

MENTORING THE BILINGUAL TEACHER

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A new teacher's first year in a classroom without a cooperating or supervising teacher to offer guidance and support may prove to be a traumatic experience, especially if the preparation, expectation and actual assignment are incongruous. As the face of the nation changes and diversity in the classroom becomes the norm across the United States, mentoring may be a promising practice for new teachers.

When mentored, the new teacher feels supported, confident, and competent. Mentoring is also responsible for curtailing the number of teachers who leave teaching during the induction period of their careers. For new teachers in bilingual education settings, a mentoring relationship between them and experienced teachers can lead to better program implementation, provide the support needed for working with students in two languages and be mutually beneficial.

Of particular importance is the retention of bilingual teachers given:

- their scarcity in all settings--urban, suburban and rural areas (Council of the Greater City Schools, 1992); and
- the greater demands that are being placed on all teachers to collaborate, lead, and make sound educational decisions for all students, including language minorities (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993; Holmes Group, 1986).

The purpose of this article is to present a review of the literature on mentoring bilingual teachers and to pose alternatives to extant models. A question and answer format has been used to provide a definition of mentoring, discuss implementation efforts and problems encountered, identify salient issues emerging from the pairing of mentors in bilingual settings and suggest mentoring alternatives.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is usually an intense, dyadic relationship in which the mentor furthers the professional and personal development of the protégé providing information, assistance, support and guidance. The mentoring relationship is usually organized around supportive activities, such as:

- observation (visiting each other's classroom);
- demonstration (coaching);
- conferencing (feedback); and,
- joint preparation.

Dalton, Thompson, and Price (1977, cited in Hunt & Michael, 1983) view mentoring as a four stage process through which careers may progress: apprentice, colleague, mentor, and sponsor. An assumption made is that eventually the protégées will mature into mentors given that the teaching career is viewed as developmental, cyclical, and maturational.

How has mentoring been implemented in bilingual education?

The literature on mentoring and bilingual teachers is not extensive, but there is evidence that mentoring of bilingual education teachers is occurring. The following are some examples.

The **Multi-district Trainer of Trainers Institute (MTTI)**, that has been implemented nationwide (and internationally) since 1980 (Calderon & Marsh, 1988), offers staff development, continued feedback and support at the school site, and provides teachers with specific training (such as peer coaching and observation) in order to heighten their success with innovations. While the MTTI is not a typical mentoring strategy, in that the traditional mentor-mentee dyad is not prominent, it does involve teachers working as peer coaches to provide, over a three year period, assistance to teacher colleagues. This model, found to be effective in improving teacher morale and level of instruction for limited English proficient (LEP) students, has been adapted to fit bilingual education training contexts. For example, teachers receive training in:

effective teaching strategies for first and second language development, reading, writing, content areas through sheltered English, models for teaching critical thinking and cooperative learning models...[which]...are sequenced according to LEP students' level of English proficiency. (Calderon & Marsh, 1988, p. 139).

Another example is the **New York City Mentor Teacher Internship Program** (NYC Board of Education, 1991) designed for first year practicing teachers lacking teacher education preparation. Mentees eligible for this internship program enroll in courses leading towards certification and receive assistance from experienced teachers. Similar to the MTTI, it has been adapted to serve the novice bilingual teacher. Where possible, bilingual mentors are matched to bilingual mentees. The model calls for conferencing, visiting each other's classroom, providing demonstrations, and joint planning and preparation. Both the mentor and mentee receive orientation and participate in conferences and monthly workshops on the mentoring process. They are both released from certain responsibilities during the year in order to engage in the mentoring process. Coverage of classrooms during the periods set aside for mentoring is also provided. However, because in urban contexts, such as New York, there are bilingual teacher shortages, in many instances non-bilingual mentors must necessarily serve as bilingual resource brokers and identifiers for novice bilingual teachers. One way in which non-bilingual mentors have been able to provide bilingual expertise has been to help their mentees make connections with other bilingual teachers in the building or system who may not be serving officially as mentors but who are critical sources of expertise and support. In addition, mentors help novice bilingual teachers locate appropriate bilingual teacher preparation courses. To deal with the shortage of mentors, a mentor may be assigned to a larger than usual number of novice teachers; a model similar to that of staff developer.

The **San Marcos, Texas Independent School District** (Avila et al., 1991) also developed a bilingual education model for peer coaching designed to provide practical staff development opportunities to bilingual education teachers. The model design included two components: a six part workshop series and peer coaching pairing. Over the 1990-91 school year, 40 bilingual teachers received training about peer coaching and worked in coaching pairs. Each dyad engaged in peer coaching cycles that included observation, feedback, coaching, and planning. Bilingual education consultants and instructional aides provided class coverage to enable coaching pairs to work together. At the end of the year, participants reported that they felt less isolated, found mutual support, and were able to learn new instructional strategies.

From the above examples, some of the models are adapted for use in bilingual education contexts in the following ways:

- attention is paid to the language match in addition to the content (by certification or license) match;
- mentees are encouraged to take courses in bilingual/bicultural education and participate in staff

- development on issues of bilingual instruction; and
- bilingual consultants and bilingual teacher aides are hired to cover the class while the teachers take release time for mentoring activities.

What are some problem areas with existing mentoring structures?

The underlying premise is that if both mentor and mentee are prepared to teach the same subject, at the same level while taking the language of instruction into account, they will have a broader common content and pedagogical understanding from which to start the relationship. Odell (1990) found that when the mentor and protégé are from the same grade level and teach the same subject, the mentoring relationship is likely to be more successful. Despite school district attempts to honor this principle, it is unlikely that pairing will involve two bilingual teachers because:

- the majority of bilingual teachers are in school buildings where there is no more than one bilingual teacher per grade level; and
- many veteran bilingual teachers fail to be identified because they may not possess bilingual state certification (only half of the states have bilingual certification).

One of the ways some mentoring programs have moved to circumvent the license match is by using the criteria of assignment match. In effect, a certified math teacher teaching science can mentor a novice bilingual science teacher. In other words, even though content and pedagogy ought to guide the match of mentor with mentee, given the complexity of supply and demand of teachers the minimal match is usually at the general pedagogical level.

Inadequate matching can lead to a lack of content congruity between mentor and mentee. A study by Calderon (1994) underscored the importance of content congruity. She studied twenty-five pairs of minority/bilingual teachers in mentoring relationships and found that teacher pairs engaged in both -- *instructional talk* -- classroom management, teaching materials, assessment, and -- *personal talk* -- relationships with colleagues and personal financial management. The instructional talk categories were found to be no different from those in which any teacher mentor-teacher mentee dyad might engage. However, the kinds of questions that characterized the talk were directly related to bilingualism and the needs of LEP students. Some examples of questions discussed were: "I have LEP students, monolingual Spanish and monolingual English speaking students, how do I group them?" "I have two grade level combinations and some LEP students, what do I do?" "When do I conduct ESL?" "How is the language arts block split between first and second language instruction?" (Calderon, 1994 p. 39).

According to Macias (1988), the texture of the educational discussions in the regular/bilingual, mentor/mentee relationship is likely to include more about teaching generically, rather than topics of culture, bilingualism or second language learning. The knowledge bilingual teachers need is often viewed by mainstream educators as "special" knowledge associated with teaching a certain segment of the student population. Although their knowledge is acknowledged as needed and desirable, it is not perceived as necessarily relevant to the general knowledge base about teaching (Ruiz, 1993; Torres-Guzmán, 1994).

It may be reasonable to conclude, therefore, that mentor/mentee pairings and the nature of the mentoring dialogue may not fulfill the needs of the bilingual teacher. This would suggest that for novice bilingual teachers, while feeling support from the regular education veteran teachers, there may be limitations in the mentor/mentee relationships that are fundamental to the growth of their teaching.

What are some of the salient issues in bilingual/bicultural education to which the mentoring pairs must attend?

Novice teachers of bilingual education confront issues in four critical areas: (a) how to think about first and second language and instruction; (b) how to incorporate culture within the organization of instruction; (c) how to think about the interaction of language and cognitive development; and (d) how to think about education for social justice and transformation. A brief review of these critical issues in relation to mentoring follows.

Language of instruction is a critical topic for the bilingual teacher and ought to be part of the mentor/mentee dialogue.

Teacher questions: What language do I teach when? How do I teach in two languages? What children do I teach in what language?

What is known: Bilingual research findings suggest that for students to undertake instruction in a second language and be successful, they need a strong foundation in the native language (Cummins, 1981; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985; Hakuta, 1986; Ruiz, 1993; Collier, 1992). Common wisdom in the field is that building the necessary foundation takes 5 to 7 years of schooling in the native language while concurrently learning about and learning in the second language (Collier, 1992). Ramirez, et al. (1991), in the most comprehensive large scale government-directed study, found that students in programs organized around the principle of "the strong foundation," termed late-exit programs, fared better academically than those enrolled in early-exit transitional and English immersion programs. The students in late-exit programs also performed better than the norm peer group. In other words, bilingual education ought to be viewed as an educational program that takes language differences into account.

What is needed: Lemberger (1990) states that the need for a "'consistent language' policy throughout schools and districts [would] provide teachers a foundation, so they do not feel they have to create the policy individually within their classes" (p. 315). This requires that teachers communicate a clear native language policy to their students. For example, Vasquez (1993) and Milk (1993) describe how the absence of a clear native language policy at the instructional level leads student to "subvert" their choice of language; in addition, they indicate that students take their lead regarding language choice from the adult (teacher) and the material used in the classroom.

Culture and instruction cannot be separated. Teachers, in general, face many tensions around the organization of instruction. There is even greater tension as it relates to issues of inclusion. Various factors influence what happens in planning instruction, i.e., what the teacher has learned in a teacher education program, level of experience, and the curricular norms of the school.

Teacher questions: How can I make sure my instruction affirms the diversity of the classroom? What can I do to ensure pride and respect among the students for each other? How do I make the subjects I have to teach relevant and accessible to the students?

What is known: There is enough evidence in the field of bilingual/bicultural education to support the fact that culture is an important component in the organization of instruction and in teacher preparation (Macias, 1988). The relationships of self-confidence, self-esteem, identity, and language are related to achievement (Ogbu & Matuti-Bianchi, 1986; Suarez-Orosco, 1987; Ferdman, 1990). If teachers learn from their teacher education programs "that bicultural children do not receive enough verbal and social stimulation in their homes" (Daarder, 1991, p. 9), their conceptions of developing or incorporating rich cultural components within their organization of instruction may be limited to exposing bicultural children to museums, theaters, and concerts of the mainstream culture in order to "enrich" them. Within this context, cultural equity may be interpreted as bringing bicultural children "up to par" by providing them with activities that parallel the experiences of dominant group children. As found by Nieto (1995), by itself, this is an inadequate treatment of culture and instruction.

What to do: Key to deeper understanding of how instruction itself can be framed in more culturally relevant ways is the teachers' exposure to works such as the Hawaiian Kamehameha Program (Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp, 1987) and the Arizona Project on Literacy (Moll & Díaz, 1987). The important principle guiding these projects is that each community, irrespective of poverty, race, or ethnicity, has resources that can help teachers create curricula and educational environments that are inclusive of students' backgrounds and provide students greater access to new knowledge.

Language assessment and cognitive development. Teachers are often faced with having to group children for instruction and grade their performance.

Teacher questions: How do I know what this student knows? Should I test him/her in native language or in English? What would the English language test be testing? How does what he/she knows show up in his/her performance?

What is known: Assessment efforts in many states fail to address the needs of linguistically and culturally different students (DeAvila, Navarrete, Martinez & Kamm, 1994). While most school districts have instituted systematic language assessment procedures, much of the information gathered is difficult to interpret (Baker, 1988) and thus becomes of little use to teachers.

What to do: When conducting or developing language assessment, one must first consider language development and its relationship to second language achievement (Hakuta & Diaz, 1985) and linguistic variations in the first language that are related to cultural and regional differences (Torres-Guzmán, 1990). Assessment instruments written in English cannot simply be translated into other languages to serve populations who speak those languages. Such translations and adaptations require "maintaining the integrity of the original version of the system while taking into consideration the integrity of an entirely new code" (Torres-Guzmán, 1990, p. 149). Assessments "must be sensitively crafted to accommodate diverse forms of authentic communication and that they should assess only what students have had a fair opportunity to learn" (Bass, 1993, p. 32)

Transformation and power relationships. Bilingual education is increasingly becoming a program for both mainstream and language and ethnic groups, but it has traditionally been conceived as a program for an entitled language minority student population that has suffered discrimination.

Teacher questions: How do I acknowledge the experiences of injustice my students and their parents have faced? How do I get them to value the courage and struggles of the previous generations? What do I do to help students break disempowering attitudes? How do I get students to understand that learning a second language well can help them voice their individual and community needs?

What is known: Bilingual education holds the promise whereby marginalized linguistic minorities are empowered to participate fully as citizens in American society. Achieving justice and liberation tacitly undergirds the practice of bilingual education. In a study of preservice bilingual teachers' reflections of their teacher education programs, Ada (1986) found that respondents expressed feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and uncertainty regarding their cultural identity. This was, in part, a consequence of scant attention paid by their teacher education program to their linguistic and cultural experiences. Respondents argued that teacher education programs should encourage peer-to-peer support in order to enable them to break their isolation and build their sense of self.

What to do: According to Ada (1986), for teachers to help language minority children engage in the empowerment process, they must feel empowered themselves. The first-hand experiences of bilingual teachers who are themselves members of linguistic minority groups place them in the position of being able to understand the sociopolitical realities of the children in their classroom. They must be able to

give voice to children from communities that often remain unheard.

A review of the salient issues in bilingual/bicultural education raises several questions: How can we, given the current critical shortages of bilingual teachers, use the notion of mutual support of teachers and learn from the existing mentoring structures to help new bilingual teachers entering the field? How should we engage bilingual teachers in transforming instructional practices and school policies so that language minority children are not simply prepared for today's world, but are empowered to participate in creating the future? What do we know about the craft of teaching in bilingual settings? What dimensions of the dialogue need to change so that bilingual teachers are helping to shape schools of the future that include the bilingual student population? And finally, how should traditional mentoring models change in order to meet these needs?

What are the alternatives?

In addition to the features of the mentoring models described above, there are other alternatives that include: (a) additional or different criteria for selecting bilingual mentor teachers, (b) more interactive approaches towards building helping relationships between novice and experienced teachers, and (c) expanding mentor/mentee dyads so as to include a combination of bilingual and monolingual English teachers.

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed the many paths taken by teachers in becoming bilingual teachers. Initially, teachers who spoke another language or English-speaking teachers who completed 150 hours of study in another language could qualify to teach in bilingual classrooms. To fill teacher shortages, native speakers were also recruited from countries where particular languages are spoken, for example Latin and Central America or Asia (Fix & Zimmerman, 1993; Recruit Bilingual Teachers, 1987). In addition, practicing teachers who knew the language the students spoke were reassigned as bilingual teachers. Few of them were prepared adequately to work with language minority students.

Formal bilingual certification programs have come into existence in the last decade or so. The quality of these programs has been uneven. Only in the last few years, partially due to the normal maturation of the field and also to the changes in teacher education nationwide, the teachers are more adequately prepared. Since the certification process takes time to complete, many bilingual teachers have not gone beyond the provisional certification level. Certified teachers graduating from cohesive bilingual/bicultural teacher education programs that focus on the language minority student are thus recent, and their numbers are relatively small. Schools face the challenge of finding mentors who possess all the qualifications: leadership skills and experiences as well as certification/assignment/content/language requirements. The scarcity of mentors possessing the ideal combination leaves the field with two teacher pools: the veterans who possess the experience and, in smaller numbers, the innovative teachers with leadership skills and the recent graduates or novices, who possess a more cohesive and better theoretical understandings of the role of language, culture, cognition and assessment, and transformation and power.

A more interactive approach towards building helping relationships between teachers can be established between the experienced and the novice. In other words, the formally prepared and the "experientially prepared" teacher needs to be conceptualized within an interactive paradigm whereby the strengths both members of the mentoring dyad bring to the relationship are viewed as valuable. Mentoring based on this kind of interactive model allows the veteran or inservice teacher's knowledge of practice to be conceptually grounded in the beginning teacher's knowledge of new research and theoretically-based models of teaching. Even if one or the other in the pair exhibits knowledge gaps about special and specific topics (e.g., second language learning, native language instruction, etc.), the model ensures that both teachers are in a position to simultaneously learn and instruct. Through such an interactive model, novice and veteran bilingual teachers alike can engage in mutually supportive relationships that allow them to simultaneously give and receive the support they need to sustain their commitment and revitalize their practice.

While the trend is towards greater heterogeneity amongst language minority students, the teacher population is increasingly more white (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1994; Goodwin, 1991). The minority undergraduate student population does not offer much hope. There are proportionately fewer undergraduates of color in the pipeline than there were a decade ago. Even with aggressive recruitment and retention strategies, the teacher of language minorities is likely to continue to be an individual who has not had experiences similar to those of his or her students. At most, one can hope that teacher education programs begin to prepare prospective mainstream teachers to work with linguistically diverse populations that inhabit large urban areas. The quality of that preparation, realistically, is likely to be questionable for some time to come. Therefore, mentoring programs become especially significant in terms of the recruitment and retention of bilingual teachers.

The interactive model should be expanded to include non-bilingual teachers, so that bilingual teachers can serve as mentors to colleagues who may not be prepared to be, but who will undoubtedly be responsible for children who speak languages other than English. In this way, the wisdom and experiences of bilingual teachers as well as their distinctive perspectives about the needs of bilingual/bicultural children can enrich the practices of all teachers. By building bridges between teachers so that they all see themselves as responsible for all children, we can hope to ensure that the language minority student populations not only contribute to society but influence how society defines itself now and in the future.

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