

Teaching Reading to Limited English Proficient Students: A Professional Development Model for Teachers and Administrators in Rural Schools

Rural schools are schools located in rural areas with a population of less than 2,500 as defined by the Department of Education, Bureau of the Census (National Education Association [NEA], 2004) and face unique challenges for developing programs to serve the linguistic and cultural needs of English Language Learners (ELLs): (1) limited experience with ELLs; (2) a shortage of certified English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or bilingual teachers; (3) a shortage of translators with the proficiency to speak, read, or write in the students' home language; and (4) limited curriculum materials in the students' first language.

Nationwide it is estimated that 5,044,361 limited English proficient students were enrolled in public schools (PK through grade 12) for the 2002-03 school year. This number represents an 84% increase over the reported 1992-93 public school enrollment. The United States Department of Education's survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students, Office of English Language Acquisition (2004) reveals that the state of Texas had a LEP enrollment of 442,677 in the 1993-94 school year and 660,707 in 2003-04 – an increase of 56.3%.

As reported by Bérubé (2002), 56% of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the United States are enrolled in urban communities and the remaining 44%, in rural schools. These rural schools enroll from as few as 1 to as many as 500 LEP students district-wide in ESL programs rather than bilingual education programs (Bérubé, 2000). Bérubé continues, "Rural ESL programs continue to grow with nearly one third of small rural towns in the United States enrolling LEP students" (p. 9). The highest increase in

number as well as in percentage of students in the United States not fluent in English are enrolled in the earliest grades with 60% in grades K-5 (Bérubé, 2000). According to the Office of Civil Rights (U. S. Department of Education, 1991), “LEP students are faced with educational problems confronting minority students generally, in addition to special problems related to the need to master a second language. Moreover the research indicates that it is not uncommon for one set of problems to compound the other” (p.2).

Facts about Limited English Proficient Students

Definitions of English Proficient Students

Several facts define a limited English proficient student: (1) Limited English Proficient (LEP) is the term for students who were not born in the United States or whose native language is not English and who cannot participate effectively in the regular curriculum because they have difficulty speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English; (2) English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is a technique that uses English to teach non-English speakers. English as a second language is usually a component of bilingual education; and (3) bilingual education is the use of two languages for instruction, English and the native language.

Numbers (nationwide)

As stated earlier, it is estimated that approximately 5,044,361 ELL students were enrolled nationwide in public schools (PK through grade 12) for the 2002-03 school year. Among the states, Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas had enrollments of over 100,000 students, and 22 other states with a range of 20,000 -100,000 ELL students. In twelve states the percent of the K-12 LEP enrollment was greater than

10% and an additional eight states indicate the percent ranges from 5-10 percent of the K-12 enrollment that is LEP (United States Department of Education, 2004). In 2000-01, states reported over 400 languages spoken by English language learners nationwide. The data submitted indicate that 79% of ELL students claimed Spanish as their native language, followed by 2.0% Vietnamese, 1.0% Chinese, Cantonese, 1.0% Korean, and 15.4% other (United States Department of Education, 2004).

In an article entitled *High Quality Professional Development* retrieved from The English Language Knowledge Base online at <http://www.helpforschools.com>, it is suggested that schools develop a plan to serve their LEP population adapted to their district's needs. This plan should include several key elements: (1) knowledge of the law as it pertains to limited English proficient students, (2) development of an alternate language program, and (3) provisions for ongoing staff development.

Element I: Understand the Law

Districts are required to take affirmative steps to address the language development of national origin minority students where the inability to speak and understand the English language prevents the students from effective participation in the district's programs. The first element in serving students with limited English proficiency is to understand the legal requirements surrounding such students. These requirements must also be understood by the entire school community and not just school leaders and teaching staff.

Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Underlying Legal Principles

The OCR does not require or advocate a particular program of instruction for ELL students and nothing in federal law requires one form of instruction over another. Under federal law, programs to educate children with limited proficiency in English must be: (1) based on a sound educational theory, (2) adequately supported so that the program has a realistic chance for success, and (3) periodically evaluated and revised as necessary (United States Department of Education, 1991).

Selecting the Educational Approach. It is the prerogative of the district to select a specific educational approach to meet the needs of its particular ELL student population. A district may use any educational approach that is recognized as sound by experts in the field, or an approach that is recognized as a legitimate educational strategy.

Regardless of the approach selected by a district, in assessing compliance with Title VI, a two-fold inquiry applies: (1) whether the approach provides for English language development, and (2) whether the approach provides for meaningful participation for ELL students in the district's educational program.

Implementing the Educational Program. Once a district selects an educational approach, it must provide the necessary resources to implement the program. The variations in programs may be as diverse as the populations served by those districts. The need exists to describe and implement the educational approach in a written plan so that staff, administrators, and parents understand how the program works.

Program Evaluation. Under federal law, adopting an ELL program with a sound educational design is not sufficient if the program as implemented proves ineffective. Two central elements necessary for satisfying Title VI requirements for ELL students in

the ongoing education of ELL students are: (1) Is the program working? (2) Are ELL students gaining the proficiency in English that enables them to participate meaningfully in the district's education program? If a program is not working effectively, a school district is responsible for making appropriate adjustments or changes. This requirement is based on the obligation arising from Title VI for a school district to provide ELL students with meaningful opportunities to participate in its educational program (United States Department of Education, 1991).

Element 2: Develop the Alternative Language Program

School districts have broad discretion in selecting appropriate language programs, but should consider three general areas when making a decision: (1) Is there a need to provide alternative language services? (2) Will the alternative language program effectively meet the needs of LEP students? and (3) Is the program approach backed by scientifically based research? The program chosen should be considered sound by experts in the field. If a district is using a different approach, it must show that it is considered a legitimate experimental strategy.

There are many approaches school districts can take to meet the needs of limited English proficient students. Dr. John Golden of the Aurora Public Schools in Aurora, Colorado developed what he calls a *Continuum of Services* (Golden, 1996) school districts may want to consider when designing their programs.

Continuum of Bilingual Education Programs

Two Way (Dual Language)

This is a program in two languages where the students are placed according to language and immersed in a second language. Ideally, 50% of the LEP students are of

one language and 50% are English speaking. A dual language program involves instruction through two languages, where the target language is used for a significant portion of the student's instructional day. The major goals are high levels of bilingual proficiency, biliteracy, content area achievement at or above grade level, and multicultural competencies.

Developmental Bilingual

These programs employ bilingual teachers and are sometimes called "late exit" programs since students stay in the program until they can be literate in the native language as well as English. Instead of replacing the first language with English, the first language is enhanced and is used as a foundation upon which to build English.

Transitional Bilingual

These programs employ bilingual teachers whose emphasis is on transitioning students from the native language as quickly as possible to English in usually two or three years. This program is a replacement one where the student replaced the native language and culture with English and the American culture and does not encourage true bilingualism in two cultures and languages.

One Way Bilingual

This program uses teachers from foreign countries to work in bilingual programs. This may assist the student in learning content areas but it becomes a "one way street" since the teacher usually can speak little or no English and cannot teach English to the students. Other complications can arise in that the foreign teachers may not be familiar with the American curriculum, methods of teaching, and second language acquisition

processes. Sometimes the dialect of the foreign teacher may be different and American born ELL students may not be able to understand it.

Half Way Bilingual

This program uses teachers who are not completely fluent in the target language due to a shortage of teachers who speak the students' language fluently. These teachers have had a brief exposure to the language and are asked to serve as a bilingual teacher until someone who is more qualified can be found or until the person can master the language. A disadvantage of this program is that the students know more of the first language than the teacher. Due to their limitations in the language, these teachers cannot converse on a professional level with parents. It can take 5-7 years for the teacher to have a command of the language.

Translators

In many cases, translators are hired as teacher aides but end up doing the teacher's work at very low wages. As a result, there is often a high turn over of people in this group since they can often get jobs at higher wages outside the field of education. Often, their role is to listen to the teacher and then translate what the teacher says to the student. They often end up teaching the students themselves even though they are not teachers and may not know the content area subjects. When they are in the classroom translating, students may "turn off" the teacher who speaks English and simply wait for the translation.

Language acquisition is postponed to a later time.

The policy a rural school follows in selecting a program for implementation is locally or sometimes state determined. Since policies can affect hundreds or thousands of LEP students across each state, they should be developed or revisited frequently to ensure

that the approach used best meets the needs of the LEP students served (Bérubé, 2000). Chamot and O'Malley (1987), well established researchers on programs designed for LEP students, recommend these considerations to decide on a particular approach: (1) Is the approach grounded in well-controlled research? (2) Does the approach explain what and how the LEP student will learn? (3) Does the approach provide guidance for instruction?

Element 3: Notify and Involve Parents

Parent Notification

Before developing appropriate policies and procedures for notifying parents in an appropriate language, central office personnel should familiarize themselves with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) guidelines directly related to this topic. The district should then develop procedures to determine which documents should be translated into the language spoken at home. The building administrator should follow the established procedures to ensure that documents that are translated and distributed to parents of LEP students are in the home language. Administrators would be wise to maintain a file of qualified translators for language groups where the number of students may be small. Translators, particularly those not employed by the school district, should be provided training on legal requirements, confidentiality policies, and basic school policies.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is an essential part of an ELL program. It is particularly more difficult due to the cultural differences that exist with the students' immigrant backgrounds. As a school enhances existing parent involvement initiatives, administrators need to be cognizant of ways to involve immigrant parents. Title III of the

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires a school receiving Title III funds to implement an effective means of outreach to parents of limited English proficient students (National Education Association, 2004). Such outreach is to inform parents of how they can become involved with their child's education and be active participants in helping their child reach language proficiency and meet the state's academic standards. School administrators should develop their parent involvement programs with such requirements in mind. Policies and procedures formalizing the parent involvement program should be written.

Element 4: Provide Professional Development

Title IX, Section 9101 (34) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) contains specific provisions addressing the qualifications of the instructional staff, the use of Title I funds to support professional development and notification requirements to parents about staff qualifications. The district's staff responsible for the instructional staff's recruitment and development should be aware of these requirements as well as the Principal of each school receiving Title I funds.

High Quality Professional Development

High quality professional development should include activities that: (1) improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable them to become highly qualified; (2) are an integral part of broad school-wide and district-wide educational improvement plans; (3) give teachers, principals, and administrators the knowledge and skills to provide students with the opportunity to meet challenging state academic content standards and student academic achievement standards; and (4) improve classroom management skills. Additionally, professional

develop should be: (5) sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting learning impact on classroom instruction; and (6) are not one day, short term workshops or conferences. Professional development activities may involve forming partnerships with institutions of higher education to establish school-based teacher training programs that provide inservice teachers and administrators the opportunity to work under the guidance of experts in research-based reading instruction. One example of available professional development is participation in *Project TRIAD: Teachers and Administrators Improving Reading for Limited English Proficient Students* at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas.

Project TRIAD: Teachers and Administrators Improving Reading for LEP Students

Project *TRIAD* is a five year federally funded grant awarded to Sam Houston State University's Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling from the United States Department of Education focusing on rural school districts' needs in research-based reading instruction. The purpose of the grant is to provide professional development in research-based reading to triads (cohort groups) comprised of three educators from rural school districts in Southeast Texas. All triad groups are selected from PK-elementary campuses since we believe the first four years of school are critical to reading by third grade.

Three reasons the grant focuses on rural school districts' professional development are: (1) LEP students in these regions are usually served by a majority of uncertified teachers in ESL/bilingual; (2) administrators, unless they are ESL/bilingual teachers themselves, may know little about leading instructional efforts for LEP students; and (3) it continues to be difficult to find certified ESL/bilingual teachers to serve LEP

students in rural areas. The grant has eight objectives addressing staff development needs: (1) to train individuals in teams (triads) over the 5 years in research-based reading instruction, action research, curriculum alignment and development, mentoring, and parent assistance in reading through face-to-face class time and via distance education; (2) to train triads in mentoring, and then have the triads mentor new teachers who teach LEP students; (3) to develop and implement parent training modules related to reading with their children; (4) to help fund a Master's Degree in Instructional Leadership specializing in instructional leadership strategies for limited English proficient students; (5) to develop action research reports on LEP student issues at their school sites; (6) to develop four summer conferences for all of the rural districts in the educational service area; (7) to place 50 preservice reading teachers in TRIAD teachers' classrooms for 15 hours of field-based experiences; and (8) to disseminate results.

Objective 1

Objective 1 seeks to provide 198 clock hours of professional development to teams (triads) of three professionals ("reading" teachers of LEP students, teachers of LEP students, and administrators) in research-based reading instruction and in mentoring new teachers of LEP students. This objective provides each triad over three long semester terms and a summer session the following staff development courses: (1) research-based reading instruction for LEP students, (2) action research in reading related instruction, (3) advanced research-based reading instruction for LEP, and (4) curriculum planning and development in reading for LEP students.

Research-Based Reading Instruction for LEP Students. This is an introductory course consisting of 45 hours, one third of which are field-based on participants'

campuses, and the remainder through attendance at workshops conducted by experts in the field of research-based reading. Topics for these workshops include: (a) why services for LEP students are critical, (b) first and second language (L1 and L2) program types for LEP students, (c) literacy development for PK-3, and (d) an overview of reading research. The field-based work requires the participants to analyze their district and campus to determine services, program type and curriculum for reading and literacy for LEP students. As the triads complete all assignments for the prolonged professional development, positive changes are anticipated in services to LEP students, teacher attitudes, instruction, and curriculum, policy regarding LEP students.

Action Research in Reading Related Instruction. This component of the program requires 45 hours of which 15 hours are face-to-face class time and the remaining 30 hours are spent in action research. Topics covered during the class sessions include: (a) what is action research? (b) how to conduct action research with LEP students and teachers on the school campus and in the classroom; (c) ethical concerns; (d) how to write a report; (e) how to use the data to alter policy, procedures, and curriculum. To fulfill the field-based requirement for this course, triads choose a topic related to LEP students' reading instruction.

Advanced Research-Based Reading Instruction for LEP Students. This 45 hour course of which one third is field-based on the participant's campus, could include such topics as: (a) research in reading, (b) research in literacy, (c) reading in the content areas, (d) what more is needed in terms of research in reading for LEP students? (e) pedagogical considerations. In the field-based portion of the course, participants are required to

conduct 3 mini-staff development sessions with faculty on research-based reading instruction.

Curriculum Planning and Development in Reading for LEP Students. This is a 45 hour course, of which one-third of the hours are field-based on campus. Topics considered are: (a) curriculum auditing, (b) curriculum alignment with LEP standards, and (c) curriculum planning and development. During their field-based work, the triads conduct a curriculum audit and align curriculum and develop new strategies as needed.

Outcome Measures

Each participant logs in to the professional development sessions on the TRIAD web site to clock the 198 hours. Follow-up with the triads is conducted by the grant coordinator to determine application of the information learned on the campus. Course syllabi is reviewed by the directors to determine relevance and inclusion of the standards. Based on the curriculum course, curriculum audits and alignments and revisions conducted by the triads are reviewed by the grant director for accuracy.

Objective 2

This objective provides for mentoring to 78 new bilingual/ESL teachers by the triads trained in each district. Participating triads develop and implement a mentoring program for each new bilingual/ESL teacher on the campus.

Outcome Measures. The 78 mentored teachers are interviewed and observed for application within the classroom regarding information learned from triad members.

Objective 3

Objective 3 provides for the development and implementation of 5 parent training modules per district per triad in research-based reading instruction to enable parents to work with their students at home. Training consists of 5 two-hour modules and reading materials for a 1 plus 1 program (1 parent plus 1 child reading together). Participating triads develop this parent module and submit it to the Project TRIAD director for approval.

Outcome Measures. This objective is measured by: (a) completion of 5 parent modules, (b) a Likert Scale effectiveness survey is administered to parents regarding the impact of their training, and (c) achievement of students of parents who attended the training is monitored to determine impact.

Objective 4

The fourth objective of Project TRIAD is to apply the equivalent courses (4) to a 12 course (36 hour) Masters Degree in Instructional Leadership with a specialization in research-based reading instruction for LEP students for those triad participants who choose to apply it. The grant will either pay participants to participate for the year or to offer the option of paying tuition toward an Instructional Leadership graduate degree for 4 courses over four semesters.

Outcome Measures. The number of students from TRIAD groups who further their education as leaders on campuses in the area of assistance to LEP students is documented by TRIAD directors.

Objective 5

The purpose of this objective is to develop action research teams in the school districts to address issues related to reading instruction for LEP students. Participants are receive instruction during a series of monthly day long workshops how to conduct action research with LEP students and to have the triads complete an action research project that is publishable online. Action research is intended to alter policy and practice.

Outcome Measures. A total of 117 action research reports are reviewed, discussed, and posted online and presented to local school boards. Each triad produces an action research policy/ procedure report that cites it's impact on the field of reading instruction for LEP students.

Objective 6

This objective is to develop 4 summer one-day conferences in best practices of reading instruction for LEP students based on the research conducted by the Project TRIAD participants for the school districts' personnel to attend. In addition to presentations by experts in the field of reading instruction for LEP students, the action research reports of the triad members are presented.

Outcome Measures. Registration logs are kept of the attendees to demonstrate interest; evaluation forms are submitted by participants to determine the effectiveness of the workshops.

Objective 7

The purpose of this objective is to place 50 preservice teachers with triad teachers who have been trained in assessment and strategies in reading for LEP students for a 15 hour field-based experience and to encourage them to teach in these rural districts.

Outcome Measures. Fifty preservice teachers are placed in triad teacher classrooms and the number of those teachers who actually serve LEP students in rural districts is documented.

Objective 8

The 8th objective of the grant is to disseminate results of the project through local, state, and national conferences and professional media sources over the course of the grant including: (a) four local summer conferences; (b) three state, and three national conferences; and (c) thirty professional media sources including newspapers, NABE News, journals, etc. Grant participants will apply to make presentations and submit articles for publication regarding their action research projects.

Outcome Measures. The numbers of the dissemination efforts is documented and logged over the course of the grant.

Conclusion

Considering what we know about the linguistic needs of English Language Learners, what can we conclude about teaching reading to limited English proficient students in rural schools? The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in their professional development program for teachers working with English Language Learners to develop reading skills, identifies some important issues regarding learning to read in a second language: (1) regardless of the native language, students who grew up in a language rich environment develop a strong foundation for literacy; and (2) many children begin school already knowing a lot about literacy; they've been read to, talked to, and had many experiences with language (CAL, 2004). This may not be the case in many rural communities, so the responsibility for providing a language rich environment falls on the

schools. Since they may already be constrained by unqualified personnel and limited resources to provide the necessary programs, this task may appear overwhelming.

Teachers need resources available to them, flexibility to do the job, and staff development for working with non-English speaking students. Limited financial resources make allocating sufficient dollars for teaching ELL students difficult.

In his book *Effective Schools for the Urban Poor*, Ron Edmonds states, “All children are eminently educable, and the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of the education” (Edmonds, 1979, p. 20). Language minority students in particular have often been blamed for their underachievement in United States schools. By considering them “difficult” or culturally and linguistically “deprived”, schools have found it easy to absolve themselves of responsibility for the education of these students (Lucas, Henze, and Donato, 2003). Edmonds (1979) on the other hand, places the responsibility for quality education squarely in the hands of the schools. The matter of establishing a quality program of services to students identified as LEP is not grounded in the size of the program or the number served. It is grounded in excellence only. Being cognizant of and addressing the challenges of English Language Learners in our rural schools can help ensure that indeed No Child is Left Behind.

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