

March 2001

Preparing Teachers For Educating Linguistically Diverse Students

Teresa Kennedy
University of Idaho

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/nwjte>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Kennedy, Teresa (2001) "Preparing Teachers For Educating Linguistically Diverse Students," *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

DOI: 10.15760/nwjte.2001.1.1.8

Available at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/nwjte/vol1/iss1/8>

This article is brought to you for free and open access. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).

Preparing Teachers For Educating Linguistically Diverse Students

Teresa J. Kennedy, Ph.D.
University of Idaho

ABSTRACT

The nation's resident population on Census Day, April 1, 2000, was 281,421,906—a 13.2 percent increase over the 248,709,873 counted in the 1990 census. Since the ethnic profile of the United States is steadily increasing, the current drive for educational reform must strive to rethink and restructure schools to serve all students well. The intended modification of curriculum and instructional practices necessary to achieve this goal must focus on challenging and engaging all students while articulating programs across grade levels in a coherent, sequential manner. The teaching contexts are changing direction, and so, too, must teacher training and staff development programs in order to facilitate adaptation of instructional practices to meet the needs of our growing linguistically diverse school population.

INTRODUCTION

The ethnic profile of the United States changed significantly between 1980 and 1990. During this time period, the number of Asian-Americans doubled and the Hispanic population was reported to grow more than 50 percent (Armstrong, 1991). A current report by the Population Projections Program of the U.S. Census Bureau provided projections of the resident population for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia that hold significant implications for change in education. The report provided information regarding each state ranked by estimated population growth over the years 1995-2025 (Campbell, 1996). The six North-western states were included in the top 17 states that would experience the highest population changes during this period. Of these states, Idaho was listed sixth, followed by Alaska (eighth), Wyoming (eleventh), Washington (twelfth), Oregon (thirteenth), and Montana (seventeenth).

The state and county population estimates released in November 2000 reported that be-

tween 1990-1999, the American population became more racially and ethnically diverse (Symens Smith, Ahmed, & Sink, 2000). The report stated that Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander populations had the largest growth rate since the last census, explaining that these demographic changes are affected by the continuous influx of immigrants who are typically younger and have higher fertility rates.¹

Considering the number of students in our schools representing language communities other than English (see figure 1), the current reform movement must surpass previous change efforts in regard to linguistically diverse students if we are to truly serve all students well. Both preservice and inservice teacher programs must focus on ways to ensure that they address teaching to the needs of all students in our schools. This requires reform in university teacher education and district staff development programs. Current teaching methodology must incorporate best practices that include strategies to address linguistically diverse students and provide them with equal access to educational materials.

Figure 1. Population estimate: Language communities of the northwestern states in relation to total population in the USA.

	AK	ID	MT	OR	WA	WY	USA
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	16.40%	1.30%	6.50%	1.40%	1.80%	2.30%	0.90%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.50%	1.20%	0.60%	3.30%	6.00%	0.90%	4.00%
Hispanic	4.00%	7.40%	1.80%	6.40%	6.50%	6.10%	11.50%

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

Basically speaking, linguistically diverse students, commonly referred to as *language minority students*, are those from homes in which English is not the predominate language of communication between the parent and child. The language profiles for these children vary considerably with respect to oral proficiency and literacy in both the home language and in English. Therefore, their language profiles are commonly changing on a continuous basis (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Often referred to as Limited English Proficient (LEP), these students provide yet another dimension from which teachers, both new and veteran, struggle to create and implement a consistent curricula that equally prepares all students for success in our global market place.

Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language programs traditionally created for these students often suffer due to insufficient program support and wide-spread teacher shortages. Consequently, most LEP students can be found in regular classroom settings, not bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, and few of their teachers have any formal preparation in either bilingual or ESL methodology (Canney, Kennedy, Schoeder, and Miles, 1999). Since mainstream teachers increasingly find themselves struggling to cope with the high numbers of language minority students found across grade levels (K-12), both preservice and inservice teacher training programs must

include plans to assist teachers to become grounded in the knowledge and skills required to ensure student success.

WHAT BASIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS SHOULD PRESERVICE/INSERVICE TEACHERS OF LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS POSSESS?

Research and best practice dictate that support systems must be created within the classroom to facilitate learning in order for LEP students to progress academically. The following objectives must be incorporated into teacher preparation programs for Bilingual, ESL as well as Mainstream contexts if teachers are expected to take a more active role in the education of all their students (Anderson, 1991; Garcia, 1992; Kennedy & Canney, 2000; Milk, Mercado & Sapiens, 1992; Omaggio-Hadley, 2001):

- Understanding second language acquisition principles and how they can be included into communicative learning activities.
- Creating classroom environments that facilitate both language development and content learning.
- Incorporating the cultures of all students into the curriculum without bias or prejudgmental attitudes.
- Negotiating meaning within natural learning contexts that include modified speech, providing visual support, and planned meaningful redundancy of content.

- Allowing parents and community members to contribute to and be included in the instructional process of language minority students.
- Establishing direct connections with existing knowledge (generally culturally based) that the learner brings to each task.
- Creating an instructional program that provides abundant and diverse opportunities for speaking, listening, reading and writing while utilizing a variety of different teaching methods.
- Assessing student ability so that instruction can be aimed slightly above the students' existing level.
- Using "scaffolding" to actively involve all students in the classroom and to help guide them through the learning process.
- Using cooperative learning activities that incorporate hands-on, interactive, higher level thinking skills (such as problem-solving), and to establish collaborative frameworks within the classroom.

Monolingualism can be a serious barrier to basic understanding among various ethnic groups. Encouraging collaboration between language minority students and their English-speaking peers helps all students grow academically, linguistically and socially. LEP students and other "at risk" students are frequently cited as justifications for why reforms are needed, however they are rarely included in specific academic reform efforts (Gandara, 1994). School reform measures hold as much promise for English language learners as for all students in our diverse school populations, and specific measures must concentrate on how these students' language skills, cultural background, and experiences shape the school's work (Adger, 1996). All students must be held to the same high academic standards and an integrated, collaborative ESL model immerses the LEP student completely into all classroom activities while highlighting collaboration between home, school, and community, respect for the background and perspective of the LEP student, and provides equal access to subject matter.

HOW CAN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS REALISTICALLY PREPARE BOTH PRESERVICE AND INSERVICE TEACHERS TO ATTEND TO THE NEEDS OF OUR GROWING POPULATION OF LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS?

Institutions of Higher Education must address the severe national shortage of bilingual educators by recruiting more minorities into teacher preparation programs, offering teacher training courses that provide requisite knowledge and skills to address the needs of language minority students, and promoting second language and cultural studies in a proactive manner. By initiating partnerships with school districts, universities can provide positive opportunities for preservice and inservice teachers to work together in staff development programs while interacting with language minority students. Basic foreign language requirements have been recommended for teacher education programs in order to provide preservice teachers with a stronger awareness of second language learners' needs and experiences (Milk, Mercado & Sapiens, 1992). The study of a second language can provide teachers with first hand experience of how activities of mixed linguistic and conceptual complexity can be tailored to fit the needs of all students in a given classroom. Teacher education programs should require all students to complete at least a minor in a language program.

Initial steps have been taken at the University of Idaho to encourage education students to study another language and culture. The preservice foreign language education program in the College of Education has created a unique experience for K-17 students by combining its program with an inservice staff development program in a local elementary school and actively recruiting native Spanish-speaking college students into teacher education all at the same time.² Preservice teachers are enrolled in a three-credit Elementary Foreign Language Methods

course while teachers from a local elementary school are enrolled in a one-credit course focusing on bilingual collaboration. Together, the teaching teams gain an understanding of current methodology of second language teaching and improve their skills in the Spanish language through content planning and collaboration with the native speakers that work in each classroom (Kennedy, Odell, Jenson & Austin, 1998). All language assistants (native Spanish-speakers) are required to attend the pedagogy course in order to participate in the program. The content-based Spanish program focuses on enhancing and reinforcing the regular curriculum through a diverse combination of lessons that include learning activities from the GLOBE program, an international environmental science program presently being utilized in 96 different countries. Because GLOBE is a world-wide program, materials are currently available in all six United Nations' languages (English, Spanish, French, Russian, Mandarin, and Arabic), plus German, with more languages becoming available all the time. GLOBE students are introduced to other languages and cultures as they engage in authentic projects and meaningful discussions with one another, students in other countries, and world experts in the disciplines they are studying (Kennedy, 1999). This program also provides language minority students with access to materials in their native language that facilitate understanding of the curriculum.

An attitudinal inventory was administered to all elementary students participating in the Idaho FLES (Foreign Language Elementary School) program in order to measure changes relating to school, perceived difficulty in language acquisition, perceived desirability of foreign language study, cultural views, and student self-esteem and confidence levels in relation to their academic achievement in comparison to their non-FLES peers (Kennedy, Nelson, Odell, & Austin, 2000). The conclusions of this study suggested that FLES programs of this nature provide students with improved motivation to participate, to persist and to succeed in second language study and could possibly be explained by one's attitudes toward the target language and

its culture.³ The long-term goal of this collaborative program is to facilitate academic achievement of the school's LEP students, introduce monolingual students to another language and culture, prepare future bilingual teachers, and to provide professional development for veteran teachers so that they can provide optimal learning environments for all of their students in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Demographical trends indicate that mainstream teachers as well as Bilingual and ESL teachers must be prepared to deal with the social, communicative and educational needs of both native English-speaking and language minority students. Schools are becoming more and more diverse, forcing teachers to assume responsibility for the academic development of all students. Teachers must have access to professional development programs that emphasize how all learners acquire language skills and to native language resources that support comprehension and learning as needed in their classrooms. Reform efforts in educational practices focused on LEP students will not occur until all players in higher education, the K-12 schools system and the community together realize that native language plays an important role in learning, even in settings where English is the primary language of instruction for all students. One program was highlighted in order to provide an example of how teacher educators can diversify their programs. The challenge is now to create a program that can meet the needs of your diverse student population.

REFERENCES

- Adger, C.T. (1996). "Language Minority Students in School Reform: The role of collaboration." ERIC Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics, Washington, D.C.
- Anderson, A. (1991). "Teaching children: What teachers should know." In M. Kennedy (Ed.), Teaching academic subjects to diverse learners. New York: Teachers College Press.

Armstrong, L. (1991, March 1). "Census confirms remarkable shifts in ethnic make-up." *Education Week*, p. 1.

Campbell, P. R. (1996). "Population Projection for States—by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995-2025," PPL-47, U.S. Bureau of Census, Population Division.

Canney, G., Kennedy, T.J., Shroeder, M., and Miles, S. (February, 1999). "Instructional Strategies for K-12 Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Students in the Tradition Classroom." *The Reading Teacher*, 51: 5, 540-544.

Gandara, P. (1994). The impact of the education reform movement on limited English proficient students." In B. McLeod (Eds.), Language and Learning: Educating linguistically diverse students, 45-70. Albany: SUNY Press.

Garcia, E. (1992). "Linguistically and culturally diverse children: Effective instructional practices and related policy issues." In H. Waxman, J. Walker de Felix, J. Anderson, & H. Baptiste (Eds.), Students at risk in at-risk schools: Improving environments for learning. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

Kennedy, T.J. & Canney, G. (2000). "Collaboration Across Language, Age, and Geographic Borders." Chapter 17, In: Risko, K. & Bromley, K. (Eds.), Collaboration for Diverse Learners: Viewpoints and Practices, 310-329. International Reading Association Book Club Selection for December 2000.

Kennedy, T.J., Nelson, J. & Odell, M.R.L., & Austin, L. (2000). "The FLES Attitudinal Inventory." *Foreign Language Annals*, 33: 3, 278-289.

Kennedy, T.J. (Spring, 1999). "GLOBE Integrates Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Technology into the Foreign Language Classroom." *Learning Languages*, 4: 3, 23-25.

Kennedy, T.J., Odell, M.R.L., Jenson, F. and Austin, L. (December, 1998). "A content-based, hands-on program: Idaho FLES." *Hispania*, 81: 4, 933-940.

Milk, R., Mercado, C., and Sapiens, A. (1992). "Re-thinking the education of teachers of language minority children: developing reflective teachers for changing schools." Washington D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

Omaggio-Hadley, A. (2001). Teaching language in context, Third edition. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Symens Smith, A., Ahmed, B. and Sink, L. (2000, November). "An analysis of State and County Population Changes by Characteristics: 1990-1999." Working Paper Series No. 45, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C. 20233-8800.

Wong Fillmore, L. (1991). "Language and cultural issues in the early education of language minority children." In S. Kagan (Ed.), The care and education of America's young children: Obstacles and opportunities. Ninetieth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I, (pp. 30-49). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

ENDNOTES

1. Detailed information regarding the ranking of all 50 states and the District of Columbia can be found at "Reports" for State Population Projections listed at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/projections/stproj.html>.

2. Detailed information regarding the Idaho FLES program can be found at <http://ivc.uidaho.edu/fles>.

3. Detailed statistical information and sample survey are included in the article cited by Kennedy, Nelson, Odell and Austin, 2000.

Dr. Teresa Kennedy is director of the Center for Evaluation, Research and Public Service and assistant professor of education in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership at the University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83844. Email: tkennedy@uidaho.edu