


Chapter 12

Preparing and Enriching Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Educators Through Professional Development


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ABSTRACT

This chapter examined a cohort of 12 in-service teachers' and three administrators' views in regards to areas of successes, challenges, and priorities in working with immigrant and refugee students and their families as a result of three professional development (PD) sessions that were offered as part of a federal grant-based research project. Qualitative data included field notes through participant observation of group discussions, informal conversations with the participants, PD activity materials, online reflective surveys after each PD session, a background and demographic checklist, and a final questionnaire of overall learning. The results showed the participants' growing sensitivity towards their students' and families' contexts, including academic and social supports, with a desire to promote and implement more linguistically and culturally responsive strategies within their practices and school districts.

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INTRODUCTION

U.S. public schools are increasingly becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse, thus, there is a need for the 85% of all public school teachers (Howard, 2006), who are mostly White and monolingual (Bartolomé, 2004), to be well prepared. These students speak languages other than “Standard English”- the idealized version of English with its structured and rule-based system- at home and are diverse in terms of culture, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, educational background and language proficiency. Obstacles to supporting linguistically and culturally diverse students include teachers’ lack of awareness, reflection, or introspection on their own “assumptions, values, and beliefs” (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2012, p. 59). Researchers argue that systematic, sustained professional learning, guided critical reflection to connect theory to practice, and targeted professional development (PD) based on the assessed needs of teachers and students are crucial factors in preparing teachers to be culturally and linguistically responsive within their diverse contexts (Slapac, Song, & Chasteen, 2017; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). Teachers should also see each other as resources and create rich learning communities based on collaborative teacher learning strategies, reflective practices, and active learning with attention to content and context (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

In light of such endeavors, and as part of a federal grant-based research project entitled *Quality Teachers for English Learners* (QTEL), this chapter documents and reports on the analysis of a series of professional development sessions that supported 15 educators through engaging them in critically reflective questions and collecting data throughout our interactions with them. To address inequitable practices, challenges, and barriers towards EL students and their parents and families, we designed and implemented a series of PD sessions embedded in a larger teacher training program. We note that we use the term, *English Learners* (ELs), to refer to Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) who are mostly from immigrant households and acquiring English as their new or additional language. The term is purposefully chosen mainly for consistency with our grant project description of the same population, written per the federal grant guideline.

Drawing on scholarship on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (Gay, 2002; Lucas, Villegas & Freedson-Gonzales, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), language and language development for emergent bilinguals (García & Kleifgen, 2010; García & Li, 2014) and professional development in diverse educational settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991), we sought to explore the following research questions: What perceptions, assumptions and knowledge did the content teachers bring with them to QTEL regarding immigration and their students in their school/district? How did the activities through our professional development (PD) sessions enhance

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