segment was followed by small-group activities designed to provide participants with the opportunity to process the information that was presented in more depth and relate it to their own classroom situations. In the afternoon teachers usually worked in grade-level or content-area groups to develop materials they could use in their classrooms. (See Appendix B for examples of the small-group activities and material-development prompts.) Each part of the day was carefully planned to do everything we could to balance the need to address specific content with the need to keep the teachers engaged throughout each day and across the entire 3-year project.

### *5. By implementing principles and practices through microteaching*

One limitation of the project was that we did not have access to K-12 students on the staff-development days. Nonetheless, we thought it was important to provide the participants with the opportunity to "test" some of the ideas we presented and/or they developed. Our solution was microteaching, which we operationally defined for the teachers as a 10-15-minute mini-lesson that provides instruction for one specific teaching point. In effect, teachers were presenting these mini-lessons to each other in groups of four or five and receiving feedback from peers. This approach was more appropriate for some topics (e.g., vocabulary development) than others (e.g., sociolinguistics), so the frequency of the microteaching opportunities varied depending on the topic of the day.

The purpose of these segments was to encourage participants to think more specifically about the goals of their teaching in terms of how students would learn the information presented. This required them to think about teaching style as well as content, and it allowed them to give each other specific suggestions regarding how their instructional activities and teaching styles were perceived.

### *6. By encouraging the sharing of experiences among group members*

In terms of professional experience, the participants varied from 1st-year teachers who had just completed their preliminary credential requirements to teachers who had worked in the district for up to 27 years. Regardless of their level of experience, participants were initially very reluctant to take on microteaching responsibilities or to share their classroom experiences. Over time, however, participants at each school site began to understand and take advantage of the opportunities they had to interact with and learn from their colleagues. We facilitated this change in attitude by giving them time to interact around specific topics, providing a risk-free environment, negotiating differences in educational practices and belief systems, ensuring variety in group membership for the various activities we organized, and making them aware that we were willing to learn from them.

For instance, at one of the two initial sites a group of experienced 3rd-grade teachers were very resistant to the idea that they needed to reconsider some of their teaching methods (e.g., supplementing word walls with pictures of concepts to support their ELs' language acquisition) in response to the demographic shifts in the district. Basically, their attitude was: "We have been successful for the past 15-20 years doing what we have always done so we shouldn't have to change. The students should be able to adapt." We approached this type of comment in two ways. First, we asked them to discuss their basis for saying they had been "successful." These discussions often led to one of two realizations: The teachers weren't as successful as they had originally believed or they could have been even more successful if they had made the adjustment we were discussing (e.g., adding the pictures of concepts to their word walls). Second, as we observed their colleagues react to these statements and as we read their colleagues' journals, we realized that few people agreed with these teachers. Rather than ask them to directly refute their senior colleagues, we encouraged those in the majority to discuss some of their instructional practices as they related to vocabulary and concept development. As a result of these approaches, teachers gradually became more at ease and willing to take risks with both their colleagues and us.

### 7. By focusing on positive elements in teachers' practices before making them aware of areas that needed improvement

Critical elements in teachers' reaching this comfort level were our ability to share observations and criticisms constructively with them, and their ability to apply the same approach in interactions with their peers. Our approach was influenced greatly by "Characteristics of Constructive Feedback," a list of 14 guidelines that have often been cited and adapted since its original publication (Berquist, Phillips, & Quehl, 1975). The following five characteristics are the ones that were central to our work:

- Our feedback was *descriptive rather than evaluative*. This reduced the likelihood that teachers would respond defensively to our observations and comments.
- Our feedback was *focused on behavior rather than the person*. We always tried to refer to what someone did rather than to what we thought or imagined the person to be.
- Our feedback was *directed toward behavior that the teacher could do something about* rather than something over which he or she had no control.
- Our feedback was *as timely as possible* given the structure of the project.
- Our feedback involved the *amount of information we believed the teacher could use* rather than the amount we would have at times liked to give. Overloading a person with feedback—even accurate feedback—reduces the likelihood that it will be used.

### 8. *By requiring the use of reflective journals*

Between each Friday meeting, teachers were required to keep a reflective journal in which they recorded their perceptions of each staff-development session, their analyses of articles related to the topics being covered, and most important, their students' reactions to ideas they implemented in their classrooms. We also encouraged them to reflect on changes in their practices and attitudes that emerged during the course of the project. Teachers were told we were looking for evidence of their ability to:

- Comprehend what they heard and read;
- Relate new ideas to previously learned ideas;
- Apply ideas to new situations;
- React critically to what they encountered.

While my colleague or I read and responded to each entry after every other session, at the end of each year of the project we analyzed all the journal entries in an effort to identify patterns or themes in teacher comments. The analysis procedures we followed were consistent with those noted in Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994). In essence, the language and themes that emerged from the journals were organized into the following five major themes, examples of which appear in Appendix C:

- Changing attitudes;
- Implementing new practices;
- Validating previously learned practices;
- Appreciating bilingualism;
- Developing language awareness.

These journal entries provided the greatest insight into the impact of the project. They clearly indicated that the teachers gained a deeper understanding of the topics we addressed, an expanded repertoire of pedagogical skills with which to teach the content, and significantly more sensitivity to factors affecting their students' lives.

### Conclusion

For teachers to be prepared to meet the needs of their English learners, the structure of teacher professional-development models is critical for generative pedagogical development. Much of the research on teacher education has suggested that effective models of professional development include active learning, collective participation, and a focus on content as teachers develop knowledge for teaching (Desimone, 2009). Therefore, if teachers are to fully use the potential of professional-development projects in which they participate, they must experience their professional development with the same interactivity and attention to learning that they will be expected to develop with students. By engaging teachers in an integrated process of explicit instruction with mentored support and both individual and collaborative experimentation,

we helped the teachers in this project develop their capacity to enhance their students' language and literacy development in the same active and meaningful ways that they are now providing to their students.

## Author

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## Appendix A
## List of Session Content

### Year 1

| September | *First Language Acquisition* |
| October | *Second Language Acquisition* |
| November | *Oral Language Development: Classroom Applications (I)* |
| January | *Oral Language Development: Classroom Applications (II)* |
| February | *Major Trends in Language and Literacy Instruction* |
| March | *Literacy Development: Classroom Applications (I)* |
| April | *Literacy Development: Classroom Applications (II)* |
| May | *Literacy Development: Classroom Applications (III)* |

### Year 2

| September | *Stages of Language Acquisition and Demographic Trends* |
| October | *Intercultural Communication* |
| November | *Bilingualism and Biculturalism* |
| January | *Evaluating and Adapting Instructional Materials* |
| February | *Assessment in Education* |
| March | *Linguistic Foundations* |
| April | *Sociolinguistics* |
| May | *The Role of Computer Technology in Education (I)* |

### Year 3

| September | *From Sheltered English to SDAIE* |
| October | *Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (I)* |
| November | *Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (II)* |
| January | *Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (III)* |
| February | *Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (IV)* |
| March | *Assessing Students' Growth* |
| April | *The Role of Computer Technology in Education (II)* |
| May | *Putting It All Together* |

*#1 Vocabulary and Concept Development*
For students to learn words well enough to use them, instruction must:

- Relate new to known;
- Promote active, in-depth processing;
- Create a language/word-rich environment;
- Support independent word learning.

In your grade-level or content-area groups, discuss the extent to which you are addressing these instructional guidelines in your classroom.

- Rank order each guideline according to how much emphasis each one receives in your classroom (1 = most; 4 = least).
- In what ways are you addressing each guideline in your classroom?
- Discuss a specific example of a strategy you use that is related to one of the guidelines.
- Which strategy from those presented this morning seems most useful to you?

*#2 Analyzing Student Language Samples*
Using the student work samples you brought today, get into your grade-level or content-area groups and discuss your samples in light of the questions below.

- What errors did the students make?
- What is the source of the errors (competence or performance)?
- Which errors should be corrected (global or local)?
- What patterns, if any, exist across students?

*#3 Using Cummins's Quadrants to Explore Levels of Challenge in Learning Activities*
Part One: Groups Arranged by Departments

- Step 1: Review the lessons you have taught since Thanksgiving. List the instructional tasks in which you have engaged students. By instructional tasks we mean the lectures, labs, demonstrations, role-playing, tests, homework assignments, and other learning activities you have used in the past two weeks.
- Step 2: Categorize as many of your instructional tasks as possible according to the quadrants we discussed earlier.
- Step 3: Count the number of instructional tasks in each quadrant and compute the percentage of your instructional tasks that fell into each quadrant.

Part Two: Groups Arranged by Teams

- Step 1: Each team member should identify his or her most effective quadrant C task.
- Step 2: Discuss your best quadrant C task with your team members and explain why you categorized it as quadrant C.
- Step 3: Choose a quadrant D task from one team member's list and modify it in a way that would make it a quadrant C task. Focus on the process you go through to reach your objective.

Part Three: Groups Arranged by Teams

- Step 1: Teams share what they had to do to modify their quadrant D task to make it quadrant C.
- Step 2: Whole-group debriefing.

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**Appendix C**
**Examples of Journal Comments by Theme**

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*Changing Attitudes*
"The inservice proved to all of us that real learning can take place even if you and your students don't speak the same language. At the beginning many of us didn't believe this and were very discouraged. Now everyone in our school realizes that what we have learned can make a difference. We were involved, we understood, we had fun and we learned. Now we are helping our students do the same thing." (4th-grade teacher)

*Implementing New Practices*
"I have always felt as though I have to be totally in control all the time. Trying cooperative groups and more student centered activities is difficult for me to get used to but I'm trying. I do see that my ELs contribute more in small groups than they do in whole class discussions." (9th-grade history teacher)

*Validating Previously Learned Practices*
"Our last session brought to mind many things that I have tried over the years and had forgotten about. Now it's time to reactivate those practices. I tried a graphic organizer earlier this week when introducing our new unit and I can see that students are remembering more of the information." (7th-grade English teacher)

*Appreciating Bilingualism*
"I'm really pleased with the results of allowing students to write in their journals in Spanish. I can't understand everything they write but my aide helps me. Seeing how much more engaged they are with their journals has made me realize the importance of encouraging them to utilize both languages." (2nd-grade teacher)

### Developing Language Awareness

"I've been trying to listen carefully to the types of errors that my students are making in their oral language. I understand now that many of their mistakes are developmental as these students learn to communicate in English. I'm also sharing some of what I have learned with parents to help them understand how their child is progressing." (kindergarten teacher)