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Preparing Today's Teachers for Tomorrow's Children

Socorro Herrera and Robert Fanning

Today's social reality requires that educators throughout the United States face the challenges of teaching and preparing culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classroom. School districts which were never before required to address the many nuances of diversity, from school systems in Western states like Utah, to those in Midwestern states like Kansas, to Appalachian districts in states like Kentucky, often find themselves unprepared for these new challenges. Educators in these and similar systems now find that the increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse [CLD] students in the classrooms are an actuality which they must address, and address quickly. Such diversity among districts is an emergent social reality which, according to ten or more years of demographic analyses and projections, will not pass in the foreseeable future (NCES, 1999).

It is imperative that school leaders take immediate and proactive steps to begin the process of better preparing teachers, site-based administrators, and school staff to work successfully with these transforming student populations. Due to changes in staffing patterns at a local processing plant, at least one school district of less than 1000 students in Kansas went from zero language learning students in May of 1997 to 55 second language learners in August of the same year (Kansas Department of Education, 1999). Such contingencies are fast becoming less the exception than the norm.

In his fourth annual State of American Education Address, United States [US] Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley (1997), expressed concern about the adequate preparation of teachers for increasing classroom diversity:

> The entire context of American Education is changing. *We need teachers* skilled in using computers as a powerful tool and many more teachers *well versed in teaching English as a Second Language*. Our teachers need to be prepared to teach *all* of America's children– the gifted and the talented, *our many new immigrants*, the college bound achiever and the disabled child who is learning so much more because he or she is now included [italicized emphasis added].

Paradoxically, however, as the number of students with diverse learning needs has increased, the number of teachers properly prepared to

address the differential learning needs of CLD students has remained quite limited.

Dr. Riley, in his sixth address to the U.S. House of Representatives (1999), has also indicated that the population of CLD students is the fastest growing in the nation. His evidence comes from annual increases in numbers reported by state educational agencies for the fifty states. These data attest to the fact that the numbers of CLD students have increased 67 percent between the 1990-91 and 1996-97 school years.

This significant shift in CLD student numbers and the diversities they represent makes it arduous for schools to provide appropriate programs and services for *all* students. Further compounding the problem, is the increasingly disconcerting reality that while almost 30 percent of the U.S. student population is comprised of CLD students; yet, less than 13 percent of our teachers come from the same ethnic and linguistic groups (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1997a). Additionally, Secretary Riley has cited significant barriers to fostering an adequate pool of such teachers, including: (1) a generalized failure to recruit sufficient numbers of CLD students into the teaching profession and retain them to practice, and (2) the failure of institutions of higher education to properly prepare teachers for the diverse cultural and linguistic realities of today's classroom.

Setting high expectations for educators necessary to meet the differential, educational needs of *all* American children, President Clinton wishes to hold schools accountable for ensuring that CLD students can speak and read English after three consecutive years in our schools. Whereas, it is schools and school systems which must demonstrate the insight necessary to appropriately continue language transition support for students until they are *proficient* in English and content-area classrooms where English is the medium of instruction.

The National Commission on Teaching (NCTAF, 1997b) estimates that increased student enrollment and teachers' retirements are creating a situation, wherein, two million new teachers will be required in America's schools in the next decade. The following relevant statistics are taken from the NCTAF, *Fact Sheet: On Teaching in America:*

> • Seventy-five percent of urban school districts admit hiring teachers without proper qualifications. About one fourth of newly hired teachers lack the proper qualifications for the job.
> • More than 12 percent of all newly hired teachers have no training at all. Fifteen percent enter the classroom not having met state standards for professional practice.
> • Fifty-six percent of secondary physical science teachers and 27 percent of mathematics teachers do not have backgrounds in those fields.
> • Two out of every five adults providing students with bilingual education are not teachers, but *teacher aides* (NCTAF, 1997b, pp. 2-5).

Responding to the NCTAF report and others like it, President Clinton has called on our society to ensure that a talented, dedicated, and well prepared teacher provide instruction in ever American classroom. To meet this call, U.S. school districts must dramatically change the way in which they recruit, professionally develop, and functionally support teachers as lifelong learners and as professionals. It is indeed alarming that 22 percent of all new teachers leave the profession within

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the first three years, often from lack of support, and sometimes, from a *sink or swim approach* to the first years of teaching practice (NCTAF, 1997a). If we are to achieve broad educational goals, such as those in which we espouse that *all* students will meet or exceed rigorous state standards, local districts must insist on equally high standards for teacher support and long-term, professional development. Moreover, these local districts must abide by, not just the standards, but the policies, infrastructures, and commitments necessary to the attainment of those standards which are espoused.

Federally funded programs are *not* the *answer* to the needs of CLD students and their teachers, but they are often a pragmatic beginning for genuine commitments among school systems to appropriate preparedness for diversity. Such federal programs variously target the particular needs of CLD students, especially those who are migrant or who come from low-income families. Tragically, however, some of these programs perpetuate a perception that funding should be focused on remediation efforts in the schools. As classrooms across the country become increasingly diverse on a daily basis, teachers, administrators, and staff must become more inclusive in their practices. Each of these professionals must acquire the knowledge base, practice skills, and competencies essential to genuine outcome impacts for these students. Just as student backgrounds and needs are changing, so must instruction, content, leadership, professional development, and policy.

For example, in the State of Kansas, the State Board of Education has determined that each school and district will: (1) implement and practice principles and procedures of effective schools; (2) work collaboratively with its community to create a learning community; (3) demonstrate effective staff development; and (4) create opportunities in academic and applied situations which foster a high level of mastery of essential skills of practice, effective communications skills, complex thinking in academic and applied situations, and the characteristics necessary work effectively in both independent and group situations. These are potentially powerful standards for coping with rapidly changing classroom diversity. However, the realization of that potential is likely to be a function of district capability in appropriately developing and supporting school and district educators to achieve such standards *in practice.*

Incorporating the needs of all students into the learning environment which is created in today's classrooms is admittedly a daunting task. School officials often complain that newly graduated teachers come unprepared for the reality of diverse classrooms. From classroom management, to instructional methodologies, to appropriate competence for cultural and linguistic diversity in practice, few teachers possess the knowledge to be successful with today's students (Mazarella, 1999). Changing this situation will, for the majority, of teachers who will practice in the new century, necessitate genuine commitments among local districts to improved, long-term, professional development.

Professional development programs can provide meaningful assistance to teachers but frequently offer only hints or lists of techniques of limited applicability. Much of what is offered as professional development is flawed for a number of reasons, including: (1) it fails to meet teachers' needs; (2) it is short-term, infrequent, and sometimes mandated by administrators who often do not participate themselves, and (3) it provides few opportunities for practice, feedback, and follow-up (Green & del Bosque, 1994; Ostermann & Kottkamp, 1993; Routman, 1996).

To be effective in a climate of increasing diversity and practice complexity, professional development should be ongoing, dynamic, theory/research driven, based in reflective practice, and interesting/relevant to practitioner needs (Ostermann & Kottkamp, 1993; Routman, 1996). As well articulated by Fullan and Miles: "The ultimate goal of professional development activities is changing the culture of learning for both adults and students so that engagement and betterment is a way of life in schools" (1991, p. 41).

Effective professional development activities engage teachers and other educators in at least a two-part learning process. At one level, educators need to see themselves as involved learners who are discovering how *all* students learn. On a related plane, educators need to reflect on the ways in which they can create and nurture optimal learning environments which enhance acdemic achievement for *all* students. Goldenberg & Gallimore (1997) have written: "We must say good-bye to quick fix workshops and say hello to staff development that provides intellectual stimulation and opportunities to develop new knowledge and skill" (p. 71). Increasingly, today's professional development must also target and develop educators' capacities for critical thinking about the complexities of practice and reflection on the many assumptions that are inherent in cross-cultural practice with CLD students; assumptions which are not necessarily valid, nor likely to increase student achievement.

A fundamental lesson learned in the past two decades or more of school reform efforts is that much more time is required for professional development than is presently allocated. In fact, *time* has emerged as the key issue of most school reform analyses appearing in the last decade (Fullan & Miles, 1992; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1997). Currently, teachers' and administrators' professional development often focuses on a multiplicity of separate components, including: implementation to target educational standards, guidelines for working with diverse populations, changing forms and purposes of student assessment, enhancing professional collaboration on goals, and critically revising existing curriculums. Inevitably, districts must begin to prioritize professional development as a critical budgetary item. Twenty-first century education will demand that educators receive enhanced opportunities to critically examine, reflect on, develop, and collaboratively master, new perspectives on, and approaches to, diverse student populations (Corcoran, 1995).

Shanker has noted that employees of the Saturn automobile company spend five percent (92 hours/year) of their work time in learning (1993). Shanker has written:

> "Imagine what a training program like this would do for people trying to restructure their schools. Or, to put it another way, imagine trying to change things as basic as the culture of the school with a couple of days of in-service training a year and some hours stolen from class preparation periods. If it takes 600 courses (the Saturn training group offers nearly 600 different courses and 92 hours a year per employee to make a better automobile), it will take that and more to make better schools. If we are not willing to commit ourselves to that kind of effort, we are not going to get what we want (1993, p. 11).

Shanker's comments demonstrably point to the importance of *time* commitments where both effectiveness and change are concerned. His remarks also suggest something of the complexity involved in school restructuring efforts.

Although professional development will serve as a vital linchpin in the changes needed to better prepare staff and schools for complex diversity, a comprehensive system of interventions and support structures is also essential where high standards of student achievement are the appropriate goal of restructuring efforts. For CLD students, the design of a seamless intervention system that is broad enough to include all students but sufficiently specific to address individual needs is critical.

To this end, Bridges (1993), in his examination of the *character of organizations,* has argued that a systems thinking approach allows us to focus on what are the key variables in such an intervention system, while also recognizing the dynamic complexity among them. For Bridges, examining such a system over time enables us to see patterns more clearly and better understand how to change them toward increased efficacy. For example, a systems perspective enables us to recognize the pitfalls of existing, often fragmented, interventions for CLD students; a recognition that can break the cycle of dependence while strengthening classroom instruction for these and other students. Already many of our schools have begun to identify relevant variables that break this cycle and foster improved school/classroom services for *all* students. Such variables include, but are not limited to the degree of collaboration/collegiality fostered by educators' professional development and the potential of peer-to-peer learning that is cooperative and experiential. Thus, co-teaching and multi-aging programs are increasingly popular practices offering another glimpse of how systems thinking can empower and coordinate effective change. To improve instruction, some schools offer integrated classes co-taught by special educators, bilingual personnel, support staff and classroom teachers. Co-teaching and multi-aging allow educators to create learning environments which are synergistic and appropriately address the developmental levels and differential needs of *all* students. Such practices can prove especially effective with CLD students whose favored learning styles are not necessarily congruent with those targeted by traditional instruction.

In the face of complex student diversity, school districts cannot effectively achieve the goals of reform initiatives through implementation practices that retain a dependence on detached, parallel instructional supports grounded in pull-out services, remedial curriculums, and a deficit (to be overcome) perspective on second language learning. Through a broader systems perspective, it is possible to design more appropriate interventions which integrate, collaborate, and maximize resources in improving learning outcomes for all students.

Given the increasing complexity of classrooms, and especially school environments, a site-based determination of appropriate resource allocations often holds the greatest promise for both improved instructional effectiveness and enhanced student achievement. A site-based approach to student diversity, especially language diversity among students, typically demands significant redefinitions of roles, responsibilities, and duties for administrative, instructional, and support personnel. Under this developing system, schools are expected to determine what resources at what levels are appropriate and necessary to meet the needs of all students within the school. To be effective, this process must unfold in such a manner as to assure appropriate educational protections for all. Necessarily, high levels of collaboration, reflection, critical thinking, and collegiality are essential to effectiveness. Schools must be open to creative and unique ways of meeting the needs of all students; many of which have been detailed by Miramontes, Commins, and Nadeau (1998); especially, where the

needs of large numbers of CLD students must be addressed by the process. As they reiterate, however, openness to creativity and flexibility is lost upon a site which fails to collaborate both inside and outside the school, including collaboration with parents and the school's community.

Conclusion

Effectively meeting the challenge of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity among classroom student populations is a complex but manageable task. A variety of relevant concerns must be addressed and assessed at the local level. At minimum, and perhaps most important, is an assessment of the degree to which local educators are appropriately prepared to maximize academic achievement among CLD students; an increasingly significant variable in school effectiveness. Is their professional development consistent with what we know about appropriate preparedness for complex practice? Has adequate time and follow-up been devoted to this concern? Do the professional development models/approaches utilized foster ongoing collaboration, reflectivity, critical thinking, and collegiality?

We must also be concerned with the extent to which sites within the district need to be restructured for diversity? Is an adequate support structure available to professionally developed, school educators? On what basis are resources allocated and is it effective for this site and its student population? Does school infrastructure and leadership empower collaboration, accountability, and collegiality? Have site-based management models been considered to enhance specificity?

Finally, are the educational services provided to CLD students appropriate to their differential student backgrounds and learning needs? Is content relevant and authentic? Is instruction targeted to differential learning needs? Are innovative approaches such as multi-aging, cooperative learning, and experiential models enabled?

We maintain that effectiveness and professionalism are necessarily a function of context. On the one hand, we have offered some relevant questions to consider when assessing the context of local education. On the other hand, in closing, we would like to offer some fundamental assumptions to keep in mind when considering the more interactive context of educational efforts at the classroom, school, and/or district levels:

- We have a responsibility to educate *all* students and assist them in meeting the benchmarks of our local and state outcome measures.
- The educational planning process for all students must reflect the diversity of student populations and recognize the need for planning which addresses site-specific differences among such populations.
- In evaluating, redefining, and refining current service delivery, alternatives considered should be based not on labels and deficit perceptions regarding students, but on identified teaching and learning needs.
- Ongoing research and theory building will, from time to time, suggest alternative interventions (such as cooperative learning, team teaching, and multi-aging) as more or less effective with certain student populations. Open-mindedness and perspective-taking are critical to the appropriate consideration and evaluation of such alternatives.
- The primary purpose of a particular student's evaluation must not be eligibility for service or classification for

labeling. Instead, the appropriate purpose must be to determine the student's educational strengths and needs, while critically evaluating possible interventions which maximize the potential for student achievement. Information collected for this purpose must be holistic, culturally-sensitive, and constructive in order to purposively assist teachers, administrators, parents, support personnel, and applicable community service agencies in setting appropriate educational goals for the student. Such goals must reflect high expectations. Where CLD students are concerned, such information should account for the student's proficiency in his/her native language as a basis for second language development patterns and expectations.

• Long-term, site-specific, reflective, and collaborative professional development for school leaders, teachers, and support personnel is essential to success in the school's efforts to meet the many challenges of complex diversity. Often appropriate professional development is well grounded in site-specific determinations of need.

• Site-based management holds the potential for focused and targeted success in addressing the differential needs of fast changing student populations. Such models maximize resource allocation, foster collaboration, encourage creativity, and empower collegiality.

For many years a prevailing model for the education of CLD students has been to *dumb-down* the curriculum, subdivide and *remediate* skill inadequacies, and compensate for perceived *deficiencies* in culture and language. Through time, cross-cultural interaction, and research, we have learned that there is, instead, much that these students already bring to the school. Yes it is different, it may sometimes seem foreign, it is often much harder to surface and understand. Yet, these students do bring rich experiential and cultural backgrounds to the learning setting, about which others may learn and benefit. These students often bring another language, through which they are able, if asked, to articulate what is often a considerable knowledge and skills base which may be utilized as a basis for planning instruction. Indeed, instead of *dumbing down* for these students, we might just be very surprised to learn the benefits of new understandings and new approaches which *build up* to, enhanced student motivation and confidence, elaboration upon the student's existing knowledge and language base, appropriate and focused instruction, authentic and alternative assessments, and the many unrealized student outcomes which are possible with empathy.

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