

Question

What kinds of knowledge and skills do mainstream teachers, English as a second language teachers, bilingual teachers, and support staff need to implement an effective program for English language learners?



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We begin by looking at the knowledge and skills needed by all teachers; then we address each of the specific categories of teachers, indicating what knowledge and skills they are likely to have, as well as those for which they are likely to need special professional development. Finally, we discuss some special considerations for school personnel (guidance counselors, school secretaries, other support staff). We also provide a list of suggestions for professional development activities to promote better understanding and skills for promoting effective instruction for English language learners (ELLs).

As indicated in Crandall (2000, p. 285) "There is substantial agreement within the educational community regarding the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (dispositions) that all teachers need to be able to effectively teach today's diverse students." One way of identifying these knowledge, skills, and attitudes is to look at the requirements for all teachers in states such as Florida or California, where there are large numbers of ELLs. Florida requires the following as topics for pre-service teacher education or professional development for those who are already teaching:

- Knowledge of first and second language acquisition and literacy development.
- Knowledge of differences in cross-cultural communication and educational experiences and expectations concerning the appropriate roles of teachers, learners, and parents in school, as well as strategies for linking instruction with language and literacy activities in the home and community.

- Strategies for adapting materials and instruction to accommodate differences in language and literacy development (methodology for teaching ELLs both academic content and English).
- Appropriate assessment strategies.

Similar areas were identified by California (where more than one-third of all ELLs reside), resulting in the restructuring of teacher licensing to include the Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) and Bilingual CLAD (BCLAD) options, which encourage all teachers to include a focus on language development, culture, and integrated language and content instruction in their teacher preparation.

Mainstream Teachers

There is a growing gap in the background, educational experiences, and expectations between teachers and the students in their classrooms. While national and state accreditation of teacher education programs may emphasize the importance of diversity and the need to “differentiate instruction” (which often translates as a need to provide for special education students), the majority of teachers have had little preparation for teaching students whose languages, cultures, and educational experiences differ substantially from their own. Thus, most mainstream teachers will need professional development on:

- Knowledge of how ELLs acquire and develop their first and second languages.
- Knowledge of how ELLs develop first and second language literacy.
- Knowledge of cross-cultural differences in communication.
- Skills in adapting instruction to accommodate students of differing levels of English proficiency (sometimes referred to as sheltered instruction, or SDAIE; see Echevarria & Graves, 1998).
- Skills in providing instruction that is appropriate for different learning styles (oral/aural, visual, kinesthetic; a preference for working alone or in groups).
- Skills in conferencing with parents who may not speak English (such as finding and working with an interpreter) and who may have different expectations about the appropriate roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers in the education of their children.
- Skills in assessing learning (often referred to as “accommodations”) that provide ELLs with an opportunity to demonstrate their under-

standing in a variety of ways, without relying on oral or written English that is above the level of the proficiency of ELLs.

- Knowledge of the types of English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual programs and services offered to students and skills in working collaboratively with these teachers in coplanning or coteaching lessons.

ESL Teachers

Novice ESL teachers usually have at least an undergraduate degree in TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) or, more typically, a graduate degree, in which they will have developed at least the following:

- Knowledge of the structure of English (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and so on) and skills in teaching that English structure to ELLs.
- Skills in helping ELLs to develop oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) proficiency in English.
- Knowledge of first and second language acquisition and how to teach English, through English, to ELLs with different English proficiency levels (it is not necessary to speak a student’s language to teach that student English).
- Knowledge of cross-cultural communication and differences in learning styles and some skills in creating lessons for learners with diverse learning styles.
- Knowledge of the basic laws and regulations governing the education of ELLs.

They will usually have had experience learning and using another language, and they may have lived abroad or in diverse communities where they became interested in ESL. Thus, they will be prepared to have learners from different language and cultural backgrounds in their classes and to accommodate different levels of English proficiency in their instruction. Like all novice teachers, however, they will need:

- Knowledge of the policies and procedures related to ELLs in the school and district, including intake and placement procedures, the types of programs and services offered, regulations governing standardized assessments (exemptions and accommodations), and reports required.

- Knowledge of specific responsibilities, including whom to report to (principal, district supervisor, other).
- Knowledge of state or district curriculum and standards related to instruction for ELLs.
- Knowledge of the content taught in mainstream classes (through curriculum guides for the mainstream content areas or review of instructional materials) and skills for integrating academic concepts, texts, tasks, and tests into the ESL classroom.
- Skills to work collaboratively with mainstream teachers in coplanning, coteaching, or previewing/reviewing content in ESL instruction that effectively integrates academic content into the language focus.
- Knowledge of resources available to ELLs and their families and skills in accessing these resources, including working with district staff, guidance counselors, and district staff.
- Skills in managing classes with a seemingly continual intake and outflow of students (resulting from the mobility of immigrant students and the differences in the rate of development of English language proficiency).
- Skills in working with students who have experienced severe shock or trauma as victims of revolution or war.
- If teaching in more than one school, knowledge of responsibilities and skill in functioning without the support of a school or even a regular classroom.
- If teaching in an elementary school, knowledge of scheduling and skill in negotiating time for “pulling out” ELLs for ESL instruction.
- If teaching in a middle or high school with ELLs who have limited prior schooling or literacy, including students from countries in which a Creole variety of English is spoken, skills in teaching initial literacy in English (Crandall, 2003; Crandall & Greenblatt, 1999; Hamayan, 1994).

Veteran ESL teachers will have most of the same knowledge and skills as novice ESL teachers, with the following exceptions: They may be teaching with methods and techniques that do not adequately focus on the academic concepts and language and literacy needs of their students, since a focus on integrating language and content instruction is relatively new in ESL teacher preparation. They may also be unaware of or resistant to standards developed for teaching ESL and will need focused attention to curriculum or lesson planning that reflects those standards.

Like all experienced teachers, they may also be suffering from burnout, which can be especially severe for teachers who have seen a constantly shifting population of learners from different parts of the world, with different backgrounds and needs. Ways to provide needed professional development and refreshment include pairing these experienced teachers with novice ESL teachers, which can result in a mutually rewarding experience for both, and forming a relationship with a nearby university’s TESOL teacher education program, which can bring teacher education faculty, teacher candidates, and graduate students in applied linguistics and TESOL as resources to the school (see Crandall, 2000). These teachers would also benefit from being able to attend a local or national TESOL conference.

Bilingual Teachers

Novice bilingual teachers who have a degree or endorsement in bilingual education have the knowledge and skills to teach content areas through the students’ primary language (usually Spanish). Being bilingual and bicultural themselves, they also share a great deal with the experiences of their students and are able to provide emotional and educational support to students, who can continue to learn through their primary language while they are also learning English.

Novice bilingual teachers will have much the same knowledge and skills as ESL teachers but with the additional ability to teach through a student’s primary language. They should also have preparation in teaching ESL, but may have limited experience in doing so. They will need:

- Knowledge of the policies and procedures related to bilingual learners in the school and district, including intake and placement procedures, the types of programs and services offered, regulations governing standardized assessments (exemptions and accommodations), and reports required.
- Knowledge of state or district curriculum and standards related to instruction for bilingual students.
- Skills in working collaboratively with ESL and mainstream teachers, especially in transitioning students from bilingual classes to ESL, sheltered, or mainstream classes.
- Knowledge of bilingual resources available in the community and skill in helping families, the school, and the district to access these resources, including help for guidance counselors, nurses, and other school staff who work with bilingual students.

- Skill in helping serve as a cultural interpreter for other school personnel.
- Skill in managing classes of students with diverse backgrounds, including differences in proficiency in the home language and English.
- Skills in working with students who have experienced severe shock or trauma as victims of revolution or war.

Like experienced ESL teachers, experienced bilingual teachers will need opportunities to learn new approaches and techniques for teaching bilingual learners and ways to align their instruction with new standards and assessments. They may also be experiencing teacher “burnout” and need a chance to work with a less experienced, but enthusiastic bilingual teacher in a mentoring relationship from which both will benefit. They will also benefit from being able to attend local or national NABE (National Association for Bilingual Education) or other professional conferences, participate in teaching in-service programs focused on bilingual/bicultural students, or other approaches to broaden their perspectives or provide an opportunity to share the wealth of their experiences with other teachers and school personnel.

Support Staff

Effective schooling for ELLs requires understanding and assistance from all school personnel; however, most will have had little education or experience in dealing with students from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. We discuss briefly some of the knowledge and skills needed by key personnel in the school. Experienced ESL, bilingual teachers in the school or district personnel who work with ELLs, and university faculty who teach in ESL or bilingual teacher preparation programs can all provide training and assistance to these personnel. If there is a large population of students from the same linguistic and cultural background, it may also be helpful to have a series of schoolwide in-service programs focused on the language, cultural practices, educational experiences, and other important features of that community. A series of these programs will help all school personnel become more familiar and comfortable with the diversity of students in the school. Some schools have also provided classes in basic language instruction (“Spanish for Educators”).

Guidance Counselors

Although guidance counselors have the knowledge and skills to interact with students and their families and to provide academic and other counseling,

they are likely to have had almost no preparation for dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse students and families. They will need the following to help them tailor what they do for ELLs and their families:

- Understanding of basic differences in communication patterns (degrees of formality or informality, directness or indirectness, and so on) and the ability to present information in simple but noncondescending English.
- Knowledge of different educational systems and beliefs about appropriate roles and responsibilities of teachers and parents in schooling and skill in helping reluctant parents to participate in school events.
- Ability to work with an interpreter when needed.
- Knowledge of basic differences in beliefs and practices concerning mental and physical health and skills in interacting with culturally diverse students and families when discussing these topics.
- Knowledge of the ESL or bilingual programs offered in the school and skills in working with ESL and bilingual teachers in designing appropriate courses and schedules for ELLs.
- Knowledge of the educational systems and policies in the home countries of the ELLs or their parents and skill in helping both students and families to make the transition to American schools and colleges (Crandall & Greenblatt, 1999).
- For middle and high school, skill in helping ELLs to negotiate the complex path to college preparation, application, and financial aid, which may be especially difficult for students who are the first in their families to attend or even consider attending college (Crandall & Greenblatt, 1999).

Secretaries

Secretaries are often the first to meet the families of ELLs, who may come to their neighborhood school to begin enrolling their children. These secretaries may have had no prior experience or training to help them in their role as the first point of contact for ELLs. They will need:

- Knowledge of the steps required for registration and placement of new ELLs.
- Knowledge of available resources for translation or interpretation, including a roster of language capabilities of all school personnel

and students who can be called upon, especially for providing emergency translation or interpretation.

- Skill in greeting new parents and students and helping them feel welcome across language barriers.
- Skill in working with ESL or bilingual teachers.

Nurses

Nurses need to have a clear plan for how they will deal with emergency situations for all students, including ELLs. They will need:

- Knowledge of how to locate interpreters and translators for emergencies.
- Knowledge of whom to contact for translation of common forms or where translated forms are available.
- Knowledge of differences in medical practices and skill in explaining new medical practices to ELLs and their parents.

Instructional Aides

Instructional aides are often a very diverse group. They may have high or limited levels of educational achievement; they may be members of the ELL's community or not. Depending on their background, they may be assigned different roles and will have different needs. It is important that administrators regularly assess the effectiveness of the aide, especially if that aide has a principal role in instruction of ELLs. At a minimum, instructional aides will need:

- Training in how to work to support ELLs in mainstream and ESL/bilingual classrooms.
- Basic knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of students and effective ways of interacting with them.
- Training in instructional strategies for teaching/tutoring ELLs that complement those used by the classroom teacher.

Custodians, Bus Drivers, Cafeteria Workers

All of these personnel will need:

- Cultural awareness and sensitivity training to help them understand differences in student behavior.

- Basic instruction in modifying their language to make it understandable to ELLs (restating in simple language, demonstrating, using gestures, enlisting the aid of someone who speaks the student's language).

Some Professional Development Approaches for All Teachers

To help all teachers to develop greater understanding of and skills in meeting the needs of ELLs, the following professional development approaches may be useful:

- Peer observation, with mainstream and ESL or bilingual teachers observing each others' classes. This is particularly helpful if the teachers share some students and if the focus is on the students rather than the teachers.
- Collaborative curriculum development or lesson planning by ESL/bilingual and mainstream teachers. This is an excellent summer in-service program where teachers work closely together and learn from each other.
- Team teaching. Opportunities for ESL/bilingual and mainstream teachers to coteach, especially in the upper grades, can provide opportunities for teachers to learn instructional strategies from each other.
- Teacher inquiry or research groups. Small groups of teachers can be encouraged to engage in an extended program that focuses on better understanding the instructional needs of ELLs.
- Participation in a professional development school or similar internship site with a university that has a TESOL or bilingual teacher education program. This will increase the number of ESL or bilingual teachers in the school, provide opportunities for mainstream teachers to have an ESL/bilingual intern for part of the internship, and may lead to a longer-term collaboration focused on the needs of ELLs in the school.
- Courses cotaught by language and mainstream teachers or university teacher educators on topics such as how to teach and assess linguistically and culturally diverse students. It is important to develop collaborations among mainstream and language teachers to encourage sharing of knowledge, experiences, and concerns.

- Parent classes (especially in ESL) or after-school or weekend sessions for parents of ELLs and the ELLs focused on academic skills such as literacy or math, or community resources. Parents of ELLs may be reluctant to come to school or to participate in parent-teacher conferences or associations, but a program that focuses on their interests and needs can bring them to school and help make them feel more comfortable.
- Professional development programs focused on the culture and educational backgrounds of immigrant students in the school or district. These programs may include shorter programs, with visits to community centers or students' homes, or a longer program that focuses on the language, educational system, teacher and student roles and responsibilities, and parental expectations of the school. A good model for the latter is a semester-long program that brings students, members of the community, and teachers together in the learning process. Students can talk about their experiences, community members can explain cultural and educational traditions, and teachers participating in the program can tutor and learn from ELLs who need additional attention (see Crandall, 2003).

Question

What levels of language proficiency in the language of instruction does a bilingual teacher need to have in order to teach effectively in a bilingual program?



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Since acquiring English is a primary goal (or one of the primary goals) of the program for English language learners (ELLs), it is imperative that the instructor have a command of the English language, as well as an intimate understanding of language acquisition, its steps, and the instructional strategies to facilitate acquisition. The teacher also needs to be able to modulate

his or her language to make it more comprehensible and to build on the student's personal experience and scaffold the academic concepts, including that of language.

If the ELL is fortunate to be supported by content instruction in the home language, the teacher delivering that instruction must possess native-like fluency and an academic level of proficiency in the language of instruction. This is often overlooked as a primary concern in developing an effective program for the ELLs at school. Finding qualified instructors who can deliver quality instruction in the home language of ELLs can be a great challenge. Many teachers are fluent in the native language of their ELLs but do not possess the knowledge, vocabulary, or experience to deliver effective instruction in that language. And many times the teacher lacks the requisite native fluency to ensure proper modeling and further development of the language.

Above all, the instructor who has the requisite native fluency and academic language level must have a clear understanding of the educational model (bilingual or ESL) selected by the school and must be able to vary the use of the student's two languages in a way that fits into the long-term language plan for that student.

New Mexico offers the *La Prueba* examination for Spanish fluency which all teachers must pass in order to complete and receive their bilingual endorsement. This endorsement permits them to deliver instruction in the language of their endorsement. The fifteen subtests of this comprehensive examination include fluency, grammar/conventions of the language, regional dialects, academic levels of language, and so on. It is not uncommon for a teacher to retake this test in order to successfully complete at least three of the four components of the test. Referred to as a "progressive" test, once the test is successfully completed, the site administrator can be confident that the teacher possesses a good foundation for instructing in the language. Instructor Proficiency Examinations, which identify an instructor with native proficiency skill in a student's home language, are currently being developed in New Mexico in Navajo, as well as Keres, one of the primary languages of the Pueblo People.

English Language Learners at School



A Guide for Administrators

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