

Improving the Preparation of Teachers Wishing to Work in Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs: Listening to the Practitioners

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Abstract: Two-way bilingual school principals were interviewed to find out their views on staffing. Finding candidates proficient in Spanish to provide content area instruction in this language was their greatest challenge. They suggested that the university offer content courses taught in Spanish and courses focusing on the mechanics of the language.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) students have grown from 1,553,918 (1986-1987) to 4,148,997 (1999-2000), comprising nearly 9% of the national public school enrollment (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1999). A large majority of this population does not have a command of English that allows them to be placed in mainstream classrooms (Nieto, 2000); therefore, it has been necessary to implement different programs in order to meet their linguistic and academic needs. Most programs differ in the languages of instruction, but their common underlying characteristic is a subtractive view of bilingualism (Lambert, 1980; Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003), since they do not aim at maintaining the students' native languages.

Two-way bilingual education, however, is a program that promotes bilingualism and biliteracy (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003; Ovando & Pérez, 2000) by placing both language majority and language minority students in the classroom to receive instruction in and through two languages. Some models provide equal amounts of time in each language (de Jong, 2002a; Lindholm-Leary, 2001) while others provide 60% of the time in and through English and the remaining 40% in and through the minority language (Castro Feinberg, 1999), and others provide 90% of the time in the minority language in Kindergarten, with the percentage of time devoted to English increasing throughout the grades (Crawford, 1999; Nieto, 2000).

In spite of their beneficial effects on students' academic achievement (Alanis, 2000; Cazabon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993; de Jong, 2002b; Kirk Senesac, 2002), attitudes toward bilingualism (Cazabon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993; Lambert & Cazabon, 1994; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2001), and academic achievement and attitudes toward bilingualism (Lindholm & Aclan, 1993), the number of two-way bilingual programs is still very limited in the U.S. (261 in 23 states [Center for Applied Linguistics, 2002]), due to their complex nature. For Lindholm (1990), two-way programs should incorporate long-term treatment, integration of language arts with curriculum, separation of languages for instruction, additive environment, opportunities for speech production, administrative support, high-quality teachers, and home-school collaboration.

Two-way school principals point to staff who is proficient in the minority language to ensure the program's success. Teachers' proficiency in the minority language is an invaluable skill (Castro Feinberg, 2002; Guerrero, 1998; Lindholm, 1990), because it ensures high status for both languages of instruction (Castro Feinberg, 2002). However, the lack of second language learning opportunities in mandatory education in the U.S. (Guerrero, 1998) has caused a scarcity of teachers who are biliterate (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). As a result, many bilingual teachers are not good models in the non-English language (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Collier, 1995), which affects the quality of instruction received by their students (Gaarder, 1977; Trueba, 1989).

Since hiring staff members who are proficient in the minority language appears to be one of the key decisions to be made by two-way program administrators (Castro Feinberg, 2002), the main goal of the present article was to examine the opinions of principals of two-way programs on this issue. A second goal of the project was to obtain input from them that would allow the researchers to improve the university's teacher preparation program.

Method

Setting

The research was conducted in six schools in the Miami area that followed the BISO (Bilingual School Organization) model, as well as in the middle school receiving students from two of them. BISO schools are "Special Developmental Bilingual/Biliterate" programs in the terminology used by M-DCPS to describe schools that place two culture groups together so that they study one another's native language and cultural background (Beebe & Mackey, 1990). They provide English for Speakers of Other Languages, Spanish as a Second Language, Spanish for Spanish Speakers, Curriculum Content in Spanish, the introduction of basic concepts and skills in the student's home language and reinforcement in the second language, as well as the district's instructional program in English (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2002). The middle school was included because many students who had attended two of the BISO schools continued their education there, and the principal wished to offer them bilingual content curriculum.

Subjects

Participants were the six principals of the elementary BISO schools and the principal of the middle school. However, since one of the principals did not return the researchers' phone calls, the study was limited to six principals. They were all experienced administrators (ranging from 5 to 14 years of experience) and educators (averaging 25 years in education), having worked as teachers, bilingual and instructional coordinators, and assistant principals. They all held Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Three were enrolled in doctoral programs.

Instrument

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview that asked the principals (a) to describe the qualities of their ideal candidate, (b) to identify the weaknesses applicants needed to overcome, (c) to explain whether they had difficulties finding suitable candidates, (d) to describe their expectations regarding prospective teachers' preparation, second language proficiency, and familiarity with their programs, and (e) to offer insights on how FIU's teacher preparation program could be improved. Since candidates' preparation and qualifications appeared to be the principals' main priority, the order was altered, but all the topics were covered in depth.

Procedures

Data Collection

The aforementioned topics were discussed in a meeting with each one of the principals. Two of the researchers were present at each meeting, which lasted an average of 50 minutes and their notes were cross-checked afterwards. A follow-up letter was sent to each principal thanking them and encouraging them to add any considerations not discussed in the interview.

Data Analysis

Subjects' responses allowed the researchers to identify five major topics: (a) challenges faced at the time of recruiting new faculty, (b) qualifications of suitable candidates, (c) selection procedures, (d) strategies to support teachers, and (e) suggestions to help improve Florida

International University's teacher preparation program, but only the first, second, and fifth topics were relevant for this project.

Results and Discussion

Challenges Faced by the Principals

Five principals agreed that candidates wishing to work at two-way bilingual schools needed to achieve higher levels of Spanish proficiency to teach the Spanish component of the program, especially in 4th and 5th grades. The principals explained that since many of the new teachers were second and/or third generation Spanish speakers, their command of Spanish, their heritage language (Krashen, 1998; Tse, 2000; Valdés, 2001), was adequate to maintain informal conversations at home or with their friends, but did not allow them to deliver academic instruction in Spanish in the upper grades. Three principals pointed out that because many candidates had been schooled mostly or only in English, they lacked cultural background in Spanish. As a result, their students could not be as exposed to Spanish folktales, songs, or rhymes as they were with similar enrichment activities conducted in English. Finally, three of the principals stated that credential-related issues and the perception that teaching in Spanish required more work seemed to prevent more appropriate placements. Thus, they explained that some teachers might be certified in Elementary Education but not in Spanish or vice-versa and, therefore, they were not authorized to teach certain classes, and that some teachers were reluctant to teach in Spanish because they felt that students "are not motivated," since English was perceived as the more prestigious language.

Qualifications of Suitable Candidates

The principals thought that suitable candidates should have four characteristics: proficiency in Spanish, commitment to the program, theoretical preparation, and willingness to work with others.

All the principals agreed that candidates should possess knowledge of oral and written Spanish in order to deliver content area instruction effectively and that they had to show positive attitudes towards two-way instruction. As one of them stated, "They have to have their heart in the bilingual program." Four principals pointed to the applicants' knowledge of the rationale of dual language instruction as an important asset to be considered for a position, and spoke about the importance of staff members getting along and working well with others because articulation is required to ensure the success of the program.

Suggestions to Help Improve the University's Teacher Preparation Program

Principals' responses appeared to concentrate on two areas: augmenting the Spanish proficiency of the candidates and developing collaborative efforts university-schools

Augmenting the Spanish proficiency of the candidates. All the principals agreed that teacher preparation programs should include content (Literature and Contrastive Rhetoric) and language (Spelling, Grammar, Linguistics, and the writing process) classes taught in Spanish to augment students' proficiency and background in this language. Along these lines, four principals suggested that the university offer an experimental "Methods of Teaching Content Areas in Spanish" class taught by a professor proficient in Spanish. Instruction, students' presentations, demonstration lessons, and lesson plans in this class would be conducted in Spanish. For three principals, it was necessary to increase the number of hours devoted to fieldwork and a heavier emphasis on hands-on approaches in the instruction provided at FIU.

Developing collaborative efforts between the university and the BISO schools. Five principals emphasized the need to establish university-school partnerships that allowed pre-

service teachers to work as paraprofessionals in two-way schools. Three principals advocated holding orientation sessions at BISO sites to help familiarize students with the programs' goals and aims.

Outcomes of the Project

The information gathered revealed the need to improve the university's teacher preparation program in TESOL and Elementary Education. The researchers analyzed the suggestions and ranked them according to feasibility (solutions that belonged within their realm) and rapid implementation (possibility of being put into practice in a short period of time).

Offering a course in Spanish and holding orientation meetings for interested students at one of the two-way school sites appeared to meet both criteria. The researchers decided to explore the possibility of offering one of the sections of the Methods of Teaching Science course entirely in Spanish during the Fall 2003 semester.

Holding meetings at BISO schools would not entail major inconveniences for the students, since one of the BISO schools is located on campus. Students would have access to: (a) information about TESOL, Modern Language, and Elementary Education programs, (b) educators working in successful two-way programs, and (c) augmenting their knowledge of BISO programs.

Conclusion

Principals identified candidates' lack of proficiency in the minority language as their greatest challenge at the time of finding qualified individuals for their schools (Campbell, 1996; Draper & Hicks, 2000), and suggested that the university offers content courses taught in the minority language in order to promote it (Krashen, 1998; Valdés, 2001).

The outcomes of this project reveal the need to open channels of communication between universities and schools that result in mutual benefits for both institutions (Goal IV of M-DCPS' District Strategic Plan: "Schools will maximize opportunities to increase the number of students who are bilingual and biliterate"). In promoting the teaching and learning of Spanish in addition to English (Fradd, 1996), the researchers hope to start a reversal in the overwhelming trend toward subtractive bilingualism surrounding universities and colleges in the United States (Guerrero, 1998). This will be achieved by encouraging students to expand their knowledge of other languages and cultures (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Krashen, 1998), by exemplifying the benefits of additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1980), and by increasing the bilingual force who can contribute to the economy in the area (Fradd, 1996).

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