

# Programs That Prepare Teachers to Work Effectively With Students Learning English

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Schools and teacher education programs have begun to rethink preservice and inservice professional development to take into account the need for teachers to work effectively with students learning English. New approaches to teacher education are based on the belief that English language learners' access to challenging content can be enhanced through teaching strategies that provide multiple pathways to the understanding of language and content. Because students must use language to acquire academic content in mainstream classes, second language teaching must be integrated with the social, cultural, and political contexts of language use.

This digest provides a summary of some of the problems associated with traditional teacher education and describes preservice and inservice programs that prepare teachers to work effectively with English language learners.

## Traditional Teacher Education Programs

A number of problems have traditionally plagued second language teacher education programs, including those described below.

### Failure to see the interconnectedness between first and second languages and cultures

Schools and teacher education programs often focus on pushing students to work rapidly and unrealistically to acquire fluent English without attention to continued first language development. This approach minimizes the connections between first and second language development and reduces the potential for advancement in both languages. Inattention to the first language development of non-English speakers is also detrimental to their academic achievement. Teacher preparation programs should help future teachers to integrate second language development with first language development and to recognize the uniqueness and value of specific languages and cultures.

### Fragmentation and isolation of language teaching and learning

In many schools and teacher education programs, English as a second language (ESL), bilingual, foreign language, and language arts programs are the responsibility of distinctly separate administrative departments. This fragmentation isolates teachers and makes it difficult for them to communicate across programs and to benefit from communication across disciplines.

### View of language

Teacher education programs often focus on the components of language, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. This narrow view overlooks the social nature of language as a tool for communication and a mechanism through which content can be explored and examined. Language study is generally decontextualized and unrelated to the lives of students, their school, or the community, and much of language instruction is grammar driven.

### Paralyzing focus on methodology

Historically, preparation programs for foreign language and ESL teachers have placed emphasis on instructional methods rather than on the what, why, and who of second language instruction. Tedick and Walker (1994) argue that this concentration on methodology has made second language instruction teacher centered, because it focuses on the ways in which the

teacher best organizes, presents, and assesses success with lessons. Such a narrow focus has insulated second language teachers from the growing knowledge about language in the fields of adult education, literacy development, and early childhood education. This knowledge supports a view of language development as "an integrated, generative process in which the learner is an active agent" (p. 306).

### Disjuncture between language and culture

Prospective second language teachers need to have knowledge about language development, but they also need a clear understanding of themselves and their students as cultural beings. They should be aware of the variety of world views espoused by participants in the target culture and the native culture, and of the need to view both cultures from a number of perspectives. Such insights cannot be achieved by simply adding more culture courses to the teacher education curriculum. Instead, just as culture must be an integral part of second language pedagogy, it must also be an integral part of teacher education programs, including attention to school culture and classroom ecology (Tedick & Walker, 1994, p. 309).

## Preservice Teacher Education Programs

Two preservice programs designed specifically to prepare teachers to work effectively with immigrant students are the Second Languages and Cultures Education Program at the University of Minnesota and the Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development Program at San Diego State University.

### Second Languages and Cultures (SLC) Education Program, University of Minnesota

This postbaccalaureate program encompasses both foreign language and ESL teacher preparation. The combination seeks to lessen fragmentation in the field of language learning and isolation of language teachers.

The SLC program is based on the philosophical tenets that "teachers and students both act as knowers and learners in an active, experiential, and integrative process; that teaching is context sensitive; and that reflection is a cornerstone in teacher development" (Tedick & Walker, 1995, p. 503). Students begin their field experiences in classrooms while continuing to take courses on campus. Students explore issues and questions in 10 areas: language and culture; the language learner; integration of curriculum, instruction, and learner characteristics; theory and research bases for second language teaching and learning; school culture and second languages; personal development as a teacher; assessment; language and cultural diversity; research; and intensive classroom experience at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Students in the SLC program are organized into cohort groups, referred to as "a community of developing teachers," where they work together and share experiences. These cohort groups are further divided into "base groups" and "feedback session groups." A graduate assistant usually facilitates the base group and keeps close contact with teaching candidates through conferences, journals, and on-site visits and observations. Through base groups, students are able to share their experiences with one another and get feedback on their work. In the feedback sessions, devel-

oping teachers view microteaching videos (focused on one element of their own or others' classroom practice) and more globally oriented videos of their actual teaching in the schools. In addition, students participate in work days set aside for group projects. Graduates continue to be members of cohort groups for their first year of teaching, participate together in monthly seminars at the university, and engage in action research projects leading to their Master's degree in education.

### **The Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development Program (CLAD), San Diego State University**

This preservice teacher education program seeks to prepare teachers to work with English language learners where bilingual programs are not available or to work in the English component of a bilingual program. Pedagogical strategies include Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), also called sheltered instruction. Instruction in a subject area is delivered in English by a content-area-certified teacher using techniques designed to provide English learners access to the curriculum. This is increasingly important at the secondary school level, where students may otherwise be denied access to core academic instruction.

Content courses in mathematics, social studies, science, reading, and language arts include attention to culture and pedagogical methods for new English language learners. Other requirements include a course on the psychological foundations of education, with an emphasis on culture, language, and language acquisition, and student teaching experiences and seminars. Students are placed in a school for at least one semester with a master teacher who has obtained a Language Development Specialist certificate or credential and has a significant number of new English learners in class.

The CLAD program aims to develop future teachers' knowledge in the following areas:

- *Cultural awareness.* This component focuses on issues of cultural diversity; assimilation; and relationships among cultural diversity, educational equity, academic achievement, and socioeconomic status.
- *Theoretical knowledge.* Students learn about language phonology, morphology and syntax, first and second language acquisition, the structure and role of language in social settings, philosophy and theory of bilingual and bicultural education, techniques and materials in ESL instruction, and the effects of attitudes and motivation in learning.
- *Content knowledge.* Students complete an undergraduate major in an academic content area before being admitted to the preservice program.
- *Knowledge of pedagogical methods.* This includes learning about Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach, content-based instruction, cooperative learning, and whole language teaching strategies.
- *Fieldwork.* This includes practice teaching, classroom observations, and community ethnographies.

### **Inservice Teacher Development**

#### **The International High School, New York City**

This school serves recent immigrants to the United States and accepts only students who have been in the country for 4 years or less and who score in the lowest 21% on the English Language Battery Exam. The school is small, with approximately 460 students from over 50 countries, speaking over 35 languages. The program emphasizes interdisciplinary team teaching, small-group student collaboration, and English and native language learning through study of academic content. Four fundamental building blocks make up the school's philosophy: (1) a linguistic

methodology that assumes that language skills are best learned through the use of content material in context; (2) a commitment to both English and native language development; (3) heterogeneous small-group student collaboration on experiential, activity-based projects; and (4) small-group faculty collaboration on both instructional planning and school-wide governance.

The last building block—institutionalized collaboration among teachers and administrators—led to the faculty's willingness to take collective responsibility for their own professional development. Staff committees oversee a process of planning school-wide colloquia, seminars, and peer review. Teachers write their own self-evaluations periodically, which are added to peer and administrator assessments.

Exchanges such as faculty presentations, summer staff development institutes, and informal visits among classrooms have benefited from the varied experience of the faculty. Teachers with backgrounds in ESL, bilingual education, and other content areas complement each others' strengths. The school has an explicit policy to document its practices and approaches in writing. Proposals, handbooks, curriculum guides, and a school journal provide other means of sharing ideas about teaching and learning among the staff.

The staff development process follows a few rules of thumb to guide teachers in their instructional planning and delivery.

- *Start at the beginning.* This suggests that assignments not assume student familiarity with matters that would be obvious to U.S. students, such as how to use a book to find information.
- *Break down the task.* This implies that longer (e.g., 2- or 3-week) projects be broken down into smaller segments, each of which is demonstrated with an example before students themselves carry out the task.
- *Use models.* This includes modeling examples of finished assignments as well as the process that leads to the finished product.

### **Conclusion**

The programs described in this digest illustrate several principles for the professional development of teachers working with English language learners. They need occasions to connect theory and practice in tightly integrated ways; support in learning how to understand what students bring to the classroom; concrete strategies that shape collaborative learning environments and build on students' language, culture, and experience; ongoing opportunities for collaboration and collective problem solving; and experiences that allow them to learn and work professionally in the same ways that they hope to teach. Building teacher preparation programs and school learning communities that provide these kinds of opportunities for language teachers is one of the most important investments that society can make in the education of immigrant youth.

### **References**

- Tedick, D.J., & Walker, C.L. (1994). Second language teacher education: The problems that plague us. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 300-311.
- Tedick, D.J., & Walker, C.L. (1995). From theory to practice: How do we prepare teachers for second language classrooms? *Foreign Language Annals*, 28, 499-517.

For a more detailed discussion of the issues and a more in-depth description of these and other preservice and inservice programs, see *New Concepts and New Challenges: Professional Development for Teachers of Immigrant Youth*, by Josué M. González and Linda Darling-Hammond. The book is available from Delta Systems Co., Inc., 1400 Miller Pkwy., McHenry, IL 60050-7030, 1-800-323-8270, [www.delta-systems.com](http://www.delta-systems.com).

