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The Journal of Border Educational Research

The articles presented in the Journal of Border Educational Research represent various views and perspectives on educational practices and concerns within cross-cultural settings. Included topics cover field-based experiences, action research, descriptions of successful educational practices and position papers that address issues faced by students, teachers, and other professionals in border regions and other cross-cultural situations.

The eclectic array of articles and essays included clearly represents the concept that borders are more than merely marked lines on maps. Borders exist wherever cultures meet and intermingle; where languages come together and beliefs interact. The contributing authors have each chosen to address border concerns and cross-cultural issues from their own perspectives and the results are enlightening and informative. Each author addresses salient issues educators face when working within culturally diverse groups.

The Journal of Border Educational Research is proud to share these contributions to border research with you. We believe they significantly advance cross-cultural education with thoughtful investigations of vital questions. We hope that you find something in this issue that inspires you to reexamine the multicultural issues in your environment.

RB

Randel D. Brown
Editor

Language, Life and Learning in Laredo

In August 2008, the International Conference on Language, Life and Learning took place at the Texas A&M International University in Laredo. Hundreds of participants came to the campus to enjoy two days of inspiring speakers, workshops, food and friends. It was a time to prepare for the upcoming year of teaching and administering school programs, but there were plenty of opportunities for networking and for reconnecting with friends and colleagues one hadn't seen in a while.

The presentations were very diverse, as were the presenters. There were strands of workshops available for teachers and administrators. The topics ranged from early childhood, the arts, sports and fitness to administering a dual-language school. Some presenters were university faculty and experts in their field, but many were teachers and administrators with something important to share with their colleagues. Every session was geared toward maximizing the professional development of the participants. All in all, the conference proved to be a great way to kick off the new school year.

In this issue of the JBER you will find some of the papers submitted by conference presenters. The topics range from issues in K-12 education to concerns in higher education. You will also discover that many of the articles focus on the English language learner (particularly Spanish speakers) and bilingual and dual-language instruction. These are important topics that need to be continually thrust into the foreground of our ongoing discussions regarding school improvements, literacy learning, and standardized testing. Understanding the needs of ELL students and the challenges faced by bilingual educators is the key to making informed decisions and in advocating for appropriate education policy.

It is my hope that this issue of the JBER will inspire you to advocate for or even create positive changes in your classroom, school, or perhaps your district. May be next year you'll have something to present at our International Conference on Language, Life and Learning 2009. I'll see you there!

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Learning Business Research: Graduate Students Performance

Rolando Pena-Sanchez
Texas A&M International University

Abstract

This article describes the graduate students' academic performances in a course of business research methods, where the students have been participating solving assignments and exams; which helped these students to build their own learning through basic activities: reviewing research designs, designing and analyzing surveys, examining cases of study and writing a final research report. Cross-tables were built for two categorical variables: course-type (at 2 levels of classification: "online" and "classroom"), and the 2 levels of gender; where the dependent variable was the proportion of successful students, whose final grades were A or B. The statistical analysis was performed via the Chi-square test, for which we found that the variable "course-type" was not significant (p -value=0.235), similarly the variable "gender" was not significant (p -value=0.212); furthermore, a significant correlation (p -value=0.01) was found for the variables: Final grades and Basic statistical knowledge. An analogy among the Deming's cycle for the continuous improvement of quality, and the learning process derived in the development of learning circles.

Introduction

The online courses provide the opportunity to obtain an education when geographical, physical and/or schedule limitations exist; but some students without this kind of limitations are using this resource expecting easy classes and less assignments or less effort looking to obtain a higher grade. Thus, the online courses are real academic challenges for all professors, whose priority is to provide high-quality teaching, maintaining a professional ethics environment.

Teaching involves the transfer of knowledge and feedback at two levels: group communication and personal communication. This paper describes the students' academic progress in an online course of business research through interactive software assignments and diverse educational homework helping each person to build his/her e-learning in a course of business research online at a small state university.

Before the communication via Internet, the "distance learning" courses were provided by correspondence (mail); technology is periodically and progressively (Jones 2002) changing our lives. Now technology combined with the Internet enables any person to have access to a never-ending process of information (Steinfeld 1987). Technology and the Internet empower individuals and facilitate a more active position in the e-learning process.

Some of the advantages of taking online courses are the convenience and the flexibility for studying from any computer at any time and any where, which permits to comply with working, personal and family responsibilities; but the disadvantages most notorious are the lack of interaction with professors and classmates, the lack of updated computing equipment (hardware & software) and the lack of systematic (discipline) reading from students. The instructors/professors provide power-point presentations and audio presentations for the lessons in the chapters, but it does not make up for the lack of a lecture; because most of the power point presentations are taken directly

from the book. So, reading is an essential part in being successful in online courses. About not-frequent disadvantages, we can mention the lack of computer knowledge from students, the slow e-response time from professors and the lack of reading's skills (Steen 2006). In addition, the final exams will be held under controlled conditions of place, date and time.

e-Learning and Technology

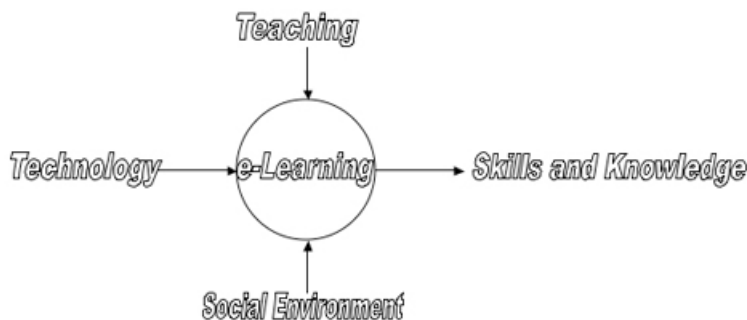
Technology has always been the changing force for mankind (Close 2000); e-Learning looks like every other “e” construct or concept (i.e. e-Commerce, e-Buy); the term “e” of e-Learning meant to be electronic; and the span of electronic in the term e-Learning can include Internet and several more electronic media technologies; of course, in this world of global communications, other factors affecting the e-Learning activity are the teaching styles/techniques as well as the social environment (see Figure 1) of a learner. The social environment represents the culture where the learner was cultured (educated) and/or lives in, as well as the individuals and institutions with whom the learner interacts, which generates his/her quality of life (Barnett 2007).

Cisco Systems is one of the largest corporations of e-Learning users (technical participants), that explains its compromise with the e-Learning's components as “Components can include content delivery in multiple formats, management of the learning experience, and a networked community of learners, content developers and experts. e-Learning provides faster learning at reduced costs, increased access to learning, and clear accountability for all participants in the learning process. In today's fast-paced culture, organizations that implement e-Learning provide their work force with the ability to turn change into an advantage” (Kirschner 2001).

In this context the differences between e-Learning and online-learning should be noted: e-Learning represents the whole category of technology-based learning, while online-learning is synonymous with web-based learning; in order to be more precisely, online-learning is in fact a component of e-Learning. Thus, we can sketch a definition of e-Learning as a delivery process of knowledge, through different electronic media technologies including internet (Pena-Sanchez 2005), intranet, extranet, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV, CD ROM, etc.

e-Learning helps us increase access to training and ensure that it is immediately relevant and cost-effective. Some advantages of online-learning include: Anywhere, Anytime, Anyone: e-Learning is available 24 hours a day, around the world. Organizations can distribute training and relevant information (Glauser 1984) to multiple locations easily and conveniently, allowing employees to access training at their convenience (Pena-Sanchez 2007).

Figure 1 The e-Learning process and its related factors



Since geographical and time barriers are virtually removed, e-Learning is no longer limited to a few people who can travel to a seminar or conference. e-Learning can occur throughout organizations and e-collaborative (Kock 2005) individuals, accelerating the transfer of knowledge, and transforming learning from an isolated example of qualified development into a powerful tool for managerial decisions.

The presence of interactive software facilitates the e-learning process. The major objective of interactive software for business research is to provide students with an understanding of how to interpret results and how to solve problems (basic competences) as applied to business scenarios. In general, software of this kind runs in three modes. First, using the instruct mode, the user gain an understanding of the statistical technique or methodology. Second, using the practice mode, the participant gains the mastery of the technique with hints and help available to assist his/her learning. Third, using the certify mode, the user are required to obtain his/her certificate indicating mastery of the topic without help or hints. At the end of a time-period of training, the user will be credited for each certificate earned. The total credit will be equal to a specific percentage with each certificate carrying equal weight.

The Deming Cycle

W. Edwards Deming in the 1950's proposed that industrial production processes should be analyzed and measured to identify sources of variations that cause products to deviate from customer necessities or requirements. He recommended that production or business processes be placed in a continuous feedback loop so that managers can identify and change the parts of the process that need improvements. Deming created a diagram (Figure 2) to illustrate this continuous process. The Deming's cycle for the continuous improvement of quality commonly known as the PDCA cycle; for Plan, Do, Check, Act. This methodology can be described in a few words as follows:

Plan: Design and revise business process in accordance with customer requirements to improve results

Do: Implement the process or plan and measure its performance

Check: Monitor and measure the processes and products and report the results

Act: Decide on changes or actions needed to improve the process performance

Figure 2 Deming's "Plan, Do Check & Act" Cycle



Source: Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 30, 2007 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deming_Cycle

Research Hypotheses

The following hypothesis uses the proportion of students getting or exceeding the final grade “B” as the dependent variable. First, we determine if any difference exist between the proportion of successful students taking an online course with respect to the proportion of other successful students registered in a classic (classroom) course. As the students receiving instruction in a classroom are more comfortable with the academic feedback and have more complex problems discussions, we would expect for these students group to have a higher proportion of successful students than for the group of students without this practice into the classroom.

Dependent Variable: Proportion of students that got (B) or better (A) final grade.

Independent Variable: Course-type of Business Research (type 1: Online, type 2: Classic or Classroom)

Research Hypothesis HA1: The population’s proportion of students receiving classroom instruction that got “A” or “B” as final grades exceeds the proportion of students receiving online instruction.

$$H_{A1}: p_{\text{classroom}} > p_{\text{online}}$$

The corresponding null hypothesis is

$$H_{01}: p_{\text{classroom}} \leq p_{\text{online}}$$

Next, we consider the impact of gender on business research’ learning. As men tend to feel more comfortable with computers (Frankel 1990), we expect the online software usage for the proportion of males to be associated to passing or better final grades than females also under the same online course-type.

Independent Variable: Student gender (male and female).

Research Hypothesis HA2: The population’s proportion of male students (with passing or better final grades) receiving instruction at an online course exceeds the proportion of female students (with passing or better final grades) that were also registered in an online course; this is

$$H_{A2}: p_{\text{males}} > p_{\text{females}}$$

In this case its corresponding null hypothesis is

$$H_{02}: p_{\text{males}} \leq p_{\text{females}}$$

Our course examinations contain a questionnaire (Appendix A) used to estimate the students’ fundamental knowledge in statistics applied to business research. The Spearman rank correlation is used to test the relationship between the students’ final grades and their basic statistical knowledge.

Thus, the null hypothesis takes the form

$$H_{03}: \rho = 0$$

For which, its correspondent alternative hypothesis is

$$H_{A3}: \rho \neq 0$$

Data and Methodology

Sampling

A random sample of size $n = 256$ students was used to test the previous hypotheses. The sample data corresponds to the students' final grades reported during the academic period from Spring-2003 to Fall-2007 at an American state university where we work. In order to eliminate a source of variation due to the factor "instructors" (professors); the total sample of students was under the same instructor supervision.

Statistical Technique

Given that the two independent variables are in categorical (nominal) scale, the appropriated statistical technique is a nonparametric method used in case of contingency (cross) tables: the analysis is performed via the Chi-square test.

The Chi-square Test

The observations of a random sample of size n are classified according to two criteria in an $r \times c$ contingency table (Conover 1999).

H_0 : The event "an observation is in row i " is independent of the event "that same observation is in column j " for all i and j ; or $P(\text{row } i \cap \text{column } j) = P(\text{row } i) \cdot P(\text{column } j)$

H_A : $P(\text{row } i \cap \text{column } j) \neq P(\text{row } i) \cdot P(\text{column } j)$

The test statistic χ^2 (chi-square) is defined as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \sum ((O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2 / E_{ij}), \quad i=1, \dots, r; \quad j=1, \dots, c \quad (1)$$

Where, O_{ij} represents the observed frequency in cell (i,j) ; while the term E_{ij} represents the expected frequency in cell (i,j) , if H_0 is really true.

$$E_{ij} = R_i C_j / n \quad (2)$$

R_i and C_j are the sum of observed frequencies in row i and column j respectively.

The statistic χ^2 is compared with quantiles from the Chi-square distribution with $(r-1) \cdot (c-1)$ degrees of freedom.

In terms of goodness-of-fit, the chi-square test (Cooper 2008) compares the observed and expected frequencies in each category to test either that all categories contain the same proportion of values or that each category contains a researcher-specified proportion of values.

The Spearman rank correlation coefficient $\rho(\text{rho})$

This nonparametric estimated coefficient can be used to test for independence between two random variables; for which the hypotheses take the following form:

H_0 : The variables X and Y are mutually independent

H_a : There is a tendency for the larger {smaller} values of X to be paired with the larger values of Y, or vice versa.

The nonparametric test statistic T_r is defined (Conover 1999) as:

$$T_r = \sum [R(X_i) - R(Y_i)]^2, \quad i=1, 2, \dots, n \quad (3)$$

Then ρ is obtained as follows

$$\rho = 1 - (6 T_r / n(n^2 - 1)) \quad (4)$$

The Pearson correlation coefficient

This is a parametric estimate, which is defined (Cooper 2008) as

$$\rho = \text{COV}(X, Y) / (\text{SD}(X) \cdot \text{SD}(Y)) \quad (5)$$

Where COV represents the covariance operator, and SD is the standard deviation operator.

Statistical Analysis

Table 1 contains a cross-tabulation for the variables grade status (at 3 levels: passing, not passing and withdraw) and course type (at 2 levels: level 1: Classroom, level 2: Online). The corresponding test show up in Table 2.

Similarly, Table 3 is a contingency table for the variable Grade status (at 2 levels: passing and not passing grade) combined with gender; in the presence of just one level of the factor course type: only students that have been taking the online course. Its corresponding χ^2 test is given in Table 4.

Table 1 Cross-tabulation for the variables grade status and course type

Course Type (n=256)		Count	Status Grade			Total
		%	Passing	Not passing	Withdraw	
	Classroom	Count	186	9	8	203
		%	91.6%	4.4%	3.9%	100.0%
	Online	Count	49	4	0	53
		%	92.5%	7.5%	.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	235	13	8	256
		%	91.8%	5.1%	3.1%	100.0%

Table 2 Chi-Square to test $H_{01}: p_{\text{Classroom}} \leq p_{\text{Online}}$

Null Hypothesis: H_{02}	Value	degrees of freedom	p-value n of cases: 256
Chi-Square statistic	2.894	2	0.235

Table 3 Cross-tabulation for the variables grade status and gender

Student Gender			Course Type		Total
			Classroom	Online	
	Male	Count	119	36	155
		%	76.8%	23.2%	100.0%
	Female	Count	67	13	80
		%	83.8%	16.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	186	49	235
		%	79.1%	20.9%	100.0%

Table 4 Chi-Square to test $H_{02}: p_{\text{male}} \leq p_{\text{female}}$

Null Hypothesis: H_{02}	Value	degrees of freedom	p-value n of cases: 235
Chi-Square statistic	1.556	1	0.212

Table 5 Correlation estimate between final grades and basic statistical knowledge to test the null hypothesis $H_{03}: \rho = 0$

Method	Correlation Coefficient Estimate	p-value n of cases: 248
Pearson	0.422	0.01
Spearman	0.456	0.01

Conclusions

Our conclusion supported by a nonparametric statistical analysis through the Chi-square test is that the population proportion of successful students (that got passing or better final grades: A or B) in a course of Business Research does not depend on how these students decided to take their course instruction: online or in a classroom (p -value=0.235 in Table 2); in other words, for the students that got passing or better grades: the proportion (92.5%) of students registered online does not differ significantly to the proportion (91.6%) of students that were receiving their instruction through a classic manner in a classroom. A confirmation of this conclusion was obtained via the z-test (Cooper 2008) for two proportions (z-test p -value=0.4227), where $p_1=186/203$ and $p_2=49/53$; thus, the data does not support the research hypothesis HA1.

From Table 4's information, our conclusion is that we don't have sufficient evidence (p -value=0.212) to support the 2nd research hypothesis (the data does not support HA2) about the gender effect on the students' academic performance (measured through their final grades) if they have been taking an online course; which means: the proportions of males and females students do not show a significant difference. This is, the proportion of students registered in an online course that got passing or better final grades does not depend on how these students were classified according to their gender (female or male).

The majority of successful students have been reading and completing their business research's assignments; student's discipline in combination with his/her basic foundations in Statistics (statistical skills) is the key of success in a course of business research, independently on the manner on how these students decided to take their course instruction: whether online or in a classic way at a classroom.

Table 5 shows a significant correlation between the variables: students' final grades and their basic statistical knowledge (p -value=0.01); therefore, there is conclusive empirical evidence about the pattern between both variables, which exhibit a positive linear trend.

If we overlap the Figures 1 and 2, will be easier to understand the benefits of the PDCA cycle into the learning process:

1. The continuous improvement of quality (Kulkarni 2002) in a manufacturing process is analogous to the continuous improvement of efficacy and efficiency in a learning process. Thus, the continuous improvement of learning's quality (efficacy and efficiency) is also a never-ending process.
2. Learning circles development: The endorsement toward an active engagement from the students during online and/or class sessions: individual academic participation, team activities, promotion of critical thinking, academic diversity in groups of collaboration and a continuous quality (efficacy and efficiency) improvement on the learning process. Where, efficacy (effectiveness) of learning is the degree to which desired academic objectives (measurable outcomes) of learning are achieved; meanwhile, efficiency of learning is the ratio of the outputs of learning (knowledge and skills) to the associated efforts (cost and/or time) of producing those.
3. The learning circles can be implemented as the departure point for learning communities.

Recommendations

Given that “e-learning” can be viewed as a process in which the learners increase their skills and knowledge (see Figure 1); by experience, we can say that the lack of skills as a self-didactic is a critical factor for to be a successful online student. Therefore, before to initiate an online course, we recommend reinforcing such abilities: habit for reading, reduction and/or elimination of distractions, optimal time-planning to meet the academic prerequisite, etc.

Business Research courses are difficult because they contain formulas and it would be better to see an instructor explain its interpretations and applications during the lectures than to read about the subject matter in the textbook. If a Business Research course needs to be taken online due to geographical limitations, work restrictions and/or scheduling conflicts; then, we recommend that the students should be prepared to do a systematical activity of reading and studying several hours per week for such online course.

Directions for Further Research

These findings should influence both administrators and educators about their choice for some software and/or technology to support academic learning (Hilton 1999). As educators, we all should seek the most effective and efficient tool for basic academic competences, as well as for e-collaborative tasks (McEntee 1997).

It is hoped that this paper will foster more research into the relationships between software diversity, e- communication (Clyde 1999) and academic tasks for e-Learning purposes, so that more effective and efficient decisions will occur both in universities and organizations (Sitkin 1992).

As reference of the importance of e-communication: Second-by-second, the number of organizations making use of e-mail are shown an expanding increase in a geometrical form. According to a study, the following results were evaluated:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of e-mails being sent</u>
1995	101 billion e-mails were sent
2000	2.6 trillion e-mails were sent

(Source: <http://www.mybestdocs.com/mitchell-l-email-v5.htm>) (Mitchell 2002)

This is an increase of almost 26 fold over a five year period.

Appendix A

Questionnaire: Define and provide an example or an application in Business Research for each one of the following 10 fundamental statistical concepts:

1. Mean	6. t Test
2. Median	7. Chi-Square Test
3. Mode	8. p-value
4. Standard Deviation	9. Correlation
5. z Score	10. Regression

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Representational Patterns of English Language Learners Receiving Special Education Services in South Texas

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Abstract

This study examined the representational patterns of English language learners (ELLs) receiving special education services in school districts in South Texas and school district characteristics that were related to the probability that an English language learner might be placed in special education programs. Results indicated that 77% of the school districts in the South Texas area showed overrepresentation of ELLs in special education classes. Data indicated that ELLs in South Texas and the three Education Service Centers (ESC) that comprise South Texas were anywhere from two times to two and one-half times more likely to be identified as needing special education services than their non-English language learner peers. The districts with overrepresentation concerns were overwhelmingly located in ESC Region I, where 92% of the districts demonstrated overrepresentation. Finally, results indicated that relative risk ratios indicating overrepresentation of ELLs were inversely correlated with low percentages of poor/underserved students, Latino students, ELLs, Latino teachers, and students in bilingual/English as a second language programs.

As children in America's classrooms increasingly come from culturally and linguistically diverse families, teachers are faced with the challenge of educating a more diverse population than ever before (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). Related to the increased diversity of the school population is the concern of the disproportionate number of students of color receiving special education services (Warger & Burnette, 2000). The phenomenon of disproportionate representation has been documented and studied for more than 35 years (Hosp & Reschly, 2003). Reports and studies (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002) continue to document the overrepresentation of African American and Native American children in programs for students with mild disabilities and the underrepresentation of Asian American and Latino students in these special education programs.

The knowledge base concerning the representational patterns of English language learners (ELLs) receiving special education services is scarce (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Klingner & Artiles, 2003). Results from the scant research that does exist document contradictory conclusions. In one study, Zehler et al. (2003) reported an underrepresentation of ELLs receiving special education services, while other researchers have found that ELLs are overrepresented in special

education programs (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). Additionally, there is preliminary evidence that overrepresentation of English learners in speech/language impairment category may exist in some states (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002), and that ELLs who lack proficiency in both their native language and English may be heavily overrepresented in special education programs (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005).

A national, in-depth descriptive study concerning ELLs with disabilities was conducted under the auspices of U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement of Limited English Proficient Students. Zehler et al. (2003) studied 3,424 schools in 1,315 school districts across the nation. With regards to ELLs, the study documented a 72% increase from 1992 through 2002 in the number of ELLs in public schools. Seventy-seven percent of ELLs spoke Spanish. The investigators found evidence of underrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs. In particular, the researchers documented smaller proportions of ELLs than students in the general school population in special education programs. In 2002, 13.5% of students from the general population were receiving special education services, while only 9.2% of ELLs were. Additionally, smaller proportions of ELLs than students from the general population were reported for each of the mild disability categories. For example, in 2002, 6.6% of students from the general population were identified as having a learning disability, while only 5.2% of ELLs were. Likewise, 1% of students from the general population were identified as having an emotional disturbance, while only .23% of ELLs were. Similarly, 1.2% of the students from the general population were in special education programs for students with mental retardation, while only .72% of ELLs were. Finally, 2.7% of the general education students were identified as having a speech/language impairment, while 2.1% of the ELLs were.

Within states, there also appears to also be great variations in placement rates. For example, in Texas, Robertson and Kushner (1994) found that ELLs were up to five times as likely to be in special education programs in one district as in another. In Illinois, ELLs with disabilities are underrepresented and underserved at the state level, but Brusca-Vega (2002) acknowledged that variations might exist at the district level. Two state-level studies, one from California (Artiles, Rueda et al., 2002, 2005) and the other from Texas (Johnson, Lessem, Bergquist, Carmichael, & Whitten, 2002), merit in-depth analyses and discussion in this literature review because of their comprehensiveness and importance to the understanding of the representation patterns of ELLs in special education programs.

Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, and Higareda (2002) asserted, "the intersections of ELLs and special education are little understood" (p. 118). These researchers noted that when Latinos and other groups are studied at the national level, Latinos are not overrepresented (e.g., the way that African Americans are); however, "when the issue of language is added in, the results change and a serious civil rights issue emerges" (p. 118). With the hopes of adding to this critical knowledge base, Artiles and his colleagues studied 11 urban districts, "heavily populated by English learners, particularly of Latino descent" (Artiles et al., 2002, p. 121) in the state of California during the 1998-1999 school year, where 42% of the student population was classified as ELLs. Using the "aggregate of districts as the unit of analysis" (Artiles et al., p. 123), the researchers described the placement patterns of ELLs identified as having mental retardation or a speech/language impairment.

Important results indicated patterns of English language learner representation in special education with regards to grade level, disability category, language support and special education program. Artiles and his colleagues found that ELLs were overrepresented in special education programs in secondary grades, but not in elementary grades, nor at the district level. Specifically,

when data were disaggregated by grade level, ELLs were not overrepresented in grades K-4, but the problem emerged at grade five and remained through grade twelve. “English language learners are 27 percent more likely to be placed [in special education programs] in elementary grades and almost twice as likely to be placed in secondary grades” (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002, p. 127).

When data were examined by disability category, the English learner population was overrepresented at the district level, in both the categories of mental retardation and speech/language impairment. Overrepresentation was not a concern at the elementary level, but ELLs were noticeably overrepresented at the secondary level in the mental retardation and speech/language impairment categories. The investigators noted “for the MR [mental retardation] category, the situation in secondary classes is dramatic, as English learners are more than three times as likely to be placed in this program” (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002, p. 127).

With regards to language support and special education placement, the researchers found that the probability of being placed in the more restrictive special day class was higher for English learners in straight English immersion programs when compared with English learners in modified English immersion programs and bilingual education programs. The researchers noted “elementary English learners in the straight English immersion program are more than twice as likely to receive RSP [resource specialist program] services than are English learners placed in the modified English immersion model, and almost three times more likely than English learners placed in bilingual programs” (pp. 128-129). Finally, the most glaring evidence of the disproportionality concern among ELLs’ participation rates in special education was that during the five years between 1993-1994 and 1998-1999, there was an increase of 12% in the ELL subgroup of Latinos, but an increase of 345% of Latino ELL students in special education (Rueda, Artiles, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002).

In a follow-up study of the same districts for the same year, Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, and Higareda (2005) calculated the risk indices (in addition to the composition indices and odds ratios previously reported) and provided information concerning English language learner representation in the category of learning disabilities. In addition to reporting the previous findings, the researchers found that ELLs were overrepresented in special education programs for learning disabilities at the secondary level. There was overrepresentation of low-socioeconomic status (SES) English language learners in learning disability programs at all grade levels, as well as the speech/language impairment disability category at the secondary level. Finally, at the conclusion of their research, Artiles and his colleagues again underlined the importance of studying English language learner representation in special education programs using disaggregated data because reliance on national or state data may obscure important local trends.

In Texas, the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University convened a team of investigators to examine the representation of minority students in special education (Johnson, Lessem, Bergquist, Carmichael, & Whitten, 2002). Two components of this study merit discussion here: an examination of national and state statistics from the IDEA database by Johnson, Lessem, and Bergquist (2002) and an analysis of Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data to further examine the extent and possible variables underlying the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education across Texas by Carmichael and Whitten, (2002).

Johnson, Lessem, and Bergquist (2002) analyzed data provided by the U.S. Department of Education via the IDEA database for the 1999-2000 to answer the questions: “What were the participation rates of minority children [students of color] in special education reported by Texas?” and “How does Texas compare with the rest of the nation?” (p. 4). Johnson and his colleagues

disaggregated data according to five race/ethnicity categories: American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, Hispanic, and White. The authors noted that in Texas, as in most of the nation, overrepresentation of African American in special education, especially in programs for mental retardation, was a serious concern. Regarding Latinos identified as having disabilities, the researchers found a slight underrepresentation of Latinos identified as having speech/language impairment, but more underrepresentation of Latino students identified as having an emotional disturbance. Indeed, Texas had the fourth largest disparity in the nation. However, the authors concluded the discussion of their study by stating: "Texas was not marked by extreme anomalies [when their representational patterns were compared to that of other states]," and noted, "it was particularly important to review school district level information on these same issues" (Johnson, Lessem, & Bergquist, 2002, p. 22).

Carmichael and Whitten (2002) used Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data available for each student in the State of Texas to further examine representational patterns of students of color. The researchers investigated whether individual or district-level characteristics influenced the probability that students of color would be identified as having a disability. Individual student characteristics included ethnicity, gender, "at-risk" designation, income status, English proficiency, and immigrant/migrant status. District-level variables included "characteristics of the student body (size, ethnicity, TAAS passing rates, and attendance rate), characteristics of the teaching staff (ethnic composition, qualifications, and experience, and district characteristics (wealth, instructional expenditures, and geographic location)" (p. 8).

Regarding characteristics that impacted representation of students of color in special education programs at the individual level, Carmichael and Whitten (2002) found a slight underrepresentation of Latinos in special education programs, a difference score of almost -4%. However, there was more pronounced evidence of underrepresentation of Latinos in the special education categories of speech/language impairment (difference score of -6.1%) and emotional disturbance (difference score of -13.1%).

Concerning the participation rates of ELLs, the authors found that these students were underrepresented in special education programs (difference score of -4.7%). Additionally, the authors found that ELL designation was the least likely of all the individual risk factors studied to be associated with placement in special education programs. That is, ELLs were significantly less likely to have received special education services than students with no risk factors. ELLs were designated as either bilingual or ESL according to the type of instruction they received to address their second language acquisition concerns.

Bilingual status was found to influence placement in special education programs. The proportion of Latino bilingual students enrolled in special education (9.8%) was only half that of the overall student population (18.4%). Interestingly, this finding held true for ELLs in bilingual programs but not for ELLs in English as a Second Language programs, where their representational patterns were found to be the same as their European American peers. Carmichael and Whitten (2002) noted: "where students are identified as having language barriers, participation in special education drops dramatically" (p. 11). Since 93% of ELLs are Latinos, this finding is consistent with patterns of underrepresentation of Latinos in special education. The researchers surmised that language differences might still be the key to the underrepresentation problem (Carmichael & Whitten, 2002).

Regarding district characteristics that impacted representation of students of color in special education programs, Carmichael and Whitten (2002) found that teacher ethnicity was the only district characteristic significantly related to the placement of students of color in special education.

For example, in a district with no teachers of color, the likelihood that a student would receive special education services is “15.8% for an African American student, 13.4% for a White student, and 11.1% for a Hispanic student” (p. 24). Carmichael and Whitten stated “as the proportion of minority teachers increases, the number of students expected to be placed declines to less than 9% for both minority ethnicities but remains the same for White students” (p. 24). However, although the probability of placement in special education classes for Latino students increases where there are fewer minority teachers, Latinos are still dramatically underrepresented. Finally, other district variables, including size of district, enrollment of students of color, teacher qualifications, teacher experience, student-teacher ratio, district wealth, instructional expenditures per student, and district location in the state were unrelated to the likelihood that students of color would be placed in special education programs.

The results of the research conducted in Texas are surprising against the backdrop of recent measures taken by the State of Texas to make districts accountable for disproportionate representation of students of color in programs for students with disabilities (i.e., the implementation of the Special Education Data Analysis System and, as recently as the school year 2004-2005, the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System). Given the high percentage of Latino students and ELLs in certain districts in the State of Texas, especially in South Texas, the need for a study to better understand the representation of ELLs in special education programs is apparent and warranted. Therefore, this purpose of this study was to (a) examine the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services in South Texas and (b) identify possible relationships between the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services and the characteristics of school districts in South Texas.

Method

Population

The population for this study consisted of school districts located in three Education Service Center (ESC) Regions (N=130). These are ESC Region I (N=38), ESC Region II (N=42), and ESC Region XX (N=50). This area is defined as South Texas for the purpose of this investigation. The characteristics of the population for this study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
 Characteristics of Texas and Education Service Centers Regions I, II, and XX

Characteristics	State of Texas	Region I	Region II	Region XX
Enrollment	4,311,502	340,361	106,865	349,126
Latino Students	43.8	96.3	68.1	65.5
ELLs	15.3	39.3	6.4	10.2
Poor	52.8	84.6	59.0	61.0
Latino Teachers	18.8	81.2	42.2	34.2
Bi/ESL	14.1	37.2	5.6	8.9

Note. All numbers, except those for enrollment, are in percentages. *ELLs* means enrollment of English language learners. *Poor* means enrollment of poor/underserved students. *Bi/ESL* means enrollment of students in bilingual or English as a second language programs.

Source: Texas Education Agency (2004b).

During the 2003-2004 school year, as noted in Table 1, the percentage of Latino students enrolled in each of the regions in the study was approximately 1.5 times or more above the state average of 43.8%. Additionally, the three regions in the study had higher averages than the state for poor/underserved students and Latino teachers. Finally, the total student enrollment for the regions in the study was 796,352 students, which accounted for 18.5% of the total enrollment for the State of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2004b).

Twenty of the districts had to be eliminated from the originally defined population because data for students identified as ELLs and/or special education students were not available due to the masking of reports in order to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Data were masked if the number of special education students or ELLs was less than five, or if the number of ELLs identified as special education students was less than three (B. Pena, personal communication, March 30, 2004). The final number of districts comprising the sample of the study was 110. This constituted 94.7% of the districts from ESC Region I (N=36), 78.6% of the districts from ESC Region II (N=33), and 82% of the districts from ESC Region XX (N= 41).

Data Sources

The two data sources used for this research study were The Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System 2004-2005 (Texas Education Agency, 2005) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (Texas Education Agency, 2004a). The Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System 2004-2005 provided data for each of the school districts concerning total student enrollment, number of Latinos, number of ELLs, number of special education students, and number of ELLs who had been identified as having a disability. Data in this report corresponded to the 2003-2004 school year. These data were used to calculate composition indices, risk indices, and relative risk ratios for the population.

The Academic Excellence Indicator System (Texas Education Agency, 2004a) was used to provide additional data concerning the district characteristics of percentage of Latino teachers, percentage of poor/underserved students and percentage of students enrolled in bilingual/English as a second language programs. Data in this report corresponded to the 2003-2004 school year. The data were used in the correlational part of the study.

Data Analysis

In order to determine the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services in South Texas, composition indices, risk indices, and relative risk ratios were reported for each of the districts in the study. First, composition indices indicated the percent of students with disabilities that were ELLs in each of the districts in the study. Then risk indices indicated the percent of ELLs that were identified as having a disability in each of the districts in the study. Finally, relative risk ratios indicated the extent to which being an English language learner affected the probability of being identified as a student having a disability in each of the school districts in the study.

In order to determine possible relationships between the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services and the characteristics of school districts in South Texas, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for each of the districts in the study were calculated in order to describe the direction and strength of the relationship among relative risk ratios and school district variables.

Results

For each of the districts in the study, composition indices, risk indices, and relative risk ratios were calculated to report the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services in South Texas. Composition indices and risk indices depicted the same representational patterns, which was expected given that composition and risk indices report a similar phenomenon; that is, the participation of ELLs in special education programs. Composition indices and risk indices for school districts in ESC Region I indicated that 33 (91.7%) of the 36 school districts had an overrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs. Additionally, two school districts (5.5%) showed composition indices that indicated an underrepresentation of ELLs receiving special education services, while only one (2.8%) district demonstrated the number of ELLs in special education programs that was proportional to ELLs' enrollment in the district. In ESC Region II, 26 (78.8%) of the 33 districts demonstrated overrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs, while five (15.2%) of the districts reported underrepresentation, and two (6 %) districts demonstrated proportional representation. In ESC Region XX, 26 (63.4%) of the 41 districts had an overrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs, while six (14.6%) of the districts depicted underrepresentation, and nine (22%) districts revealed proportional representation.

Coutinho and Oswald (1998) used relative risk ratios to calculate the degree of disproportionate representation defined as "the extent to which membership in a given ethnic group affects the probability of being placed in a specific special educational disability category" (p. 67). The relative risk ratios reported in this study describe the extent to which being an English language learner affected the probability of being identified as a student having a disability. Relative risk ratios greater than 1.00 indicate that ELLs are at a greater risk of being identified for special education services than their peers who are not ELLs. Furthermore, relative risk ratios of less than 1.00 indicate that ELLs are less likely to be identified for special education services than their peers who are not ELLs (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the relative risk ratios in the three regions included in this study, as well as the aggregate category of South Texas. As noted, the mean relative risk ratios for each of the ESC Regions, as well as the region of South Texas, are 2.00 or greater. These data indicate that ELLs in South Texas and the three ESC Regions that comprise South Texas were anywhere from two times to two and one-half times more likely to be identified as needing special education services than their non-English language learner peers.

Table 2
 Descriptive Statistics of Relative Risk Ratios in South Texas and ESC Regions I, II, and XX

ESC Region	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
I	36	.63	7.75	2.51	1.38
II	33	.58	3.77	2.04	1.00
XX	41	.51	12.94	2.00	2.04
South Texas	110	.51	12.94	2.18	1.58

Note. Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) have been rounded to the nearest hundredth.

Overall, the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services in school districts in South Texas indicated overrepresentation. Eighty-five (77.3%) of the 110 school districts in the South Texas area demonstrated overrepresentation of ELLs in special education classes, either by Parrish’s (2002) definition of an odds ratio equal to or greater than 2.0 (47.3%), or by Chinn and Hughes’ (1987) 10% rule (30%). The districts with overrepresentation concerns were overwhelmingly located in ESC Region I, where 33 (91.7%) of the 36 districts met both of the criteria.

Relative Risk Ratios and School District Characteristics

Table 3 shows the relationship between relative risk ratios and the characteristics of the school districts in South Texas (N=110) and ESC Region I (N=36), Region II (N=33), and Region XX (N=42).

As noted in Table 3, for the school districts in South Texas, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were statistically significant for relative risk ratios and the school district characteristics of percentage of ELLs, percentage of Latino teachers, and percentage of students enrolled in bilingual/English as a second language programs. Furthermore, the coefficients indicated a positive relationship, meaning that districts in the study with higher relative risk ratios (indicating overrepresentation) had greater numbers of ELLs enrolled in the districts, greater percentages of Latino teachers, and larger numbers of students in the districts enrolled in bilingual/English as a second language programs. Positive relationships were also found in Region II between relative risk ratios and the school district characteristics of percentage of Latino students enrolled in the district and percentage of Latino teachers employed by the district.

Table 3
Relationship Between Relative Risk Ratios, and Characteristics of School Districts in South Texas and ESC Regions I, II, and XX

Characteristic	South Texas N=110	Region I N=36	Region II N=33	Region XX N=42
Enrollment	-.148	-.065	-.296	-.195
ELLs	.229*	.250	.111	.195
Latino students	.179	-.095	.379*	.083
Poor	.078	-.160	.141	-.001
Latino teachers	.229*	.079	.360*	.168
Bi/ESL	.235*	.264	.100	.216

Note. ELLs means enrollment of English language learners.
 Poor means enrollment of poor/underserved.
 Bi/ESL means enrollment of students in bilingual or English as a second language programs.
 *Significant at the .05 level (2 tailed).

Since an overwhelming number of districts in South Texas (85 out of 110, or 77.3%) demonstrated overrepresentation of ELLs receiving special education services, additional analyses were undertaken to determine if there were any relationships between relative risk ratios and school districts’ characteristics when relative risk ratios were rank ordered and divided into subcategories.

After rank ordering the relative risk ratios for South Texas and ESC Regions I, II, and XX, four subcategories were created: districts with relative risk ratios equal to or greater than 1.12 (N=85), districts with odd ratios equal to or greater than 2.00 (N=52), districts with relative risk ratios equal to or greater than 2.50 (N=34), and districts with relative risk ratios equal to or greater than 3.00 (N=20). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were again calculated to determine if there were relationships between relative risk ratios and school district characteristics. Table 4 shows the relationship between relative risk ratios and characteristics of school districts in the study when the relative risk ratios were equal to or greater than 2.50.

As noted in Table 4, statistically significant inverse relationships began to appear as relative risk ratios became larger. For example, inverse relationships between percentage of Latino students and relative risk ratios greater than 2.50 were documented in South Texas, Regions I and XXI. Additionally, the percentage of ELLs, the percentage of poor/underserved students, the percentage of Latino teachers employed by the district, and percentage of students served in bilingual/English as a second language programs were inversely related to relative risk ratios greater than 2.50 in ESC Region I.

Table 4
 Relationship Between Relative Risk Ratios and Characteristics of School Districts in South Texas and ESC Regions I, II, and XX: Districts With Relative Risk Ratios Equal to or Greater Than 2.50

Characteristic	South Texas N=34	Region I N=15	Region II N=13	Region XX N=6
Enrollment	-.161	-.303	-.509	-.362
ELLs	-.142	-.576*	.408	-.349
Latino students	-.364*	-.784**	.191	-.912*
Poor	-.290	-.666**	-.041	-.705
Latino teachers	-.306	-.696**	.296	-.734
Bi/ESL	-.130	-.515*	.442	-.325

Note. ELLs means enrollment of English language learners.

Poor means enrollment of poor/underserved.

Bi/ESL means enrollment of students in bilingual or English as a second language programs.

*Significant at the .05 level (2 tailed).

**Significant at the .01 level (2 tailed).

Discussion

Although trends of underrepresentation of ELLs receiving special education services have been reported at the national level (Zehler et al., 2003) and state level (Carmichael & Whitten, 2002; Henderson, Abbot, & Strang, 1993), the present study documented the contradictory finding of considerable overrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs in districts in South Texas. The fact that the regional patterns of disproportionality found in this investigation are contrary to national and state patterns punctuates the importance of the observation made by researchers to disaggregate data in order to fully understand the representational patterns of students of color

in special education programs (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry, 1994; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). The present study has demonstrated that data aggregated and reported at the national and state levels should not be extrapolated to ascertain representational patterns in smaller entities within the State of Texas, such as ESC regions and individual districts, as this information may not accurately depict the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services.

The patterns of overrepresentation among ELLs receiving special education services discovered in this study are supported by the results of studies conducted by Artiles and his colleagues (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002; Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005), who studied the representational patterns of ELLs in the State of California. This comparability may be attributed to the similarities between the present study conducted in Texas and the Artiles study conducted in California. Firstly, the districts in both studies were “heavily populated by English [language] learners, particularly of Latino descent” (Artiles et al., 2002, p. 121). Additionally, the unit of analysis, an aggregate of districts, was utilized in both studies. In the California study, Artiles and his investigators’ unit of analysis were 11 urban school districts throughout the state. Likewise, in the present study, the unit of analysis was an aggregate of districts as defined by an ESC Region.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study have implications for school districts. First, school district personnel need to understand that studies of representational patterns of ELLs at the national and state level may not be representative of the representational patterns of ELLs in their districts and on their individual campuses. Therefore, school district administrators need to become aware of the representational patterns at the state level and document and monitor the participation rates of ELLs receiving special education services in their districts. These monitoring efforts could be instrumental in helping reduce or prevent disproportionate representation of ELLs in special education programs (Coutinho & Oswald, 2004; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2003). Additionally, district administrators should disaggregate data at the district and campus levels concerning the participation rates of ELLs in special education programs according to grade level, disability category, special education placement, and bilingual/English as a second language designation, in order to better understand the types of services ELLs with disabilities are being afforded and to determine whether or not these services are appropriate. Finally, after schools have accurate data regarding the representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services in their districts and on individual campuses, they should “then study the referral, assessment, and placement decision making process to guide reforms or changes in practice” (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000, p. 146).

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations to the present study. First, due to the masking of data for confidentiality purposes, the sum total of the districts identified in the original population for this study had to be reduced by 15%. With the exception of one district, the districts that were deleted from the original population identified for the study had enrollments of less than 1000 students. Excluding some of the smaller districts may have affected the results reported herein.

Although this study presented data in a more disaggregated form than previous studies at the national and state level, the unit of analysis was the aggregate of districts at the ESC region level and the subsequent aggregation of three regions at the South Texas level. Likewise, representational

patterns and the school district characteristics that were related to the patterns were reported for the aggregate category of all disabilities, and not disaggregated according to disabilities category; for example, learning disabilities. Important trends at the district level may have been overlooked by this aggregation of data.

Finally, due to the scarcity of research concerning the representational patterns of ELLs in special education programs and the school districts' characteristics related to their placement, it was difficult to identify parallels between the findings of this study and previously conducted studies cited in the literature. Most of the previously conducted studies involved African Americans and/or Latinos. The possible exception to this dilemma was the California study by Artiles and his colleagues (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002, 2005).

Suggestions for Further Research

Considering the need to more accurately understand the representational patterns of ELLs in special education programs, several recommendations seem warranted for future research. Most important, this study necessitates replication, especially in the other 17 ESC Regions in the State of Texas not included in the study. For example, ESC Region XVIII (Midland) and ESC Region XIX (El Paso) could be studied as West Texas. Likewise, a study of Central Texas would consist of ESC Region IX (Wichita Falls), ESC Region XI (Fort Worth), ESC Region XII (Waco), ESC Region XIII (Austin), ESC Region XIV (Abilene), and ESC Region XV (San Angelo). Studying the Texas Panhandle would require including ESC Regions XVI (Amarillo) and XVII (Lubbock). The study of East Texas could be comprised of ESC Region VII (Kilgore), ESC Region VIII (Mount Pleasant), and ESC Region X (Richardson). ESC Region III (Victoria), ESC Region IV (Houston), ESC Region V (Beaumont), and ESC Region VI (Huntsville) could comprise a study of the Texas Coastal Region. Finally, this study should be replicated in any district or combinations of districts in the nation where there is evidence to suggest that national and/or state data on disproportionality do not reflect trends in a given geographical area.

Once overall representational patterns for ELLs in the aggregate category of all disabilities have been discerned, data need to be disaggregated according to disability category. This in-depth analysis of data is especially critical in the high incidence disability categories because of the ongoing concern of other groups of students of color being disproportionately represented in special education programs. It is safe to assume that ELLs may also be at risk. Moreover, there are data in Texas (Johnson, Lessem, Bergquist, Carmichael, & Whitten, 2002) to suggest that Latinos are decidedly underrepresented in the low incidence categories of autism and other health impairments. Finally, data concerning representational patterns need to be disaggregated and reported according to grade level, special education placement, and type of bilingual program, as was done by Artiles and his colleagues in their California study (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002, 2005).

The relationships between representational patterns of ELLs receiving special education services and school district characteristics such as total student enrollment, percentage of poor/underserved students, percentage of Latino students, percentage of ELLs, percentage of Latino teachers, and percentage of students in bilingual/English as a second language programs are still not clear. Further research is needed to determine if these or other characteristics associated with school districts (e.g., teacher-student ratio, per pupil expenditure, and dropout rates) are related to representational patterns and how they are related.

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Sick Children, Alternative Assessments, and What Happens at Home During Testing Time: Mexican-American Parents' Voices on High-Stakes Schooling

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Abstract

This mixed-method study conducted in a border city between Texas and Mexico examines Mexican-American parents' beliefs of the value of high-stakes testing and their perspectives of its effects on their children. Parents expressed their appreciation of assessment, but they also desired alternatives to the current high-stakes testing programs. They were concerned that the quality of the curriculum their children received was negatively affected because of the focus on testing. Unsolicited and numerous responses from the survey participants called for an extension to the study to examine the parents' perspectives of the testing program's impact on their children's physical and emotional health. This led to further exploration of the alarming information about children's stress-induced physical and emotional consequences.

Introduction

Texas was a pioneer in the use of standardized tests for making high-stakes decisions such as student graduation and ranking and publicizing a school's "quality" based on a single score. In the 1980s, Texas began an educational reform movement to hold schools accountable where policy makers designed and implemented a system of standards and high-stakes testing. The use of one instrument ensured efficiency as the data could be quickly projected into charts comparing schools and districts. As Texas legislators moved into national offices, the nation followed suit, and high-stakes testing became a major component of federal legislation signed into law by President George W. Bush, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (www.ed.gov/nclb).

Educational research documenting the reductionist effects that high-stakes testing has imposed on schools across the country is abundant. A leader in the effort, Linda Darling-Hammond (1991, 2007), compares the narrowing curriculum in U.S. test-driven schools to curriculum focusing on critical thinking and problem solving in schools in higher-achieving countries. She notes that the NCLB requirement for increasing layers of test scores showing adequate yearly progress sets a statistical target that is unreasonable and results in successful schools tagged as failures. More than 40 percent of the nation's schools were placed in some category of failure from 2002 – 2006, affecting how schools educated and prepared their students for such high-stakes accountability.

The reality is that all students are impacted by high-stakes standardized tests; however, children from families who are minority, poor, or non-English speaking are especially disadvantaged (Valenzuela, 2005), including Latino students. Despite reform efforts to meet all the educational needs of Latino sub-populations and the disparity of school success between Latinos and all other student groups, a great number of this population is becoming more disenfranchised by the current state of U.S. public schooling (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). The use of

high-stakes testing is especially threatening to socially and economically marginalized Mexican-American students (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000; Krashen, 1994), exacerbating the complexities and difficulties they experience in their efforts to reach school success (Valencia, 1999; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

There are also statistical complexities involved in schools serving minority youth, such as English language learners. Wright (2005) found that as students in this category become proficient, they are moved to another category, leaving the new learners in a category on their own and still required to meet the higher proficiency levels required to avoid the failure categories. Therefore, many Mexican-American communities with a significant number of English language learning students will be unfairly represented via this NCLB reporting system.

These disparities initiated our desire to examine the phenomenon of the impact of high-stakes standardized testing on minority youth from the perspective of the home. Although not an ethnographic study itself, this study provides a place for researchers to begin to explore questions on what Latino-Mexican-American families believe about high-stakes testing and the ways it impacts their children. One of the recommendations we have as a result of this study is more qualitative research, such as ethnographies and case studies, to probe deeper into this phenomenon of what occurs at home during high-stakes testing time and what educators and policy-makers need to know about it.

So that reform efforts can be made to empower Mexican-American parents, their children and their communities, it is important to increase our understanding of how parents view the practice of high-stakes testing and how it is currently affecting their children's school-going experiences. Such knowledge may contribute to a better understanding of what Mexican-American parents value in their children's education, as well as how schools and educators can prepare their children for the rigors of a high-stakes testing climate in which we currently exist.

Research Design

This study was a mixed methods design that used quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data to answer the research question, What are the attitudes of Mexican-American parents towards high stakes standardized tests? We used the sequential process of a mixed methods approach to gathering our data (Creswell, 2005).

We began with a survey to answer our research question on Mexican-American parent attitudes and opinions toward high-stakes testing in El Paso, Texas and its impact on their children (We refer to the parents and caregivers throughout this paper as parents with the understanding that other caregivers may serve in the role of parent). We then followed with structured interviews of participants of Mexican-American descent in the same geographical area of the city where we conducted the surveys.

Survey Methodology

The survey we used for this study was adapted from a similar study done by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) with parents of third graders in Colorado public schools in 1992 (Shepard and Bliem, 1993). (Permission was granted from CRESST to modify and administer the survey.) The descriptive data analysis and presentation is also modeled after the CRESST study.

In the El Paso study, there were 340 survey respondents. The participant selection process meets standards for randomness based on a population meeting these qualifications: 1) participants chosen with Hispanic surnames, 2) the study participants were located in the El Paso border region between Texas and Mexico, 3) the participants indicated that they were caregivers of school-aged children.

The participants were contacted by telephone and, if they were parents of school-aged children, invited them to participate in a 5 – 10 minute survey about their attitudes regarding the Texas state testing system. Only participants with Hispanic surnames were considered. Although we are fully aware that a Hispanic surname does not always indicate a participant's connection to Mexican-descent roots, we considered the geography and history of the El Paso region to qualify our determination that participants were of Mexican-descent. Over 95 percent (N=340) of those contacted agreed to participate. Participants could select Spanish or English for the survey. Only 15 percent selected Spanish. The responses were tallied and percentages for each response were computed.

Interview Methodology

The initial research design was simply to duplicate Shepard and Bliem's (1993) study with a Mexican-American population in the Texas-Mexico border region. Although the data and implications from this earlier study by Shepard and Bliem (1993) were important, we saw the need to add to this data with information specifically from the Mexican-American community. However, during the survey process, a strand of interesting information emerged.

While taking the surveys, a number of parents volunteered more information about the impact of the testing program on their children. Twenty of the 340 participants described adverse health impacts on their children, which they attributed to the stress surrounding the testing program in this community. These impacts included upset stomach and anxiety attacks. Though anecdotal at that point, the evidence pushed us to deepen the study with this focus in mind.

Since this strand was not in the initial design, the research assistants did not pursue this topic with the participants during the survey. So we wanted to know, "Could these negative physical and emotional effects on children be occurring to other families in the area?" This led us to extend the research by interviewing additional parents who were members of the same Mexican-American community as the survey participants and ask the focused question, "How has the Texas testing system affected you and your children?"

We interviewed Mexican-American parents in various El Paso communities and neighborhoods. University graduate students assisted with conducting the interviews and were instructed to interview parents or guardians of a neighbor "three dwellings to the left of their dwelling" or, if that was not logical, a similar dwelling. They asked the neighbors if they had children in the public schools and if they would share information about how the testing program (known as TAKS in Texas – Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) affects them and their children. If there were no children in that home, the students went to the next home, and so on. No parent who met the criteria refused an interview. The research question was asked in English, and all of the 41 participants responded in English with Spanish phrases included – a common practice in a bilingual city. The interview data were transcribed, coded, and grouped into themes after constant comparative analysis (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) was done of the content.

Results/Findings

We discuss the results and analysis in light of the three themes that emerged from the perspective of these Mexican-American families: 1) Accountability is necessary, but a variety of alternative assessment strategies are more valuable than the use of a single determinant of student success. 2) The high-stakes testing environment engenders a sense of discouragement brought on by the narrowing of the curriculum and forcing teachers to resort to teaching to the test at the cost of creative and innovative pedagogy. 3) Parents frequently discussed the physical and psychological

distress their children experienced when dealing with the pressures and consequences of high-stakes tests.

Survey Results

The results from the Colorado study are similar to the results of the El Paso survey. However, El Paso area parents expressed stronger opposition to using the test to fail students or to prevent graduation. Findings from the El Paso survey study show that 50 percent of the Mexican-American parents favored the use of state-mandated, standardized tests, but 69 percent oppose using such tests to determine whether their child is promoted to the next grade. The results (shown as percentage of responses) are provided in Table 1. The Texas test is Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

Table 1
El Paso Area 2004 Survey Results: Parent Opinions about Standardized Tests

1. Schools are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. What grade would you give the information you receive from your oldest child's teachers regarding his or her academic progress?	A. 28% B. 36% C. 26% D. 6% F. 4%
2. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS test to measure the academic achievement of your child?	Favor 50% Oppose 50%
3. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS test to fail or pass your child to the next grade?	Favor 31% Oppose 69%
4. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS test to allow or disallow your child to graduate?	Favor 31% Oppose 69%
5. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS test to rank the local schools in terms of student achievement?	Favor 64% Oppose 36%
6. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS to identify areas in which teachers need to improve their teaching skills?	Favor 64% Oppose 36%
7. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS test to identify areas in which students need extra help?	Favor 75% Oppose 25%
8. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS test to determine how much teachers should be paid?	Favor 29% Oppose 71%
9. Do you favor or oppose requiring Texas schools to use the TAKS test to determine the level of funding each local school should receive?	Favor 22% Oppose 78%

(Questions adopted from Shepard and Bliem's (1993) CRESST study)

These survey data indicated that the Mexican-American parents have an understanding of the limits of using a short answer test to make important decisions about their children and their schools. A large majority opposed the use of this one instrument to fail a child or to deny graduation. There was also strong opposition to using the test to determine school funding or to determine teachers' pay.

Parents' Preferences for Reporting Assessment Information

Question #10 on the survey asked the parents to rate different assessment instruments to indicate how useful they felt these instruments would be to provide important information to the family about the child's progress. The use of the state test and the practice tests were rated highly by only about 10 percent of the parents, while alternative forms of assessment were rated much higher as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Parents' responses about preferences of assessment and reporting instruments

Instrument	Percent of parents rating the instrument as very useful
Report Cards	48
Conversation	64
TAKS	16
Mock TAKS	19
Conference	72
Progress Report	56
Work Papers	50
Sample Work	60

Interview Results

Of the 42 interviews, comments supporting the test came from eight parents. One of these mothers said that her children do well. "If they wouldn't be passing them....I might think differently about this test." She stated that the test is good because, "It does measure how much they know and what the teachers are teaching them." However, even she began her comments about how her children get very stressed and anxious and how she worries about how much pressure they put on themselves. Two other parents called the tests a "necessary evil," but did credit the tests for making teachers teach better. Two parents said their children were well prepared because the school provided a strong program for them and they loved to read.

In the rest of the interviews, 36 (86 percent) of the parents expressed concern about and opposition to the high-stakes testing system. Three major themes emerged from our analysis:

1) the high stakes testing was causing physical and emotional distress in their children, 2) parents felt that the tests were narrowing the curriculum and what and how it was being taught, and 3) parents wanted alternative forms of assessment for their children with less reliance on a test that determines and defines so much. Stress on the students was the dominant theme and mentioned in 27 of the 42 interviews. This information mirrors the quantitative data from the parent survey.

The Physical and Emotional Climate Under the Pressure of Testing

The following comments by parents reveal that their children experienced various stresses during testing time. One mother noted that her daughter wants to eat a lot more when she has to take the TAKS test. She believes that "It's one of the reasons that school children are getting a lot of stress that leads them to have more health problems such as obesity." Losing sleep was another common concern, one parent admitting "it is stressful for the girls to the extent that they cannot sleep at night. I can't sleep either." This parent even commented how one of her girls was so stressed that they [the parents] sent her to counseling.

Six parents said that their children get sick during the testing weeks, and one said her son pulled his hair out last year during the testing week. The parents' voices quoted below show their concern. The following are examples of the types of anxiety that both parents and children endure during TAKS time:

- "When the test date is approaching, she is very anxious, has trouble sleeping, she gets irritable more easily, has stomach pains and constipation."
- "My daughter has a very hard time with tests. She becomes very nervous and anxious. My children do very well on their report cards during the year, but the TAKS test tells a very different story."
- "Every year he throws up, he has diarrhea, he is sick."
- "The school called me last year. She had a nervous breakdown during the test. I had to pick her up. She was shaking and crying, and it took three hours to calm her down."
- "I still get nervous for my girls to see them leave the morning of the test and see their scared faces leaves me worried all day."

A parent who was also a teacher told us, "I see it in my own class; I teach fifth grade. The kids come in on the day of the test and are totally freaked out. I have a student that is so anxiety ridden that he has real panic attacks. I don't think this will tell us if a student is prepared to move on to the next grade!"

These Mexican-American parents describe their children suffering psychological and physical backlashes from high-stakes testing and the stress associated with this time during the school year. Although certain amounts of stress may help students be productive and recognize accountability, excessive amounts of stress may have negative effects on children. MacLean (1990) and Sylwester (2003) explain the role that stress plays in brain functions. When the human experiences stress-related emotions such as fear and devaluation, the brain downshifts to its core in order to respond in the most basic way. In doing so, the individual is not accessing the more advanced thinking centers of the brain. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that a stressful testing environment strips from the child the opportunity to function at an optimum, or even normal, level.

This emotional setback in learning opportunities is exacerbated by the reduction in curriculum quality discussed in the next section, which makes even more problematic the teaching and learning climate that is created in schools, which is most that are under a high-stakes accountability system.

Narrowing the Curriculum

I think that a child should be encouraged to love school and continue on with their education; however, the consequences that this test brings to not only my child but to other families in this situation are hatred towards school and education – Parent

Consistent messages came from the parents about their desires for rich educational experiences for their children. They reported that the focus on test preparation did not encourage those experiences. One parent told about her son being taken out of band to be put into a test drill class. Oddly enough, the school called this test drill class “enrichment.” Another mother said her daughters were threatened about being removed from a health magnet program, which they loved, to be in a test preparation program. The parents bemoaned dittos, drills, and test prep books.

Several comments were about “real teaching,” which we interpret to mean teaching that was meaningful and effective for the students on levels beyond the usefulness for tests. “What happened to real teaching, teaching students about our world, rather than teaching strategies on how to pass a test?” Learning happens through a deeper struggle with concepts as they are situated in real world contexts (Wiggins, 1998) where understanding develops in multiple and interrelated streams. The parents credited the test with a shallow curriculum where students were being “bombarded” with fragmented information and test taking strategies rather than a curriculum that allows for reflection and understanding. One parent said the following:

Kids are getting bits and pieces of everything just to pass the test. No time to absorb and have a deep understanding in order to digest what they are learning. My child has only been in school for six weeks. In his homework for math, he is to cover more than five concepts such as ... this pattern of numbers, counting money, draw the time on a clock, is the equation greater or less than one, and odd or even numbers. I don't believe that in six weeks my child has learned all these concepts. I think it just shows them strategies to pass the test.

It is particularly disconcerting that some students opt out of school rather than face the test. A parent of a daughter in eleventh grade expressed anger because her daughter wanted to give up. “She feels so stressed out that she is already making plans to get a GED instead of a diploma.” Three other parents expressed this concern about their children opting to drop out because of the tests.

Romo & Falbo (1996) found similar instances in their study of “at-risk” Latino students who were trying to graduate from high school. The students found so many obstacles, including what was then the state-mandated test (TAAS), impeding their way to graduation that, ultimately, many dropped out. They suggested that that the tracking system contributed to the lack of preparation of Mexican-American students because of the curriculum they were exposed to and how “teachers and administrators have low academic expectations for students in the non-college-track programs and fail to train them up to the level of skills they will need to get a good job in the future” (p. 66).

Historically, Mexican-American children have been disproportionately tracked into low-ability courses (Donato, 1997), which have affected their access to a curriculum and teaching-learning dynamics that would adequately prepare them for assessments. When they scored low on those assessments, they were continually kept in those lower-track classes for remediation purposes. Such classes typically have less challenging curriculum and lower expectations from teachers. For so many Mexican-American students today, their underperformance in schools still stems from “the gross inequities in instructional quality, resources, and other support services are conveniently

ignored when testing takes precedence over pedagogy; another is that teachers' creativity is diminished when they have to 'teach to the test' and are discouraged from implementing more engaging pedagogical practices" (Nieto, 2003, p. 56).

A Call for a More Just Assessment System

"One assessment! It's like all that hard work he did during the year doesn't mean anything." Parent

Most of the parents expressed a respect for accountability to have some way of understanding how their children and schools were doing academically. However, consistently, the concern was that one instrument could not provide this information adequately. Valencia (1999) has suggested "for Texas and other states that utilize such practices, high-stakes testing violates a major principle of measurement, which holds that test scores represent a very small sample of behavior and thus should always be used in conjunction with other sources of assessment" (p. 129).

Some parents recognized that these tests are not a true indication of who their children are as learners or what they are learning. One said, "I don't feel these tests tell me much of anything, other than that my children, luckily, are good test takers". Another parent mentioned, "It can't tell me if my son is smart or if he needs help. It just tells me if he knows how to take a test or even if he guessed right." Further elaborating on the fact that one test does not reflect true learning, another parent said,

For me and my child, I don't think it does him justice. I don't think it's indicative of how and what he's able to do. And, like I stated earlier, there are other ways, and you have children who can think on their own, but when they come to a test, it affects them differently. So with that, I think the people in the state of Texas, they need to look at other ways of evaluating children.

Other parents also talked about how the success of their children should not be measured by one test score alone and that grade promotion should not be based on this test. One parent said "The educational success of our children can definitely not be measured on one state test" while the other mentioned "I cannot believe they would fail my son based on a test score and not on how well he is doing in class."

The survey data also showed parents' preference for assessments that look at the performance throughout the year, that provide teacher's input, and that provide information through multiple tools and reports. The majority did not want test results used to fail children or deny graduation. The parents of this study believe that their children exist in an unfair system that is used to cause an unfair advantage to their children who might be failed and denied graduation.

Conclusion

The level of test-induced pressure endured by children in schools today is unprecedented. With the re-authorization of NCLB, policymakers must look closely at what high-stakes testing has done to schools, their teachers, and most importantly the children. It is especially critical to consider the negative repercussions of high-stakes testing on Mexican-American students because of the historical and present marginalization that so many experience at all levels of schooling, especially in the middle and high school grades.

It has been shown that students who do not perform well on such tests are essentially "pushed out" of the system because schools do not want them to bring down their scores (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Many of these schools are located in disadvantaged urban and rural areas with high concentrations of Latino students and other students of color. Parents like those in this study

are providing insight to what many teachers may not see or what policy-makers do not want to hear. We cannot afford to ignore what the parents of such students have to say about the climate of high-stakes testing in the era of No Child Left Behind and what it is doing to their children and their schools. One of the many consequences recognized by Darling-Hammond (2004) is that more and more states are showing high school completion rates for African-American and Latino students similar to those before 1954. Is high-stakes testing one of the culprits marginalizing these student populations out of our schools systems? And what can further studies outside of schools and into the homes of such students tell us about what such tests are doing to them, their families, and their attitudes toward school? We recommend further qualitative studies based on the results and implications of this present study.

Ultimately, we must be concerned that if any environmental factor adversely affects our children's health, we are obligated to pursue the causes and effects. This urgency is exacerbated if the cause is from an educational experience. Ultimately, we believe that such emotions associated with high-stakes tests and preparing for them take away from any natural curiosity or desire to learn and explore for the children in schools today. The parents of studies such as this one may provide a critical link to providing additional support for struggling students, especially if they know that their voice is being heard. Parents and caring educators may provide insight, support, and strategies to children on how to effectively navigate the pressures involved with high-stakes testing in their schools. With the knowledge that children are dealing with excessive physical and emotional stress during testing time, policymakers who are concerned about the academic success and engagement (or disengagement) of Mexican-American students in schools must acknowledge that what happens at home and outside of schools in this era of high-stakes accountability is critical to recognize. To do otherwise is to discount that the manner in which students experience school is not important, but only that ultimately one test score counts.

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Successfully Navigating Doctoral Studies in School Leadership: Diverse Minority Students Voices

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the factors that affect diverse minority student success as they complete doctoral studies in school leadership. Previous research on single minority student groups suggests that these students encounter challenges that prevent them from being successful. Thus, it is imperative to illuminate the avenues that actually assist students to successfully navigate their doctoral studies. Reported here are the factors that contribute to diverse minority students' doctoral degree completion, factors that might have a detrimental effect, how to overcome these, and implications for institutions that offer school leadership programs.

Introduction

Graduate schools are engaged in institutional endeavors to recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds, as well as to increase degree completion of school leadership doctoral students in an attempt to reflect the country's increasing diversity. Such endeavors represent an effort to contribute to a "democratic citizenship" (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004, p. 17). However, graduate schools have not made considerable progress. In general, Cherwitz asserts, "African American and Hispanics are still significantly underrepresented among recipients of Ph.Ds. The two groups comprise 32 percent of all U.S. citizens in the age range of Ph.D. candidates but only 7 percent of those earning doctorates" (2005, p. 72). Therefore, it is imperative that researchers and practitioners in higher education search for better ways to promote and support doctoral students who come from diverse backgrounds. As Nettles, noted "further research should also investigate what factors contribute specifically to doctoral students' being satisfied with their programs. Perhaps a higher retention rate could be attained once those factors are known" (1990, p. 517). Further, little is known about diverse doctoral recipients' differences and specific experiences (Nettles, 1990). Therefore, additional inquiry should aim at "getting to the what, how and why of diversity on campus" (Gurin, Nagda, 2006, p. 20).

This paper reports the results of a study conducted to identify the factors that affect diverse minority students' success as they complete doctoral studies in school leadership. Following is a brief theoretical overview, a description of the methods used, a summary of findings and conclusions including implications for aspiring doctoral students and institutions of higher education.

Theoretical Overview

Previous studies on educational attainment indicate that minority graduate students are lagging behind their majority peers, especially at the graduate level (Nettles 1990). However, others suggest that attaining funding to complete the doctoral program, (Border & Barba, 1998) and participating in research support groups, (Wasburn 2002) constitute contributors to the success of minority graduate students.

More recently, researchers have identified the challenges encountered by specific ethnic/minority doctoral students. For example, in *Latina/o Pathway to the PhD: Abriendo Caminos*, Contreras and Gandara (2006) explore the difficulties and the successes of Latina/o students engaged in doctoral degree level studies and report that factors such as: (a) historical analysis of Latina/o education, (b) the presence of Latina/o faculty mentors as a means of ensuring student success, and (c) interventions that doctoral degree granting institutions can employ to help students successfully complete a doctoral degree program may affect their studies. Others have explored the role that identity plays in Latina/o doctoral studies success, noting that minorities enrolled in doctoral degree programs report feelings of marginalization and adopt strategies of resistance to help them achieve success in their doctoral experience (Watford, Rivas, Burciage, and Solorzano, 2006). Additionally, Torres (2006) describes the socialization process that Latina/o students utilize to experience success and explains that Latina/o students' familial and environmental factors influences their identity and must be further explored in research studies that aim at identifying those factors that help to ensure student success in doctoral programs.

On the other hand, others determined the complexities that Latina/o students endure as they work through their doctoral programs. For instance, Kamimura (2006) suggests that Latina/o students must go through a period of enculturation to succeed in graduate school. With the same focus, Rosales (2006) explains that Latina/o students report experiencing periods of change as they find themselves in doctoral programs that are attended mainly by White student- serving institutions.

Additional studies describe the cultural challenges that Latina/o students face. These explain that Latina/o students struggle to preserve their ethnic identity while enrolled in a doctoral program (Ramirez, 2006), that Latina/o students enrolled in doctoral studies attribute their success to family, friends, and faculty advisors as well as to their gender (Segura-Herrera, 2006), that Latina/o students will face additional challenges as a result of their ethnic minority backgrounds (Vera-Sanchez , 2006) .

Similarly, Hurtado and Sinha (2006) conducted a study of Latina students specifically and suggest that the socialization process in doctoral level programs impacts these graduate students academic success and achievement. Employing a psycho-sociocultural model, others explain that common day-to-day experiences of Latina/o students, their life roles, and familial expectations all play a part in the experiences of Latina/o students enrolled in doctoral programs (Castellanos, 2006).

Researchers have addressed various other aspects of the doctoral experience, and have identified students decisions to enroll in graduate school (Perna, 2004), causes of low enrollment and success rates of diverse groups in graduate studies (Jones, 2004), strategies used by African American students in order to succeed (Jones, 2004, and the specific experiences of African American Ph.D. students, prior to degree completion (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004). Research has also focused on efforts to improve the overall doctoral experience (Beeler, 1993), support provided during students' graduate experience (Border & Barba, 1998), ways to increase

the presence of minority students in graduate programs (Phillip, 1993), and determining doctoral attrition (Golde, 2005), embracing a more general comprehensive perspective. Other scholars attempted to determine the effect of race and gender on graduate school and degree completion (Ellis, 2001), understand graduate students decisions to enroll in graduate school (Perna, 2004), identify causes of low enrollment and success rates of diverse groups of students in graduate studies (Allen, 2005), describe the specific experiences of African American students prior to degree completion (Lewis, Davies & Smith, 2004), and highlight the challenges that first year Hispanic doctoral students experience (Millet, & Nettles, 2006),

The emphasis of most previous research, however, is on issues or factors affecting specific single ethnic groups, during the time they were engaged in doctoral studies, but the experiences and reflections of diverse minority students who have successfully navigated the doctoral studies journey have not been addressed. Furthermore, as more students from minority backgrounds pursue doctoral level studies, and encounter roadblocks to achieve success, it is imperative to illuminate the voices of those who actually completed their degrees as they reflect on their experiences, struggles and successes. As Gurin and Nagda (2006) suggest, additional research is needed to better understand the issues and challenges that students from diverse backgrounds experience, in addition to how they actually meet the doctoral studies expectations in order to graduate.

Thus, highlighting the voices of successful diverse minority doctoral students may generate important implications for both, aspiring graduate students who come from diverse backgrounds and plan to engage in doctoral studies as well as for institutions of higher education willing “to design, incubate, and test new, perhaps less obvious methods for increasing the number of persons of color who elect to complete graduate education (Cherwitz, 2005, p. 20), and take bold steps towards more creative ways to enhance doctoral graduate rates for all students.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that affect diverse minority students' success as they complete doctoral level studies in school leadership. Diverse students referred to both male and female students from Mexican American, African American, and Asian American backgrounds. Three main questions guided the study:

1. What factors facilitate diverse doctoral students' success (degree completion)?
2. What factors block diverse doctoral students' success (degree completion)?
3. How do diverse students overcome the identified blocks in order to complete their degrees?

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach (Patton, 1999). The goal was “to examine questions that can be best answered by verbally describing how participants in a study perceive and interpret various aspects of their environment” (Crowl, Kaminisky, & Podell, 1997, p. 499). Further, the researchers adopted the notion that “events cannot be understood unless one understands how they are perceived and interpreted by people who participate in them” (Glanz, 1998, p.88). Thus, participants were selected using purposeful and snow-ball sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Participants

Study participants were selected using purposeful and snowballing sampling. Graduate students who met the following criteria were selected:

- (a) Successfully completed a doctoral program,
- (b) Identified as being from diverse backgrounds (African American, Mexican American, Asian-American, male and female),
- (c) Represented each of the four doctoral specializations (Community College, Higher Education, Educational Policy and Planning, and Superintendency) in a major university, and
- d) Graduated in the last four years

A total of 18 graduates participated in the study. From these, six were male and twelve were female. Five were African American, twelve were Mexican American, and one was Asian American. The average age of the participants was 42, ranging from 34 to 58. Most participants were married, only two were single (never married) and two were divorced. The average time spent to complete the degree was 3 years, but the reported range was from 2 to 6. Most have changed jobs since graduation with a majority being promoted to a higher level position.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the study were collected through participants' written responses to open-ended questions. Questionnaires were mailed using electronic media, including a request to participate in the study. Participants were asked to respond to the questions and return the completed questionnaires through electronic media and as a separate attachment. These were printed without participants' names in order to assure confidentiality. The questions were aimed at capturing participants' points of view without pre-determining the selection of questionnaire categories (Patton, 1990).

Data analysis was completed using grounded theory guidelines. "Grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data in order to build middle range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 250). Further, constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to identify emerging themes. Thus participants' written responses were coded, compared and synthesized across participants' experiences, specific program and ethnic background. Therefore, responses were organized under emerging categories of themes generated inductively (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). However, no comparison of subgroups' responses was completed.

Findings

Given the focus of this study, an attempt was made to capture participants' voices in order to address the three main research questions. Thus, findings are presented according to three major themes: factors that facilitate diverse minority doctoral students' success (degree completion), factors that block diverse minority doctoral students' success and strategies that these students use to overcome the identified blocking factors.

Factors that facilitate diverse minority doctoral students' success

Data revealed that at least six factors facilitate diverse minority doctoral students' level of success. According to the participants, completing a doctoral degree can be facilitated by mentoring, cohort membership, faculty support, graduate school personnel, family support, additional course work, and personal motivation.

Mentoring

The supportive relationship established with a faculty member through mentoring emerged as a significant factor that contributes to the students' success. As a participant noted, "mentoring given by my professors was most helpful." When a student is assigned a professor who is willing to spend time, and provide counsel and guidance to a doctoral student, he or she is in a better position to navigate the university structure, demands and requirements. Students value faculty who take the time to mentor them by sharing their own experiences and suggesting ideas to become successful.

A participant stated:

"The support of faculty who were willing to mentor me, and provide me with research opportunities alongside with my course work, contributed to my completion of doctoral studies."

Another one explained,

"I also had a wonderful mentor who encouraged me to complete the program. One particular mentor shared similar situation of going to college while raising children."

Cohort membership

The data revealed that a significant factor contributing to students' success is cohort membership. Having access to a group of peers who are also engaged in the doctoral studies journey provides an excellent source of moral support. In addition cohort members provide empathetic listening, share resources and offer honest and constructive feedback. Participants realize that by becoming members of a cohort, they are indeed engaged in a true community of learners who are willing to work together through the doctoral experience.

In participants words,

"The doctoral program itself consisted of a fellowship program and a cohort system that served each of us in the program to help each other out throughout the program. The cohort members were a great factor in ensuring that each of us sees the program through all the way to the end."

"Having a cohort of doctoral fellows was extremely beneficial. We worked together through the process."

"Being in a cohort helped me the most. We met regularly and added many opportunities to discuss what we were going through."

"It is most helpful to be in a supportive cohort that explores race and gender issues in leadership."

Faculty support

According to the data, support from faculty facilitates diverse minority doctoral students' success. Participants attribute their success to the interest and assistance of a few select faculty, particularly of those who come from diverse backgrounds. Faculty support may include encouraging students to pursue the degree, providing resources, spending time with the students, explaining the importance and benefits of engaging in a doctoral program, and providing guidance.

Further, faculty become advocates for students and excellent references for job searches. They also offer assistance in preparation to apply for jobs and follow these students' careers, upon their graduations. Recognizing the value of such support, a participant stated:

"Two faculty in the program, Dr. Perez and Dr. White both encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies. Prior to considering this degree, I assumed that Ph.D.'s were for highly intellectual people who were so brilliant, that I would have never considered myself in that league. These faculty members encouraged me to consider myself "in that league" and they also demystified the doctoral experience for me, and portrayed it as something attainable."

Another one observed,

"Faculty develop a personal interest in each of their doctoral students. They are sincerely and genuinely interested in each one of us and the main thing is they want you to succeed, since one has invested so much time, energy and money in a doctoral program. "

Graduate school personnel

The role and contributions of graduate school personnel including advisors and coordinators emerged as critical component for diverse minority doctoral student success. Participants report that they benefit from the professional assistance, knowledge, experience and helping attitude of the staff. Such assistance may come in the form of information about the university bureaucracy and other related matters, focused listening, specific orientation to processes and other tips to successfully navigate the doctoral journey. Graduate school staff also play a key role in encouraging students to complete their doctoral studies. As participants explained,

"The Graduate advisor helped me navigate through the bureaucracy at the university and bridged the gaps that needed to be bridged between all facets of the doctoral experience....A doctoral student needs to have a graduate advisor and chair that will be successful in getting the student through the program."

"I also found a great deal of support in Ms. Flower , the graduate coordinator. She would spend time and talk to me about stress, about scholarships/fellowship opportunities, and she also took time to understand the unique cultural expectations that shaped my personal experiences and consequently impacted my academic pursuits."

"My graduate advisor was phenomenal in always being ready to support, guide and encourage me to keep moving."

Family support

Support from family emerged as one of the major factors contributing to diverse minority doctoral students' success. Participants give credit to their own nuclear and extended families for providing understanding, encouragement and support to achieve their academic goals. This support may come in very concrete ways, from providing financial assistance to adjusting family obligations. Families are willing to adjust family activities and schedules, and make special arrangements to care for their children or elder parents. As participants shared,

“Most importantly, I had wonderful emotional, mental and spiritual support at home from my wife, parents and extended family. No one in my rather large family had ever received a doctorate, although there are several attorneys, engineers and school teachers.”

“My mother was always interested in my studies. We would talk about my career and studies all the time. My husband encouraged and supported me. My son also was encouraging in his own way as a middle-schooler.”

“My husband and my family including my parents, brothers and sisters supported me during my doctoral studies by helping me take care of my children when I was commuting to and from Brownsville.”

“My family was supportive with encouraging words. They did not have a clue what this journey would entail so they did not know what to do to provide support. Eventually, my husband became my computer tech and my daughter became my first editor.”

“Both my family and my wife’s family were extremely supportive of my attendance to the doctoral program. Both my wife and I had to relocate to Austin so that I could and our families provided a great deal of emotional support throughout.”

Taking additional courses

The data also revealed that diverse minority doctoral students credit their success to additional courses or workshops. In some cases, these are not courses necessarily required for their program of studies. Reflecting on the additional course work, participants cited several benefits related to specific seminars and other academic events. For instance, they report that an additional dissertation seminar was instrumental in the development of their dissertation proposals. They also acknowledge that their ability to write in a scholarly fashion is enhanced through the activities and projects completed in such additional instructional offerings. As a participant noted,

“The capstone dissertation seminar, taught by Dr. Perez, was the absolute icing on the cake. Although intense, this course shaped my timeline, writing, and completion of the dissertation. It provided not only room for critique, but also the structure I needed to finish writing my dissertation.”

“The sequence of a course of study and the building block effect of those courses also contributed to my success. However, the single most important help came from a course that was not a part of the required curriculum, did not count for credit and came at the end of the course work. It taught me the structure and process of a dissertation. It helped me narrow my focus. It provided a place to get feedback on my work. The professor offered practical valuable information and supported the concept of scholarly work.”

Personal motivation

The data revealed that having a high level of personal interest and determination facilitates completing doctoral studies. Participants report that their own motivation in pursuing the degree played a key factor in navigating the journey. This inner desire is a key factor to endure the demands and challenges associated with the requirements of a doctoral degree. For some it is a life-time professional goal. As a participant put it,

“My drive to prove to people that (I a Mexican-American kid from a small border town who had coached most of his life) could not only complete a doctoral study but excel and complete even before some others who did not face the some obstacles as a minority does. I am also very proud of my experiences as a coach. I wanted to prove to people that coaches are bright disciplined individuals that believe in academics and are great motivators and providers, not ignorant, beer-bellied slobs who only care about winning at any cost.”

“As I was working on my master’s degree in educational administration, I realized that I wanted to continue to work towards a Ph.D. I knew that a doctorate would prepare me to gain a better understanding of educational leadership and research. I also wanted to have a Ph.D. before my 30th birthday.”

“I always wanted a terminal degree. The more I worked in public education, the more I observed it was necessary and more beneficial for a woman/minority to have a doctorate.”

“As I navigated through my teaching career, I then developed an interest in public school administration. I worked on a master’s degree in educational administration and then became a campus administrator. I then decided to join my two interests and pursue a doctoral degree in administration which would also teach me how to research and write and essentially to study at the doctoral level how reality gets created which was my initial interest.”

“It was always a personal and academic goal of mine to pursue a doctoral studies program in educational administration and supervision. I wanted to get a doctorate so that I could speak intelligently and be able to help teachers, principals, children and parents.”

Factors that negatively impact degree completion

According to the data, doctoral studies completion may be negatively affected by several factors. Participants named lack of resources (financial and time), family separation (both nuclear and extended), negative stereotypes, and work demands as factors that might block their efforts to pursue a doctoral degree and in turn become additional stressors.

Lack of resources. The high cost associated with doctoral studies affects diverse minority students’ level of success. Participants find themselves in need of additional funding to be able to cover all expenses, including tuition and other family-related expenses, particularly if they either leave their jobs or take on jobs with lesser compensation.

“There were extraordinary financial pressures. I had not planned for this and so I was taking a financial risk. Even so, I believed then (as I do now) that eventually the financial risk was worth it.”

Similarly, lack of time to meet the demands of graduate school can also become a blocking factor. As a result, students have to be critical about their own obligations and priorities. They become very organized and disciplined in trying to respond to all their academic responsibilities, job-related duties and family obligations. As a student reflected:

“Although I had a full-time job, I used a planner to write down appointments, meetings, class assignments, and important dates to keep. At night, I reviewed my calendar to prioritize the next day activities and keep my calendar at a glance to ensure that items that needed my attention were being addressed. I also honor as much as possible Friday nights as time to be spent with family and Sunday mornings to go to church.”

Family separation

An added burden for doctoral diverse minority students has to leave their families in order to attend the university. In some cases, students report having to move to a different city and as a result, they leave their family and children behind. Thus, family separation may cause stress, guilt and isolation which in turn may negatively impact these students level of concentration and dedication to their academic obligations.

“I constantly felt guilty about spending an enormous amount of time on my school work and my work and not enough time with my spouse. This put a big strain on my marriage, and at times, I felt that my marriage was being pulled apart so it took a lot of work to balance all three things-work, school, and family life.”

“When I was first admitted, I commuted to Dallas often because of family responsibilities. As a mother and wife, my critical obstacles were the traditional, socially-imposed perceptions about fulfilling my responsibilities. Once I relieved myself of this guilt I had very few critical obstacles.”

Negative stereotypes

The data revealed that both certain faculty and doctoral peers' negative stereotypes might have a detrimental effect on diverse minority doctoral students' success. It appears that unfavorable perceptions related to ethnicity, lack of ability to write in a scholarly fashion and the different experiences of these students have an effect on their own academic progress. Further, some faculty research preferences tend to keep students from pursuing alternative areas of research and how these students are socialized into the academia. As participants noted,

“Once in the doctoral program, some of my fellow students had negative stereotypes about students of color and our ability to hold our own. At times, students like myself were excluded from the decision-making process.”

“I faced overt racism, and I could clearly see that there was favoritism of certain students who were doing certain kinds of research. I found no support from faculty members to even encourage research questions I wanted to ask, nor any support to prepare for an academic career.”

Work demands

The data suggests that most diverse minority doctoral students need to continue working in order to finance their graduate studies and to provide for their families. As a result, they cannot afford to become full time students. The need to respond to the expectations of their professional responsibilities and effectively navigate graduate school obligations, requires that these students become skillful in addressing full time work demands. Further, it appears that faculty expectations do not take into consideration students' additional responsibilities. As participants noted:

"During the day, I never studied because I was involved with my school as a principal. At the time, we were vying to be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School and our progress and achievements needed to be maintained at their highest level."

Strategies doctoral students use to successfully navigate the doctoral journey

According to the data, doctoral students resort to various means to overcome the factors that might prevent them from degree completion. Strategies that diverse students use to navigate their studies include: securing family support (financial and moral), applying for fellowships and other similar funding opportunities, balancing family, job, and doctoral studies demands, establishing positive relationships with faculty, particularly with minority professors, and developing a network of peers.

Securing family support

One way of addressing the factors that have potential to negatively affect student success is by actively securing family support both financial and moral. As students engage in doctoral studies, they must sacrifice family time and resources. Thus, it is essential to make sure that their families understand the type of commitment that will be needed. Due to the demands and expectations of doctoral studies, participants need to make special arrangements and are highly disciplined to spend time with family and children so that family members do not become resentful. As a participant pointed out:

"addressing these and other obstacles requires "first, student motivation and commitment to pursue a doctoral program; second, family support and understanding; and third, to have solved the financial issue." Another one said, "I cut all personal, social, family functions, which my Hispanic family in San Antonio did not understand."

Another one stated:

"As a student, I had to become more disciplined than I had ever been, committed to a lack of sleep, and sacrificed time with my family and leisure activities. Thankful, my children were very young and had very good sleep habits (in bed by 8). So much of my work was done after that time. Weekends were a bit more difficult but by managing my work schedule and school schedule, I was able to accomplish all my coursework, data collection and writing."

Applying for alternative sources of funding

Data revealed that one way of alleviating the high cost of doctoral studies and providing for their families is securing funding through various means. For instance, participants reported

that they searched for other forms of funding, beyond their own resources. These may include student loans and fellowships offered by professional associations, philanthropic organizations, and the institution they are attending. Thus, they also apply for research assistantships, and other scholarships. Doctoral studies require extra expenses and these create additional financial pressures. As a participant noted,

“Financially, I worked when I could and I was able to secure scholarships. I borrowed some money from family and I paid it back when promised. I had to remind myself that the financial risk far outweighed what I would be able to achieve financially in the future.”

Balancing family, job, and doctoral studies demands

Data revealed that completing doctoral studies becomes a balancing act for participants in this study. Most are aware of the need to pay attention to family and children, job responsibilities and graduate school expectations. Further, it appears that they make conscious efforts to equally respond to what could be seen as competing expectations and priorities. They do so by purposefully scheduling time to spend with family members, aside from study time and work. They enact specific actions that may help to navigate their studies without compromising the quality time spent with family and the energy and time spend in meeting the academic expectations of their studies. As a participant shared:

“I took a conscious effort to balance my work, school, and family responsibilities. I had to make a point to try to spend an equal amount of time in each of the three areas and even then it was never truly balanced. One year, I even made a point take a short cruise with my wife for the New Year. That really helped. I also tried to focus on the activities that my wife valued the most in order to make sure her needs were being met.”

“I studied from 11 P.M. to 3 A.M. daily. Friday evenings were for family because I did not have classes. On holidays, if we went out-of-town, I would take my books and desktop computer, as I did not have a laptop at the time. I would study while my son and husband enjoyed the holiday. But, I was there with them, as a family.”

“Effective time management was the key to dealing with professors that did not recognize that I had a full time job. I made sure I clearly understood the expectations and deadlines for the courses and tried to stay ahead of the game. However, because of the extensive work and school load, I have pulled many all nighters.”

Establishing positive relationships with faculty and peers

The data revealed that positive relationships with faculty and doctoral peers emerged as an important strategy to navigate the doctoral studies journey. Participants recognize that getting to know faculty, particularly minority professors is essential to their success. Further, open and honest communication with professors is also regarded as a way to address some of the blocking factors. As a student remembered:

“Some professors would call me up to remind me to attend classes and to increase my class load from 3 to 9 hours each semester so I could finish. These professors developed a personal interest in each of us and the main thing is that they want you to succeed. “

Others expressed appreciation for the relationship they develop with their peers

Doctoral peers can be an excellent source of support and can provide feedback regarding students' work. Participants acknowledge that peers become an excellent sounding boards and offer help in testing ideas and projects. As a participant explained,

"I was able to forge key relationships with other critically-minded, social justice-centered Students. We collectively formed a small reading and writing group. This group met frequently, we each read our most recent manuscripts, and we were provided with a "safe" environment from which to argue, critique, and support each other's work."

Another one suggested,

"Form or seek out like-minded, critical and supportive circle of colleagues. As mentioned previously, this group of friends supported my work and critiqued me when needed. They provide safe space to share ideas and challenged me to meet deadlines. In its simplest form, the group provided space for all of us to vent when we needed and blow off steam when it could no longer be contained."

Conclusion

This study focused on the factors that contribute to doctoral studies success, defined as degree completion. Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire to capture students' true voices. Given that prior research has focused on single minority doctoral student groups, an effort was made to include African American, Hispanic American and Asian American doctoral students to ensure diverse minority student representation.

Findings suggest that factors that have potential to facilitate doctoral studies relate include mentoring, cohort membership, faculty support, graduate school staff, family support, additional course work, and personal motivation. On the other hand factors that might have a detrimental effect on doctoral students' success may include lack of resources, family separation, negative stereotypes, and work demands. Further findings indicate that successful diverse minority doctoral students employ purposeful and planned strategies to overcome the obstacles faced during their doctoral journey. These include, securing family support, searching for other forms of funding such as fellowships and research assistantships, balancing family work and studies, and developing positive relationships with faculty.

In summary, it can be affirmed that taken together these emerging factors reflect the components of the Tri-dimensional Foundation of the Hispanic Student Persistence Model (Pino & Ovando, 2005) to some extent. This model suggests that family support, student personal self-concept and institutional climate tend to influence diverse students' success. Thus, it can be concluded that their presence may significantly contribute to diverse minority doctoral students' success, but their absence may have a detrimental effect on their experiences and degree completion rates. Consequently, aspiring doctoral students need to engage in a deep personal reflection and analysis of the possibilities and demands of doctoral work prior to entering doctoral programs, to seek accurate information about institutional expectations and requirements, search for alternative ways to finance their studies, and secure family understanding and support. On the other hand, institutions of higher education must continue the search and development of innovative mechanisms that have potential to create positive doctoral degree experiences and degree completion rates of students who come from diverse backgrounds. For instance, institutions

interested in attracting more diverse aspiring doctoral candidates may institutionalize the cohort concept as an effective avenue to engage students in collaborative arrangements that lead to true learning communities of scholars. Institutions should also offer additional support systems, particularly to enhance students' ability to write in scholarly fashion, as well as generate financial support through fellowships, research and teaching assistantships and the like. Further, institutions that offer school leadership programs may also contemplate the need to recruit, hire, support and retain faculty who come from diverse backgrounds, have a true understanding of the challenges associated with doctoral work, and can relate to the unique needs of diverse minority aspirants. By doing so, these institutions will indeed be in a position to make solid contributions to better prepare all citizens who in turn might contribute to a better democratic society.

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An Analysis of Teachers' Fears for the First Day of School

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Abstract

This qualitative study focused on fears about the first day of school as expressed by three groups of educators: inexperienced teachers enrolled in an alternative certification program, paraprofessionals with classroom experience, and junior/senior education majors anticipating field experience. Participant groups answered the open-ended question, "What is your biggest fear for the first day of school?" Three dominant thematic categories emerged. The first and most frequent category, Perception-of-Self, described fears related to academic competency, personal self-control, and peer-student acceptance. Unique to this category was the fear of inappropriate or violent behavior. The second category, Perception-of-World, spoke to issues of classroom control and responsibility. The third category, Fear –for –the Student, addressed emotional and physical safety of the student. This study provides various insights useful for teacher candidate preparation.

Research suggests that a teacher's sense of efficacy, specifically the ability to handle situation-specific expectations, is a contributing factor to the quality of the teacher's performance in the classroom (Bandura, 1997; Campbell, 1996). Teachers' expectations influence their choice of educational activities, the amount of effort they expend, and the extent of their persistence in the face of obstacles (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1977; Young, 1995). Despite the pivotal impact of self-efficacy on teaching, the emotional reaction of teachers to their work has been largely unexplored (Nias, 1996). The very nature of teaching is "highly charged with the feeling aroused by and directed towards not just people but values and ideals" (Nias, 1996, p.293). These feelings are "intimately connected" to the teacher's sense of efficacy and self worth and often are dependent upon the approval of others. Collectively these emotions influence the entire educational community. Joram and Gabriele (1998) trace this emotional influence to long-standing "personal experiences and cultural beliefs" through which the pre-service teacher interprets their teaching performance.

In many respects, the antithesis of efficacy is fear. The fear of under-preparation, lack of essential knowledge, relationships with parents and colleagues, time management, and gaps in pedagogical skills are documented sources of anxiety for the novice teacher (McCann &

Johannesen, 2004). Drawing from a sample of pre-service educators in Southwest Texas, Wilson, Ireton, and Wood (1997) cited ten dominant fears: assignment and mentor apprehension, parental confrontation, time utilization, racial xenophobia, teaching expectations, evaluations, acceptance, inadequate preparation, violence, and classroom management. Gee (2001) questioned 24 pre-service teachers and 36 postgraduate teachers about what they feared most in their first year of teaching. Gee found that issues of classroom management and meeting state curriculum standards were their biggest fears.

Current research has not specifically addressed the first year fears of the alternatively certified teacher. Nougaret, Scruggs, and Mastrioperi (2005) suggested that nontraditional licensed teachers when asked to self-evaluate were “unaware of their own relative deficiencies”(p.255). Research has found that although this group of teachers had degrees in the field in which they were teaching, many were not able to explain fundamental concepts to students (Rubino, Soltys, Wright, & Young, 1994). The ratings of first year teachers who were traditionally certified were substantially higher in planning and preparation, management of student behavior, and instructional skills than the emergency/alternatively certified teacher. Teachers with a low sense of efficacy (i.e. high performance fear factor) tend to avoid activities that they perceive to be beyond their abilities. In contrast, teachers with a strong sense of efficacy (i.e. low performance fear factor) believe that they are capable of having a positive effect on student performance (Ashton, & Webb, 1986; Campbell, 1996).

Paraprofessionals have numerous roles and levels of responsibility as they provide instructional support within the school, community, and job sites for students with disabilities (Carroll, 2001). In a study conducted by French (2003), paraprofessionals reported that they had limited, or no, pre-training before entering the classroom. Many reported concern about fulfilling their responsibility to support the curriculum and adaptations designed by the special (French, 2003). The paraprofessional as an instructional assistant has created a situation which may result in lower levels of teacher involvement, less qualified teaching interventions for the most complex learning needs, and inadvertent detrimental effects such as over-dependency and interference with peer interaction (French, 2003; Giangreco, Yuan, McKezie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005). Research has shown that paraprofessionals who have adequate support in areas of education, planning, and collaboration have demonstrated improvement in self-confidence and consequently are more effective in their support of students (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2003).

This qualitative study addressed fears about the first day of school as expressed by inexperienced teachers enrolled in an alternative certification program, paraprofessionals with classroom experience, and junior/senior education majors anticipating field experience. The pre-service teachers, alternatively certification seeking teachers, and paraprofessionals in this study had one commonality: no participant had ever fully accepted responsibility for the educational experience of a classroom of students. It is from their perspective that this study sought to create an overall thematic picture of the underlying fear of educators as they anticipate their educational placement for the new school year.

Experimental Procedure

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

This study progresses from a constructivist viewpoint drawing on the connection of experience with concept formation and environmental impact (Flick, 2004). For this reason, the researchers

chose to use an instrumental case study design to focus on the issues raised by the participants' expressions of fear to create a picture of the participants' perceptions of the circumstances at the time of the research (Creswell, 1998; Merkens, 2004). This study also incorporated aspects of qualitative methodology from phenomenology and grounded theory, where emerging themes are discussed from the perspective of the participants and then compared to existing field literature (Creswell, 1998). Data collection involved the purposeful sampling of three separate groups within one bounded system as they anticipated the first day of school.

Participants

To form a theoretical, purposeful sampling, participants were sought from three different roles within the East Texas educational community. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling draws out the most information rich participants in the area of concern (Creswell, 1998; Merkens, 2004). The participants were 59 paraprofessionals engaged in an in-service workshop, 37 teachers in a pre-service training in the university-based alternative certification program prior to their first day of work, and 91 junior or senior undergraduate education majors anticipating field experience.

Data Analysis

Data Collection. The research question originated as an in-service activity that inquired into different traits and personality variables such as "why did you choose the teaching profession." The final question of the session asked the participants to describe their biggest fear for the first day of school, record this fear, and turn it in to the instructor anonymously.

Coding the Responses. Transcribed statements ranged from one to three sentences. In the open coding phase of this study, the researchers, using the constant comparison method, created categorical aggregations that sought out the "issue-relevant meaning" of these statements, established patterns, and looked for correspondence between categories (Creswell, 1998). A statement became representational of a thematic category when two of three coders agreed. A second, axial coding, further sub-divided the thematic categories. The researchers identified thematic categories and resulting sub themes and addressed these themes for interconnection.

Standards of Quality and Verification

Internal validity. Post-hoc consensus between the first three members of the research team resolved data coding discrepancies. The research design used participants with slightly different roles in the education community: paraprofessional, alternatively certified educator, and junior/senior education majors anticipating field experience. This form of data triangulation created diverse data sources to explore the same phenomena (Arskey & Knight, 1999).

External validity. In a qualitative study, the researcher returns to the field literature to enrich the development of the emerging themes (Creswell, 1998). As the concerns of pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals thematically emerge, each fear was an occasion to return to the literature where the researchers compared and contrasted the expression of fear to the pre-existing field literature.

Analysis

Thematic Results

Three themes captured 158 of the 183 responses. Collectively, those themes converge at a point that is best represented as "The fear of being unequal to the task ahead." The research team

identified the dominant thematic categories under this central theme: Perception-of-Self (n = 105), Perception-of-the World (n = 45), and Fear-for-the-Student (n = 18). A fourth category, Nonspecific Responses or Incidental Concerns (n = 25), reflected two extremities of response: no fear at all, and generalized nonspecific anxiety.

Category One: Perception- of -Self

Perception-of -Self described 105 of the 183 responses. Under this category emerged the following sub-themes: Personal Self-Control under Stress (n = 16), Classroom Academic Competency (n = 52), Competency Issues outside the Classroom (n = 26), and Social Acceptance by Peers and Students (n = 11) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Perception-of-Self (n = 105)

Fear	Participant Category	Number Statements
Self Control Under Stress		
Clamming up, stage fright	Pre-service	9
Oversleeping	Pre-service	1
Crying	Pre-service	1
Losing Glasses	Pre-service	1
Inappropriate behavior	Pre-service	2
Physically harming student	Pre-service	1
	Para- professional	1
Academic competency		
Not feeling prepared or organized; overwhelmed.	Pre-service	25
	Alternative Certification	14
	Paraprofessionals	13
Outside classroom		
Scheduling/assignments	Para-professional	16
Poor career choice	Alternative certification	6
Parental disapproval	Alternative certification	4
Social Acceptance		
Lack of student respect	Pre-service	6
Being mistaken for a student	Pre-service	1
Lack of coworker respect	Pre-service	1
Not being liked or fitting in	Para-professional	1

Personal Self Control under Stress (n = 16)

Nine pre-service teachers expressed their biggest fear as one of performance. According to one participant, "I have the biggest fear of not being prepared and students not responding." Several students stated that they had concerns with "clamming up in front of the class and not being able to teach"; another statement was "drawing a blank and not remembering anything - leading to brain block." As stated by one pre-service teacher, their biggest fear was "forgetting what they had been taught."

Two statements made by pre-service teachers identified personal fears related to inadvertent, inappropriate behavior within the classroom. For example, "falling and flashing the class" or "forgetting my underpants." One pre-service teacher stated that she/he hoped they would "Not kill a student the first day due to lack of respect." A paraprofessional feared that under stress she/he would react to disrespect by "hitting a student."

Classroom Academic Competency (n = 52)

Pre-service teachers feared they would not be able to "develop a good lesson plan that the kids would enjoy" or "accomplish goals related to the students." Pre-service teachers also expressed concern about their competency levels in organizational skills. These fears manifested in statements such as "not being organized," "unprepared," and "not having materials suited for children" or specifically, "not having materials that will interest the class" or "the answer to a question."

Alternative certification seeking teachers also expressed fears of inadequate "preparedness" in their expression of fears. For example, the fear of "letting the kids down and not integrating enough creativity into the class to keep attention," the fear that "kids won't understand what (I'm) teaching," and the fear that they would not be "good at teaching." Alternative certification seeking teachers were also concerned that they would "not (know) an answer ... at ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) meetings" or be able to "apply all the information that that I have learned."

Paraprofessionals centered their concern on personal competency levels as they assumed the role of academic support. They focused their fear of the first day of the new school year on "knowing how to do my duties and get the kids off the bus at the same time," "adjusting to a new teacher and expectations and what kind of class we will have, and behavioral issues," and "not knowing if I am in the right class." Paraprofessionals also expressed fear of "having a substitute for the whole day and me having more responsibility with the kids" and "not being able to comfort new students and make them feel like they belong."

Competency Issues Outside Classroom (n = 26)

The third theme of Perception-of -Self related to fears centered on issues outside the classroom. Reflective of their role, paraprofessionals mostly feared the nature of their assignments and the variables in duty assignments. The job description of a paraprofessional varies substantially as does the need for extra school duties (cafeteria, hall, study hall), and the discretion of the general or special education teacher to whom they have been assigned. Some comments expressed a fear of "getting kids back into a routine," "being able to successfully deal with all the changes that are taking place on my campus," and "knowing how to do my morning duties and getting kids off the bus at the same time." These statements reflected a concern for completing their required tasks, "completing lesson plans", and communication with other workers on campus.

Alternatively certification seeking teachers expressed a fear of collaboration with parents. These fears related to confrontational situations such as “dealing with parents” and “parents staying to long and (therefore, I) have problems.” These participant teachers also reflected a concern about making “another” poor career choice. Several of the comments reflected concerns such as “getting tired of teaching all day” and “never finding a career to stick with” or a “concern for choice of career” expressed an uncertainty in their ability to be successful in their new position.

Social Acceptance (n = 11)

The fourth property in Perception-of -Self concerns social acceptance. Eight pre-service teachers stated that lack of student respect was their biggest fear. Coupling of this statement with concerns about classroom management did not occur; therefore, the independent raters placed this fear with social acceptance. For example, pre-service teachers commented that their biggest fear on the first day of school was that the “students don’t respect me,” and “the class won’t like me.” In the same manner, first day teachers in their early twenties feared that both the students and the faculty would mistake them for a student. The concern over lack of acceptance and respect by both students and peers was consistent with studies that examined the contrast between first year teachers’ perceived and real expectations (Wilson & Ireton, 1997, Young, 1995).

Relationship to field literature

A teachers’ sense of efficacy and their inexperience affects their surroundings and their judgment (Campbell, 1996). Thematically, fears of academic unpreparedness aligned with the field literature. Novice teachers’ fear that their academic background is flawed and therefore they do not to have the competency levels needed to instruct the class (Wilson, Ireton, & Elmer 1997). Wilson (1997) stated prospective teachers’ feared multiple level and differential assignments, no time for course preparation, and not being able to meet expectations for the job.

Shepard & Brown (2003) conducted research on the personal confidence level and the ability to teach for teachers alternatively certified discovering that for this population confidence and ability were directly influenced by pedagogical skill level. Even though a degree in a particular field might prepare someone to perform professionally, it did not guarantee that the person would be able to teach the subject matter. Our respondents seeking alternative certification expressed the fear of lack of academic competency. Expressions of concern from the alternatively certified teachers about the possibility of making another career mistake were unique to this study.

Most paraprofessionals are responsible for some degree of academic instruction and emotional support of students with disabilities in either the resource classroom setting or the included classroom. Supervising teachers have the responsibility to provide practical information and an overview of academic duties and responsibilities to new paraprofessionals in a timely manner (Carroll, 2001). Paraprofessionals interviewed expressed a fear of not being able to teach subject matter for which they had no formal academic preparation. In addition to teaching subject matter, these paraprofessionals perceived their job responsibility to include keeping “students with disabilities from bothering general education classroom teachers and creating all modifications and adaptations for the child”.

Of heightened concern to the research team were statements made by pre-service teachers and a paraprofessional reflecting their fear that, under stress, they would harm a student or inadvertently act in a sexually inappropriate manner. Even if these statements (forgetting to wear underwear, accidentally flashing the class, or hitting a student) reflected the fear of inadvertent

inappropriate acts or were meant to be random statements of bravado, the respondents were aware of their professional surrounding and the public nature of their response. These response categories were unprecedented in field literature.

Category Two Perception-of-the World

Perception-of-the-World contained 45 of the 187 responses. This theme spoke to various facets of classroom control (n = 45) (see Table 2).

Table 2
Issues of Classroom Control and Safety (n = 45)

Fear	Participant Category	Number of Statements
Classroom Management	Pre-service	28
	Alternative certification	6
	Para-professional	1
Uncontrollable kids	Alternative certification	2
	Para-professional	1
Student /student aggression	Paraprofessionals	3
Violence from students	Alternative certification	3
911 activities	Paraprofessional	1

Issues of Classroom Control

Eight pre-service teachers expressed their biggest fear as having “students out of control.” This perspective dominated statements such as “no control, children having no respect for me” or “no respect from the children because they know it’s your first day.” One pre-service teacher was concerned about implementing the basics of classroom control and expressed “How do I instill class room management?” as her biggest fear. Others expressed fears such as “no respect from students,” a general fear of “classroom management,” or “children going crazy.”

Two paraprofessionals and one new alternatively certified teacher were most afraid of uncontrollable kids. This perspective differs from overall classroom management; it is more in the nature of outburst control or fear of general classroom anarchy. Comments that spoke to this fear were “afraid that I will get Dennis the Menace the first day” and “psychotically violent student.”

Paraprofessionals often assume the supervisory and escort role for students with outburst behavior tendencies. Students who need intense behavior monitoring might also have acting out behaviors. This fear is best expressed by the paraprofessional who stated, “My biggest fear is that I child I work one on one with will harm himself or mostly another student.”

Three alternative certification teachers expressed personal fear, specifically, “I am afraid of being physically harmed at school.” The comment of an alternative certification-seeking teacher stating their biggest fear was that of “a reoccurrence of 911 activities in their school” addresses a fear of physical harm both for and from the student body.

Relationship to field literature

According to Truog (1998), principals, evaluating the competencies of new teachers, rated classroom management as the lowest competency. Discipline was the most frequently cited deficiency of the new teacher. Teachers whose classrooms were less structured than normally expected regardless received over all lower ratings from the building principals. Research has demonstrated that effective classroom instruction in teacher education programs can alter students’ disparaging views about classroom management (Sokal, Smith & Mowat, 2003).

The fear by the educator for personal safety while preventing classroom violence is not unprecedented (Murdick & Gartin, 1993; Wilson, & Ireton, 1997; Weinstein, 1998). Children who display deficits in learning and acceptable social behavior have a higher level of frustration, school failure, and even retaliatory violence (Murdick & Gartin).

**Category Three
Fear-for-the Student**

Fear-for-the-Student contained 18 of the 183 responses. Two themes emerged: Student’s Emotional / Academic Well-Being and the Parent-Student Relationship (see Table 3).

Table 3
Student Well Being (n = 18)

Fear	Participant Category	Number of Statements
Emotional/Academic	Alternative certification	1
	Para-professional	13
Parent/Student Relationship	Pre-service	1
	Para-professional	3

Student Well Being (n = 18)

Paraprofessionals work one on one with children within the classroom and 13 of the paraprofessionals in our participant group were concerned most about the student’s welfare on the first day of school. Examples of fear statements to this effect were, “seeing all the new faces and reassuring them that they will be all right” and “not being able to comfort a new student and make them feel like they belong.” Paraprofessionals, also described their biggest fear as a concern for the academic success of the students. They expressed these fears as a “concern about at-risk students being able to pass TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills)” and “not accomplishing goals relating to the students.” One alternative certification teacher also directly addressed concern about the welfare of students academically and emotionally stating a hope “that they will enjoy what I am teaching and make friends.”

Paraprofessionals were fearful for the well-being of children in the home. They expressed their biggest fear as “parents are losing their parenting skills and that teachers have to replace them” or “parents being abusive to their children.”

Relationship to field literature

Teachers and paraprofessionals have the responsibility by law to report suspicions of child abuse and consequently fear parental retaliation and displeasure (Wilson & Ireton, 1997). Giangreco & Doyle (2002) stated that paraprofessionals specifically have a concern for student well-being and their ability to support the student in and outside the classroom. This involvement of paraprofessionals in the every day academic planning of students correlates with higher student achievement.

**Category Four
 Incidental Concerns**

Incidental concerns contained 25 of the 183 responses. These responses formed two incidental categories because participants specified either experiencing a non-specific all pervasive fear in general or expressed a no fear statement. Whether the participants in the later category actually had no fear or had no inclination to answer the question will remain unanswered (see Table 4).

Table 4

Incidental Concerns (n = 25)

Fear	Participant Category	Number of Statements
Non-specific	Pre-service	4
	Alternative certification	4
	Para-professional	3
The Fearless 14	Pre-service	7
	Alternative certification	6
	Para-professional	1

Incidental Concerns (n = 25)

Statements made by all three groups expressed non-specific fears such as “getting it all right” or “fear of failure” or the “fear of the unknown.” One comment made by a paraprofessional stated the biggest fear is “having a heart attack from having so much fun on the first day.” Individuals who did not express a fear for the first day made comments such as “I’m fearless and not afraid of anything, “I am ready to seize the future” and “I do not have a fear of the first day of school.”

Relationship to field literature

Individuals that have a high sense of efficacy have reduced fears in the areas of classroom management and promotion of academic success of students (Ashton & Webb, 1996). However, in a study of 140 teachers Campbell (1996) concluded, “The possibility that youthful enthusiasm

or idealism would produce higher levels of teacher efficacy than experience, age, or post-baccalaureate education, must also be rejected” (p. 10). In fact, the antithesis of this statement was valid; as teachers accrued more experience, their efficacy and confidence increased.

Discussion

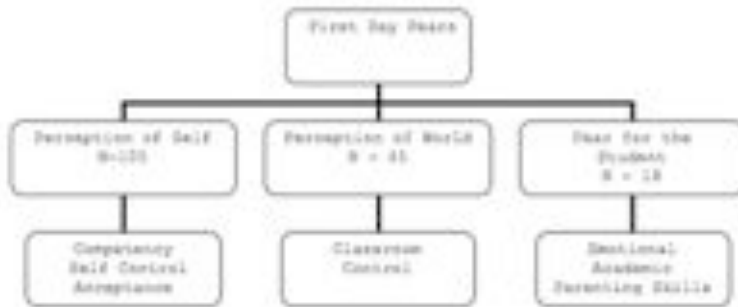


Figure 1. Dominant First Day Fears of Pre-Service Teachers, Paraprofessionals, and Alternative Certification Teachers.

Dominant Fears

The dominant fear category for the first day of school was Perception-of -Self (N = 105). Within this category the large majority of respondents (n = 52) feared that they would be overwhelmed with the responsibility of their new teaching assignment, feeling disorganized and incompetent. In the category of Perception-of-the World, 38 respondents voiced their biggest fear as the inability to control the behavior of a classroom of students. Ninety of the 183 participants in this study expressed the fear of incompetence on the job. Interestingly, 12 of the participants, all paraprofessionals, feared their level of competency might affect the academic or emotional well-being of the students.

Pre-service Teachers

In order of concern pre-service teachers predominantly feared lack of classroom management skills (n = 28) followed closely by a fear of being overwhelmed with the academic responsibility (n = 25). First day performance anxiety concerned 12 of our pre-service respondents. On a more general note, 10 pre-service teachers feared lack of respect from students and peers. Three pre-service teachers expressed a fear of participating (deliberately? inadvertently?) in inappropriate behaviors. Pre-service teachers did not fear violence from students; rather they feared they might lose control and harm a student.

Alternative Certification Seeking Teachers

The dominant first day fear for new teachers who had taken the alternative certification pathway was the same as the pre-service teachers. Both feared being overwhelmed academically

on their first day of school. Fear of inadequate classroom management ability (n = 6) and the fear of having made a poor career move (n = 6) were tied for second place. Five respondents stated that uncontrollable students and the fear of being physically attacked was their biggest fear. Four respondents were concerned that they would meet with parental disapproval because of their inexperience.

Paraprofessionals

The paraprofessional returning to the classroom predominantly feared environmental factors (n = 16) such as duty rosters, which students they would have, and what kind of teacher would be supervising their activities. The second biggest fear of the paraprofessional (n = 13) was again the fear of being overwhelmed academically. Paraprofessionals, however, cross categorically reflected a fear of violent actions (n = 9): students attacking each other, parents abusing the children, uncontrollable students, a 911 threat from a student, and last but not least losing self-control and hitting a student. Thirteen paraprofessionals expressed their primary concern for the academic and emotional well being of the students on the first day of school. If one combines a fear for student academic and social well-being with the fear for the personal safety of the students, the dominant fear for the first day of school for paraprofessionals (n = 22) centered on the student welfare rather than on their personal concerns.

A Snapshot of the First Day of School

According to our survey, on the first day of school in East Texas 42% of the new teachers were worried about losing control of the classroom; 37% of the alternatively certified teachers feared they were not academically prepared; and 45% of the paraprofessionals were worried about the nature of their responsibility. The overall fear index for the first day of schools indicated that of the 183 participants in our study:

- 42% were concerned about academic performance ability
- 32% were concerned about student control
- 9% were concerned with student well-being
- 7% were fearless
- 5% had a fear of the unknown
- 3% worried about a poor career choice
- 2% were possibly a safety threat to the students.
-

Conclusion

The top fears expressed by all three groups held some commonalities such as classroom control, management and academic competency, but in each category there were separate concerns that were only held by that group. With introduction of multiple methods of attaining teacher certification this study highlights areas of concern with the level of preparation available through alternative certification programs, the growing challenges and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, and the extent of pre-service training offered to student teachers. Examination of the biggest fear for the first school day provided insight into these challenges.

The thematic category, Personal Control under Stress, was unprecedented in field literature. District policies, Education Code of Ethics for Teacher Certification and each state's Educational Code specifying ethical conduct standards for teachers; standards established to protect students from physical, emotional abuse and sexual conduct that constitutes indecency. Although there is no

research currently available on teachers who react violently or inappropriately under stress, there have been incidences of physical aggression during disciplinary actions reported in the national news (News 11, Atlanta, 2005). This thematic category contained four comments, three from pre-service teachers and one from a paraprofessional that were categorized as inappropriate/illegal behaviors. As researchers, we question the motivation behind the public disclosure of the fear of forgetting your underwear, flashing the class, or hitting a student. Nevertheless, these comments speak to the necessity of developing a more stringent screening procedure for potential educators.

The study as a whole was bound in a particular time in history and geographical location. Because this grouping of individuals was a unique occurrence, returning to the identical group to validate finding by participant reaction would not be possible. Yet this study serves to enrich the literature base on the concerns of the beginning teacher and paraprofessional while it highlights several unique and important issues.

We are left with some valuable questions. Are individuals entering the teaching field unprepared for the realities of the assignment? Are we addressing violence in our schools in our preparatory programs for pre-service teachers? Do our pre-service teachers have a general lack of concern about the effects of their competence on the emotional and academic well being of the students? These areas warrant further and more intense study. It is anticipated that the voice of these participants and the questions raised in this study will provide educational stakeholders in administration, counseling, and higher education with a perspective that can be used to better prepare teacher candidates for the realities of their prospective educational assignment.

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SÍ SOY BILINGÜE, But...: Latino Teachers Preparedness on The Border

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Abstract

Improving educational achievement is critical for the long-term success of the majority Latino population on the Texas-Mexico border which includes identifying and mediating gaps in teacher preparation. This study examined beginning teachers' perceptions of how well they were prepared within an educator preparation program on the border. One-hundred and eight teachers were surveyed. Results indicated that these teachers felt prepared in the areas of designing lesson plans, maintaining order, and implementing new methods of teaching. They felt less prepared to address the needs of special education students and English language learners. Consequently, courses are being redesigned to address these gaps.

Texas faces critical shortages of teachers, especially in the border region where population growth has increased demand exponentially. The Texas-Mexico border region is uniquely different from the rest of Texas; it is a cultural economic and educational entity unto itself (Arreola, 2002). While Latinos are still a minority in the state of Texas at 32 % of the population, they comprise a large majority in the frontera or border region at 75-95 % of the population depending upon the particular county (Latino Research Center, 2002). If considered as a 51st state, the Texas border region would rank first in the nation in terms of poverty, first in the percentage of school children living in poverty, first in the number of unemployed, first in the percentage of adults who do not have a high school diploma, and dead last in per-capita personal income (Sharp, 1998). It is an area that has experienced tremendous economic and population growth, but this growth has not brought prosperity to the vast majority of the border residents (Sharp, 1998). Education is critical to success of the region.

A close look one border community, Laredo, provides a snapshot into the reality faced by beginning teachers on the border. According to the recent census data, the population of Laredo grew by 44.9 % from 1990 to 2000, making Laredo one of the ten fastest growing cities in the nation with a population of 193,117 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Even if no one new moved to Laredo from either side of the border, the population would continue to grow because the median age is 26.4 meaning that half of the population is under the age of 27 (County Information Project, 2006). Needless to say, they can't seem to build schools fast enough in Laredo.

Two school districts serve the city of Laredo: Laredo Independent School District (LISD) and United Independent School District (UISD). LISD serves older, central, downtown Laredo. UISD serves much of the newer growth areas of Laredo, both to the north and to the south of central Laredo. UISD is the "richer" of the two districts in terms of its property tax base, but it includes

everything from million dollar mansions in the north to *colonias*¹ in the south. LISD is made up of primarily older residential areas with limited commercial development and is “landlocked” by UISD. However, both districts are considered property poor school districts. The Robin Hood Plan in Texas which redistributes \$1.2 billion each year from roughly 130 property wealthy school districts to roughly 900 property poor school districts has greatly benefited both UISD and LISD. If Robin Hood were to be dismantled, the two Laredo districts stand to lose 18.8 million dollars in funding each year (Cortez, 2004). However, ten plus years of Robin Hood cannot even begin to wipe out over a hundred years of neglect on the border. Nowhere is the intersection of poverty and ethnicity more pronounced than in the public schools of Laredo, Texas.

In LISD, 99.3 % of the students are Latino and 96.2 % are classified as economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 2005). UISD is more racially and economically diverse although not by much. 97.4 % of the student population is Latino, 73 % of whom are economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 2005). 65.9 % of LISD students are classified as Limited English Proficient² (LEP) and 82.4 % are listed as being “at risk” (Texas Education Agency, 2005). In UISD, 45.3 % are English language learners with 66 % classified as “at risk” (Texas Education Agency, 2005).

The primary mission of the College of Education at this university in the borderlands is to prepare teachers in accordance with the standards established by the state of Texas. In actuality, we are in the business of preparing Latinos from the frontera to teach on the frontera in less than ideal conditions. The Texas Teacher Recruitment and Retention Study indicated that an estimated one-third to one-half of all new teachers will leave the teaching profession within five years (Texas Association of School Boards, 2002). Teacher retention is critical if we are ever to meet the demand for teachers. Various researchers have recommended revamping teacher education programs as a way of improving teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Foster & Cobb, 2000). In designing and implementing effective teacher education programs, it critical that teacher preparation faculty solicit feedback from beginning teachers in order to identify gaps in the preparation program. This is especially warranted in the case of the border region where many beginning teachers are Latinos from the border region, who have been trained in the border region, and consequently are employed as teachers in the border region.

One component that could assist in the retention of beginning teachers is the quality of pre-service education that they receive. Educator preparation entities can continue to train and produce teachers, but if the beginning teacher is not educated in key areas such as teaching second language learners, or given opportunities to apply learning theories in the field, the likelihood of them staying in the classroom for more than five years is low. Successful teaching is an art that takes insight, knowledge, and numerous years of classroom experience to grow; yet, in many cases new teachers do not remain long enough in the classroom to develop the art of teaching (Portner, 2003). By providing early field experiences, a strong knowledge base, and the skills to work collaboratively with others in an educational setting, teachers may stay in the classroom long enough to develop a repertoire of skills and remain in the classroom for their entire professional career.

From the first day of school, beginning teachers are responsible for working with diverse

1 The Office of the Secretary of State of Texas defines a “colonia” as a residential area along the Texas-Mexico border that may lack some of the most basic living necessities, such as potable water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing.

2 Although we, like many researchers, prefer to use the term English language learner (ELL), the state of Texas uses the designation Limited English Proficient (LEP).

groups of students. They must deal with them intellectually, emotionally, and socially (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). Novice teachers almost immediately feel overwhelmed with all the duties that the teaching profession entails. They may encounter a professional plunge when teachers, from the moment they are awarded their first license, are considered full members of the profession and not as novices (Schlosser & Balzano, 2002). Beginning teachers come into a situation where they must deal with the same responsibilities that a 20-year veteran would face in teaching (Birkeland & Johnson, 2002).

Numerous studies have been conducted in regards to educator preparation program effectiveness (Williams & Alawiye, 2001; Andrew, 1990; Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hill & Brodin, 2004; San, 1999). Williams and Alawiye (2001) stated:

The evaluation of an institution must, to a large extent, be based on the degree to which its educational program meets the needs of students in the area it serves. Since these needs are related to the opportunities, conditions, and program effectiveness, it is important that the students analyze and describe the services they generally receive from the institution (p. 2).

Thus, beginning teacher perceptions of their preparedness is one area that an institution needs to evaluate in order to assess the effectiveness of the educator preparation program.

Williams and Alawiye (2001) in a study of 33 student teachers found that these student teachers' perceived the strengths of their teacher preparation program to be as follows: (a) care about students, (b) strong, knowledgeable professors, (c) lesson planning, (d) knowledgeable staff, (e) staff well organized, and (f) well prepared. Student teachers' perceived weaknesses of the teacher preparation program included: (a) classes not consistent, (b) cooperating teachers, (c) computer classes, (d) math class, (e) student teaching last quarter, (f) selection of faculty to teach methods courses, (g) classroom management, (h) class availability, (i) student/supervisor ratio, (j) screening of master teachers, (k) preparing portfolios, (l) reading in content area for physical education, and (m) lack of communication with main campus. In another study, San (1999) examined the perceptions of 304 first, second and third-year beginning teachers to find out their perceived levels of preparedness from their educator preparation program. Results indicated that the beginning teachers rated their pre-service preparation as very low in reference to developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes for teaching. In a similar vein, Hill and Brodin (2004) found that first year physical education teachers felt unprepared in the areas of classroom management and discipline, special needs populations, assessment, and parental involvement. In a survey of new teachers by the National Center for Education Information (NCEI), "...it was unanimously concluded that teachers think the best way to learn all aspects of teaching is a combination of college courses on campus and field-based experiences" (NCEI, 1997, p. 30). The new teachers surveyed about their preparedness believed they had been best prepared in subject matter knowledge, followed by teaching methods, then by understanding of child/adolescent development. When asked the areas in which they felt least prepared, they reported difficulties in recognizing and addressing student learning styles, classroom management and discipline, and strategies which would enable them to function effectively in schools as an institution. Darling-Hammond (2006) found that 86 % of recent graduates of exemplary teacher preparation programs felt well-prepared, in contrast to 65 % percent in the comparison group (p. 60). Graduates from the exemplary programs rated their preparation highly in the following areas: "promoting student learning, understanding learners, teaching critical thinking, and developing curriculum" (p. 64). Of particular interest to this study, neither of the exemplary program group nor the comparison group felt well prepared to address the needs of English language learners (p. 65).

This study examined beginning frontera teachers' perceptions of how well they had been prepared to teach at an educator preparation program in the borderlands. As will be demonstrated by the demographic data, our graduates are almost solely from the border region themselves who remain in the border region to teach. The border region is an area of great need. If we are ever to advance in the area of education, we must engage in localized research in order to address local needs and formulate local solutions.

Method

Participants

The participants included second- and third-year teachers currently employed in either one of two school districts in the border region who were teaching pre-kindergarten through grade twelve. The respondents under investigation consisted of 159 teachers who graduated from a university located on the Texas-Mexico border. The participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 1990).

The original population of this study involved 159 second- and third-year teachers; however, a total of 108 participants completed the questionnaire. This represents a more than adequate return rate of 68% (Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001). Of the 108 respondents, 65 (60%) were in their third year of teaching and 43 (40%) were in their second year of teaching.

Research Design

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix A) entitled, Second- and Third-Year Questionnaire (O'Dell, Zhang, Wang & D'Esposito, 2004), which was developed to address the issue of the quality of beginning teachers. The original questionnaire, by Dr. Lisa O'Dell, was modified to address the issues that beginning teachers face on the border. Specifically, the survey sought to determine beginning teachers' perceptions of how well they were prepared to design lesson plans that engage students in learning, implement new methods of teaching that meet the identified needs of students in the classroom, address the needs of special education students, and address the needs of English language learners. It was of particular interest to ascertain if beginning teachers felt prepared to address the needs of English language learners since the majority of the beginning teachers are from the border region, were prepared on the border, and currently teach in border schools. The questionnaire consisted of five different sections. Section one pertained to the participants' demographics; section two documented their current teaching assignment; the third section focused on their teaching preparedness; the fourth component explored teachers' perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher preparation program; and the final section pertained to the teachers' future plans in education.

Validity was determined by a panel of experts made up of current educators, who included (a) a Chair from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, (b) a College of Education faculty member, (c) an elementary school administrator, and (d) a classroom teacher. These experts reviewed the process used to develop the questionnaire, as well as the questionnaire itself (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The item assessment was based on the following criteria:

1. Clear instructions
2. Clarity of each question
3. Clear understanding of each section
4. Detail in each question was adequate to answer research questions
5. Relevancy of items to research questions
6. Convenience of instrument in data collection (Glenn, 2000).

A field study was conducted to establish the reliability of the survey instrument developed for this study. The coefficients of reliability indicated that the questionnaire developed and implemented by the researcher for use in this study had an appropriate level of internal consistency and thus was suitable for use in this study. An interrator reliability involving the use of content analysis was conducted to examine the consistency of the responses given in section four of the questionnaire and complete agreement was reached in the identification of emergent themes and specific examples of these constructs.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data regarding beginning teachers' perceptions of how well their undergraduate program prepared them to assume particular teaching responsibilities. The Likert scale results were reported using frequencies and percentages incorporated into tables. A simple analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical procedure was used to determine the probability of significant differences in perceptions between the two groups of teachers categorized by years of teaching experience. Furthermore, content analysis procedures were used to analyze second-year and third-year teachers' perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher preparation program. Finally, an examination of the entire data set was conducted to determine if there were patterns of information that tended to typify second-year teachers and those with three years of experience.

Results

Demographic data collected in sections one and two of the survey served to validate what education faculty at this border institution already suspected: we are preparing students from the frontera to teach on the frontera. One hundred percent of the respondents were Latinos and Spanish/English bilinguals in varying degrees. Regarding the number of years that the participants attended the university from which they graduated, 40 (37%) of the participants attended for two years; 22 (20%) and 33 (31%) attended for three and four years, respectively. Given high poverty rates in the border region, typically many of our students attend the local community college for two years since it is less expensive. The remaining 13 (12%) attended for five or more years. Sixty (56%) of the respondents were certified to teach in the area of Early Childhood Bilingual Education. Upon analyzing the data in regards to how many miles away from their hometown the participants taught, 65 (60%) taught in their hometown, 25 (23%) worked from 1-10 miles from their hometown, 11 (10%) were employed from 11-20 miles from their hometown, and seven (7%) taught more than 20 miles from their hometown. The data supports that graduates from the border region do not leave the border area; as 101 (95%) indicated that they work from 0-20 miles from their hometown.

In regards to the ethnicity of their students, one hundred percent of the participants indicated that they had a majority of Latinos in their classroom, with 76 (70%) reporting that 100% of their students were Latino. All of the participants reported having significant numbers of English language learners and economically disadvantaged students in their classrooms. This, of course, comes as no surprise to anyone who lives and works on the border.

Section three of the questionnaire focused on aspects of the participants perceptions of their preparedness to teach. The results are presented in Table 1. Eighty-one percent of the participants reported that they felt prepared or very prepared to design lesson plans that engage students in learning. At least 61% indicated that they were prepared to maintain order in the classroom

and control misbehaviors that occur. Approximately half of the respondents reported that they had learned to use student performance assessment techniques and to implement new methods of teaching to meet the identified needs of students in the classroom, including English language learners. Thirty-eight percent of those surveyed claimed that they felt competent to address the needs of Special Education students. Overall, 56% of the respondents claimed that they felt prepared during their first year of teaching.

Table 1
Participants' Perceptions of their Teaching Preparedness

Teaching Activities	VU f (%)	U f (%)	SU f (%)	SP f (%)	P f (%)	VP f (%)
Design lesson plans that engage students in learning	3 (3)	17 (16)	48 (44)	40 (37)		
Maintain order in the classroom	3 (3)	10 (9)	25 (23)	39 (36)	31 (29)	
Control misbehaviors that occur	1 (1)	5 (5)	12 (11)	25 (23)	45 (42)	20 (19)
Use student performance assessment	2 (2)	12 (11)	37 (34)	41 (38)	16 (15)	
Implement new teaching methods that meet students' needs	1 (2)	7 (7)	41 (38)	39 (36)	20 (19)	
Address the needs of Special Education students	6 (6)	21 (19)	40 (37)	28 (26)	13 (12)	
Address the needs of students with limited English proficiency	1 (1)	3 (3)	10 (9)	40 (37)	40 (37)	14 (13)
Overall, sense of preparedness in first year as a certified teacher	3 (3)	12 (11)	32 (30)	49 (45)	12 (11)	

Note. VU=Very Unprepared, U= Unprepared, SU= Somewhat Unprepared, SP= Somewhat Prepared, P= Prepared, VP= Very Prepared. Percents were rounded to the nearest whole percent.

Content analysis was used to analyze the open-ended responses given in section 4 which dealt with the greatest strengths and weaknesses of their teacher preparation program (Holsti, 1968). The three most common strengths reported were meaningful field experiences, strong support from knowledgeable faculty, and great preparation in designing lesson plans. Firstly, respondents perceived field experiences as being beneficial. In addition to exposing students to actual classrooms, respondents stated that field experiences provided, "Internship-hands-on experience and great observation opportunities." They also commented that "going to the school campus to observe-student teaching" and "seeing/experiencing firsthand an actual school environment" were very profitable. Fifty respondents referred to field experiences as being one of the greatest strengths of the educator preparation program.

A second theme that surfaced from the data involved the support and knowledge provided by the university professors. Respondents reported that they benefited from, "knowledgeable instructors" who shared "knowledge and personal experiences." They also appreciated professors being, "... available when needed for support on situations", "even without making appointments with them." Professors were typically referred to as, "awesome and helpful, willing to provide information and encouragement to the teaching profession." Forty-six respondents referred to the support and knowledge provided by university professors as being a significant strength of the educator preparation program.

A final theme that emerged from the data was that respondents felt prepared to create lesson plans. Participants typically reported that they had learned, “how to write lesson plans” and to do so for subjects “throughout the curriculum”. Thirty-four respondents referred to lesson planning as being one of the greatest strengths of their educator preparation program.

Two themes regarding the greatest weaknesses of the teacher preparation program from which the participants graduated emerged. Respondents reported that there was a great need for additional preparation in (a) classroom management and discipline, and (b) special education. Thirty-one participants stated that there was not enough information given in regards to classroom management and discipline. Respondents reported that they would have liked “special instruction for classroom management” and felt that there was “not enough preparation in classroom management”. Furthermore, they would have liked to have learned strategies on “how to deal with misbehaviors” and some type of “... training on discipline and how to handle discipline problems”.

Twenty-five of the individuals surveyed reported that greater attention needed to be given to special education in the educator preparation program. Some of the constructs that emerged included (a) a greater emphasis overall in special education, (b) behavior management of special education students, (c) inclusion, (d) the referral process, and (e) ways to address the needs of special education students. Participants typically reported that the “special education process needs to be emphasized a bit more” and “another special education course was needed”. In addition, participants did not feel that they had the “ability to work/teach/control special education students” and they were unsure as to “... how to include our special education students”. In addition, participants felt that the educator preparation program “...should teach how to fill out referral packets and how to modify” instruction for students with special needs.

A simple analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical procedure was used to compare the differences in perceptions between the two groups of teachers involved in this study; i.e., those in their third year of teaching and those in their second year of teaching. Significant differences were found between the teachers with two years of teaching experience and those with three years of teaching experience in only three of the areas specifically examined by this research study. These differences are reported in Table 2.

Second-year teachers felt well prepared; however, third-year teachers perceived themselves to be prepared to maintain order in the classroom. When asked how prepared they felt in addressing the needs of special education students and of students with limited English proficiency, second-year teachers reported feeling significantly better prepared than the third- year teachers.

Table 2

Comparison of Second- and Third-Year Teachers' Perceptions				
Ability to:	M1	M2	df	F
13 B. Maintain order in the classroom	4.61	5.05	1, 106	4.50*
13 F. Address the needs of Special Education students	3.95	4.56	1, 106	8.99**
13 G. Address the needs of students with limited English proficiency	4.26	4.74	1, 106	6.47**

Note. M1=mean for participants in third year of teaching.
 M2=mean for participants in second year of teaching.
 *= $p \leq .05$; **= $p \leq .01$.

Since the probability values were more than .05, the results of the ANOVA indicated that no significant differences existed between the perceptions of the two groups on the remaining items. Specifically, those participants with two years of experience and those with three years of experience reported that they felt somewhat prepared in the following areas: (a) controlling misbehaviors that occur, (b) using student performance assessment techniques, and (c) implementing new methods of teaching that meet the identified needs of students in the classroom. The two groups indicated that they felt prepared in designing lesson plans that engage students in learning.

Discussion

Given the demographics of our local school districts, we were particularly surprised and troubled by the findings that only 50 percent felt prepared or very prepared to meet the needs of English language learners. Although our education majors do not have any difficulties communicating with the students in the local schools because of their functional abilities in Spanish, they do not necessarily feel confident in their abilities to help English language learners acquire the knowledge and skills specified in different content areas while continuing to acquire English as a second language. It is of critical importance that all of our graduates, not just the bilingual education majors, have the necessary skills to meet the needs of English language learners who represent the majority of students in local schools on the border.

In a similar vein, we are disturbed by the 62 % of beginning teachers who did not feel prepared to meet the needs of special education students. In light of recent research (Contreras, 2006) which demonstrated that English language learners are overrepresented in special education programs in Texas border regions, we believe these two issues are related. Therefore, we recognize that we must double our efforts to prepare our beginning teachers to address the needs of English language learners and special education students. As a result of these findings, faculty in the College of Education⁰ added a new course on second language acquisition which will be required for all programs. This course will focus on issues in second language acquisition, and both theory and practice in teaching English as a Second Language through K-12 content areas. This course will provide all education majors with strategies for teaching English language learners through content area instruction. It will also have a field component in which students will be required to work one-on-one with an English language learner over the course of the semester.

We were encouraged by the finding that second year teachers felt more prepared than third year teachers to address the needs of second language learners because it served to validate a prior change in the program which increased the number of hours of field experience. When the third-year teachers were enrolled in the educator preparation program, only one of their pre-service courses required a field component that consisted of 77 hours, and their student teaching experience consisted of nine weeks. After reflecting on the importance of field-based experiences, it was decided that a 40-hour field component should be added to the first course in the professional development sequence. The second course in the sequence continued to require 77 hours of field experience, and the student teaching semester was increased to 12 weeks.

Field experiences have been an important component of educator preparation programs. According to Paese (1989), "The field experience component has always been a vital part of teacher education programs" (p. 18). Field experiences function as a critical link between formal teacher training and apprenticeships. When new teachers are asked to choose the most valuable aspect of their preparation for teaching, they often point to their practical experiences (Richardson-Koehler, 1988). In a perfect world, we would be able to dramatically increase the number of courses and

field hours so as ensure that all our students were well prepared to face the challenges of frontera classrooms. However, the reality is that many of our students face their own twin challenges of time and finances as they work full-time jobs in order to be able to attend university in the first place.

Future Research

This study focused on exploring second and third-year frontera teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach. Replication of this study could be conducted with teachers who have completed only one full year of teaching. A comparison could be made between the original respondents with two to three years of experience, and those with one full year of teaching experience. In this way, a profile of teachers with one, two, or three years of experience could be created. This characterization could assist educator preparation programs in designing their programs by providing data regarding the areas in which beginning teachers felt they were prepared. In addition, the profile could generate information regarding the impact that school districts have on beginning teachers.

Further studies could be conducted to compare the degree of teacher preparedness based on teachers' level of certification, i.e., Early Childhood-4th grade, 4th -8th grade, 8th -12th grade. At present there were not enough beginning teachers in the area of 8-12 certification to provide a viable comparison with EC-4 and 4-8 teachers. However, in the future, these numbers may increase and lend themselves to further research. This type of study would provide a rich knowledge base as to how secondary teachers view their preparedness to teach when compared to those teachers who were prepared for the EC-4 or 4-8 certificates, since 8-12 certification majors are primarily prepared through the College of Arts and Sciences. It is also imperative that we study the degree of teacher preparedness of special education majors given the findings of this study. Unfortunately, numbers for this major continue to be fairly low.

A qualitative study with 3-4 of the teachers involved in the present study could be conducted to try to capture how elements such as administrative support, facilities, and resources may influence the success or failure of a beginning teacher. Beginning teachers could provide authentic details regarding the administrative assistance, resources, and facilities to which they had access. This study could provide information on the role that administration, school facilities, and available resources play with regard to beginning teachers' decision to remain or leave the teaching profession.

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APPENDIX A

SECOND- AND THIRD-YEAR TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the entire questionnaire (all five sections) and return it in the enclosed envelope. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

SECTION ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Was 2002-2003 the first academic year that you taught as a fully certified teacher?

YES NO

1a. If NO, in what month and year did you first teach as a certified teacher? _____

2. How many years did you attend the university from which you graduated? _____ years

3. Please circle the highest of these degrees that you currently hold.

BA BS MA MS PhD EdD

Other (Specify) _____

4. List the subjects that you are certified to teach.

Also indicate the grade levels for which your certificate/endorsement holds.

5. What is your racial/ethnic background?

African American _____ Asian/Pacific Islander _____ Caucasian _____
Hispanic _____ Native American _____ Other (Specify) _____

6. Do you speak or understand Spanish?

YES NO

SECTION TWO: CURRENT TEACHING ASSIGNMENT

5. What grade(s) are you currently teaching? Circle all that apply.

PreK-3 PreK-4 GrK Gr1 Gr2 Gr3 Gr4 Gr5 Gr6 Gr7 Gr8
Gr9 Gr10 Gr11 Gr12

6. What subject(s) are you currently teaching? _____

7. Approximately how many miles away from your hometown is the town/city in which you are teaching? _____

8. On average, how many students do you have in a class? _____

9. Roughly what percentage of the students you teach can be classified as each of the following:
 African American _____ Asian/Pacific Islander _____ Caucasian _____
 Hispanic _____ Native American _____ Other (Specify) _____
 (NOTE: The numbers in question #9 should sum to 100%.)

10. Roughly what percentage of the students you teach have been classified as each of the following:
 Bilingual _____ *English as a Second Language (ESL) _____ Special Education _____
 *Limited English Proficient (LEP) _____ Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch _____

* ESL is a program of techniques, methodology and special curriculum designed to teach Limited English Proficient students English language skills, which may include listening, speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation. ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of the students' native language.

* LEP Students are identified as limited English proficient by the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) according to criteria established in the Texas Administrative Code. Not all pupils identified as LEP receive bilingual or English as a second language instruction, although most do. Parental consent is required in order for students to participate in this program.

11. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the number of the label that best describes your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Parents support me in my efforts to educate their children.	1	2	3	4
b. The school administration supports me in my work.	1	2	3	4
c. Experienced teachers at my school encourage me.	1	2	3	4

12. Did you participate in an *induction program intended to support beginning teachers at any time during the past year?

YES NO

12a. If YES, who sponsored the program (check all that apply)?
 _____ School District/Campus _____ Educational Service Center _____ University
 _____ Other (Specify) _____

12b. If YES, briefly explain why induction activities were, or were not, helpful to you. _____

* Involves ongoing, systematic training and support for new teachers beginning before the first day of school and continuing throughout the first two or three years of teaching.

SECTION THREE: TEACHING PREPAREDNESS

13. In your first year as a certified teacher, how prepared did you feel to perform each of the following activities?

Please circle the number that corresponds to the label that best describes your feelings.

	Very unprepared	Unprepared	Somewhat Unprepared	Somewhat Prepared	Prepared	Very Prepared
a. Design lesson plans that engage students in learning	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Maintain order in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Control misbehaviors that occur	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Use student performance assessment techniques	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Implement new methods of teaching that meet the identified needs of students in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Address the needs of Special Education students	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Address the needs of students with limited English proficiency	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Overall, how prepared did you feel in your first year as a certified teacher?	1	2	3	4	5	6

SECTION FOUR: EVALUATION OF TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM

14. Please describe what you believe to be the three greatest strengths and the three greatest weaknesses of the teacher preparation program from which you graduated.

a. Greatest Strengths

b. Greatest Weaknesses

SECTION FIVE: FUTURE PLANS

15. Do you plan to continue to teach during the next academic year? YES NO
 Please explain briefly why you responded this way. _____

15a. If YES, approximately how many years do you estimate you will remain in the teaching profession? _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Designing an Anti-Racist Curriculum For Middle School Students in Texas via The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and Latino/Latina Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper describes how Latino/Latina critical pedagogy (LatCrit) can be incorporated into the Texas' middle school curriculum. The author demonstrates how the Texas Essential Elements (TEKS), a scheme of cross-curricular goals and objectives can be used to design an anti-racist curriculum. Moreover, instructional strategies for teaching an anti-racist curriculum are provided.

Today, one of the primary goals of the middle school teacher is to help young adolescents learn and appreciate cultural diversity, and for most teachers, multicultural education is the instructional medium implemented to achieve this goal. However, as more and more teachers become exposed to critical pedagogy through their graduate studies, the need to help them become comfortable with applying this theoretical framework to their daily teaching practices is paramount. Unfortunately, the academic milieu found in most elementary, middle, and secondary schools as a whole is not receptive to the exploration and use of non-traditional pedagogical theories in the American classroom. This article attempts to help Texas' middle school teachers realize that implementing critical pedagogy into their daily curriculum is doable via the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), a scheme of cross-curricular goals and objectives designed for each grade level and adopted by the Texas Education Agency (2002).

Second, the paper aims to link the theoretical foundations of Latina/Latino critical pedagogy (LatCrit) an offshoot of critical pedagogy to the everyday middle school curriculum.³

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy can be defined as a teaching approach that encourages students to question and challenge existing beliefs and values prevalent in today's societies. In short, via this pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, teachers can assist their students in developing a critical consciousness by giving them the freedom to question ideologies and practices that they (the students) deem oppressive inside and outside of school. In addition, critical pedagogy requires the teachers to help the students transfer and apply the knowledge that they have learned in the classroom to the outside world (Apple, 1990; Nieto, 2002).

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) perhaps the most renowned critical educator is responsible for heavily impacting critical pedagogy. He championed the need for teachers and students to ponder

³ The author has recently completed a four-year longitudinal study with students enrolled in alternative education programs. For the first fourteen months of the study, she designed and taught an anti-racist curriculum to the students. This paper focuses on this period of the study only. Although the author has had her research on the effects of this curriculum on the students' development of a Chicano consciousness via Latina/Latino critical pedagogy published, she has never listed or described the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) that were incorporated into the anti-racist curriculum until now. Colleagues and teachers over the past two years have prompted her to write this article describing how the TEKS were used.

critically about education and to understand how the education system has impacted their views on society and its political infrastructure (Freire, 1970). Supporters of critical pedagogy argue that it affords students opportunities to realize that we are living under an unjust social order that has denied poor young people the opportunities necessary to move out of poverty. Apple (1990) suggests that through dialogue and reflection in the classroom teachers can enable their students to realize that an inequity surrounding the opportunities and resources afforded to impoverished people exists.

Scholars in the field of education argue that we need to make the American curriculum more meaningful to students of color; that we should celebrate cultural diversity; and be willing to challenge and re-define the American curriculum for the betterment of our youngsters (Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Nieto, 1999; Delpit, 1995). In short, they posit that schools validate their students' cultural backgrounds in an attempt to enable the children to form their self-identities. For example, some researchers argue that children of Mexican descent who were born in the United States should be given opportunities to decide if they wish to be considered Americans, Chicanos, or Mexican-Americans (author, 2006; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). However, in order to form their self-identities, these youngsters need to be given opportunities to learn about ethnicity and racial classification (Duncan, 2002; Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, Parker, 2002, Valenzuela, 1999). According to Price (2005) young adolescents are capable of understanding racial and ethnic conflicts:

Take advantage of adolescent passion. Direct adolescents' enthusiasm toward productive ends. A teen's passion can become a bridge to learning about such topics as music theory, history, politics, race relations, or marketing (p. 25).

Critical race theorists espouse the need for society to challenge the traditional ways in which children are taught and by reexamining the curriculum to make it more responsive to social and political change. In addition to supporting the need for addressing the issue of racism and racial/ethnic conflicts in the classroom, critical pedagogy embraces the need for weaving social justice into the fabric of the American curriculum. Social justice is "generally thought of as a society which affords individuals and groups fair treatment and a just share of the benefits of society" (Wikipedia, 2007, p. 1). Middle school students first need to recognize the inequities that exist in our society before they can address them later on as adults in the social and political arenas.

To many individuals, speaking about racism and racial/ethnic conflicts are topics to be avoided because they make people feel uncomfortable. Have we not heard at some point in our lives that politics and religion are two topics that should be avoided because they generate controversy? Have we not heard it said that we should all learn to get along with each other? This last statement although beautiful in theory is far too simplistic.

Conversely, critics of multicultural education and anti-racist curricula believe that teaching students about racial and ethnic diversity serves only to divide the population living in the United States. They believe that children should be taught that we are all Americans regardless of our cultural differences—again another simplistic notion (Lasch, 1995). When people of color suffer discrimination, they are made to feel that they are not part of the Caucasian American experience. Therefore, to ask them to accept the idea that we are all the same is unrealistic. So, how do we learn to get along? Perhaps one of the ways to bring this goal to fruition is to encourage our youth to learn about racism and to explore their feelings and attitudes toward this topic.

Applying Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom

Most researchers working in the social sciences today would agree that education is a primary vehicle to producing future citizens who value diversity, and who are cognizant of the racial and ethnic disparities that exist in our world. Yet, despite their calls for change in the American curriculum and in the pedagogical arena per se, schools across the nation do not implement critical pedagogy. Granted, there are some classroom teachers who do incorporate critical pedagogy into their instructional lessons and classroom practices, however, these educators are in the minority. It takes an emotionally strong teacher to overcome the worries associated with the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom, notably, critical pedagogy is too difficult to design, critical pedagogy promotes disharmony in the school community, and loss of employment.

Critical Pedagogy is Too Difficult to Implement

Several teachers have expressed to the author that they would incorporate the tenets of critical pedagogy into their daily instruction if they knew how to do so successfully. As Priscilla a fifth-grade teacher enrolled in the author's graduate course on curriculum wrote:

Critical pedagogy is too difficult to do in a classroom. I enjoyed learning about this theory and Paolo Freire in my graduate classes, but it's hard to do. I wouldn't know how to begin. Do school districts provide teachers with training to understand critical pedagogy? I know my school district doesn't.

Critical Pedagogy Promotes Disharmony in the School Community

This second concern is based on the belief that discussing racism in the classroom will yield friction and dissension among school communities consisting of administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents. Educators who hold this opinion are worried that an anti-racist curriculum may actually lead to an increase in racial and ethnic tension in schools. Unfortunately, these individuals do not realize that refusing to address this topic serves only to perpetuate this tension. Maintaining a culturally sensitive and harmonious climate in schools is dependent upon a willingness to engage in dialogue on racial and ethnic issues and not by avoidance.

Loss of Employment

A third factor that prevents Texas' teachers from implementing critical pedagogy in their classrooms is the fear that doing so will result in the termination of their teaching contracts. In short, they are afraid of upsetting their school principals, parents, school boards, and the Texas State Board of Education. In essence, they are afraid that addressing topics such as racism in the classroom may place them in jeopardy of losing their jobs because regrettably for many school districts challenging the status quo is frowned upon. Therefore, we cannot blame teachers for their concern. It is not easy to stand outside the box and teach to your convictions. Having been a classroom teacher for seventeen years, the author knows how challenging it can be for teachers to bring critical pedagogy into their classrooms for fear of being disciplined by the school administrator. However, she was able to have her fourth-grade students learn about Che Guevara and have them re-enact a strike against produce growers in California to celebrate Cesar Chavez' birthday, without any reprisals from school district personnel. The author believes that her supervisors were willing to cut her some slack since they viewed her as an effective teacher in the classroom. In Texas, designing an anti-racist curriculum is doable because the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) make it possible.

Method

Description of Locale and Participants

Four years ago the author began a longitudinal study in which her primary goal was to motivate 52 Mexican and Chicano students (40 males and 12 females) enrolled in a middle school alternative education program to become reengaged in learning. The school is located in a neighborhood on the U.S.-Mexico border in which 99% of the population is of Mexican descent and the primary language spoken in the family is Spanish. The students' misbehavior in school or in the community was responsible for their enrollment in the alternative education program.

Data Acquisition

For the first fourteen months of the study, the author designed and taught an anti-racist curriculum for four hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The content areas that were integrated into the curriculum were language arts and social studies. Due to the fact that the author was teaching at the university and could not spend all day with the students, she was unable to teach the students mathematics or science. As a result, both content areas were not included in the anti-racist curriculum.

The quantitative and qualitative methods used for collecting data throughout the fourteen month period consisted of videotaped and non-videotaped class discussions, pre- and post-questionnaires, student interviews, student journals, student work, and drawings. The class discussions that were not videotaped were transcribed. The director of the alternative education program and the author took notes of what was said. After they had transcribed the discussions, the director and the author compared notes. When there was a discrepancy, the students were asked to clarify the content that had been transcribed. University colleagues specializing in anthropology and cultural studies reviewed the videotapes and provided their input. Teachers were not interviewed because this study was only to determine how youngsters enrolled in the alternative education program could become reengaged in learning. Also, the author did not receive permission to ascertain how the students were doing once they left the program and returned to the regular education program.

In the beginning of the investigation, many of the students had stated that school was boring and in an attempt to make learning fun, she began designing lessons and activities founded on the constructivist principles of teaching and learning in an attempt to motivate these youngsters to learn. During the first week of the study, however, the author became aware of the students' strong resistance to learning in English. Many of the youngsters held the opinion that speaking in English was a betrayal of their Mexican heritage. In fact, during the initial weeks of the study, the investigator was regarded as a "gringa" by the students because she spoke English well. The author soon realized that oppositional culture was at work. Massey et al. (1991) define the theory of oppositional culture as a human condition in which:

Involuntary minorities compare themselves with native majority members and are painfully aware of their disadvantaged status, which generates negative feelings toward the mainstream values and institutions. . . Involuntary minorities thus come to perceive knowledge of and participation in the dominant culture and its institutions as a betrayal of group loyalty and a threat to identity. They develop a defiant position vis à vis mainstream institutions and feel alienated from schools, learning, and education. . .(p. 8).

Research has shown that oppositional culture is the result of racism and this fact is well-documented in the literature (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 1991; Fordham & Ogbu 1986; Matute-Bianchi, 1986).

In an attempt to help these youngsters realize that speaking English is not a betrayal to their cultural heritage, the author decided to meet oppositional culture head-on and began designing an anti-racist curriculum based on Latina/Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit).

Solorzano and Bernal (2001) provide a definition of this theoretical framework:

LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino panethnicity. . .LatCrit is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos' multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (p. 311-312).

LatCrit addresses topics and issues that affect Latinas/Latinos on a daily basis. There are five themes that shape the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of the LatCrit framework in education.

1. The interdisciplinary perspective.
2. The centrality of experiential knowledge.
3. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.
4. The commitment to social justice.
5. The challenge to dominant ideology (pp. 312-315).

Designing an Anti-Racist Curriculum via LatCrit for Middle School

In Texas, it is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) that drive the curriculum. Teachers are required to teach these cross-curricular goals and objectives outlined by the Texas Education Agency. Adopting LatCrit as the theoretical framework of the curriculum required the author to incorporate the five themes into her design of lessons and activities along with the TEKS.

Interdisciplinary Perspective

Teaching across the disciplines is important to helping students learn about race and ethnicity because these topics can be covered in various content areas, and the more instruction children receive on these issues the better informed they will be. Researchers have demonstrated that integrating content areas enables students to become more successful in school because they realize that concepts found in one discipline can also appear in other disciplines as well (Emmer & Gerwels, 2002; Vaughan, 2002; Deeds & Allen, 2000; Carlin & Ciaccio, 1997; Wolfinger & Stockard, 1997). In effect, the children come to realize that curriculum is seamless. The author selected social studies, English language arts, and the fine arts as the content areas to integrate into her curriculum. The TEKS provided in each of these subjects are excellent gateways for teaching students via critical pedagogy. Although mathematics and science are content areas that can be taught successfully via critical pedagogy, time constraints did not allow the author to teach these subjects to the students.

Social Studies Disciplines 6-8

The disciplines listed under social studies for the middle school curriculum are history, geography, economics, government, citizenship, culture, science, technology, society, and critical

thinking skills. These content areas lend themselves readily to the development of an anti-racist curriculum.

Due to the fact that the alternative education program was a student pull-out program in which students came from grades sixth, seventh, and eighth, the author selected the seventh grade as the focus of her anti-racist curriculum. She reasoned that if she needed to upgrade or lower the level of difficulty of content, she would be able to do so. After analyzing the TEKS for all three grade levels, the author found that the goals and objectives for the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were similar, except that the levels of difficulty increased. Due to the large number of TEKS, only a sample of the objectives that are germane to designing an anti-racist curriculum will be discussed.

The Social Studies TEKS are ideally suited for designing an anti-racist curriculum because the objectives afford teachers the opportunities to discuss terms such as invasion, conquests, colonization, immigration, and trade. For example, in history, the students are expected to “describe characteristics of selected contemporary societies such as Bosnia and Northern Ireland that resulted from historical events or factors such as invasion, conquests, colonization, immigration, and trade” (Sixth Grade Social Studies-History, Section A). This objective gives teachers the opportunity to discuss key elements associated with colonization, namely, conquest and oppression.

Also, the seventh grade social studies TEKS expects students to be able to “contrast Spanish and Anglo purposes for and methods of settlement in Texas” (Seventh Grade Social Studies-History, #2). In addition, students are required to “understand how individuals, events, and issues shaped the history of Texas during the 20th century and are expected to trace the civil rights and equal rights movements of various groups in Texas” (Seventh Grade Social Studies-History, #2-F). During the author’s study, she had students read chapters from Guadalupe San Miguel’s book *Brown, not white: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston* (2001) in addition to reading the social studies textbook. The students were surprised that the textbook provided only a superficial description of the struggles facing Mexicans and Chicanos living in Texas during the 20th century. Conversely, they stated that San Miguel’s book afforded a more comprehensive discussion of how discrimination and racism impacted the lives of Mexicans and Chicanos decades earlier, and that unfortunately, discrimination against Mexicans and Chicanos still continues. Moreover, the students often stated that they were proud of the Mexicans and Chicanos in Texas who challenged discrimination.

The eighth grade history TEKS also serve as gateways to teaching an anti-racist curriculum. Students are expected to “explain the major issues and events of the Mexican War and their impact on the U.S.; and identify areas that were acquired to form the United States” (Eighth Grade Social Studies-History, Secs. D-E.) The author selected the work of Richard

Santos (1982) to accompany the textbook. The students found Santos’ account of Santa Anna’s role in the war against Texas most intriguing. According to the students, the textbook portrayed Santa Ana as a man whose only goal was to end the war and end the bloodshed. In addition, the students said that they enjoyed reading history books written from people of Mexican descent because it was refreshing. They complained of always having to read historical accounts written by Caucasian Americans. Although the students were aware of the fact that there are people of Mexican descent who do not support the struggle against oppression, and in fact, support the status quo, the students were still pleased that people of Mexican descent write books.

Geography also gives teachers avenues for developing an anti-racist curriculum. Students in the seventh grade for example, are required to understand the characteristics, distribution, and migration of population in Texas in the 19th and 20th centuries. In essence, they are expected to

“analyze how immigration and migration to Texas in the 19th and 20th centuries have influenced Texas (Seventh Grade Social Studies-Geography #11-B). The students in the study participated in class discussions on how Mexican immigration has contributed to the U.S. economy.

Culture is another content area listed under social studies in which students can learn to become critical thinkers regarding race and ethnicity. The TEKS require students to understand the concept of diversity within unity in Texas. Students are expected to “describe how people from selected racial, ethnic, and religious groups attempt to maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to the larger Texas culture” (Seventh Grade Social Studies-Culture #19-B). This objective was a wonderful conduit to having the students learn and discuss the ways in which Latinos attempt to maintain their ethnic and racial identities in this country. The children were especially interested in learning about lowriders and how Mexicans and Chicanos living in the U.S. use art as a medium for self-expression. The students enjoyed reviewing the artwork and photographs provided in several issues of the journal *Aztlán*.

Experiential Knowledge

The second theme of LatCrit emphasizes the need to acknowledge the importance of experience, and the TEKS recognize this need, also. In effect, a student is expected to “compare text events with his/her own and other reader’s experiences” (Seventh Grade English Language Arts & Reading, #12-A).

Working with children, teachers observe their students’ behavior and are able to contribute valuable knowledge to understanding how children learn and how they respond to the curriculum. For example, teaching an anti-racist curriculum requires teachers to not only listen to their students’ comments but to observe their facial and bodily gestures as they learn about racism in an attempt to determine how their students are feeling.

Also, teachers must recognize the experiential knowledge their students bring with them from home and the world outside school. Students who have felt discrimination come with a prior knowledge or experience that must be acknowledged. Some of the students in the study stated that they were racists and hated whites or “gringos” as they preferred to call this group. Five of the students stated that they had personally suffered discrimination at the hands of whites (author, 2006). Some students often expressed anti-Anglo sentiments during their discussions. As Jorge wrote:

I don’t dislike anglos, I hate them scence (since) the day I was born because they are the badest persons in the world because they discriminate my raza and ones (once) you mess with my people you mess with me. I don’t care about nobody only (“Mexican” ... white or Americans are eating because of Mexican people who are in the fields taking chiles, sevollas, and all that so some trash can eat (Discrimination) is the word of my hate to white or (“American trash”)! (author, 2006, p. 8).

The other students said that their knowledge and understanding of racism came from their parents, grandparents, and other family members. Since these students came with some prior knowledge of racism, it was relatively simple to teach the students about racism through readings and discussions. Teachers who discount their students’ knowledge and opinions regarding racism because they believe that they are too young to have formed an opinion on racism are doing their students a major disservice. Youngsters can experience discrimination as well as adults. The student’s statement clearly demonstrates that anti-racist curricula are needed. Even minority students can be racist.

Throughout the study, the students were often given opportunities to conduct group discussions on racism and topics that were important to them such as teen suicide, substance abuse, gangs, and teen violence. Giving students the chance to conduct these discussions gave them a voice and helped them to feel empowered in the classroom. The author and the director of the alternative education program were often silent during these discussions to give the students the freedom to express themselves.

The Centrality of Race and Racism and their Intersectionality with other Forms of Subordination

This theme was the most challenging to weave into the fabric of an anti-racist curriculum because of its complexity. Teaching students about race and racism was fairly easy. However, helping children to understand how racial and ethnic discrimination connect with other forms of discrimination including that of gender, alternative lifestyles, religious beliefs, and poverty made the task more difficult. Although there are no TEKS specifically aimed at addressing the issues of gender inequity, alternative lifestyles, religious beliefs, and poverty, the author was able to fit these topics under objectives that were broad and offered the author a wide range of latitude.

The Language Arts and the Fine Arts TEKS were used primarily to weave this theme into the curriculum because literature and the arts provide a wide variety of genres that can be used to link racism with other forms of oppression. Currently, there are paperback books on the market that address cultural diversity and human sexuality and can be easily used to augment the middle school language arts curriculum.

English Language Arts 6-8

The TEKS for the English Language Arts program for all three grade levels contain the following skills: listening/speaking/purposes; listening/speaking/critical listening; listening/speaking/appreciation; listening/speaking/culture; listening/speaking/audiences; reading/work identification; reading/variety of texts; reading/vocabulary development; reading/comprehension; reading/literary response; reading/text structures/literary concepts; reading/inquiry/research; reading/culture; writing/purposes; writing/grammar/usage; writing/writing process; writing/evaluation; writing/inquiry/research; writing/connections; viewing/representing/analysis; viewing/representing/production; and writing/penmanship/capitalization/punctuation/spelling. These skills, namely, those in italics are excellent conduits to developing an anti-racist curriculum. For example, implementing critical pedagogy into the curriculum requires that students be able to recognize how the media influences people and the TEKS for listening/speaking/critical thinking require teachers to give students opportunities to “identify and analyze a speaker’s persuasive techniques such as selling, convincing and using propaganda” (Sixth Grade English Language Arts & Reading, #2, B-C). In the study, the students viewed speeches given by local politicians and television commercials to determine the persuasive techniques used, if any.

Also, the goal of reading/text structures/literary concepts affords a student opportunities to “increase knowledge of his or her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures (Seventh Grade English Language Arts & Reading, #12-A). Throughout the fourteen-month study, students read stories depicting various cultures. For example, students read books such as *Julie of the Wolves*, *Seedfolks*, *Shark Beneath the Reef*, *Hoops*, and *The Big Wave*.

Fine Arts 6-8

A second content area that was used to address the centrality of racism and the intersectionality

of racism was the fine arts. The Fine Arts program for the middle school curriculum consists of three content areas, namely, art, music, and theatre. Each content area contains the same four basic strands: perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and critical evaluation. In critical evaluation, teachers are required to provide students with opportunities to make critical judgments and informed choices.

The strand of historical and cultural heritage is most helpful in getting children to understand that the oppressed often use the arts as a medium to express their suffering. The TEKS expect students to “identify in artworks the influence of historical and political events and to demonstrate in dramatic activities that theatre is a reflection of life.” (Sixth Grade Fine Arts, #3 –A; #4A). Showing the movie *The Color Purple* (1985) to the students enabled them to see how a young Black girl grew up in the south during the early 1900s and how she encountered racism and gender inequities.

Commitment to Social Justice

Teaching students about race and racism involves the teaching of social justice as well. Young teenagers come to school already with some notions about justice. In short, they have some understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Yet, the traditional curriculum rarely allows students to explore and examine the ways in which people have been unkind to each other. Granted students learn about the historical episodes, such as slavery, in which human cruelty has played a significant role in this nation’s history. However, students learn about slavery from a historical perspective. They memorize a series of dates and the causes surrounding the Civil War, but they do not allow our students to ask if the oppression of Blacks continues today, and if so in what way does this subordination continue?

The social studies TEKS allow teachers to incorporate social justice into their curriculum. In fact, the subject area ideally suited to teaching social justice is government. For example, students in the eighth grade are expected to learn about the impact of landmark Supreme Court Cases on American society. Students must “evaluate the impact of selected landmark Supreme Court decisions including *Dred Scott v. Sandford* on life in the U.S.” (Eighth Grade Social Studies-Government, 19-B). This objective is a gateway for middle school instructors to teach how the highest court in the land has played an important role in the lives of people of color. The key word in this objective is “including.” This word suggests that other court cases can be reviewed. In her study, the author had the students learn about *Gong Lum v. Rice* (275 U.S. 78), [1927] a case involving a child of Chinese descent who was not allowed to attend an all-white school. The Court ruled against her petition to attend the all-white school. The students also read about *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1* (413 U.S. 189), [1973] a case involving African American and Latino students who challenged a school system that practiced racial and ethnic discrimination. To simplify the content for the students, the author downloaded materials written for young people from the Inter Net instead of having them read the actual cases contained in the United States Reports (1928, 1972).

Challenge to Dominant Ideology

By far, this theme was the easiest to weave into the curriculum and the most fun. In general, direct instruction is commonly used to teach middle school students. The teacher’s primary role is to convey knowledge to the students and students answer teacher-directed questions. Having students complete worksheets or assignments provided in the textbooks are the common modes of student assessment.

In an attempt to challenge this dominant practice, the author adopted authentic instruction as the medium used to teach the anti-racist curriculum to the students and authentic assessment (author, 2006). The author taught the students on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while the regular teachers taught the children on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. In order to avoid confusing students regarding content, the author taught students the same concepts they were learning with their regular teachers. For example, if the social studies teacher was having the students study the Civil War, then the author had the students study the Civil War, also. However, the author would employ additional resources besides the textbook to teach the students. Students read articles downloaded from the Inter Net, and were introduced to books presenting different perspectives on the Civil War. Most school districts today use the textbook as the primary tool to teach social studies. The author challenged this common practice by consulting a variety of resources to gain information on the Civil War.

The authentic modes of instruction used to teach the curriculum included: 1) use of the cinema; 2) use of outside resources in addition to textbooks; 3) student empowerment techniques; and 4) the adoption of a student engagement vs. classroom management philosophy. A brief description of each follows.

The cinema is an excellent tool for teaching students about racism, prejudice, and how people stereotype others. The students viewed at least one movie a week. The middle school TEKS that enable teachers to use the cinema as an instructional medium fall under the content areas of English/Language Arts & Reading, and the Fine Arts. The English TEKS, for example, call for students to “evaluate how different media influence and inform” and to “interpret and evaluate the various ways visual image makers such as illustrators, documentary filmmakers, and political cartoonists represent meanings” (Sixth Grade English Language Arts/TEKS, # 23-D). Also, under the Fine Arts TEKS students are expected to “explain the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in American society” (Sixth Grade Fine Arts, #3-B). These objectives give teachers wonderful opportunities to use the cinema in their teaching.

One of the movies that can be used to demonstrate how the media has portrayed people of Mexican descent in a patronizingly manner, is *The Magnificent Seven* (1960). This movie enabled the students in the author’s study to realize that the motion picture industry has played a major role in perpetuating the stereotypes associated with Mexicans and Chicanos. In this movie, the overall theme that the Anglo is the superior ethnic group comes across loud and clear. The Mexicans in the movie are dependent upon the Anglos for their assistance in ridding the village of some Mexican bandits. The most heated discussions occurred after viewing this movie. The youngsters were angry at how the Mexican farmers were portrayed as weak men who believed that they needed Anglo gunfighters to help them instead of standing up to these bandits themselves.

A second movie that was useful in helping the children expand their knowledge of racism was *Glory* (1989). This movie shows how African Americans were regarded as child-like by some whites, but also demonstrates the courage that these young Black soldiers exhibited as they fought the Confederacy. The movie was especially beneficial to the students in that it helped them learn that Blacks have also experienced a history of discrimination.

Use of Outside Resources

In addition to the textbook, teachers who wish to instruct via critical pedagogy need to go beyond this traditional staple of instruction and use other mediums to convey knowledge to students. The author found the use of paperback books, newspapers, the Inter Net, guest speakers, and field trips to be valuable modes of teaching. Students need to be exposed to different perspectives on issues in order to be able to make well-informed decisions.

Under the English/Language Arts & Reading TEKS, students are expected to “identify between a speaker’s opinion and verifiable fact” (Sixth Grade English Lang. Arts/TEKS, #10). Teaching this objective enables students to realize the need for holding public speakers accountable for their comments.

Empowering students in the classroom is helpful in motivating students to work.

Throughout her study, the author gave students opportunities to write about race and ethnicity. Students went to the library or used the Inter Net to acquire information on the topics that were of interest to them. For example, two boys wrote a paper on the racial and ethnic compositions of male and female prisoners in the United States. While they were incarcerated in the county Boot Camp Program, these boys noticed that the majority of the detainees were boys of color. As a result, they wanted to determine if this irregularity existed in adult correctional facilities as well.

A second tool for fostering student empowerment is allowing students to play more active roles in the classroom. Middle school students need to be given responsibilities such as collecting and passing out papers, taking roll, and leading class discussions. Allowing students to lead class discussions on racial and ethnic issues, for example, demonstrates to them that their teachers are willing to relinquish some of their control regarding what and how learning occurs in the classroom. When students realize that they share in the decision-making process, they feel empowered which can make them more willing to participate in learning and less prone to misbehaving in the classroom.

A third tool for empowering students is the use of authentic assessments to assess student progress. Using rubrics in which the criteria for evaluation is clearly stated enables the students to know exactly what they are expected to do (Tombari, 1999). In short, students learn to become responsible for their own learning because they know that doing well is contingent upon their willingness to meet the specified criteria. Students were also given opportunities to assess themselves and their peers using rubrics.

A fourth tool is cooperative learning. This instructional strategy allows students to work in groups to complete work. By assigning students particular roles to play such as time monitor, materials collector, the illustrator, the recorder, and the reporter, students learn to become responsible for completing their tasks in order to help the group. In effect, they learn the importance and value of teamwork (Emmer & Gerwels, 2002). In addition, the positive effects associated with successful teamwork leads to student empowerment because students realize that as individuals they can help the group succeed, and therefore, they come to see value in themselves.

A fifth strategy for fostering student empowerment is the endorsement of the notion that Knowledge is Power (KIP). Students need to realize that knowledge is an important criterion for empowerment. The more we know about a particular problem or situation the more capable we are of rendering well-informed choices or decisions. The author used KIP as a vehicle for helping students understand that speaking and learning in English is not a betrayal of their Mexican heritage, but a way of empowering themselves in this country. Through class discussions, reading,

and a series of guest speakers, most of the students came to the realization that since English is the primary language of parlance spoken in this country, it is prudent for them to learn the language in an attempt to be admitted into good colleges, and finding good employment (author 2006). Although speaking English well is not a guarantee of admittance to a good college or finding a good job, or breaking through the ceiling of discrimination, the students still need to learn this language in an attempt to “even the playing field.”

The final strategy used to empower the students was the adoption of a student engagement vs. classroom management philosophy. Researchers have come to the conclusion that keeping students engaged in learning minimizes their need to misbehave in the classroom (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2004). The author shares this view. Constructivist teaching enables students to build their own knowledge, and thereby helps them to realize that they are capable and responsible for their own learning, which in turn, gives them a sense of empowerment. When teachers do not afford students opportunities to become independent learners, they become dependent upon their instructors. Constructivist teaching allows children to become independent thinkers, which in turn gives them the self-confidence needed to believe that they can make a difference in their classrooms, schools, and in their communities.

Conclusion

Implementing critical pedagogy in a middle school classroom requires teachers to make sincere efforts at rethinking the way they teach in order to provide their students with opportunities to be critical thinkers and to appreciate all forms of diversity. Our children need to be better prepared to work with people from different social and cultural backgrounds because this nation is rapidly becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. Therefore, it behooves us to consider making the American curriculum more accepting of alternate ways to instruct our youth.

Although racism is universal, educators can attempt to dismantle this practice by educating the young people who will be inheriting our world in the future. In order to achieve this goal, we must allow our youngsters to learn about racial and ethnic conflicts and to recognize how racism and prejudice prevent societies from enjoying the benefits of diversity. However, before we can begin teaching our children about racism, school communities consisting of parents, teachers, and administrators, must be willing to commit to designing and implementing anti-racist curricula. Unfortunately, embracing such curricula will create controversy and intense public scrutiny in the social and political arenas. Yet, school communities must be willing to undergo this challenge in order to help children become more tolerant of all forms of diversity.

Designing an anti-racist curriculum in Texas is doable. If educators truly wish to teach via critical pedagogy, then it is up to them to examine their teaching methodologies, and to examine the curriculum that they are currently teaching in their classrooms. Given the political climate that we are in, doing so will not be easy. However, whoever said that teaching is for the faint of heart?

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Dual Language Program: Deal or No Deal?

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Abstract

Our country has an increasing need for bilingual graduates in the workplace. In addition to this, educators in many borderland states are finding a need to have strategies for instructing a continually increasing number of Spanish speaking children. One of the best ways to create full bilinguals is through a model of bilingual education called “Dual Language.” This consists of structured instruction delivered in two languages. In Dual Language programs, both Spanish and English native speakers can attain bilingualism. Teachers need effective strategies recommended by practitioners in Dual Language programs that have produced academically successful bilingual students. This investigation examines and identifies several common practices observed in effective dual language classrooms across four states in a structured format from a triangulated perspective. In order to implement effective dual language programs there must be a commitment to ensuring that certain components of effective programs are included in program implementation. This study highlights these components of effective dual language programs as observed in three U.S. borderland states. Are school districts willing to commit to excellence in second language development- deal or no deal?

Dual language bilingual program development has been prompted by the need to prepare our children to navigate in an increasingly global society (Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan 2000). This enriched model for educating children learning a second language would be beneficial for immigrant children in our borderlands. By providing a certain amount of instruction in each language in an isolated way, English speakers and Spanish speakers both benefit. Speakers of different languages benefit as their peers, teacher and school come to expect and even appreciate differences among students. Students who are minority language speakers are seen as desirable and often actively recruited as educators plan and instruct in dual language programs (Montague 1998). The view of a bilingual child with a locally relevant language shifts from a “compensatory and deficit model” to a “gifted and talented” orientation. Garcia and Jensen (2006) noted that there are three major goals for students in dual language programs:

- 1.To help children to learn English and find success in U. S. schools;
- 2.To help these children become competent in their own language without sacrificing success in school; and
- 3.To promote linguistic and ethnic equity among the children encouraging children to bridge the gaps between cultures and languages.” (p. 32)

In many schools, this means that minority language speakers are now finding validation, excitement and enthusiasm over their presence in classrooms. As a result, their school performance oftentimes increases (Thomas & Collier 1997).

Dual Language bilingual programs operate with the objective of producing communicative and literate children who can negotiate between two languages in their daily interactions (Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan 2000). The Center for Applied Linguistics in 2006 reported that there were 329 dual language programs in 29 states plus the District of Columbia. These are schools involved in this dynamic form of education centered on children, tapping into one of our nations' greatest resources: language difference.

Rationale for the Study

One of the primary goals of bilingual education is for students to learn English (Krashen 1996). According to cognitive research and theory in language acquisition, the best way for minority students to learn English is for them to master their first language first. In this way, they can gain access to the high level of proficiency needed for upper-intermediate and secondary instruction. While second language learners are still learning the language of school instruction, content delivery should ideally be available to them in the native language so that they don't fall behind in the subject areas while learning English. In addition, knowledge is transferred across languages in the brain rather than constructed initially in the weakest language (Krashen and Biber 1988; Krashen 1996; Willig 1985). In other words, concepts such as reading are learned once and transferred across languages at the cognitive level. When provided with quality bilingual education, the conceptual base developed through the medium of a child's first language facilitates later learning in English. This occurs so that children who come to school with a home language background other than English are able to attain similar access to education as their English speaking peers (Krashen 1996; Beykont 1994).

Regardless of delivery model, the cognitive advantages of bilingualism are immeasurable (Grosjean 1982). The validation of one's home culture and language is absolutely essential to learning if we expect our children to move beyond the survival levels of basic needs in school (Maslow 1954). However, the quality of the program being delivered is a definitive tool in facilitating optimal student performance in school.

Dual language programs are committed to providing students with an enriched education program in two languages. Part of the educational requirements of No Child Left Behind is Annual Yearly Progress based on state criterion referenced tests or standardized tests. Many dual language programs are found in schools with low socioeconomic status, those in which 80-95% of the students qualify for free and/or reduced lunch, and those with high percentages of students qualifying as English language learners actually credit the implementation of their dual language programs with helping to achieve Annual Yearly Progress (Kriteman 2006). With the emphasis on high academic achievement in two languages, dual language education acknowledges and encourages the knowledge and skills the students bring to the classroom by building on prior knowledge and experiences. Two-way bilingual programs, or dual language, provide reading instruction in the native language and in English both to English language learners and to English speakers (Calderón and Minaya-Rowe 2003; Howard, Sugarman, and Christian 2003). The programs try to enroll half language minority students and half native English speaking students in each classroom, thus promoting cross cultural awareness (Garcia and Jensen 2006). The instructional strategies used by dual language teachers take advantage of both the majority and

minority language speakers serving as the language models throughout the school day. Students feel empowered and capable of meeting the teacher's high academic expectations (Kriteman 2006).

Definition of Terms

The programs included here demonstrated consistent application of the four features identified by Lindholm (2000) as defining quality Dual Language or "bilingual immersion" programs. These four features include:

- (1) "...Instruction through two languages, where the target language is used for a significant portion of the students' instructional day..."
- (2) "...periods of instruction during which only one language is used..."
- (3) "...native English speakers and native speakers of the target language are participants."
- (4) "...students are integrated for most content..." (p. 13)

As employed in this study, the label of "Dual Language" applies to such programs that provide equity in access to language rather than all bilingual programs (Leslow-Hurley 2000). For the purposes of this discussion, "Dual Language" refers to both the 90/10 and the 50/50 model of bilingual education. Some of the programs studied here include each language for half of time spent in school for each grade level, or a "50/50" model. Others use the "90/10" model. These programs provided instruction through the minority language, Spanish, for 90% of the day for all kindergarteners with English constituting 10% of all kindergarten instruction. In the first grade English was increased to 20% of the day, until an equal time split of 50% for each language is achieved by the third or fourth grade year in the program.

All of the programs described in this study included language minority and language majority students in the program. These programs have been referred to as "two-way" programs in the literature (Freeman 1998; Lindholm 1999; Thomas and Collier, 1997). Both 90/10 and 50/50 models of Dual Language programs as used in a "two-way" format with balanced populations have been compared in previous studies (Christian and Whitcher 1995; Freeman 1998; Lindholm 1987; Torres-Guzmán 2002; Valdés 1997). This study, however, strives to identify and group common practices and strategies used by practitioners, parents and administrators implementing Dual Language instruction in schools where the students have demonstrated academic success through a comparison of test scores. In most cases, state mandated standardized tests were used as a measure of academic success in English across populations with each school site electing different formal and informal methods to measure academic success in Spanish.

Introduction

Seven components from a practitioner's perspective that become critical for success in applied Dual Language programs are used here for the purpose of categorizing the practices observed in this study (Montague 1999). These critical components include the following:

- (1) Definition of the Model
- (2) Gradual Phase-In
- (3) Population to be Served
- (4) Materials
- (5) Training
- (6) Administrative Support
- (7) Elicited Response of the Second Language

Most of the schools in this study addressed these critical components at various levels, through different practices. For the purposes of this discussion, common strategies and practices are grouped according to these seven critical components.

Methods

This study examined dual language programs to identify common teaching practices and strategies in Dual Language classrooms of effective programs. For the purposes of this discussion, a school with a Dual Language program was determined to be effective according to the following criteria:

(1)The school serves a diverse population with a general balance of native language speakers represented in Dual Language classrooms.

(2)Test scores from the school were reviewed. Several states provide a special label that indicates high test-scores on a school-wide basis have been attained. For the schools located in these states, the criteria of “excellent,” or “highly recognized,” had to be met. For states where schools are not labeled in such a manner, another definition signifying high scores school-wide had to be attained.

(3)The last criteria for inclusion here was that the school and district were prepared to cooperate with the nature of the research required for this study.

Through the use of these three criteria, six school districts in four different states were chosen. The states included New Mexico, California, Texas, and Virginia. Three of the four schools were located in borderland states. Though each school district agreed to participate, complete anonymity of the school has been preserved. Triangulation was achieved through collecting data in the following ways. First, surveys were obtained from each teacher whose Dual Language class was included in this study. Second, each school was visited and the researchers had an opportunity to observe teachers at work with children in their classrooms. Lastly, interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, school administrator(s) and in some cases, the district officials who oversaw the programs.

As each classroom was visited and interviews occurred, practices that were common among classrooms began to emerge. Many of these practices have been reflected in previous studies in the professional literature, though some were original to each teacher’s personal style of teaching. Many classroom practices and program characteristics became evident through the interviews and in some of the surveys. Additionally, the surveys served as an anonymous place for teachers to detail their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of their particular program. Data from the classroom observations, interviews, and surveys was compiled using the SPSS data analysis program. Conclusions were drawn based on trends indicated in the data.

Data Collection

Data collection was three-fold for this study. Interview questions addressed program implementation, initiation and success. All teachers at each dual language school site were interviewed. Each participant who was interviewed was encouraged to be candid and respond in detail. Surveys were submitted to participating teachers and collected on site or through the mail after the researchers left the site. All survey responses have been tallied and compared to establish commonalities and differences between groups at each school site. Both researchers observed in about 90% of the classrooms at every school, and made notation of practices observed. Notes from researcher observations and interview notes were analyzed and have been compared and trends noted are included here.

Findings

As stated previously, for purposes of organization and discussion, common practices have been grouped here through comparison with the established critical components of quality Dual Language programs as described by Montague (1999).

Definition of the Model

When all participants define and agree upon the model to be implemented, whether 50/50 or 90/10, the program attains a certain level of endorsement by all and therefore is assured increased opportunity for success. This agreement provides for realistic expectations in addition to facilitating a common standard for all to connect with the program. This is as important for teachers outside of the program as it is for those implementing it. Additionally, parents and other community members need to be invested in the model for the program to achieve long-term success.

Most of the schools in this study established an agreed-upon model that varied from school-to-school. The most common practice seen in this study was for the initiators of the program, whether they were teachers or administrators, to become well read in the current research and share the information with other participants. In some cases, this meant teachers sharing with administrators or vice versa. All schools in this study used various practices to share the information with parents. Some schools invited parents to learn about the program by volunteering in the classes, others held parent classes at the school, one school held community meetings for the purpose of sharing research and other program information with parents. Once administrators were able to support teachers and educate community members, teachers had more time to polish and plan for instruction rather than keeping parents abreast of the research and justifying the program.

The most common practice used by administrators in this area included facilitating teacher training before initiating the program in that particular teacher's class. For the schools that used a gradual phase-in of the program, this was accomplished smoothly. Some schools wrote grants for funding of teacher training, other schools hosted research discussion for teacher-to-teacher training to occur, two schools were fortunate enough to have district training available. For most schools, agreement upon the model to be used was valued by the administrator and then reinforced through hiring practices as well as with school-to-parent relationships. For all of the schools that implemented an agreed-upon model, practices such as regular community meetings, parent inclusion in the program through strategies discussed later in this section, and regular teacher training were common. One administrator also made a consistent effort to raise awareness of the model used at her school with district officials.

Gradual Phase-In

A gradual phasing-in of the program leads to long-term success by preserving a balanced student population in addition to facilitating teacher and administrator success and a growth in parent awareness of the program as it grows each year to include a new grade. Most administrators in this study learned the research and implemented their program with a gradual phase-in. According to interviews with teachers and the parent community, administrators were able to preserve the integrity of the program by implementing a gradual phase-in in spite of sometimes over-enthusiastic parents and teachers. In one case, the school implemented the program across grades prematurely and discussed regret over this decision during the interviews. At the time of our visit, the school faculty was planning to further study the challenges posed by this implementation during the upcoming summer break.

The most common practice seen by all of the administrators interviewed was to keep open communication between teachers and the parent community so that gradual phasing-in of the program could occur and unrealistic expectations did not hamper success of the program.

Population to be Served

Instruction reflecting the population represented is imperative to prevent teacher burn-out and facilitate success for children as various language models are available on a peer basis. Without access to peer language models, unnecessary linguistic responsibility can fall upon the teacher. Over time, this affects the quality of the program (Montague, 1988). For optimal success, each language must be equally represented in each classroom. Children work best when they have access to other children who are native speakers of the target language.

Common to all schools was the practice of developing special features inherent in the overall program to meet the need of the population represented at the school. Working with second language learners in the light of the current accountability climate elicited some creative strategies from educators. For example, tutoring before and after school occurred twice weekly for all students in the program at one school. At many of the schools, strategies from second language methodology such as ESL (English as a Second Language,) TPR (Total Physical Response) and the Natural Approach were used for both populations. What sets these programs apart is that these schools were observed using these strategies with language majority speakers learning a second language instead of the reverse, which is usually seen in bilingual programs meant to benefit language minority students. In effect, this created fully integrated ESL and SFL (Spanish as a Foreign Language) programs within each classroom. This had powerful social effect, as we watched the children operate effectively in heterogeneous groups and in self-selected groups. Native English speakers and native Spanish speakers learned in the early grades of the program the degree to which they needed one another. Rather than separating over difference, we saw children appearing to value the differences between each other. Teachers used various strategies to encourage this mixing, including project work for small groups, cooperative learning, and large group confidence building activities.

Another strategy noted was the explicit instruction of appropriate student response at the upper levels when first language peers criticized the accent of second language learners of the minority language. For example, when a native speaker of one language jeered at a peer attempting to speak that language as her second language, she had a patterned response which he immediately recognized and respected: "We don't make fun of language in this class." Typically, such strategies have been required of language minority students on an individual basis and have been implicit. By making the strategies explicit, this teacher apparently hoped to facilitate language production by both groups.

Materials

Quality materials must be available in each language. If teacher-made texts and other materials are available in one language while the other language represented has professional, company-made materials, this sends a clear message to all participants regarding the value of each language. Both teachers and districts had many strategies to assure a provision of quality materials in both languages. Many of the districts visited were committed to the program and facilitated teacher time to preview, purchase and created equitable classroom materials in each language. In one of the schools, the teachers had come together to establish lists of items needed

for a successful program. Then parents facilitated the purchase of the items through fund-raisers and spent time at the school arranging the materials for common use by the teachers in hands-on room just for science and math instruction. An additional strategy for providing quality literacy materials for each class on a limited basis was observed at a school that housed any material not being used in the central library. The library was divided by language to facilitate easy access by teachers and students. Materials were scheduled thematically by teachers for extended time periods such as four to six weeks.

Training

Teacher training in dual language methodology is preferable before initiating the program. Bilingual teachers untrained in the methodology of second language education and the specifics of Dual Language models are more likely to code-switch, translate and otherwise fail to isolate each of the languages in verbal and written form. Teachers used interesting strategies to attain training. In one case, the teachers brought the idea of the program to the administrator and proceeded to provide research and ideas to facilitate discussion. Once the administrator bought in to the program, the community became involved and teacher training was facilitated at the school level. In another city, there was a district-wide initiation of the program. This facilitated quite a different experience of all involved. One school in this district demonstrated high satisfaction with the program and a clear understanding of the established methodology.

Faculty at another school discussed being overwhelmed by the expectations put onto them before they had been trained and fully understood prescribed methodology. Though it was nice to enjoy administrative support, some of the faculty felt that the program had been initiated on too large of a basis, at the district level, with concurrent teacher training occurring. They talked about the frustration of trying to catch up in their own classrooms. When we visited, these teachers had used strategies of joining together and forming study groups with other teachers to avoid future burn-out in the program. This school was impressive with bilingual instruction and equity in language access, materials, environmental literacy and bilingual peers. The interviews indicated that though teachers' professional learning strategies were working, their success had been hard-earned.

The administrators used interesting strategies to facilitate teacher training, both at the district and at the school level. One district encouraged school administrators as well as Dual Language teachers to attain certification in Bilingual Education. Other school administrators were able to use proficiency requirements when hiring new teachers for the program. This required the administrator to be aware of the research before proceeding too far with the program. Another administrator facilitated regular teacher attendance at professional conferences, such as NABE (National Association of Bilingual Education) and CABE (California Association of Bilingual Education).

Administrative Support

Administrative support is essential for success of the program long-term due to political implications inherent in Dual Language programming. In the schools that participated in this study, the administrative role turned out to be a common base upon which all other program components were laid. Both district and school administrators used a variety of strategies to facilitate a quality program. At the district level, funding for materials and training was provided for many of the schools to purchase materials. Another district developed a department expressly for the

purpose of facilitating programs and applied for Title VII funding, which was then made available for schools to access. This department then became a channel that responded to teachers' needs and procured what teachers requested to improve their programs. This district also provided district level position(s) to support dual language programs. Several districts demonstrated commitment to second language learning and bilingualism. This became apparent through actions such as teacher training, in-service programs, district-produced materials provided for classroom use. One administrator needed the support of the superintendent to improve her program. The superintendent was supportive, for example in accepting and facilitating teacher visas to secure native language speakers and to provide for travel of Native American teachers to visit Spanish speaking countries.

For all of the schools that participated in this study the school administrator demonstrated an impressive commitment to bilingualism for all children and to bilingual education. At another school, the present administrator had come into the position after the initiating administrator retired. The teachers and administration at this school used various strategies to keep faculty new to the program versed in the professional research. One administrator discussed strategies for keeping the school in the district eye with representation at board meetings and other district functions. Most teachers indicated that their administrator used various strategies to make sure that they were included in instructional decision making. These administrators facilitated smooth program implementation with parent support. Several administrators noted that being committed to program staffing was the key to the success of the dual language program.

In addition to hiring and recruiting, administrators with successful programs had to ensure compatibility for planning partners and facilitate sufficient time on a consistent basis for regular teacher planning. Another facet of teacher planning that some administrators and teachers insisted upon was both horizontal and vertical planning. In this way, teachers in third grade, for example, were able to provide instruction consistent with the other third grade classes as well as being better aware of what how to plan for individual children from the second graders that would be coming in for the fall and preparing them for teachers of the next grade in the spring. Administrators that knew the importance of the community's investment in the program facilitated transportation for parent attendance at various school training classes and for volunteering in classrooms. Additionally, both administrators and teachers discussed the importance of the administrators' continual protection of the program. For example, this was evident when one principal made continual efforts to "educate" the district and parents about Dual Language research, and also refused to add new students to the program after the first grade.

Elicited Response in the Second Language

Examination of the role of elicited response of the second language in the program must occur and be agreed upon by all participants. Though each school elicits response in different and creative ways, without eliciting language production from children in their weakest language, oftentimes only language minority children will develop into productive bilinguals while language majority children develop only receptive skills. For educational as well as socio-political reasons, the role of elicited response in the program is often overlooked when planning a new program (Montague, 1999). The issue usually arises after the program is well under way when minority second language learners, Spanish speakers, are producing English but English speakers are not productive bilinguals. Administrators used strategies such as hiring teachers proficient in the language and facilitating team teaching so that as consistent language models, teachers were not required to switch languages. The teachers at one school particularly versed at producing

productive bilinguals had them plan performances and presentations in both languages. Another school had children produce bilingual videos for parents new to the program, welcoming them to the school and informing them about the program.

Additional Commonalities

As patterns emerged in the data, there were additional components that the dual language schools exhibited consistency with other schools in the study. One of main trends found in the schools was that of assuring that there was continuous assessment of language development in both languages was occurring on a continual basis. Additionally, faculties and administrators examined their strategies and program through assessing the program goals and outcomes on a continual basis. In all of the programs, support staff was enthusiastic about the program.

In all schools, thematic instruction and integration of the curriculum was planned and implemented. There was also a good deal of student-centered learning with “hands on” activities evident in the classrooms. There was purposeful integration of culture into the curriculum at these schools. Most of the schools had integration of culture into the social studies. Multicultural projects were displayed in many of the classroom, thus providing for another component of effective dual language programs. Technology was incorporated into the curriculum through hands-on projects that included Internet research. The faculty at these schools promoted a positive classroom climate and children and parents felt welcomed in the school. In all the schools, the teachers were committed to bilingualism and their dual language programs.

Discussion

The strategies presented here have been documented in an effort to identify commonalities among Dual Language classrooms, practitioners and programs in schools educating children in today’s climate of accountability. One school felt the need to withdraw from the public system and become a charter school in order to maintain the integrity of the dual language program in a state with a high stakes testing agenda. Another principal found herself fighting a constant political battle among public school officials outside of her immediate community to protect the program.

Dual language education is providing a solid academic background for all children while also providing a basis for bilingualism so that they will be more economically viable in the global economy of the future. The implications of this study are important and for the future of quality bilingual programs in United States schools. School districts located in U.S. borderland regions would do well to examine dual language education for children. In most countries around the world bilingualism is valued; however, in the United States monolingualism has been prevalent. If the United States is going to continue to be competitive in the global economy, bilingualism promoted through dual language programs will be a positive asset for children and the country.

Possibly the most significant, overall impression that this study provides is the remarkable effort made by each of the administrators and teachers to provide quality dual language instruction, often in the face of continual struggle. The belief that these professionals bring to their craft the benefits of bilingualism for all children was highly impressive at each site. Even teachers and administrators who did not have access to quality teacher training manifested impressively high standards.

The implementation of effective dual language programs demands a commitment to ensuring that the critical components of successful dual language programs addressed in this study are included in discussions among administrators, teachers, parents, and community members as they

prepare to implement dual language programs in a school or district. As school districts look at moving from transitional bilingual programs or English as a second language programs to dual language programs, district administrators must assume responsibility for preparing children for the global society of the future. So, the question is deal or no deal?

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What do Pre-Service Teachers Think About the Recruitment and Retention of Quality Bilingual Teachers in the Classroom?

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Abstract

This study identified important factors that need to be considered concerning the recruitment and retention of teachers certified in bilingual/ESL from the pre-service teacher perspective. The Bilingual Pre-Service Teacher Questionnaire (BPTQ) was developed and administered to seventy-three undergraduate students who were enrolled in courses, which would lead to bilingual certification at a large university in central Texas. Students rated the importance of the following areas: (1) resources and materials for the classroom; (2) compensation/salary; (3) professional development provided by the district; (4) and support from administration, parents, and co-workers. Additionally, students were asked to respond to the following two questions:

(1) Describe when/how you decided to become a teacher/bilingual teacher. (Recruitment)

(2) What challenges do you anticipate facing in your future bilingual classroom? (Retention)

Results indicated that support from administration, parents, and co-workers is most important for retention of bilingual/ESL teachers. The majority of students also acknowledged that it was an influential/inspirational experience working with bilingual/monolingual students that influenced their decision to become a bilingual teacher (recruitment).

Introduction

As the shortages across the nation in the supply of K-12 teachers prepared in bilingual/ESL education grow, (American Association of Employment in Education [AAEE], 2001) the demographic enrollment trend data indicates that English language learners (ELLs) continue to become an increasing proportion of the nation's student population (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2003; US Census, 2000). The need for more highly qualified teachers who are adequately prepared to teach ELLs in our public schools is an urgent problem and is highly recognized by school districts throughout the nation (Darling Hammond, 1997; Diaz-Rico & Smith, 1994). This study identified significant variables, from the pre-service teacher perspective, that will lead to successful recruitment and retention of future teachers in the area of bilingual/ESL education.

Review of Literature

The nation's shortage in the supply of K-12 bilingual/ESL teachers is alarming, and the problem becomes even more complex as the population of ELLs increases every year. According to NCELA (2007), U.S. public schools serve about 5.1 million second language learners. More than four hundred sixty different languages are spoken among our ELL population. Significantly, eighty percent of ELLs are Spanish speakers (Kindler, 2002). All state agencies reported using at least one type of English language instruction program with 40 states using a bilingual program in addition to English as a second language (ESL).

The national shortage of bilingual/ESL teachers is not limited to specific states. AAEE found that the shortages of bilingual/ESL teachers occurred in every region of the United States. These shortages are not limited to specific states. In fact, the most severe shortages have occurred in states that historically have not had large immigrant populations (2001). For example, the research conducted by the Oregon University System (2000) reported that around half of Oregon's school administrators had difficulty in finding bilingual/ESL teachers

Texas, as well as many other states bordering with Mexico, faces a great challenge. The following table depicts that the majority of students attending public schools in Texas are Hispanic.

Texas Student Profile 2007-2008

Ethnicity	African American	Hispanic	Native American	Asian/Pacific Islander	White
Student Count	666,009	2,203,240	16,285	16,285	1,626,638
Percentage of Total	14%	47%	0.3%	0.3%	35%
For a total of 4,671,493 students					

(Source: Public Education Information Management System [2007-2008], TEA 2008)

It is important to note that the total identified number of second language learners in Texas is 775,645. Within this group, 718,919 of these students are Hispanic and speak Spanish as their first language (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2008).

One of the heaviest concentrations of Hispanic ELL's can be found at the US/Mexico border. The following table depicts the number of bilingual certified teachers by Education Service Center (ESC) regions that border with Mexico in comparison with the number of ELLs attending public schools in those regions.

Certified Bilingual/ESL Teacher/ELLs Ratio by ESC Regions at the Mexican Border 2007-2008

Regions	1 Edinburg	20 San Antonio	15 San Angelo	18 Midland Odessa	19 El Paso
Certified Bilingual/ESL Teachers	6,901	1,675	164	164	1,533
Number of ELLs	149,730	40,375	3,767	7,975	4,8757
Bilingual/ESL Teacher/Student ratio	21.70	24.10	22.97	48.63	31.80

(Source: Public Education Information Management System (2007-2008), TEA 2008)

According to the table above, the bilingual/ESL teacher/ELLs ratio in regions 18 and 19 is alarming. In region 18, there is one certified bilingual/ESL teacher for each 48.63 students and in Region 19 there is one teacher for each 31.80 students.

The increasing growth of Hispanic students across the nation, and specifically in Texas, places greater demands on the recruitment and retention of highly qualified bilingual/ESL teachers to address the academic and linguistic needs of this population.

Shortage of Bilingual/ESL Certified Teachers in Texas

Studies have documented that successful recruitment of bilingual/ESL certified teachers has been a persistent problem in school districts throughout Texas (Texas State Board for Educator Certification [SBEC], 2002; AAEE, 2001). The study conducted by Lara-Alecio, Galloway, Irby and Brown (2004) from the Texas A&M University Bilingual/ESL Teacher Retention and Recruitment Coalition revealed 40% of the 843 Texas school districts that participated in the study had bilingual/ESL vacancies in the fall of 2002. Of those teachers assigned to a bilingual/ESL classroom, 40% of school districts reported that less than 10 % of those teachers were fully certified.

In addition, according to the Austin American Statesman (2004), universities are not producing enough educators who can teach elementary students in English and their native language. According to this article, there are a number of factors that contribute to the national shortage of bilingual teachers. These factors include low salaries, high turnover among new teachers and early and routine retirement. According to Gold (1996), the lack of systematic, psychological, and academic support is one of the most important reasons for the shortages of bilingual/ESL teachers. The shortage of bilingual teachers in general constitutes an inconsistency in the student population demographic (National Education Association [NEA], 2002).

Bilingual/ESL Certified Teacher Retention/Recruitment

The retention of teachers who have already been certified in the bilingual/ESL area is addressed by several researches. Nineteen percent of new teachers leave after their first year of teaching because they don't have seriously needed professional support (Texas Center for Educational Research [TCER], 1999). According to Viadero (2002) 29% percent of new teachers leave the education field within their first three years, and by the end of five years, 39 % have

left. The need for retaining bilingual education teachers was examined by Gonzales and Sosa (1993). They emphasized that states and schools need to create support systems to help smooth new teachers' transitions. The school systems have included mentor-type support systems where older and more experienced staff members are teamed with new teachers for one or more years. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) stated that the loss of new teachers played a major role in the teacher shortage problem; however, the efforts to recruit more teachers will not alone solve the diminishing school staffing problem. The study emphasized retaining teachers by increasing support for new teachers from school administrators and improving teachers' working conditions. These research findings suggest that the first year of a teacher's career is critical in teacher retention, and programs that help them succeed should be implemented (TCER, 1999).

Strategies to Recruit/Retain Bilingual/ESL Teachers

Lara–Alecio, Galloway, Irby, and Brown (2004) studied retention and recruitment strategies of bilingual/ESL teachers by school districts in Texas. The study revealed some strategies that superintendents employ to recruit and retain bilingual/ESL teachers. These strategies include: a) prioritizing recruitment, b) providing fringe benefits, c) professional development opportunities, d) formal mentoring/induction programs, e) encouraging paraprofessionals and teachers to obtain degrees/certification, f) assisting financially, and g) collaborating with universities and other educational entities. The study also points out that school districts must develop and implement policies and strategic plans aimed at addressing the need for bilingual/ESL teachers.

Darling-Hammond (1997) identifies the following factors in the retention of bilingual teachers: a) student motivation and discipline, b) recognition and support with the administration, c) salary is a factor though not a prominent one, d) attrition rates particularly in high poverty schools, and e) control over salient elements of working environment that includes: influence over policy, professional prestige, resources available, support from administrators, general work conditions, and opportunities for advancement.

Summary

The number of second language learners across the nation is dramatically increasing in the nation and in Texas (Green, 2006; NCELA, 2003; TEA, 2008; US Census, 2000). At the same time, there is a shortage of highly qualified bilingual/ESL certified teachers nationwide (AAEE, 2001). Thus, there is a strong need to produce and retain certified bilingual/ESL teachers. In the studies mentioned above, researchers agree on several factors that need to be considered in regards to the recruitment and retention of teachers certified in bilingual/ESL. These factors include: working conditions, administrative support, professional development and salary (Darling Hammond, 1997; Gold, 1996; Gonzales & Sosa, 1993; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Mandel, 2006; Lara–Alecio, Galloway, Irby, and Brown, 2004; TCER, 1999). It is also noted in the literature that the first year of teaching is a critical year and strong support and mentorship is recommended (TCER, 1999).

Purpose of the Study

It is evident that there is a strong need to recruit and produce more highly qualified bilingual/ESL teachers. This is especially apparent in Texas where the number of second language learners continues to increase at a very fast pace. There is also a need to find ways to keep the bilingual/ESL teachers already teaching in elementary school classrooms. There is published research in regards to the retention of mainstream teachers and limited published evidence in regards to

the recruitment and retention of bilingual/ESL teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999; 1997; Diaz-Rico and Smith, 1994; Lara–Aleccio, Galloway, Irby, and Brown, 2004). At the time of this publication, published evidence in regards to recruitment and retention of bilingual/ESL teachers from the pre-service teacher perspective was not located.

The purpose of this study was to investigate which factors are most important in recruiting and retaining bilingual teachers from the viewpoint of bilingual pre-service teachers. Therefore, an answer to the following question was sought:

Which of the following factors will lead to bilingual teacher recruitment and retention from the perspective of pre-service teachers that are working toward teacher certification in bilingual/ESL education: (a) resources and materials for the classroom, (b) compensation/salary, (c) professional development provided by the district, and (d) support from administration, parents, and co-workers?

Furthermore, the students were asked to respond to the following two questions which yielded additional qualitative data:

- (1) Describe when/how you decided to become a teacher/bilingual teacher.
(Recruitment)
- (2) What challenges do you anticipate facing in your future bilingual classroom? (Retention)

Methodology

The following section will discuss the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data on the factors that will lead to recruitment and retention of bilingual teachers from the perspective of pre-service teachers that are working toward teacher certification with an emphasis in bilingual/ESL education. This section specifically contains a description of the respondents, instrument, data gathering procedures, and data analysis and results.

Respondents

Seventy-three undergraduate students who identified themselves as future bilingual teachers and were enrolled in courses (Introduction to Bilingual Education and the Psychological Foundations of the Bilingual Child), which would lead to initial bilingual/ESL teacher certification, filled out a questionnaire addressing bilingual/ESL teacher recruitment and retention. The courses that they were enrolled in were in a block format with a field component. Students met for class with course instructors once a week for a three hour time period. On a separate day, students spent approximately 3 hours in an elementary bilingual classroom as interns. During this time, students were expected to observe classroom routines, work with individual students and small groups, develop lesson plans and assist and perform normal teacher duties.

Sixty-seven of the students who responded to the questionnaire were female while only 6 were male. The majority of the respondents were Hispanic. The respondents were informed by the authors/researchers that the questionnaire was critical in identifying factors that helped them to choose bilingual education as a career. The questionnaire would also recognize reasons that would possibly lead them to remain in the classroom as a bilingual teacher for an extended period of time in the future.

All of the respondents were enrolled at Texas State University-San Marcos, a doctoral granting university that is located in the Austin-San Antonio corridor. Presently, there are over 28,132 students enrolled in the university. Thirty percent of the student body comes from ethnic minorities. Texas State is also one of the top 20 producers of Hispanic baccalaureate graduates in the United States (Texas State University [TSU], 2008).

Texas State University began as Southwest Texas State Normal School in 1903. The original mission of the university was to prepare public school teachers. Today, Texas State University-San Marcos is one of the top three university producers of teachers on a yearly basis in the state of Texas (TSU, 2008; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2008).

During the fall of 2007, approximately 4,900 students made up the College of Education. Roughly 2,500 of those students were enrolled in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Of those students, approximately 1,900 were White (76%) and 500 (20%) were Hispanic (TSU, 2008; THECB, 2008).

Procedure and Instrumentation

Initially, the authors and researchers reviewed the literature for all possible information on the topic of recruitment, retention and future bilingual teachers. They found that there is published research in regards to the retention of mainstream teachers and limited published evidence in regards to the recruitment and retention of bilingual/ESL teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999; 1997; Diaz-Rico and Smith, 1994; Lara-Alecio, Galloway, Irby, and Brown, 2004). However, at the time of this publication, published evidence in regards to recruitment and retention of bilingual/ESL teachers from the pre-service teacher perspective was not located.

Based on the lack of research in the field and the experience of the researchers as former bilingual teachers, supervisors, and university professors, the Bilingual Pre-Service Teacher Questionnaire was developed. The first questionnaire was given to 18 elementary bilingual/ESL teachers from a school district located in the Brazos Valley. Minor wording alterations were made to the first questionnaire to make it appropriate for pre-service teachers.

The questionnaire consists of 4 questions in which students were to rate the importance of the following areas on their importance pertaining to recruitment and retention: resources and materials for the classroom, compensation/salary, professional development provided by the district, and support from administration, parents, and co-workers. These four factors were identified as critical to include on the questionnaire as they are commonly cited in the literature concerning teacher recruitment and retention (Darling Hammond, 1997; Gold, 1996; Gonzales & Sosa, 1993; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Mandel, 2006;; Lara-Alecio, Galloway, Irby, and Brown, 2004; TCER, 1999). The questionnaire also asks students to answer the following two questions:

- (1) Describe when/how you decided to become a teacher/bilingual teacher. (Recruitment)
- (2) What challenges do you anticipate facing in your future bilingual classroom? (Retention)

Seventy-three undergraduate students who were enrolled in bilingual education courses (Introduction to Bilingual Education and the Psychological Foundations of the Bilingual Child) filled out the questionnaires in regards to bilingual teacher recruitment and retention. Because the questionnaire was a required assignment for the students enrolled in the bilingual education courses, all respondents completed the questionnaire. Respondents were given the opportunity to turn in their questionnaire anonymously and still receive credit for the activity.

Respondents rated the four areas using a five point Likert scale of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 with 1 and 2 indicating the lowest level of importance and 4 and 5 indicating the highest level of importance (1=not very important and 5=extremely important). Respondent also answered the two additional questions provided which yielded qualitative data.

Analysis and Results

For the purpose of this study, an answer to the following question was sought:

Which of the following factors will lead to recruitment, retention and job satisfaction from the perspective of pre-service teachers that are working toward teacher certification in bilingual/ESL education: (a) resources and materials for the classroom, (b) compensation/salary, (c) professional development provided by the district, and (d) support from administration, parents, and co-workers?

Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each of the four areas. For this portion of the study, recruitment and retention as a bilingual/ESL teacher were identified as the dependent variables. The four factors that were rated by respondents (resources and materials, compensation/salary, professional development, and support) were identified as independent variables.

Table 1 Mean scores by question

Question	Mean	SD
A. Resources and Materials	4.64	0.61
B. Compensation/Salary	3.77	0.98
C. Professional Development	4.49	0.81
D. Support	4.82	0.66

Respondents rated support from administration, parents, and co-workers as the most important factor leading to recruitment and retention with a mean score of 4.64. Respondents rated resources and materials for the bilingual classroom as the second most important factor with a mean score of 4.64. Professional development provided by the school district was rated as the third most important factor leading to recruitment and retention as a bilingual/ESL teacher with a mean score of 4.49. It is important to note that even though the respondents rated professional development third out of four factors, it is still important because the mean score was over 4. This indicates that the respondents still rated it as very important to extremely important.

Finally, the respondents rated compensation/salary as least important. Compensation/salary was the only factor that did not receive a mean score over 4. However, it is important to note, that the mean score was over 3, so the respondents still indicated that it was somewhat important.

Additionally, students were asked to respond to the following two questions:

- (1) Describe when/how you decided to become a teacher/bilingual teacher. (Recruitment)
- (2) What challenges do you anticipate facing in your future bilingual classroom? (Retention)

The qualitative data provided by the pre-service teachers was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) by coding and categorizing the most common themes and strands.

Table 2 Reasons for becoming a bilingual teacher and anticipated challenges in future bilingual classrooms

Reasons	Anticipated challenges
A previous influential/inspirational experience working with bilingual and/or monolingual students	Getting cooperation and support from parents, teachers, and/or students
Having an inspirational teacher when the pre-service teacher was young	Speaking the Spanish language fluently and being able to communicate with parents effectively
Having a relative in the field of teaching	Not being skilled enough to teach bilingual students properly
Some pre-service teachers were English language learners in bilingual programs. They wanted to be able to help students who are in the same position they were in previously	Not having enough or proper resources for bilingual teachers – not having Spanish textbooks and funding within the school to help teach these students

The most common reason mentioned by the pre-service teachers (40% of responses) for becoming a teacher/bilingual teacher was because of a previous influential/inspirational experience working with bilingual and/or monolingual students. This is evident in the following pre-service teacher responses:

Pre-service teacher response: I decided to become a bilingual teacher my junior year in high school. I was an elementary aid with the Headstart program. I was able to see a change in the students as they started learning English.

Pre-service teacher response: I decided to become a bilingual teacher when I worked as a tutor. It was amazing how so many students needed help translating. I like working with students. I was fortunate to know Spanish, so why not help others in need?

Pre-service teacher response: During high school I took an education class that allowed us to go into kinder classes and help the teacher while getting to know the students. This is when I decided to look into education.

The second most common reason mentioned for becoming a bilingual teacher was having an inspirational teacher when the pre-service teacher was young. The following pre-service teacher responses illustrate this reason:

Pre-service teacher response: My fourth grade teacher is the one who inspired me to become a teacher. After the fourth grade, I knew I was going to be a teacher. She was so amazing and touched the entire class with her teaching methods.

Pre-service teacher response: I decided to become a teacher in middle school. I had a very good teacher and she inspired me.

Other reasons mentioned by the pre-service teachers for becoming a teacher/bilingual teacher included having a relative in the teaching field, and wanting to help students who are in the same position they were in previously (pre-service teachers were English language learners in bilingual programs when they were young). Additional pre-service teacher responses pertaining to the aforementioned reasons include:

Pre-service teacher response: I knew I wanted to become a teacher by watching my mom in her classroom. I think there is not better reward in any job than watching and helping children learn and grow.

Pre-service teacher response: I decided to become a bilingual teacher because I would like to help those kids just like me. I was told by some teachers that I would probably not make it to college which inspired me to show them that I can succeed knowing other languages.

The most common challenge anticipated in future bilingual classrooms mentioned by the pre-service teachers (25% of responses) is getting cooperation and support from parents, teachers, and/or students. This is evident in the following pre-service teacher responses:

Pre-service teacher response: I anticipate facing challenges with parents, support from faculty and administrators, and an overwhelming workload.

Pre-service teacher response: I anticipate that cooperation might not be easily received from students and teachers.

Pre-service teacher response: The challenge I feel that I might face is maybe working with a school district that doesn't allow enough freedom for me to teach to my children with their needs in mind. I don't just anticipate it, I fear it.

The second most common challenge anticipated by the pre-service teachers in their future bilingual classrooms is speaking the Spanish language fluently and being able to communicate confidently with their students and the parents. The following pre-service teacher responses illustrate this concern:

Pre-service teacher response: I know my Spanish is not perfect, so until it is better I feel that may be a challenge.

Pre-service teacher response: One challenge is my Spanish level. I plan to work on it as much as I can, but I know I will never be as good as someone whose first language is Spanish.

Other anticipated challenges mentioned by the pre-service teachers included not being skilled enough to teach bilingual students properly and not having enough or proper resources for bilingual students. Additional comments made by the pre-service teachers pertaining to the aforementioned anticipated challenges include:

Pre-service teacher response: I am a bit scared of having a bilingual classroom where all the children are at different levels. I'm scared of not being able to help each one equally.

Pre-service teacher response: I think the materials for a bilingual class have gotten better, but this is where I think a lot of the challenge will be.

Finally, some additional challenges that did not show a significant trend, but were also mentioned by the pre-service teachers included having discipline and classroom management issues, teaching to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and having cultural differences with the parents and students.

Discussion of Results

Through the completion of the BPTQ, seventy-three respondents rated support from administration, parents, and co-workers as the most important feature for recruitment, retention and job satisfaction. This is consistent with the literature (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gold, 1996; Gonzales & Sosa, 1993; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Mandel, 2006; TCER, 1999). It appears that the pre-service teachers show astuteness in their recognition that parents, communities, school administrators and teachers need to support each other and be consistent. This is evident by the following comments made on the questionnaire by some of the pre-service teachers pertaining to support:

Pre-Service Teacher Response: Without support from the extended school community, my job could become very frustrating. Children benefit most when teachers, administrators, parents,

and faculty cooperate well together to help the kids achieve. I will certainly look at this aspect of the districts and schools I hope to work for.

Pre-Service Teacher Response: I believe that children learn best when everyone important in their lives are involved with their academics. If the parents make education an important factor, the children will be motivated to learn. I really hope I have supportive administration and co-workers, because as a team we can work better to help the child.

It is interesting that salary was rated lowest in importance. Again, this is consistent with the literature (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Perhaps, the pre-service teachers are already aware that teachers' salaries are typically low. This is again evident by many of the comments made by the pre-service teachers pertaining to support:

Pre-Service Teacher Response: I chose to be a teacher to help children not for the salary. I believe that it is very rewarding to see the progress in my students.

Pre-Service Teacher Response: I chose to be a teacher to help children not for the salary. I believe that it is very rewarding to see the progress in my students.

The pre-service teachers rated resources and materials second. This shows that the pre-service teachers are aware of the importance of materials that are age and language appropriate when working with English language learners.

Finally, the pre-service teachers rated professional development provided by the school district as third. It appears that the pre-service teachers are aware of the fact that it is important to keep up to date with new research, ideas and methods in order to best serve their bilingual students.

The pre-service teachers were also asked to complete two questions pertaining to recruitment and retention on the BPTQ. When asked for reasons why they decided to become teachers (recruitment), the most common answer given dealt with having a previous influential experience working with bilingual and/or monolingual students. Perhaps, providing more opportunities for students to work with younger English language learners would help in recruiting more individuals to become bilingual teachers. These opportunities may help students to discover a passion for working with children and lead them to choose a career as a bilingual educator.

Other reasons given for becoming a bilingual teacher included having had an inspirational teacher at some point during their education and having a relative in the teaching profession. Another reason given for becoming a bilingual teacher was the fact that several of the pre-service teachers had been in bilingual programs as English language learners when they were younger. They knew what it felt like to be learning English as a second language and wanted to help students who were now in the same situation they had been in years earlier. In terms of recruitment, it may be helpful to identify high school students who were previously second language learners and provide them with information on attending college and becoming bilingual teachers. Again, this may encourage and inform these high school students not only on how to choose teaching as a career, but also what procedures to follow in order to attend college.

When the pre-service teachers were asked to identify challenges that they anticipate having in their future bilingual classrooms (retention), the most common answer given was that they would not get the support and cooperation needed to be successful. This is consistent with the literature (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gold, 1996; Gonzales & Sosa, 1993; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Mandel, 2006; TCER, 1999) as well as with the results of the quantitative portion of the BPTQ. Again, the pre-service teachers show that they recognize the importance of support in order to be successful educators. This indicates the importance of having support systems in place in order to keep these teachers in the classroom for an extended period of time.

Other anticipated challenges that the pre-service teachers identified included speaking the Spanish language fluently, not being skilled enough to teach bilingual children properly, and not having enough or proper resources. This indicates how important it is, as illustrated through the results of the quantitative portion of the BPTQ, that bilingual teachers continuously receive appropriate professional development. These professional development opportunities could include Spanish language courses. Through effective professional development sessions, teachers could keep up with the most current research and methods for successfully teaching English language learners.

Resources should also be provided for bilingual teachers whenever needed. Bilingual teachers work toward helping children to become biliterate. Because the children are learning in two languages, the teachers need as many if not more resources than monolingual English teachers. Many times, materials in Spanish are more expensive or harder to find. Administrators need to take this into consideration when purchasing supplies for classrooms. So, according to the pre-service teachers, it can be concluded that providing effective professional development and appropriate resources for the bilingual classroom will help in retaining bilingual teachers in the classroom where they are so desperately needed.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation of this study concerns the fact that it was conducted with pre-service teachers/respondents who were attending and working toward bilingual/ESL certification at one university. The classroom and field experiences for these respondents would therefore be very similar and may be unlike pre-service teachers in other bilingual education programs at other universities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

At this juncture, it is important to continue to disseminate the questionnaire (BPTQ) to respondents who are enrolled in bilingual/ESL education programs at other universities. As the population of English language learners continues to grow, as much data as possible in this area is needed in order to help administrators and university faculty to develop and implement successful strategies and programs that will lead to the recruitment and retention of highly qualified bilingual/ESL teachers.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this type of study are particularly significant because of the need for highly qualified bilingual/ESL teachers who are adequately prepared to teach the English Language Learners in our public schools (Diaz-Rico & Smith, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). It is of great importance for school administrators to know what factors need to be addressed in order to recruit and retain these bilingual/ESL teachers in the classroom for the benefit of the students and for accountability purposes according to No Child Left Behind legislation which focuses on high standards and increasing academic achievement for all students (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kiefer, & Rivera, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). It is also important for university faculty involved in teacher preparation programs to be aware of this information as they recruit students into their bilingual/ESL programs and as they build relationships with school districts.

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Positive Behavior Supports and Multi-cultural Concerns

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Abstract

This article discusses Positive Behavior Support (PBS) strategies with P-12 students with disabilities who hail from various cultures. The effectiveness of PBS strategies is well documented in the professional literature (Mesibov et. al., 2002; Bondy & Frost, 2001; Tincani, 2004; Nelson et. al., 2004; Torgesen et al., 1997). However, there is a paucity of research documenting effective strategies with students from diverse cultures.

Introduction

Whether rooted in Autism, emotional/behavioral disabilities, or cognitive disabilities behavioral problems among children are increasingly receiving attention among educators and child health practitioners in the 21st century. Positive Behavior Support (PBS) strategies are increasing in use as interventions for children with disabilities who engage in challenging behavior (Safran, 2006). Typically, PBS strategies include supporting children's prosocial and socially competent behaviors while preventing maladaptive behaviors through individualized interventions (Powell, Dunlap, & Fox, 2006). Individualized interventions need to take into account the unique characteristics and contexts of each child, including culture, race and ethnicity, and religion. However, very little is known about the role of multicultural perspectives and issues that may need to be incorporated in successful PBS interventions. In fact, as early as 1996, Forehand and Kotchick stated that, "behavior therapists have traditionally stopped short of culture and ethnicity in their conceptualization of parenting behavior" (p. 189). Koegel, Symon, and Koegel (2002) recommended researchers consider cultural variables in future research. It has been theorized that consideration of cultural variables when developing a behavioral intervention would result in a program with "good contextual fit" (Santarelli, Koegel, Casas, & Koegel, 2001). In response to researchers' suggestions, this article attempts to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the cultural contexts of PBS strategies.

Multicultural Perspectives in Treatment Issues

There is a stated need for research focusing on behavior therapists' interventions based on multicultural foci for the treatment of children with disabilities. In its investigations of educational interventions for children with Autism, the National Research Council (2001) urged for research investigating the role of cultural diversity in the provision of services to children with autism. Multicultural issues have been seen to have a significant impact on the diagnosis and treatment of autism. Past research (Wilder, Dyches, Obiakor, & Algonzzine, 2004) indicated that diagnostic labels play a significant role in diagnostic and treatment decisions for children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Minority families might be reluctant to acknowledge that their child's atypical behaviors might be symptomatic of a cognitive or behavioral disability (Mandell & Novak, 2005).

For instance, among Latino families, the presence of cognitive or behavioral disabilities in a child may be seen by the family as a sign of divine retribution; alternately it might also be perceived as a path to a higher level of spirituality (Skinner, Bailey, Correa, & Rodriguez, 1999). Additionally, some cultures may not have a term for autism and its accompanying behavioral challenges (Wilder et al., 2004). Consequently, the identification of the etiology of problem behaviors is often challenging for families belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds.

Another issue worth mentioning is the fact that the characteristics accompanying cognitive or behavioral disabilities may vary in their significance among families of diverse cultures. Among European American families in the United States (U.S.), cognitive delays and speech difficulties appear to be more salient characteristics in requesting services (Coonrod & Stone, 2004). On the other hand, among minority families, social difficulties might be noticed more promptly. In a case study of Asian Indian American families, Daley (2004) found that social difficulties were more salient and distressing than other accompanying characteristics.

In addition to diagnostic barriers, access to services for families with children who have cognitive and/or behavioral disabilities varies by cultural background. Research conducted in the U.S. indicated disparities in use of services by cultural and ethnic background. Latinos are less likely to access services than European American families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) or African American families (Bailey, Skinner, Rodriguez, Gut, & Correa, 1999), who, in turn, are less likely to access services than European Americans (Wilder et al., 2004). Research with African American families having a child with a cognitive and/or behavioral disability suggests the greater importance of spirituality in coping with cognitive or behavioral disabilities, over mainstream interventions such as the use of professional help (Rogers-Dulan, 1998).

Additionally, minority families may prefer the use of non-mainstream treatments for children with cognitive or behavioral disabilities. For instance, Latino families have been found to be 6 times more likely to use traditional treatments (Levy, Mandell, Merhar, Ittenbach, & Pinto-Martin, 2003). Because of the many-dimensional effects exerted by cultural and ethnic diversity on families' responses to their children with challenging behaviors, the integration of culture with research and behavioral interventions is a key issue (Mandell & Novak, 2005).

Less research exploring this issue has been conducted in Arab nations (E.g. Gaad, 2004). For instance, research conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) explored societal perceptions of children with cognitive and behavioral disabilities in that culture. As in many other countries, the UAE was found to persist in several negative perceptions of children with disabilities (Alghazo, 2005; Gaad, 2004). While these perceptions gradually altered over generations, change in social and cultural beliefs is often nebulous and complicated. In addition, the researchers found that most respondents had negative perceptions of inclusion of children with cognitive and behavioral disabilities into mainstream education. Negative perceptions of inclusion may be related to lowered expectations of students with cognitive and behavioral disabilities for academic and social gains. The effect of society's lowered expectations may lead to poor instruction for the students (Good, 1987). Anecdotal evidence indicates that children with disabilities might be perceived as weaker and more vulnerable in Islamic cultures (R. Almaru, personal communication, March 8, 2006). The limited research available suggests a negative perception of cognitive and behavioral disabilities among Arab Americans, which might have an impact on the diagnosis and access of services among families belonging to these cultures.

Additionally, existing interventions might be rooted in the cultural norm of dependence on the family as opposed to self-determination. It must be noted that research cautions against the

emphasis on independent functioning in intervention strategies among minorities with cognitive or behavioral disabilities, owing to deep-seated cultural values that emphasize connection to and dependence on the family among ethnic minorities. Chamberlain (2005) urges educators to set aside their own cultural value of autonomy in such instances. On the other hand, a focus on self-determination in the context of family interconnectedness might be a far more culturally relevant goal for children with cognitive and behavioral disabilities in Arab American and other ethnic minority families (Powers, 2005).

In addition to Arab cultural values, Islamic religious beliefs also play a crucial role in Arab American parents' educational decisions for their children in general (Merry, 2005), and their possible preferred treatment and intervention strategies in particular. Consequently, a viable PBS intervention model must include not just cultural sensitivity, but also religious awareness to be effective among this population. For example, the use of pictures to serve as functional communication is well documented in the professional literature (Bondy & Frost, 2001; Mesibov et. al., 2002; Tincani, 2004). Because early Islam forbade graphic depictions of humans, this practice could be unacceptable to orthodox Muslims (Hoot et al., 2003). The depictions of human figures contained in photographs have been found to violate proscriptions against idolatry rooted in the ethos of Islamic beliefs. It is imperative that any PBS strategies created for children with behavioral difficulties mirror their linguistic, racial and ethnic and cultural contexts (Bernal & Sáez-Santiago, 2006).

Discussion

A significant contribution of this project is its input to a little- researched aspect of PBS, namely, multicultural and culture- specific interventions. A related issue is the need to acknowledge the wide variety of diversity that exists within cultures. Exploring PBS strategies in the context of such diversity needs to take into account this complexity. Research is sorely needed to advance the use of Positive Behavior Support Strategies within a multi-cultural context.

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“When I grade a paper, I do not look at the name. I grade the paper for content”: Teacher Perceptions of Students at a Hispanic Serving Institution

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Abstract

In spring 2005, at a South Texas four-year university designated an HSI, the researchers hosted focus groups of first-year writing teachers to determine if faculty perceptions fit with findings from a survey that was previously administered to university students to determine literate and language practices. In examining the rhetoric of the participant comments, researchers determined that although faculty members strive to understand the cultural backgrounds and needs of their students, Victor Villanueva's concept of “color blindness” may be at play in terms of what faculty are attempting to do and what their language illustrates about their perceptions of students. Focus group discussions revealed how teachers struggle with stereotypical views of students and more informed and complex understandings of students, and between “standards” and being attentive to needs and backgrounds of students. Racial and ethnic differences were intertwined with issues of class, familial educational background, scholastic preparation, and regional difference. Based on the findings, suggestions for teacher preparation were made.

As the Hispanic population continues to grow and as institutions of higher education seek to find ways to retain Hispanic students and provide opportunities for success for these students, how should we change our perspectives regarding this “group” and the practices that we participate in to determine and/or learn/acquire beliefs about students in this group? As part of a larger project in which surveys were administered to determine the language and literate practices of Hispanic students our south Texas, four-year Hispanic-Serving Institution, focus groups were conducted to determine if the descriptors revealed in the survey matched the beliefs and resulting practices of instructors of first year English courses in the First Year Writing Program at that same institution.

The survey, conducted with 481 first year students revealed that most of the Hispanic students who participated in the study were monolingual English speakers, and even those students who were bilingual or spoke some Spanish did not predominantly use Spanish when participating in literate practices (Araiza, Cardenas, & Loudermilk Garza, 2007). The survey also revealed that the characteristics of the Hispanic student “group” were very similar to the White student group, with economic levels being better indicators of shared characteristics than cultural group identity.

As Victor Villanueva (2006) explains in “The Rhetorics of the New Racism or The Master’s Four Tropes,” while “we are ideologically affected. . . . our assumptions about how the world works are influenced by—might even be created by—the language we receive and use. Large things, World views,” we are “also affected by the language we don’t use.” And, pointing to Burke’s work, Villanueva reminds us that “we are affected often not consciously.” So, our survey showed us one thing, and we wondered what the language, the world views that affect these instructors would mean in regard to their beliefs and practices toward Hispanic students in their classrooms.

In “Centering in the Borderlands: Lessons from Hispanic Student Writers,” Beatrice Mendez Newman (2003) writes that for many Hispanic students

“Literacy in English develops in school settings and is not reinforced in homes where grandparents, parents, and other relatives and family friends speak some version of border Spanish; where books, newspapers, and other reading materials are rare; and where family comes above everything else—including school attendance and school work” (p. 46).

These Hispanic scripts that Mendez Newman talks about such as the importance of family and oral literacy are the beliefs that many instructors operate under when it comes to teaching practices at Hispanic Serving Institutions.

In “Becoming a Border Pedagogy Educator: Rooting Practice in Paradox,” Elizabeth Garza (2007) advocates for certain critical pedagogical practices to help Hispanic students achieve academic success. She writes, “Incorporating Border Pedagogy conversations into my courses opened the door of possibility. My students frequently made spontaneous connections and applications between their Border Pedagogy experiences and their instructional practice” (Garza, 2007, p. 6). This practice of Border Pedagogy reinforces the belief that when teaching Hispanic students, teachers must adapt to the students’ needs to help them understand academic discourse. Similarly, Dora Ramirez-Dhoore and Rebecca Jones talk about incorporating a “Proper Pedagogy” in the classroom when teaching Hispanic students. In “Discovering A ‘Proper Pedagogy’: The Geography of Writing at the University of Texas-Pan American,” Ramirez-Dhoore and Jones (2007) argue that a “proper pedagogy” will help Hispanic students obtain that academic tools they need to survive in the academia (p. 64). Both authors discuss their experiences in the classroom and illustrate how their students struggle to understand academic discourse due to the fact that English is not their native language.

In contrast, Araiza, Cardenas, and Loudermilk Garza (2007) present a portrait of different Hispanic students when they studied first year students at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. In “Literate Practices/Language Practices: What Do We Really Know about Our Students?”, they presented the results of a study to identify how Hispanic students engage in literate practices in English, Spanish, and/or code-switching. The results of the survey revealed that many of the Hispanic students’ first language was English rather than Spanish, and that they used English when participating in most literate practices, especially those requiring reading or writing. In essence, this study contradicted the assumption that all Hispanic Serving Institutions must operate under an English Language Learners paradigm when teaching Hispanic students.

In this article we will build on this research that illustrates the need to examine our pedagogies and perspectives regarding Hispanic students. We present information gathered through focus groups that are part of the larger research project to examine literate and language practices, and discuss the implications of this information as it relates to teacher preparation.

First Year Writing Program

The institution studied is a regional, masters and doctoral-granting Hispanic Serving Institution that focuses on “students of high potential, especially those from groups who have been historically under-represented in Texas higher education” (Institutional Mission, 2008). It enrolls 37% Hispanic/Latino undergraduate students, most of whom are from Texas and whose first language (and for many only language) is English.

The First Year Writing Program offers two semesters of composition to the approximately 800 (out of approximately 1200) first year students who do not enter the university with prior credit for that course. These composition courses focus on argument, research, and academic writing. The majority of composition courses are linked in learning communities to a seminar course (an immersion in active learning) and one or two large lecture core courses. Students who have not passed the entrance exam (THEA) are mainstreamed into composition and are required to visit the writing center in their first semester. Assuming they pass their writing course and visit the center, most developmental writers “exit” this program at the end of the fall semester.

The students in this program are usually from the local region, many are Hispanic, many are first generation, and many work. Our students struggle with demands on their time from work and family, in addition to school.

Methods

The three semi-structured focus group sessions were conducted during the spring of 2005. The purpose of the focus group sessions was to explore the knowledge and perceptions instructors had regarding Hispanic students and Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Participants were faculty and instructors who were teaching composition 1302 courses during the spring of 2005. Participants included three members of the English department who were tenure-track specialists in writing. In addition, eight graduate student teachers in the masters' program that focuses on rhetoric and composition participated, so all had some knowledge of current theories of teaching writing. Of the eleven participants, nine were women, three of whom were Hispanic. Of the two men, one was Hispanic. Seven of the eleven were White. No compensation was offered for participation in the focus group study. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality, per the consent forms and paperwork submitted to the IRB.

Transcription and Coding

Audio recordings were transcribed in such a way to record turns but not interruptions, pauses, back channeling, or other phatic communication. Each researcher evaluated each session and categorized each turn. Initially, the researchers independently identified common themes from the transcriptions. Subsequently, the research team shared findings and derived a list of the common themes. The findings are presented below.

Findings

Dominant Themes: Students as Individuals and Being Sensitive to Backgrounds

The most prevalent themes emerging out of the focus groups relate to what participants were attempting to do in the classroom. Their comments could be organized into two dominant themes—statements articulating an emphasis on treating/dealing with students at the individual level and statements suggesting an attempt to be sensitive to the backgrounds/needs of the students.

Five of the eleven participants spoke directly about the student as an individual. Sarah says, “Remember to look at your students as individuals rather than as a homogenous group. As an undergraduate in Del Rio, there is a gap in education. I remember that a professor had a hard time helping students because of the gap in the education and knowledge. I believe that the answer to that is having a lot of one-to-one time with students. Keeping things toward individuals” (FG 2, 118). Similarly, Maria states, “I do look at where they come from and try to be sensitive to their needs. When I look at their portfolios, I try to assess them individually” (FG 1, 63).

These and similar comments espoused embodied a meritocratic ideology. Students’ work should be evaluated. Feedback and judgments should be based on the current skill set and work product of each individual. Participants’ comments revealed the idea that stereotypes and pre-conceived notions should not color how instructors evaluate and assist students with their work.

Though there was a strong emphasis on the individual student and what he/she brought into the classroom, participants of the focus groups also expressed a desire to be sensitive to the students’ backgrounds. During a part of the interview that addressed how participants prepared for teaching first-year English classes, Ivy comments, “Going back to what Maria said about respect, [one should try] to get an understanding about their background on the first day. Most of the students that did work were Hispanic and a lot of those students spend a lot of time [coming to see me] during office hours” (FG 1, 41). Stacy continues with the theme saying, “I’m sensitive [to] where they are coming from. I understand that some of these topics are difficult for them...” (FG 1, 52) to which Ivy adds, “I try very hard to find material to make it relevant to their needs” (FG 1, 53). When one participant comments, “The way my courses are set up, it can encompass all the needs of the students. I did not exactly cater to one culture” (FG 3, 183), Harper comments, “I think cultural sensitivity is important not only to faculty but to students as well... I think it is important to address this issue” (FG 3, 184).

To tend to students’ needs, instructors try to be considerate of students’ backgrounds and personal circumstances. This consideration for some participants implied a need to take into consideration the students’ cultural background. And, this consideration, for at least one focus group participant, takes place quickly—“on the first day.” Though participants want to access students individually, the goal to connect what students are learning to “what they need” still requires sensitivity to what students are bringing with them to the classroom. When one participant tries to negate the role of culture in the organization of the instruction, another participant re-asserts culture’s importance which leads to the question of how race/ethnicity/culture is discussed by the participants.

Perceptions about Race/Ethnicity

Nearly all of the participants of the focus groups addressed the issue of race/ethnicity, and their statements can be organized into three schools of thought—those (a total of three participants) whose comments articulated/alluded to differences between Whites and Hispanics, those (a total of four) who de-emphasized race/ethnicity by suggesting other characteristics were more salient, and those (a total of three) whose comments (in) directly reflected both types of beliefs.

Several spoke about experiences with or observations of Hispanics that implied or expressed a difference between Hispanic and White behaviors/values. The importance of the role of family for Hispanics was a dominant theme for those who seemed to notice differences. The importance of family for Hispanics manifested itself in the classroom for Erica; she noted, “...In the Hispanic culture, they use the family as a form of evidence [for support of their arguments in their composition

papers] and that is something I had to get used to” (FG 3, 187). Others’ comments suggest unique intersections of race and gender in Hispanics’ experiences. Erica offered, “I notice a large portion of Hispanic women. I found out that men want to stay and make money and women go to school” to which Jose (who comes from a predominantly Hispanic community) adds, “Most of the men that I know from back home—I heard a lot go to different functions such as the Army and etcetera” (FG 3, 223-4).

While the observations of some suggested the existence of White-Hispanic differences, others made direct and indirect statements that de-emphasize the racial difference. On the one hand, some comments suggested the participants believed that Whites and Hispanics are similar. Stacy asserts, “I don’t see that many differences between my students,” while shortly thereafter, Maria says, “I feel that most Hispanics don’t embrace their culture. Many of the Hispanics here do not know how to speak Spanish. I feel that there is no difference here between Hispanics and Whites” (FG 1, 71 and 74). Echoing a similar theme, Kraver notes, “...This community does not speak Spanish... I feel that it is a pressure to assimilate” (FG 3, 174). On the other hand, there are participants that suggest that characteristics other than the race/ethnicity of students play a greater role in students’ experiences. For example, Shannon notes that international students’ command of the written language is probably better than those of the area the university is serving (FG 3, 212). Shannon’s comments suggest that as a region the student population is similar, especially when one compares local students’ skills with international students.

Comments by several participants either addressed or alluded to both Hispanic-White differences as well as their similarities. For example, Jones recalls, “When we talk about our students being first generation it is very important. There is nobody to coach them or support these students... There was one experience when a young Hispanic female who wanted to come to college here and her father did not understand why she wanted to go” (FG 2, 97). Here Jones’s evokes both themes simultaneously. On the one hand her comments allude to the shared experiences of students who do not have parents/family members that can help them so (students) negotiate college life, while at the same time she evokes a popularly-held view that Hispanics tend to emphasize family over education. Similarly, Sarah noted, “My daughter’s Hispanic friend from high school had a scholarship but passed it up because her family wanted her to get married and have kids...” (FG 2, 98), and later she added, “I run into more quiet Hispanic females than Anglo females. In this atmosphere [Hispanic females] are not used to it. If they don’t have to talk, they won’t” (FG 2, 104). Though Sarah’s comments suggest White-Hispanic differences, she also discusses their similarities. While talking about first-generation students, Sarah noted, “... whether you are Anglo or Hispanic, they are going to have some problems because of the way the educational system is set up” (Focus group 2, 101) Later, while discussing the level of development and comfort with material, Sarah contributes, “More serious students stick together and less serious students hang out together (Focus group 2, 131).

While there were several participants who emphasized the similarity between whites and Hispanics, the remaining participants either directly or indirectly noted the differences. Many of their comments evoke stereotypes about Hispanics that are dominant in public discourse. Present in the participants’ comments is the image of the quiet, submissive Hispanic female as well as Hispanics having a culture that de-emphasizes education. Hispanics, particularly Hispanic men, valued work and family over education, and Hispanic values conflicted with continuing one’s education. There is a strong cultural deficiency tone in the observations participants made about Hispanics and their families. One might infer, then, that the reason for the gaps in educational attainment between

Whites and Hispanics has much to do with the differences in their culture. Even for one participant who did not see the role of ethnic cultural background, the participant still saw students coming from the local area as having less training and preparation than students from elsewhere.

Some of the participants also emphasized the role of external factors shaping educational opportunities. First-generation status was seen as a significant challenge to student success; those who noted the challenges of being a first-generation student were first-generation students themselves. Thus, their own experiences could have possibly made them attentive to that issue. Moreover, the role of generational status (being of the generation Y as opposed to the Baby Boom generation) and technological change were seen as impacting the skills and needs of the students. These characteristics, again, allude to the participants' own experience. Potentially, the salient characteristics identified by the participants are important issues shaping the participants' own experience, thereby heightening their sensitivity to those issues.

Perceptions about Working at a Hispanic Serving Institution

Whether or not participants believed racial/ethnic differences existed, most espoused the need to get to know the students and be, at least, attentive of their backgrounds. It was apparent that knowing the context from which students were coming was important for the participants. Ironically, not all the participants seemed to be as versed about the institutional context in which students would be learning.

When asked about Hispanic Serving Institutions—what they were and the populations they serve, many participant comments demonstrated a lack of familiarity with either the role of Hispanic Serving Institutions or the diversity of the population such institutions can serve; only one participant actually offered a definition for a Hispanic Serving Institution. Stacy stated, “I never really thought about what that means. I just felt that it is an institution that helps Hispanics or local [universities] that serve Hispanics.” (FG 1, 81). Sarah commented, “I did not know it [TAMU-CC] was designated as a HSI. I [expected it] to have more of a Hispanic population. I am surprised how different it is from Del Rio being a border town; Corpus is not exactly a border town” (FG 2, 84). Others seemed struck that their Hispanic students did not speak Spanish. Harper comments, “The population here I noticed that many of the Latino students do not speak Spanish” to which Kraver added, “In my classes, too. I noticed some of the Hispanic students cannot speak it at all...” (FG 3, 164-165).

Participants' comments still imply the use of stereotypes. Participants' comments showed that they held pre-conceived notions about Hispanic Serving Institutions and the student population being served. Participants noticed that students didn't speak Spanish, that there was a substantial non-Hispanic population at this Hispanics Serving Institution. The image of a homogeneous Hispanic population persists.

The term “Hispanic Serving Institution” is one which, if not informed about what constitutes a Hispanic Serving Institution, embodies an advocacy tone—this institution serves Hispanics. That tone appears to be dilemma for some. Jose stated, “I always felt uncomfortable with the term Hispanic Serving Institution because what about Asians, African Americans, and etc. Why not call it a different name?” (FG 3, 169). Jose is very much interested in seeing his students succeed, but his goal is universalistic not particularistic—everyone's individual strengths and situations should be considered. While talking about being sensitive to students needs and backgrounds, Maria says, “[Accessing students at the individual level] is difficult to do; however, I believe there should be a standard” to which Ivy replies, “I think there has to be a standard. To a certain extent I think that it is hard to put a standard on a student based on the way I was a student.” When asked if she then

modifies standards to accommodate different backgrounds, Ivy replies, “There is a standard in my classroom. The students know what an A paper, B paper, and etc is. The students understand the requirement... When I grade a paper, I do not look at the name. I grade the paper for content” (FG 1, lines 63-65).

These comments suggest that the participants wanted to be clear that though they were trying to focus on individuals and trying to be sensitive to students’ backgrounds, there was a uniformity in expectations about the work students produce. The participants’ comments return to the invocation of the meritocratic theme discussed much earlier. Participants made clear that they were not extending special treatment to one group of students over the other. Being sensitive to needs and backgrounds was not to be equated with lowering expectations or standards. This is worth noting because the participants emphasis on this suggests that there is a concern that being sensitive to background and culture is synonymous with lowering standards.

Conclusions

Participants’ comments are laden with contradictions. On the one hand, there is the desire to be attentive to individual students, yet when participants discussed Hispanic students and Hispanic Serving Institutions, stereotypes and “common knowledge” about Hispanics were often mentioned. Equally worth noting is that when discussing being attentive to students’ needs and background, some felt compelled to affirm that they did have standards regarding work products.

Though the participants emphasized the desire to focus on the needs and background situations of the participants, participants’ comments still reflected stereotypes and themes prevalent in public discourse about Hispanics. Present in the conversations were images of the docile Hispanic female, the Hispanic culture emphasizing family and work over education, and the Hispanic student as a Spanish speaker. All of these images collectively reflect the perception of the Hispanic student as a member of an at-risk population. The prevalence of those comments speaks to the prevalence of the stereotypes of Hispanic students.

These stereotypes, because they reflect national trends or media biases, run counter to what was found previously in our survey of students. This survey demonstrated that Hispanic and White students’ background experiences were not substantially different. The mothers of first year students (either White or Hispanic) had similar educational backgrounds with more than half having less than a college degree. First-year students regardless of race/ethnicity had similar educational experience. Most first-year students, regardless of race/ethnicity were monolingual English. The dominant theme that arose focused on individualism and working with each student, regardless of his or her preparation or race/ethnicity, while admirable, does also reinforce Victor Villanueva’s (2006) work on colorblindness. “The ultimate reduction, as far as I can see, is individualism. If everything is reduced to individual will, work, and responsibility, there’s no need to consider group exclusion” (5). Thus, one of the teacher’s claims the objectivity of individualism when claiming, “When I grade a paper, I do not look at the name. I grade the paper for content” (FG 1, lines 63-65). Don’t all writing teachers struggle with the concept of objectivity in grading? Are teachers able to work with each student without bias or presupposition? Does the information we gain about each student help teachers teach writing, or does it help us deny a pervasive cultural racism to which we are blind?

How do our perceptions of race and ethnicity fit into our cultural and institutional place? The issue of working at a Hispanic Serving institution is a unique one. It seems to be strikingly different than working at a Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs). When people talk about

HBCUs—like Spellman, Morehouse, Prairieview, Howard, Clark—students and faculty know where they are going; they know the history of the institutions. Faculty and students don't seem to have that at HSIs, in part because the title is a government definition, imposed based on percent of student population and not the mission or goals of the institution. A cynic would say that the HSI brand is a means to Title V funding.

It's also worth noting that our participants were emphasizing the idea of standards and meeting the needs of all types of people—as though, somehow, being at an HSI or thinking about race/ethnicity somehow also connotes preferential treatment and/or a loosening of standards. As Villanueva (2006) claims, “the sanctity of individualism within a meritocracy—a color-blind system—was maintained,” or is maintained, if all students are measured by the same standard (14). An HSI is a “respectable” university if its standards are maintained; it can be a vehicle for access of “minority” and “underserved populations,” in our case, primarily Mexican and Mexican-American students, if in doing so the “quality” of performance and learning is not sacrificed.

The disconnect between what the initial survey showed and what we see happening in the focus groups reinforces recent scholarship that calls for different perspectives in how we perceive, teach and interact with diverse populations. Leonardo “argues for a progressive politics of identity” that “must first address the notion that identity is a matter of difference between groups” (25). So, if we are looking for difference, we will find it whether it is there or not. “We cannot discover who we are separately from our common struggle with, against, and beyond each other, for in such a struggle one recognizes that there exists no boundaries separating ourselves from others other than those that we, ourselves, have constructed” (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2000, p. 23).

Teacher Preparation

In spite of having read several articles in the composition theory and practicum courses regarding the inherent racism of the composition course (Horner & Trimbur), discourse communities (Gee, Anzaldua) and teaching minority students (Delpit), teachers in these focus groups still expressed beliefs about students tainted by common stereotypes from public discourse. Regarding the status of the institution as an HSI, only some of the tenure track faculty had a clear vision of the definition of the HSI, and even that does not clearly provide a mission or role of the institution within its community, or even with regard to Hispanic students. These findings imply for our context that teachers need better and more accurate information about our students and the purpose and role of the HSI.

Certainly, as numbers of Hispanic college students increase across the country, there needs to be more specific and accurate information given to teachers. In addition, we agree with Villanueva that teachers (people) need to be aware of our biases and struggle with them, rather than simply accept a frame of individual merit and colorblindness as an ideal.

Administrators and those with influence should initiate critical discussions about race and ethnicity. It has been demonstrated that non-white students benefit where campus culture is more inclusive (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Programs that embrace discussions of race can help encourage appreciation for difference rather than erasure. In writing programs, certainly, graduate teachers could read *Teaching Writing with Latino/a Students* or *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial Studies*

Certainly, hiring Hispanic faculty and recruiting Hispanic graduate students is something we can do to make the “face” of the institution more familiar and provide a voice for the concerns of this growing population in our policies and activities.

Internal research and communication of findings to faculty, staff, and administrators can help the people at our institutions in general understand who our students are and what are their situations, based on facts rather than media presentations or stereotypes.

As our nation faces an election that is historic in racial terms, a shift in the demographics of our population in terms of race, and increasing economic pressure, it is a time when attitudes and policies will shift. We hope that universities can be in the forefront of change. In order to change attitudes we cannot be afraid to confront racism and racial identity in our classrooms and in ourselves.

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Working with Diverse Students with Special Needs in Border and Rural Areas

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Abstract

In working in border and rural areas it is crucial that we understand the issues and constructs that culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs face. It is in acknowledging these constructs that we can assist school personnel in increasing academic achievement and close the achievement gap. The following is a discussion on the issues to consider in working with this promising population.

The implementation of No Child Left Behind legislation (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002) and the concept of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) has proven difficult for two populations found in border and rural areas: English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education. Too often, students fall into both categories of ELL and students receiving special education services and are often looked upon by school districts as not making AYP (Johnson & Strange, 2005). Thus, the question may lead school personnel to ask, where do we begin to address these particular school populations.

The literature has documented that culture does impact assessment, intervention, instruction, and parent participation within the school setting (Hammam, 2004; López, 2003; Suzuki, Meller & Ponterotto, 1996; Suzuki, Ponterotto & Meller, 2001). Yet a phenomena that is not novel and/or unique for children who are culturally diverse, is functioning and living within three or more cultures or languages (i.e., López, Salas, & Menchaca-López, 2004). However, when the child who comes from a border and/or rural community enters a school setting, not only is there an added way of life calculated into the formula, as mentioned above, the chances are greater that the student will not make AYP (Johnson & Strange, 2005), perhaps due to limited experiences in our public school culture. The following discusses important issues that school personnel must consider, recognize and address for students to succeed under the current federal mandates.

The Issues

Once the culturally and linguistically diverse child has been appropriately identified within the border and/or rural school setting as a student being an ELL and/or a having a disability requiring special education (i.e., Padilla, 2001), these particular students are now functioning within two additional distinct cultures; the school culture and the culture of special education (López & Menchaca-López, 2004). This is beyond the traditional two dimensional conceptualization regarding acculturation, dominant/new culture and the native culture (i.e., Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; López, et al., 2004; Mathiason, 1968). Furthermore, there is a paradigm shift that exists from the conventional perspective of culture, which strictly focuses on the visible aspect of ethnicity and/or race (López & Menchaca-López; Menchaca-López & López, 2007). Thus, the process of acculturation becomes complicated as not only are students needing to acculturate to the dominant culture (at both the individual, societal/community and school levels), possibly enculturating to the

native ethnic culture, students are now also acculturating to the special education culture depending upon the extent through which they are receiving services. The range of special education services can vary depending on the student meeting the criteria to qualify for a disability and the services that are determined by certified bilingual personnel and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) Committee which resulted from evaluation recommendations (i.e., Salvia, Ysseldyke & Bolt, 2007). Services fall under a continuum that meet the Individual's with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) principle of a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (i.e., López & Menchaca-López; Turnbull, Turnbull & Wehmeyer, 2007).

This acculturative process experienced by students with special needs living in border and rural areas could be accompanied by the phenomena known as conflict, more commonly identified as acculturative stress (López, 2003; Padilla, 1986). The student may be struggling with which ethnic/cultural traits to maintain, which ethnic and "cultural" traits to adopt and which to reject. This may be compounded with pressures from home and school as to which traditions, values, beliefs and even language to utilize (Salas, López & Menchaca-López, 2005). Some common affective responses to the "conflict" include: anger, depression, bullying, anxiety and withdrawal (López, 2003; Menchaca-López & López, 2007). These responses could impede the academic success of these students and could mimic emotional disturbance and possible misdiagnosis of the true needs of the student leading to possible dropping out or skipping school (López, Salas, Arroyos-Jurado, & Chinn, 2004; Menchaca-López & López; Padilla, 2001; Salas, et.al.).

Addressing the Issues

This stress must be considered not only during the nondiscriminatory assessment (López, Flores, Manson-Montoya, Martinez, Meraz, & Romero, 2001) in the school setting, but also throughout the curriculum and the intervention process, such that the student's feelings and thoughts are validated and appropriate steps are taken to provide support for the student and their families. Interventions, parental involvement and professional development for school personnel for these cultural issues that are possibly impacting students and families are essential (American Psychological Association, 2002; López, 2004a). The interventions and professional development need to include and are not limited to the development of support groups for students and parents as well as individual and group counseling in more severe instances. As discussed by López (2003), normalizing the acculturation process for the student and the family can assist in understanding what is happening psychologically as well as in the interpersonal relationships, impacted by expectations from the various environments and associates (parents, teachers, etc.). Support groups can serve as "safe" forums through which students/parents learn about the construct of acculturation, the phases and models associated with acculturation, as well as behaviors and feelings associated with acculturative stress. Students and parents can dialogue and possibly identify the acculturation level and type that they are currently functioning within to help them understand why they may feel, behave and believe in a certain manner, which may be different from their peers, siblings and family members. Another positive outlet that has been suggested to assist with the acculturative process is participation in native musical or artistic groups (i.e., López, 2004b). This is important for students with disabilities and their families, as they are truly functioning within multi-cultural, multi-social and multi-lingual settings.

In addition to the cultural and communication issues arising, the student's learning style (Ormrod, 2004) will need to be identified and utilized to enhance potential and to see what other modes of learning could be developed to teach students "how" to learn academically in the school

culture (i.e., Chinn, Eleweke, & López, 2007). This is essential in that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students may learn differently than mainstreamed students. Further, it is essential to process how the cultural and linguistic information will serve to be implemented in the intervention so as to not only validate the various cultural traits and values but also to build on the strengths that are possessed in each culture which will assist in the student becoming successful.

Conclusions

Living in border and rural areas allows for great opportunities in working with students with special needs and their families that may be functioning within multiple cultural realms. It is in recognizing and working within these cultural arenas that students must function within, that allows for appropriate understanding not only of assessment information (Padilla, 2001), but ultimately success in the classroom. Border and rural districts should consider these constructs and issues to assist in academic achievement.

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Effective Instruction in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study analyzes the perceptions of 100 students regarding effective instruction in higher education. Participants in the study were upper classmen who have maintained a 2.5 grade point average and represent varying colleges across Texas A&M University-Kingsville. TAMU-K is a South Texas state university of about 6000 students, located 160 miles southeast of San Antonio. The city of Kingsville has an ethnically and culturally diverse population of approximately 26,000.

A survey posed questions in a forced-choice format and was designed to facilitate student reflection on how they best learn. The survey analyzes the importance of both professor enthusiasm and student interest. Also included are varied methodology items, including the lecture format and group formats.

Interesting Findings:

1. Professor enthusiasm was deemed more important than anything, even student interest in the subject. The attitude of the professor made the difference, regardless of the type of instruction or assessment.
2. Students de-emphasized the importance of the traditional lecture format that permeates the higher education classroom.
3. Students indicated that well-planned, interesting instructional activities will promote learning despite the level of student interest in the subject.
4. Students emphasized the need for multiple methods of instruction, using a variety of instructional materials with corresponding assessment techniques.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to analyze the perceptions of 100 university students regarding effective instruction in higher education. The following discussion revolves around implications for practicing educators. Specifically, how can educators best meet the needs of university students in today's diverse society?

Literature Review

What does the literature say about effective instruction in higher education? What are the constructs that define an effective teacher? Although specific answers to these questions remain controversial, it has been recognized that teaching effectiveness includes multiple perspectives (Abrami, d'Apollonia, & Rosenfield, 1997; Marsh & Dunkin, 1997). One construct is methodology.

However, studies about effective methodology often reach different conclusions due to reviewer bias (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997). Marsh (1987) identified nine consistent factors on Students Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ):

learning/value, enthusiasm, organization, breadth of coverage, group interaction, individual rapport, examinations/grading, assignment, and workload difficulty.

Studies suggest that exemplary teachers utilize multiple strategies in enhancing student learning. (Dunkin, 1995; Dunkin & Precians, 1992). The lecture is a necessary form of instruction as it is the quickest method to present the most information. However, the question of student attention and interest encourages the use of guided discussion, or group investigation in and out of class, to name only two alternatives to the traditional lecture. A number of variables contribute to student retention of content. Among these factors is the enthusiasm of the teacher. Exemplary teachers, according to Hilgemann & Blodget (1991), create a positive environment by challenging them intellectually. In addition, Horan (1991), describes exemplary teachers as highly organized and able to plan lessons to make courses relevant to their students. Romero-Simpson (1992) identified setting a positive climate for learning as imperative to effective instruction. He adds that critical to quality instruction and student learning is the removal of fear. What can be done to create a climate that removes fear and enhances learning? Quay and Quaglia (2004) emphasize that professors have the power to change the classroom teaching and learning environment. They stress the importance of laughter and the sharing of leadership to build a risk-free environment. In addition, acknowledging student accomplishment in the process of learning encourages continued effort, resulting ultimately in better grades.

Prior research has indicated a positive relationship between student participation in class discussion and motivation, retention, and problem solving ability (McKeachie, 1970; Smith, 1980). However, following these studies came those by Smith (1983) and Fischer & Grant (1983) which indicated that 80% of the class time revolved around the lecture method.

Cognitive psychologists have emphasized the necessity of the learner's active involvement in the content, as long-term learning depends on the learner's processing of the material (Gagne, Yekovich, & Yekovich, 1994; Gredler, 1992). Dillon (1994) emphasizes that teacher questions do not stimulate student thinking, and in turn, do not lead to student participation. He suggests instead, to utilize statements of thought or questions generated by students. Teacher questioning can also be problematic in that often questions asked are at the lowest cognitive level (Barnes, 1983).

Past research indicates that small-group in-class activities provide a more effective teaching technique than the traditional method of instruction (Beyer, 1985). Garside (1996) emphasizes that the traditional lecture methods of instruction do not involve students in analyzing, synthesizing, and assessing information. In small-group in-class activities, teachers facilitate while students become active learners, critically analyzing ideas (Meyers, 1986). Smith (1997) states "The virtues of active learning are widely acknowledged. We understand concepts better and retain them longer when we express these concepts in our own words" (p.49).

A study of college graduates to determine their perceptions as to what facilitated their continued enrollment and ultimate success cited faculty as a major factor (Hofmann, Posteraro, & Presz, 1994). This study emphasized the perceived benefits of instructor interaction. Evidently, the role of the instructor continues to be invaluable.

Ogden (2003) recommends a teaching methodology that is a modification of the traditional lecture method. The Feedback Lecture, developed at Oregon State University was designed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. The Feedback Lecture methodology divides the class period and includes activities prior to class, short mini-lectures, short discussion groups, and post-lecture activities. This format meets the needs of a variety of learning styles.

Magnan (1990) emphasizes the importance of instructors involving students in their lectures. So, even with this lecture-format method, the emphasis is not totally instructor talk. Conin Jones (2002) stresses the importance of including interactive components in every lecture, in saying, "Presenting an effective lecture is like writing a good drama-You must have a worthwhile story to tell and tell it in an interesting way" (p.454). Conin Jones (2002) also emphasizes using visual supports to supplement and enrich lecture.

Lowman (1994) attempts to define effective teaching using the terms intellectual excitement and interpersonal qualities. Intellectual excitement combines the qualities of how interesting and how clear the students find the professor's teaching. A well-presented, organized lecture is more likely appreciated by students, even when the content is more complex. The interpersonal qualities, according to Lowman (1994) emphasized that the challenging instructor whose students achieve in an independent fashion illustrates how student motivation appears to be a function of a teacher's skill at stimulating students' own internal motives, rather than merely the result of a positive approach.

Mugleston (2006) surveyed college students over a period of eighteen months about their college experience. Students were asked to respond to the following open-ended question, "My college experience would have been easier and more productive if teachers would only..." (p.86). Students wanted classes that were "entertaining, interactive, not boring, and have short breaks when there are long lectures" (p.86). Student interest and professor enthusiasm were both deemed important and students pleaded for new ideas that would make learning easier.

What, then is an effective teacher? Rosebrough (2003) emphasizes that teaching is not simply a one-way process. It occurs when learning happens because students are actively engaged with connecting new information in meaningful contexts. This can happen in a variety of formats. Perhaps the key issue for professors in higher education is the need to keep reflecting and developing as teachers. Teaching is not a natural extension of our work as scholars.

Method

Sample

The sample of students used in this research consisted of 100 college juniors and seniors who maintained a minimum 2.5 grade point average and represent varying Colleges across a small South Texas State University.

Procedure

All participants completed a survey designed to identify students' reflections regarding their perceptions on how they best learn. The survey posed questions in a forced choice format. To ensure diversity in participants, surveys were distributed in both elementary and secondary education methods classes. Another factor contributing to the diversity of the sample was the educational background of the participants. Included in the sample were transfer students from several area community colleges, as well as a couple of state universities.

Participants received the following directions:

1. You will be responding to a short survey that asks you to reflect on the types of instruction that help you learn.
2. As you complete the survey, think of all of your college classes.

Survey Results Summary

Survey: What Contributes Most to My Learning?			
For each item below, choose the answer choice (a or b) that most closely matches what you think contributes most to your learning?			
61%	1a. professor enthusiasm	30%	5b. peer interaction in class with both group grades and individual grades on projects
80%	2a. use of a variety of instructional materials and varied assessment techniques	11%	2b. lecture or guided class discussion
30%	3a. professor lecture with objective, paper-pencil tests	61%	3b. group investigation outside of class with group grades assigned to projects
77%	4a. use of a variety of learning activities and assessment techniques	23%	4b. professor lecture with objective, paper-pencil tests
62%	5a. peer interaction in class with performance assessment of both group and individual efforts	38%	5b. direct instruction from the professor with objective, paper-pencil tests
0%	6a. academic learning time or length of class period	94%	6b. multiple methods of instruction with a variety of assessment techniques
31%	7a. student interest in the subject	60%	7b. professor enthusiasm
36%	8a. group investigation outside of class with group grades assigned to projects	64%	8b. peer interaction in class with both group and individual grades on projects
78%	9a. use of a variety of learning activities with group grades assigned to projects	22%	9b. group investigation outside of class and varied assessment techniques
81%	10a. use of multiple methods of instruction and varying assessment techniques	10%	10b. lecture or guided discussion with objective paper-pencil testing
21%	11a. direct instruction from the professor with objective paper-pencil tests	70%	11b. use of a variety of materials, both in instruction and in assessment
	12a. use of a variety of learning activities and varied assessment techniques	34%	12b. student interest in the subject

Data Analysis

The perceived importance of professor enthusiasm is clear in the survey results. Sixty-one percent of the students asserted that “professor enthusiasm” had more effect on their learning than

“peer interaction in class, with both group and individual grades.” Even more remarkable is that 69% of the students cited “professor enthusiasm” as more important than “student interest in the subject.”

Several items dealing with the lecture model of instruction measured different aspects of that design. Only 11% of the students preferred the “lecture or guided discussion” while 89% of the students selected the “use of a variety of instructional materials and varied assessment techniques.” Twenty-three percent of the students selected “professor lecture with objective, paper-pencil tests,” while 77% chose “use a variety of learning activities and assessment techniques.” Thirty-nine percent of the students selected “professor lecture with objective paper-pencil tests,” while 61% selected “group investigation outside of class with group grades assigned to projects.” The final item related specifically to the lecture format connected the lecture method to paper-pencil testing. In this item, only 19% of the students selected “lecture or guided discussion with paper-pencil testing,” while 81% selected identifying “the use of multiple methods and varying assessment techniques” as most important.

Two items discussed the value of direct instruction from the professor. Only 21% of the students identified “direct instruction from the professor with paper-pencil tests” as being most important when compared to “the use of a variety of materials, both in instruction and assessment.” The other direct instruction item was compared to “peer interaction in class with performance assessment of both groups and individual efforts.” In this item, 62% of the students felt that peer interaction had more effect on their learning, while 38% preferred the direct instruction.

Three items looked at group investigation outside of class. “Group investigation outside of class” was compared to “peer interaction in class with both group and individual grades on projects.” Sixty-four percent of the students favored the peer interaction in class. When “group interaction outside of class was compared with “use a variety of learning activities with group grades assigned to projects,” students selected varied learning activities as more vital to their learning. Seventy-eight percent of the students selected “use a variety of learning activities with group grades assigned to projects.”

Only six percent of the students identified “academic learning time, or length of class period” as more important when compared to the use of “multiple methods of instruction with a variety of assessment techniques.”

Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from this data? Most importantly, students did not identify the most common forms of instruction and assessment seen in higher education as most valuable to their learning. The lecture style and direct instruction approaches with traditional paper/pencil tests, according to these students, are least effective in their learning processes.

In contrast, students identified variety as the key to success in their learning. They preferred multiple methods of instruction, using a variety of instructional materials with corresponding assessment techniques. They also cited active involvement with peers as effective in promoting learning. Active group involvement was favored whether it was scheduled within the class period or outside of class. However, students preferred peer interaction in class with group and individual assessment of projects over group investigation outside of class with group grades assigned to projects. This clearly indicates a perceived need for the professor to serve as expert and facilitator while students work in groups. This is further indicated by a preference shown to a variety of learning activities and evaluation techniques over group investigation outside of class, with group grades

assigned to projects. They emphasized the need for multiple methods of instruction, using a variety of instructional materials with corresponding assessment techniques. It is especially interesting that students felt that a variety of learning activities and assessment techniques far outweigh the variable of student interest or disinterest in the subject.

Students definitely favor learning from a variety of instructional materials facilitated by an enthusiastic instructor. It seems especially significant that professor enthusiasm was cited as even more important than student interest in the subject on almost a three-to-one basis. The same ratio holds true when looking at interesting learning activities and student interest in the subject. Students indicate that well-planned interesting instructional activities will promote learning despite the level of student interest in the subject.

Implications for Educators

This study recognizes the significant roles the professor plays in providing effective instruction. Whether serving as an expert in the delivery of a well-organized lecture, or a facilitator in a planned small-group activity, the professor is the key to the lesson's success. The attitude of the professor was identified as the pivotal issue. This study suggests that instructors who demonstrate sincere enthusiasm in teaching, using whatever mode of delivery, are going to have interested students. This study even depicted professor enthusiasm as being more important than student interest in the subject. In essence, the attitude of the professor makes the difference, regardless of the type of instruction or assessment implemented.

This study highlights the successes that occur when students are interacting with their peers in a variety of different formats. Students can learn a great deal in collaborative groups.

This study also suggests that multiple means of assessment contributes to effective learning. Using a variety of methodology and materials, with appropriate assessments seems to be the key to success. College professors need to present instruction in a multitude of different ways, including the lecture method and varied group formats. The challenge is to utilize traditional and non-traditional formats, coupled with performance assessments that are aligned with the instructional methods employed.

Survey: What Contributes Most to My Learning?	
For each item below, choose the answer choice (a or b) that most closely matches what you think contributes most to your learning?	
1a. professor enthusiasm	1b. peer interaction in class with both grades on projects
2a. use of a variety of instructional materials and varied assessment techniques	2b. lecture or guided class discussion
3a. professor lecture with objective, paper-pencil tests	3b. group investigation outside of class with group grades assigned to projects
4a. use of a variety of learning activities and assessment techniques	4b. professor lecture with objective, paper-pencil tests
5a. peer interaction in class with performance assessment of professor with objective.	5b. direct instruction from the both group and individual efforts paper-pencil tests
6a. academic learning time or length of class period	6b. multiple methods of instruction with a variety of assessment techniques
7a. student interest in the subject	7b. professor enthusiasm
8a. group investigation outside of class with group grades assigned to projects	8b. peer interaction in class with both group and individual grades on projects
9a. use of a variety of learning activities and varied assessment techniques	9b. group investigation outside of class and with group grades assigned to projects
10a. use of multiple methods of instruction and varying assessment techniques	10b. lecture or guided discussion with objective paper-pencil testing
11a. direct instruction from the professor with objective paper-pencil tests	11b. use of a variety of materials, both in instruction and in assessment
12a. use of a variety of learning activities and varied assessment techniques	12b. student interest in the subject

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The Effects of Learning Styles on Learning Reading Vocabulary Words in Context

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of learning styles on the performance of students taught 100 vocabulary words in context. The students were placed in the learning styles group and was known as the Learning Styles Preference (LSP) Group. The members of the LSP group were tested for their learning styles through the Carbo Reading Styles Inventory. The students in the other group, the Control Group, were taught through the traditional methods. Both groups took a 100 word vocabulary pre-test and post-test developed by the researcher.

At the end, the researcher discovered that the students in both groups made gains with some words, no gains with other words, and made equal gains with other words. This is attributed to the fact that some of the students involved in the study lacked the prior knowledge or did not have the experiences to help them understand the meaning of the words being tested.

Introduction

Reading continues to be one of the skills that is causing problems for the majority of the students in the American Public School Systems. Since the days of "Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It" (Flesch, 1955), teachers have been concerned with the problems that the students encounter in reading. Teachers try new methods and strategies hoping that their students reading problems will be solved.

The U. S. Department of Education reports that 30 million or 14 percent of the American population have been categorized as "Below Basic" meaning that this particular group of people has "no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills" (p. 2) Their prevalence has hindered the American work force. Therefore, our country has taken measures to solve this problem by providing \$155 million dollars to combat the illiteracy problem among the adult population (Irwin, 1988). Still, with all the monies being set aside to solve the illiteracy problem, the status quo has not shown any major improvement. To prove this, the 1994 findings of the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) also known as the "Nation's Report Card" found that after 20 years of education, "reading performance was as good, if not slightly better than in 1968" (p. 254).

The findings of the NAEP indicate that literacy is not any better today than it was back then. Although minority students, in this case the African-Americans, have made substantial progress since 1970 in narrowing the gaps between their performance and that of their white counterparts, especially in the area of reading, The differences in performance are still not acceptable. Standardized tests such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) indicate that some students throughout Texas cannot read. In 1996, the scores indicated that 60 percent of the sixth graders passed the reading portion of the TAKS test (TEA, 1996).

One of the reading areas in which Texas students scored low was in the area of vocabulary. Only 15 percent were able to master successfully all of the objectives tested in the TAKS test (TEA, 1996). This means that 85 percent of the students didn't master all of the objectives while 40 percent were not even able to pass the TAKS reading test at the minimum expectation level.

Vocabulary proves to be challenging to our students because they encounter themselves with different types of literature to read; however, not all of the literature that students encounter brings pleasure to them. Teachers are starting to take notice that one of the reasons why students encounter difficulty in reading vocabulary comprehension is related to the type of text that they encounter as they begin to read. There are two types of reading that students encounter. Narrative reading allows the students to get the information from a story that entertains the reader. On the other extreme, expository reading is not as entertaining and requires the student to read a selection that is difficult because it involves technical reading thereby posing a problem in the area of vocabulary comprehension.

Aside from lack of prior knowledge and the comprehension of vocabulary words, students at times have problems with comprehending vocabulary because the students do not possess the two types of knowledge about words which is definitional information and contextual information (Stahl, 1985). Studies indicate that vocabulary comprehension does aid in the improving of reading comprehension, but that not all methods reach all children (Stahl, 1985). In order to reach all children, the classroom teacher must use different methods of instruction to help children be successful. A possible solution to this problem is the utilization of "Learning Styles." Dunn and Dunn state that "if children can't learn the way we teach, we must teach them the way they learn" (p. 1). They claim that there are two types of learners who process information differently: analytic children-left brain processors and global children-right brain processors. An analytic processor makes decisions based on something logical, or something that makes sense to him/her. This type of learner plans and organizes things in a fashion that is comfortable to him/her. A global processor, on the other hand, makes decisions based on his/her emotions rather, than on logic.

A student who has a strong auditory modality is able to recall what he/she has heard. It is a strong indication that the student has auditory modality when he/she is able to follow oral directions. Therefore, the student will learn by listening and by speaking. Poor readers who have a strong auditory modality are able to answer orally because they are unable to decipher what is written on paper.

Students who have a visual modality can recall what they see. They are able to follow written or drawn directions from the paper. Therefore, they learn by observing people, objects, pictures and other graphic aids.

Students who learn by touching and feeling the objects that they are studying are said to have a strong tactile modality preference. These types of students recall what they touch. They remember instructions better if they write them down. Therefore, they learn better by touching or manipulating objects.

Students who learn kinesthetically recall information when there is some sort of motion involved in their learning. Kinesthetic learners recall what they experience. They are able to remember directions by performing or by rehearsing them.

Statement of the Problem

Reading is a skill of vital importance to the student. One area of concern is the comprehension of vocabulary words. Results of tests such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) indicate that the students need to improve in the area of vocabulary comprehension. A critical factor that is hindering the students' performance in vocabulary comprehension is the lack of prior knowledge. Prior knowledge is that information that the student has stored in his/her schemata. Knowledge of this nature enables the student to comprehend what he/she is reading

with more facility. Unfortunately for the Limited Bilingual Proficient Student (LEP), at times, the culture does not offer the experiences that can provide this child with the knowledge needed to grasp what is being read.

Another factor that plays an important role is learning styles. All students have different learning styles and process information in a different style. Left-brained (analytic) learners learn differently from right-brained (global) learners. The teacher who teaches through a traditional approach does not accommodate the different learning styles of his/her students. Therefore, the teacher must break away from traditional teaching by providing activities for these two different types of learners so that they can improve their vocabulary comprehension. If students cannot improve their vocabulary comprehension; they will not experience success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether students acquired vocabulary comprehension when they were taught through their learning styles. The researcher's experience in teaching reading helped him observe that some students showed no comprehension of the vocabulary words that had been taught to them daily for a whole week when the vocabulary test was administered to the students. Therefore, the purpose of this experimental study is to explore the effectiveness of instructional strategies, based on the students' learning styles, in increasing vocabulary meaning for better comprehension.

Significance of the Study

Students learn new and difficult information in different styles. At times, teachers are unable to help students because traditional teaching is not as beneficial as the teacher would like for it to be. The area of reading vocabulary is an area where students need help. Therefore, it is of significant importance to identify students learning styles so that the teacher can empower the students to learn new information. In doing this, students will be able to succeed in our educational institutions. This study will also be to help their students' achievement improve through learning styles.

Review of Literature

The educational system has been in the midst of crisis for a long time. The illiteracy rate rises every year, and educators continue in their efforts to find the method or strategy that will close the gap. Research indicates that academic achievement improves when students are heterogeneously grouped as compared to when they are homogeneously grouped. This improvement is due to the wide range of maturity levels which foster intellectual abilities among the students. Academic achievement improves because the teacher must use different teaching strategies, instructional materials and classroom management techniques (TEA, 1995).

Research also indicates that the instructional practices used in this type of settings resemble those practices that are common in high ability groups. The end result is that students develop social skills and higher levels of self-esteem, and are less likely to be dropouts as would be the case if they would be grouped by ability levels. The teachers can accommodate the strengths of the individual student by addressing the learning styles that best meet his/her needs. The literature reviewed in this study concerns both leaning styles and the traditional methods of teaching. In dealing with leaning styles, the following will be addressed:

(1) Individual learning styles; definition and measurement; (2) Learning styles instruments; (3) Learning styles and how it applies to reading; (4) Learning styles and their effect on comprehension; (5) Assessment of learning styles and (6) Learning reading vocabulary words; and (7) Summary.

Learning Styles: Definition and Measurement

The brain plays an important role in student learning. Numerous theories have tried to link the brain and how it enables students to acquire and internalize information. In the 1700's, Franz Gall, a German scientist felt that the bumps on the head equaled particular talents and characteristics. Paul Broca in the mid-1800's proposed the classic hemispheric dominance theory. Broca proposed that the left side of the brain was more dominant and had higher faculties than the right side of the brain.

Rita Dunn and Kenneth Dunn define learning styles thus: "the way in which each learner begins to concentrate on, process, and retain new and difficult information" (Dunn & Dunn, 1992, p. 2). Students do not learn in the same fashion. Traditional educators have a difficult time accepting this reality, calling it a myth. These educators need to recognize that reading and learning styles are neuroanatomical and cannot be changed (Grager, 1990). They need to be made aware that what can be changed are the different types of instructional activities. These activities should address the four different types of modalities (audio, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic). In doing this, one makes it easier for individual students to process and retain new and difficult information that is being presented to them. Traditional educators need to be made aware that those students who are left-brain dominant (analytic) will learn difficult information in a much different fashion as students who are right-brain dominant (global).

John Jackson in the 1800's questioned the left brain dominant theory. During the early 1900's Wilder Penfield worked with direct electrical stimulation on certain areas of the brain during surgery. Jun Wada further supported the theory that brain functions could be localized across hemispheric by anesthetizing one hemisphere at a time (Restak, 1988).

Gregorc elaborated on how the human mind perceives and understands information. According to Gregorc, there are two ways in which students perceive information. One was is through concrete abilities. Concrete processing involves using the five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. Using concrete abilities involves what is here and now - the tangible, the obvious (Tobias, 1994, pp. 14-15).

The mind can also process information by using what Gregorc called abstract ability. The mind is able to picture thoughts, come up with ideas or even understand and believe what can't actually be physically grasped. When we are using this abstract ability, we are using our intuition, our intellect, our imagination: We are looking beyond what is, to the more subtle implications (Tobias, 1994, p. 15). Gregorc also observed how the mind ordered information as it was being processed. Students who organize information in a linear, step-by-step process are said to be sequential processors. Sequential processors find it very comfortable to do their assignments or other activities following a set plan. This type of learner does not like to deviate from the course that he/she is following.

On the other end are students who are not bothered at all if not following a set plan. This type of organizer does not require a step by step plan telling him/her what to do. This type of learner can start at any place with a given assignment. This type of learner may start at the beginning, then go to the back and back to the middle, and so forth, deviating from the step by step process (Tobias, 1994).

The Dominant Abstract Sequential student usually requires some sort of systematic approach in handling a certain situation. This type of learner requires more time to complete his/her assignments. If an assignment is not done to the student's satisfaction, it will result in the student not turning it in. This type of student is very analytical and tries to evaluate his/her assignments

The Dominant Abstract Random student cares about pleasing people. For the Abstract Random student, "all of life and learning is intensely personal experience" (Tobias, 1994, p. 55). The teacher's instruction should have some sort of meaning to this type of student in order for him/her to process the information. Conflict and tension distract this type of learner. Their concern for others is a common characteristic.

The Dominant Concrete Random student likes to be told what assignment needs to be done, but not how to do the assignment. Learners who fall under this category like to be very independent. Therefore, rules do not go over very well with this type of processor. Instead, this type of processor feels more comfortable with general guidelines.

Ramirez, Herold and Castañeda (1975), took these two modes of perception and referred to them as "a person's cognitive style" (p. 39) in the educational sector to describe the way that students learn best. The authors took the two terms field dependent and field independent and describe the differences of these two terms; however, they substituted use the term "field sensitive" for "field dependence" stating that the word dependence is "negative in connotation" and that the word sensitive "captures the essential nature" of this cognitive style.

Barbe, Milone, & Swassing (1979) tried to capitalize on the ways students learn. They believed that students learned best when they were taught through their modality strengths. The authors clarify the difference between modality strength and modality preference. Barbe & Milone (1980) refer to a modality strengths as the channels most efficient for processing information; they imply superior functioning in one or more perceptual channels. Therefore, they may occur in a single channel, or be mixed. They are assessed through a task. A Modality preference, on the other hand, is just that: a preference and is usually measured by self-reports (p. 382).

Dunn & Carbo (1980) argued that students should be taught through their primary preference, followed by an activity reinforcing the modality strengths or modality preferences that were vital to student learning were identified as (a) auditory, (b) visual, (c) tactile, and (d) kinesthetic. Auditory learners are those learners that learn best by listening (Dunn, Carbo, Tobias, 1994). This does not mean that these types of learners learn the subject matter only by listening. On the contrary, a strong auditory learner usually has to form the sounds of the information aloud in order to get the meaning of the message. Auditory learners do this in order to effectively commit the message that is being taught to memory (Tobias, 1994).

The Dunns discovered that environmental stimuli played a very important. Analytic learners preferred no sound when they were busy doing an assignment, whereas global learners required sound. The solution to this problem was to provide the global learners with some type of noise that would help them feel comfortable. Baroque music, which has no words, was found to appease this type of learner. A recommendation made when using music is that the teacher provide those students who do not require music with a set of headphones

Analytic and global students are unique in their physiological preferences (Dunn & Dunn, 1992). Both learners have the same type of preferences. These preferences enable individuals to process and retain certain information due to certain strengths that they possess. Auditory learners remember 75 percent of what they hear in a normal 40 or 50 minute lecture, but only 30 percent of the school-aged population appears to be auditory. Visual learners remember 40

percent of what they see. Tactile learners remember what they write (if analytic) or draw or doodle (if global). Kinesthetic learners remember best the things they experience. Kinesthetic must be actively involved in going, doing, traveling, acting, and on-the-job training.

Students learn in different ways. The different types of learning styles mentioned here are just some that have had an impact on the educational sector of our country. Gregorc's model (1978) describes how students process information. Barbe, Milone, & Swassing's model (1979) describes the different modality preferences that students can utilize to learn and acquire information. The Dunn, Dunn & Price learning style inventory places strong emphasis on the environmental and physiological preferences. Learning styles models attempt to explain the many ways students can learn. As time progresses, other researchers will find or investigate other ways in which student learn. No matter how similar or different these models may be, their contribution will provide educators a better understanding of how students learn the information that is being taught to them (Dunn, DeBello, Brennan, Krinsky & Murrain, 1981). This will be conducive to better understanding how students can improve their academic achievement.

Learning Styles and How They Apply to Reading

Research indicates that our students are not doing well in the area of reading. The NAEP reports that a large amount of our population is illiterate. The NAAL (2003) carried out a different survey than the one done in previous years by Irvin (1988) where they tested members of the American population to determine the types of literacy skills that they possessed and used. This particular study compared the population in 1992 and in 2003 the following categories: (a) below basic meant that the test takers could do "no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills; (b) those members of the American society who were able "to perform simple and everyday literacy activities were placed in the basic category; (c) while those who qualified for the intermediate category "could perform moderately challenging literacy activities and (d) those categorized as proficient "could perform complex and challenging literacy activities (p. 2, 2003). As compared in 1988 when approximately 17-21 million people are considered to be illiterate. In a most recent survey completed, one way to help our students in the area of reading is by applying the concept of learning styles.

One way in which students can improve their academic achievement is in the area of reading. Since the publication "Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can do About It (Flesche, 1955)," educators have been concerned with the reading problems that their students encounter. A response to this concern was to try new and innovative methods

After years of working with the kindergarten population, Carbo discovered that students were not being taught in a fashion that was best suited to them. Carbo provided remediation for students who had severe deficits in visual and auditory perception. She provided students with high interest materials and instructional resources which accommodated the students with their perceptual strengths. She discovered that these students had a need for activities that would address their tactile/kinesthetic perceptual strength, only moderately visual, and were low auditory. She applied her Dunn & Dunn's concept of learning styles to teaching reading.

What can be done about pedagogical methods or strategies that are not suitable for the individual student? Is there a method or learning style that can resolve the educational crises for the American public school system? Teachers are searching for that method that will help their students retain the information that is being taught to the student. Numerous studies have been conducted throughout our nation over a period of time on the impact of reading learning styles on

educational programs. Holt and O'Tuel conducted a year long study in Florence, South Carolina school district in 1990. They examined the progress of 847 fourth-and fifty-graders. Results of the comprehension and vocabulary subtests of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills and the Estes Attitude for Reading proved that the group receiving the reading learning styles treatment achieved higher gains as compared to the control group.

LaShell (1986) did a study with 90 learning-disabled students in two resource programs at Yellow Springs, Ohio. LaShell's study proved that in a year, the treatment group receiving reading learning styles gained 15 months in reading comprehension, while the control group made a 4 month gain.

In 1992-1993, Margil Elementary School implemented reading learning styles. The school, which had been ranked 61st out of 65 elementary schools received astounding results. Their high at-risk student population students declined by almost half, to 157, in 10 months of implementing reading learning styles program. After three years of implementing reading styles Margil surpassed the scores of all the schools in their school district in San Antonio, Texas.

As the above research indicates, reading learning styles has positive affects on comprehension. This is partially due to the fact that the goal of a reading learning styles program is to make the student feel comfortable in order to process and retain the information that is being taught to him/her. Also, students are more motivated to read and enjoy school more.

Many groups also required a high degree of structure as was observed in the Mexican American, Chinese American, and Afro-American cultures. Vasquez (1985) and Sims (1988) also noted that Puerto Ricans and whites needed more structure than blacks. Groups also differed in the variable of persistence. Vasquez (1985) observed that Puerto Ricans were both highly persistent and motivated and that Bahamians were strongly persistent when compared with the Jamaicans (Roberts, 1984). Dunn & Griggs (1993) also reported that the ethnic groups involved in the different research studies also varied in the sociological and physical stimulus categories.

Learning Reading Vocabulary Words Through Context Clues

Reading is a process of giving meanings to printed symbols and organizing these meanings in terms of the writer's presentation (Carrillo, 1976). Unfortunately for the readers, intellectual limitations such as experiences with the word, applying the experiences to the word, applying the reader's personal experience to the author's system and using the new system of meanings make it difficult for the reader to have applicable schema in obligatory contexts of the vocabulary word. In other word, the dissonance between the readers' schema and the writers' schema is cause for miscomprehension.

Another factor that affects students' comprehension is inference. Inferencing influences the reader's selection. At times, readers are passive and do not rely on inferences to draw their own conclusions. Instead, the reader engages in what traditionally has been called bottom-up processing, outside-in processing, text-based processing, or data-driven processing (Taylor, Harris, & Pearson, 1988). In these types of modes the reader suspends judgment and waits for more information from the author. At times, this may cause a problem because reading is incidentally literal. Reading would not be found to be interesting if the author wrote word for word everything that is to happen in the story. The reader, through prior knowledge, manages to figure out the author's message. Prior knowledge is that information that the student possesses in his/her schemata that facilitates reading comprehension.

Carning, Kameenui, & Coyle (1984) used experimental passages designed to present clues to selected words. The study indicated that the subjects, were presented the selected words in isolation. The best performance by the sixth graders yielded a 40 percent success rate.

Schatz & Baldwin (1986) used natural text to determine what effects it had derived for words meanings. The researchers did three separate experiments using a variety of text types, including passages from literature, newspaper articles, and content area subject matter such as science and history. The researchers found that context was not a factor for eleventh and twelfth graders. The researchers felt that the outcomes had to do with incidental reading.

Methodology

In order to get a better understanding as to how students learned vocabulary words in context, the following question was addressed: Is there a difference in student vocabulary comprehension gains as measured by pre and post test scores for students participating in a learning style group versus students participating in a traditional setting?

To answer this question, the mean of each pre-test and post-test reading comprehension test will be calculated. The statistical analysis that was used to calculate the score was percent correct for both the pre-test and the post-test. The analysis of the data was done for every individual word. The scores for males from the control group were compared against those of the LSP group. The female scores were also compared. Finally, the LSP group results as a whole were compared to the Control Group results to see what effect, if any, the learning styles treatment had on the experimental group. The results for those comparisons are described in detail in the chapter that follows.

Participant Profile

Four classrooms with 25 students each served as the experimental group pool. All four classrooms were talking reading for 90 minutes at different times of the school day depending on their schedule. All students were heterogeneously grouped with the exception of the gifted and talented students who were placed with high achieves in different classrooms.

Treatment

The treatment for this research study included ninety minutes of reading at different times during the school day depending on the schedule. The learning styles group was administered the Carbo Reading Styles Inventory. After the testing for learning styles, appropriate instructional learning activities were implemented for both groups. The vocabulary words came from the reading basal. The treatment was administered throughout the school year which consisted of 100 words taken from twelve stories from the reading basal.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a pre-test of 100 vocabulary words that were presented in context. The results from this test were compared with the results of a post-test of the same 100 items given at the end of the semester but not administered in the same order as in the pre-test. The test-retest reliability coefficients for the 13 RSI subscales ranged from .63 to .77(Carbo, Dunn, & Dunn, 1986).

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

This study compared the amount of gains in a pre-test and a post-test made by students through the use of percentages. The students were part of the experimental (LSP) group or the

control group. The information was gathered by the researcher. The results from the data analysis follow.

Overall, the LSP group made a 42% on the pre-test and 72% on the post – test, yielding a 30% group gain. Their counterparts, the members of the Control Group, scored a 54% on the pre – test and an 83% on the post –test, for a group gain of 29 percentage points. The LSP group made a 1% greater gain. The Control Group, however, had a higher pre and post- test average (54% and 83%, respectively).

The LSP males scored an average of 40% on the pre – test and a 70% on the post – test, for a 30% gain. The Control Group males made a 54% on the pre-test and an 82% on the post – test, resulting in an overall 28% attainment. The LSP males made slightly greater gains (2%). Again, the Control Group had a higher pre-test and post – test average than the LSP group.

The LSP females earned an overall score of 44% on the pre – test and an 81% on the post – test, yielding a gain of 28 percentage points. The LSP females made a greater overall pre- test/ post – test gains (3%) than the CG females. The CG females, however, had a higher pre – and post – test average than the LSP females.

Summary of Findings

If students don't learn the way we teach them, we must teach them the way they learn. Unfortunately for the school teacher, this premise is overbearing when one thinks of teaching each individual student through a fashion which is best suited just for him/her. The thought of this is overwhelming when one thinks of the amount of time that has to be put into such a project.

In 1967, Professor Rita Dunn upon the invitation of the New York State Department of Education was asked to come up with a program that would help “educationally Disadvantaged” children to increase their achievement in school academics (Dunn, p. 3). Dunn did indeed discover that each child could be taught to a fashion in which they best learned and acquired information. The end result was a trend that became known as “learning styles” (Dunn & Dunn, 1992, p.2). Rita Dunn, with the help of her husband, Kenneth Dunn and G. E. Price, identified, by 1979, 18 elements that affected students' learning achievement. These variables were later categorized into five different stimuli which the Dunns and Price identified as follows: (a) environmental, (b) emotional, (C) sociological, (d) physiological and (e) psychological. The Dunns and their doctoral students and other colleagues since then have researched the different elements that make up the learning styles model (Dunn & Dunn, 1992). Their collaboration has changed the way educators can teach their students.

This serves of interest to the classroom teacher when providing instruction to students that respond differently from the traditional norms that have been set by our educational system. In a diverse society, students differ in many ways and teachers have to find the best strategy or method that will help them reach their students.

One area of instruction where teachers have to reach their students is in the area of reading. Testing instruments, such as the TAKS, that determine how well a student comprehends, indicate that some students are having trouble in reading.

A specific area of concern is in the understanding of vocabulary comprehension. Researchers (Nagy, 1988; Schatz & Baldwin, 1986; and Carnine, Kameenui, & Coyle, 1984) take various sides in this controversial issue; however, it is agreed that students acquire vocabulary incidentally or deliberately. Incidental and deliberate learning is affected by the context determines the amount of prior knowledge or how much experience the child has with a certain word or topic. Prior knowledge plays a vital role in the acquisition of vocabulary words.

Conclusions

Based on the comparison of the pre-test and post-test findings of the 100 vocabulary words, the following conclusions were derived from this study: 1. The sixth grade students in the Learning Styles Preference Group made gains when instruction was given to them in their preferred learning style. 2. The males in the Learning Styles Preference Group outperformed to females. 3. The males in the Control Group scored fewer gains when compared to the females in their group. 4. The sixth grade students in the Learning Styles Preference Group did not achieve higher gains that the students in the control group. 5. The students in Control Group achieved greater gains when their pre-post test scores were compared to those of the Learning Styles Preference Group. 6. Exposure to learning styles strategies did not have an effect on the outcome of this study. 7. Students who were taught through their perceptual strengths did not have higher overall group gains when the scores are compared to the students who did not receive learning styles treatment.

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The Journal of Border Educational Research

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The Journal of Border Educational Research also advocates for the expansion of university services and outreach to public schools through research on innovative school practices. Some topics you might consider are partnership initiatives between schools and universities, educator preparation programs, curriculum initiatives, and collaborative research.

All submissions will be peer reviewed. Authors of submissions will receive two copies of the journal.

Manuscripts must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Length: The manuscript, including references, charts, and tables should not exceed 20 typewritten pages.
2. Type: The entire document should be in Microsoft Word. The font should be Times New Roman, 12-point throughout.
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