

Examining the Impact of Explicit Goal-Setting and Tracking on Student Achievement in the Diversity in Language and Learning (DLL) Program at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

Report: Funded by Sanford Inspire Program Research Grants

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Literature Review

When Proposition 203 passed in Arizona in 2000 it radically changed the instructional practices for English Language Learners (ELLs) by eliminating the ability to use native language instruction in classrooms and requiring schools to implement Structured English Immersion methods. At the same time, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) instituted a Structured English Immersion (SEI) training policy for all teachers due to a court order mandating the improvement of instructional practices and services provided to EL students (CV 92-596 Flores v. State of Arizona). This policy required that licensed teachers receive an initial 15 hours of SEI training by August, 2006 and an additional 45 hours by August, 2009, and required our elementary education preservice students to take two semesters of SEI endorsement curriculum before they student teach.

Given that all teachers are expected to be prepared to work with ELLs, it is critical for us to examine how teachers in Arizona are being prepared to work with ELLs and what are the crucial issues that must be part of the teacher preparation curriculum. Teachers of ELLs need to know important issues specifically relevant to language development: What to teach, how to teach it effectively, and how it will be assessed and monitored (ITELL, 2010). De Jong, Arias, & Sanchez (2010) report that teacher preparation for working in Arizona for teachers specializing in meeting the needs of ELLs has been reduced quantitatively and qualitatively. De Jong and colleagues explain that quantitative effects of new teacher preparation practices established after Proposition 203 include the reduction of curricular requirements from 24-27 credits in ESL and BLE programs (between 360 and 405 hours) to six credits in the current SEI endorsement (90 hours). Arias (2009) reports that data from 2006 to 2009 shows a decrease of 16% in the number of credentialed and certified bilingual instructors in the state.

In the past few years, Arizona State University's Mary Lou College of Education, which prepares the vast majority of Arizona's teachers, has been forced to drastically reduce ESL/BLE certification programs. At the undergraduate level, our only remaining option for preparing teachers who will specialize in working with ELLs is the Diversity in Language and Learning (DLL) Program. Enrollment in the DLL Program has been dropping as preservice teachers report anecdotally that an SEI endorsement is seen in schools by school administrators and mentor teachers as equivalent to a ESL/BLE endorsement, a perception that has not been empirically documented.

In Arizona's attempt to prepare all teachers to work with ELLs, it seems that our state has actually watered down the type of preparation that teachers receive in their teacher training. We have fewer experts who have the extensive background necessary to understand the complexity of language acquisition and the effective instruction of ELLs. Student enrolled in the MLFTC Diversity in Language and Learning graduate with both an elementary school certification as well as a BLE/ESL endorsement and will be leaders within their schools and educational communities as they gain the necessary skills and knowledge base regarding best practices for meeting the needs of ELLs who currently constitute approximately 13% of the K-12 school-age population in Arizona (ADE, 2011).

Research Questions

I proposed a mixed methods study to examine the following research question:

How and to what extent does explicit goal-setting and tracking impact student achievement in a site-based, year-long Diversity in Language and Learning (DLL) Program?

After several meeting with individuals from the Sanford Program in May of 2011, it was determined that the focus of my work with students in the DLL program should focus on having students prepare and pass the AEPA, since this has been a challenge in the past.

It should also be noted that the computer on which I had stored all of the data for this project was stolen in December. Much of the initial data collected was lost.

In the 2011-2012 school year, I followed the two cohorts of our students in the DLL program. Thirty-two students began the program in the Fall of 2011 and as part of the work for this grant, I volunteered to teach BLE 400 (Principles of Language Minority Education). This provided me the opportunity to get to know these students much better and tailor the class to their needs. I am now the course coordinator for BLE 400 as a direct consequence of the opportunity afforded by this grant. An additional twenty-five students were the cohort that was part of the year-long residency.

As a direct consequence of the funding of the project, I can report the following preliminary results:

Fall of 2011

DLL Meet and Greet	Tenure-track and clinical faculty, staff, and alumni met with DLL students
Survey of DLL students	(data lost) results indicated a lack of knowledge of AEPA requirements, little knowledge about the Process of pursuing advance degrees
Individual Interviews	Majority wanted to teach because of their own experiences in school, many come from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds (data lost) each student in BLE 400 was interviewed For 60-90 minutes regarding the path that brought Them to the DLL program, potential challenges, And individual goal-setting
Focus Groups	(data needs to be transcribed) Students in the DLL year-long residency were interviewed in Focus groups and questions about AEPA and Professional goals were discussed. We are transcribing the data again since original Transcriptions were lost

Narratives	Students in BLE 400 submitted narratives Describing why they want to be teachers, data be Reanalyzed, original data analysis was lost
Two workshops On Professional Goal-Setting Guest	Mr. Anthony Hernandez, M.Ed. and Dr. Norma Hernandez from American Dream Consortium and Partnership for Healthy Families presented workshops and discussed the process and value of setting professional goals and pursuing advance degrees. As part of the contract, they also agreed to provide 1-1 counseling to any student interested in graduate school. On follow-up surveys, 98% of the 32 students who attended found the workshops “very helpful” and stated that they had gained valuable information that helped them set higher goals.
ASU presentation on Ed.M. programs	One of the graduate counselors and ASU Tempe provided the students with an overview of the graduate programs available at ASU. This was also helpful to the students for future professional goal- setting.
AEPA Workshop	One workshop was offered with funding provided by the grant to assist students preparing to take the AEPA in the fall. Twenty-two students attended the workshop presented by Dr. Kyle Messner of MLFTC.
AEPA Website	With the help of a student worker paid for through this grant, a website for DLL was created to post upcoming AEPA test dates, workshops, and student-led review and study sessions.
Spring 2012 AEPA Workshops	Two additional workshops were offered with funding provided by the grant to assist students preparing to take the AEPA in the spring. Twenty- eight students attended the workshops presented by Dr. Kyle Messner of MLFTC.
AEPA Materials	Funds were used to purchase AEPA study guides that could be checked out by DLL students.
Name Change	Program name is change from DLL to BLE/ESL as a direct consequence of research from the field

indicating confusion by school administrators and other key stakeholders regarding “DLL.”

Program Coordinator	As a direct consequence of my work with the program under the grant, I requested and was granted the role of Program Director for this program beginning in June of 2012.
Partnership with Mesa Community College	After determining through surveys and focus groups that many of our students came from community colleges, I was instrumental in securing a 5-year federal grant awarded to MCC that will create a pathway of student from MCC directly into our BLE/ESL program. The first cohort began MCC in Fall of 2012 and will enter our program within the next 18 months.
Focus Groups	Focus groups (6) were conducted with all students and data is still being transcribed and analyzed.
Surveys	Surveys were administered to all students finishing their first year in the DLL program. Results are still being analyzed.
Presentation at AERA	A presentation was given at AERA within the Critical Educators for Social Justice sharing the student narratives collected in the Fall of 2011 and discussing the challenges faced by minority teachers preparing to enter the teaching profession.
Proposals	An additional proposal was submitted to AERA this past July and I am awaiting a decision.

Each and every student in the DLL year-long residency (25) successfully passed both AEPA exams needed to be certified to teach in Arizona. Currently, only 26 of the 32 students continued into the final year of the BLE/ESL program. They are all on-track to take and pass the AEPA exams. Preliminary survey results also indicate that they are much more likely to pursue graduate degrees.

The data for this project is still being analyzed and a complete report will be available by October 15. Further, two manuscripts based on this work are in progress and will also be submitted shortly.

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