Meting the Needs of Spanish-Speaking Students along the South Texas Border:

A Description of Two Bi-National Teacher Preparation Programs

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Abstract
Teacher preparation programs need to recruit and retain minority teachers more effectively in light of the growing teacher shortage. Bi-national efforts are now being considered as a way of alleviating this shortage. This paper will focus on the credentialing of Mexican teachers in the U.S. through a bi-national partnership of universities funded by the Kellogg Foundation named Project Alianza. Project Alianza involved the U.S. teacher certification of Mexican normalistas through a post-baccalaureate program in a four year comprehensive university. The program provided pedagogical and content knowledge necessary for the normalistas to pass teacher certification examinations. Elements of the project, the students, the teacher preparation program and results of the teacher certification examinations will be discussed.

Introduction
The teacher shortage facing the United States and other countries continues to be an area of prime concern to parents, educators and government officials. Coupled with the dwindling number of teachers entering and staying in the profession, are the growing school-age populations. These school age populations increasingly come from homes where languages other than English are spoken. Currently, a language other than English is spoken in almost one-fifth of U.S. homes and Spanish is spoken in three-quarters of such homes (García, 2002).

Over 5 million children in the United States can benefit from bilingual education programs (González & Darling-Hammond, 1997). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000), the majority of recent immigrants and nearly a third of all immigrants come from Mexico. The children of these immigrants comprise a large percentage of the 3.5 million limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in the nation (Macías, 1998; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). While the U.S. school age population now reflects a multitude of cultures and languages, only 14% of the teachers are from minority backgrounds (Lenhardt,
2000; Schuhmann, 2003). Future projections indicate that by the year 2020, language minority students will constitute more than 15% of the school-age population and by 2026 will represent nearly one-quarter of the student population (García, 2002).

Teacher preparation programs need to recruit and retain minority teachers more effectively by using innovative practices in light of this growing shortage. Bi-national efforts to recruit and retain bilingual educations teachers in the United States have begun in an attempt to decrease the teacher shortage. Bi-national conferences between the United States and Mexico have been conducted to discuss solutions to the shortage. One solution discussed at the aforementioned conferences has been the credentialing of Mexican teachers in the United States (Petrovic, 2000). This discussion will focus on one attempt to alleviate the shortage of bilingual education teachers through a bi-national partnership of universities funded by the Kellogg Foundation named Project Alianza.

**Teacher Shortage**

The teacher shortage in the United States continues to escalate with projections of two million teachers needed over the next two decades (Geringer, 2000; Olson, 2000). This teacher shortage is exacerbated by the need for teachers to be prepared to teach an increasingly diverse student population. Currently, only 10% of teachers nationwide are certified in bilingual education and only 8% are certified in English as a second language (García, 2002; Guerrero, 1999). In reference to those U.S. teachers that already hold certification in the area of bilingual education, many of these individuals are not highly proficient in Spanish (Guerrero, 1999). Thus, many U.S. teachers are held responsible for educating children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds without the proper training and credentials.

Reports indicate that minority populations are becoming majority populations in several states, including California, Florida, and Texas (García, 2002; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). A shift in demographics is emerging with increasing immigrant populations now setting in states such as Kansas, Georgia, Nebraska, and others (García, 2002; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). More and more states are now faced with the need to educate children from homes where a language other than English is the predominant language. The teacher shortage has affected all areas of education and in particular the area of bilingual education, with a current nation-wide shortage of more than 100,000 teachers (Anderson, 2000).

An integral resource for curtailing the teacher shortage involves tapping into the emerging Spanish-speaking populations within the U.S. Recent changes in immigration patterns from Mexico have provided opportunities for recruiting and retaining more bilingual education teachers. In the past, immigration from Mexico typically consisted of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. At the present time, however, Mexican immigration to the U.S. indicates an increase of individuals with technical training and professionals, including Mexican teachers (Petrovic, 2000).
Teacher Certification in the U.S. and Mexico

Due to an increasing number of students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken, many states are now requiring teacher certification in bilingual education. In response to the concerns regarding the lack of teaching standards in the field of bilingual education, the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) drafted the Professional Standards for the Preparation of Bilingual/Multicultural Teachers (NABE, 1992). These standards include: (a) bilingual/multicultural coursework and curriculum, (b) language proficiency in English/non-English languages and abilities to teach in those languages, (c) field and practicum experiences in bilingual/multicultural classrooms, (d) life-long learning and (e) commitment to professional development. Individual states have also developed certification standards for bilingual/ESL teachers. A survey of bilingual teacher certification of seven states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, New York and Texas) with the largest LEP student populations revealed minor variations (Midobuche, 1999). All seven states reported fulfillment of some form of requirements before certification or licensure, among these requirements were prescribed courses and credit-bearing coursework at the university level and the successful passing assessments of content-area and professional knowledge. California and Texas have also developed competencies and examinations specifically for bilingual education teachers. In spite of the credentialing requirements currently in place, all seven states face a significant shortage in qualified bilingual education teachers. This underscores the need to explore additional ways of recruiting and retaining teachers into the field of bilingual education.

Teacher certification in Mexico has historically been centralized under the auspices of the Secretary of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública) with teacher preparation the major responsibility of the National School of Teachers (Escuela Naciónal de Maestros) in Mexico City (García & González, 2000). Teacher credentialing was changed in the early 1950’s with the requirement of middle school completion as a prerequisite for entrance into teacher preparation in normal schools. The three-year program resulted in an elementary education degree (Profesor de Educación Básica). Included in the 36-course program were 12 content area courses, with the remaining 24 courses comprised of methodology courses and student teaching. Mexican teachers (profesores) were then certified to teach in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (preescolares).

In 1978, the Mexican teacher preparation programs were restructured and current teacher certification requires a high school diploma prior to entering a state normal school. The four-year degree program includes a program of studies with 32 courses, one-third of which must include content-area courses. The remaining 21 courses include methods courses and student teaching. At the completion of the four-year program, participants are awarded a Baccalaureate (licenciatura). The certified teachers, or normalistas, are then categorized into two levels, the normalista básica, similar to the previous profesores de educación, and the normalista superior which is required for certification at the elementary school level (primária) or at the secondary school level (secundária). In Mexico, teachers are held in high regard and frequently assume leadership roles in the community (Garcia & González, 2000).
A comparison of teacher certification between the U.S. and Mexico reveals that while the Mexican certification is typically national in scope with little variation, teacher preparation in the U.S. is mainly determined a the state level. University-driven programs are the mainstay of teacher preparation in the U.S., although alternative routes are increasing in numbers. In Mexico, normal schools assume a greater role in the preparation of teachers. Both countries include content knowledge as well as pedagogy in the teacher preparation. The cross-cultural similarities in content knowledge course work would appear to be a positive factor in helping to alleviate the transition of *normalistas* into U.S. schools and vice versa. Pedagogical similarities may not be as readily apparent in comparing the two teacher preparation programs. More research is needed in this area to ascertain whether such pedagogical similarities do exist.

**A Comparison of U.S. and Mexico Curricula**

Many of the students in bilingual education classrooms are recent immigrants or come from homes where the parents received some formal schooling in countries other than the U.S. In order to provide a better understanding of Mexican elementary curricula that recent immigrant students have been exposed to as well as the curricula that Mexican teachers are responsible for implementing in the classroom, a comparison of Mexico and U.S. curricula in the areas of mathematics and language arts/reading was conducted by Petrovic (2000). The analysis focused on the states of California and Texas and indicated that state content standards were developed using input from national organizations, professional committee, and task forces, etc. (e. g. Mathematics Framework for California Public Schools, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics). The state standards and objectives typically are included in the accountability formulas for state funded public schools. The standards are then widely disseminated to practitioners.

In the early 1990’s, Mexico’s educational system was decentralized and reorganized, with the Secretary of Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) and state governments assigned the responsibility for public education in Mexico. The curricula were restructured in order to establish consistency in the nation’s public schools. The language arts/reading curricula was revamped to de-emphasize the grammar and structure to now emphasize written and oral communication. The mathematics curricula were organized into six general areas with subtopics in each area (Petrovic, 2000). This organizational structure does not include as many specific objectives in comparison to the Texas and California standards.

Petrovic’s (2000) analysis revealed that the U.S. and Mexico curricula in the area of mathematics appear to share many standards, especially under the topics of number sense/algebraic functions, measurement/geometry, statistics/data/probability and mathematical reasoning. The analysis of the reading/language arts curricula indicated more specificity in the California and Texas curricula, with significantly more objectives. While that analysis revealed many commonalities between the state curricula, several factors were not address, namely the quantity and quality of instructional time and instructional methodology. These pedagogical issues were indeed relevant when addressing the credentialing of teachers from other countries.
Overview of Project Alianza

The Project Alianza Partnership began with the following entities: The Intercultural Development Research Association, Mexican and American Solidarity Foundation, Arizona State University (ASU), California State University at Long Beach (CSULB), the University of Texas-Pan American (UT-PA), the University of Texas-San Antonio (UTSA) and Southwest Texas State University (SWT). The project attempts to create innovative programs and curricula for bilingual education teachers who will teach in grades kindergarten through sixth. Project Alianza also attempts to create system change in the U.S. educational system to address the nation’s changing student demographics.

This bi-national teacher preparation effort focuses on three categories of students: bilingual teacher aides; evening student in bilingual education teacher preparation programs and teachers trained in Mexico to teach in the elementary grades (normalistas) and who are legal U.S. residents. The three types of students participate jointly in teacher preparation programs that include courses of study and practicum experiences in area public schools.

One of the project’s objectives entails ensuring that the participating students become certified bilingual education teachers at the completion of their program of study. A second objective of Project Alianza necessitates the establishment and operation of a collaborative among universities in Mexico and the United States to create programs of study that address the needs of LEP students in the U.S. This second objective includes conducting intensive English-language training for normalistas and Spanish-language training for teacher aides and traditional students. Cultural awareness training for Hispanic and non-Hispanic students is also addressed within the project’s second objective. A third objective involves a leadership collaborative for diversity in education that is comprised of school people, community leaders, parents, students and university personnel. The purpose of the collaborative is to provide input to enhance the bilingual education teacher preparation programs. Each entity is to provide input to enhance the bilingual education teacher preparation programs. They would also be responsible for sponsoring a series of interactive sessions for the collaborative to share information and outcomes of the project and to promote the creation of opportunities for diversity through the K-16 continuum. A fourth objective for Project Alianza includes each participating U.S. university identifying a sister institution in Mexico. This relationship will help establish communication with teachers and students from the U.S. and Mexico to share ideas, concerns, experiences and position papers on pedagogy relative to curriculum and instruction.

UT-PA's Bi-national Teacher Preparation Effort

The following sections will focus on UT-PA's bi-national teacher preparation effort. UT-PA is located in a geographical area that borders the U.S.-Mexico border and has an enrollment of approximately 13,500 students. The surrounding area is predominantly Hispanic (85%), with Hispanics accounting for 86% of the student body at the university. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000), the area is among the poorest in the state, with per capita income averaging $6,000. Approximately 87% of the 276,000 students in the public schools speak Spanish as their first and 43% are identified as qualifying for special language programs in the form of bilingual education or English as a
Second Language (ESL). The University of Texas-Pan American currently graduates the second largest number of bilingual education students in the country.

Students seeking teacher certification must have completed general education courses and met the admission criteria to the teacher preparation program, prior to beginning their education coursework. To participate in the UT-PA Project Alianza, normalistas from Mexico must furnish documentation of the normalista superior license. Their transcripts from Mexican universities must also be evaluated by the director of the university’s Office of Admission and Records. They must also provide evidence of successful completion of the reading, writing and mathematics portions of the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP). The TASP is a comprehensive program that is designed to ensure that students attending public institutions of higher education in Texas have the necessary academic skills to perform successfully in college-level coursework. Students must achieve a score of 240 in the areas of reading, mathematics, and writing in order to be admitted into the teacher preparation program. Subtest results are waived if students earn a “B” or better in an introductory level English course and an introductory level course in mathematics. The first cohort of normalistas, Cohort I, was allowed to begin the project without taking the TASP, but was required to take the test before they completed their course work. The second cohort, Cohort II, was required to take the TASP before they began their course work. Upon becoming project participants, the normalistas’ tuition is then paid by the project and participants must meet all teacher preparation program benchmarks and requirements in order to complete state certification requirements.

The teacher preparation program is structured in four blocks/semesters of coursework for day students and five blocks/semesters of coursework for evening students. Ninety percent of the education courses are field-based and require that one half of the course grade be based on outcomes conducted in public school classrooms (e.g. learner-centered checklists, “read alouds,” case studies, lesson planning, etc.) and the other half of the course grade is based on campus-based outcomes (e.g. presentation, essay exams, multiple choice exams, creation of instructional materials, completion of an electronic portfolio, formal observations of teaching, etc.). Evening students enroll in three education courses per semester and the classes are conducted twice weekly.

The first block/semester of courses is multidisciplinary in nature, with students enrolled in an early childhood course, a special education course and a bilingual education. The second block/semester of courses includes two reading acquisition/strategy courses coupled with an instructional technology course. The third block/semester of courses begins with the first course in bilingual education methodology as well as a multicultural education course and classroom management course. The fourth and final block/semester of coursework includes three bilingual education courses focusing on the development of bilingualism and bi-literacy, as well as dual language instruction in the content areas of science, mathematics, social studies and fine arts. The fifth and final block/semester is a fourteen -week practicum in the classroom.

All courses emphasize the state’s five Learner-Centered Proficiencies: Learner-Centered Knowledge, Learner-Centered Instruction, Equity and Excellence for all Learners, Learner-Centered Communication and Learner-Centered Professional Development.
The Learner-Centered Proficiencies guide the instruction by incorporating: constructivist theory, cooperative learning, thematic instruction, portfolio assessment, the integration of technology and developmentally appropriate instruction. The practicum experience is in a bilingual classroom. Since the normalistas are employed as teachers in Mexico or in other professions in the U.S. during the day, they enroll as evening students. During the fifth block students must be categorized as post-baccalaureate students, apply for a temporary teaching certificate as bilingual education, and be hired by school districts as the teachers of record for that particular classroom. While they are categorized as teachers of record, normalistas must enroll for six credit hours of student teaching, be observed by a university supervisor, and attend review sessions for the various state certification examinations.

In order to enhance the normalista’s understanding of the educational systems in the U.S., their travel to state/national bilingual education conferences is provided by the project. Trips to neighboring schools in Mexico are arranged to familiarize the non-LEP evening students with public education in Mexico. In order to meet the linguistic needs of the both the non-LEP students and the normalistas, instruction is provided in both Spanish and English by Spanish proficient instructors (full-time and adjunct faculty). Peer mentoring is used in an effort to increase the English proficiency of the normalistas by pairing them with a non-LEP evening student for class projects, group presentations, cooperative learning activities and review sessions. This bilingual pairing is also done to increase the Spanish proficiency of the non-LEP student since numerous bilingual education course outcomes must also be completed in Spanish. In an effort to familiarize the normalistas with the certification examination, course exams are written in a format comparable to the certification examinations and review sessions (focusing on terminology) are provided for normalistas. During summer sessions, the normalistas are required to enroll in seminars provided by the English Language Institute (ELI) under the auspices of the English department in the College of Arts and Humanities. English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies are stressed in these seminars in an effort to improve oral and written communication in English.

Areas of Improvement for the UT-PA Bi-National Teacher Preparation Program

As cohorts of students completed the program, certain areas of concern emerged. Concerns related to differing philosophies regarding pedagogy were evident. English language proficiency was also of a concern relative to students successfully completing requirements for state certification.

With the state of Texas focusing on learner-centered instruction that encompasses the constructivist theory, normalistas are faced with attempting to reconcile their teacher preparation methodology with this aforementioned philosophy. The five-semester sequence did not appear to adequately familiarize the normalistas with the constructivist theory. The length of teaching experience in Mexico may have also impacted the ability to internalize the constructivist theory.

The English proficiency of normalistas undoubtedly was a contributing factor to the performance on certification examinations that were administered totally in English. The
normalistas oftentimes commented on the difficulty of the terminology used in educational settings, both at the university and the public schools. The use of peer coaching in the teacher preparation program may need to be re-examined and restructured to ensure that normalistas are provided with numerous opportunities to practice their English proficiency.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

As U.S. demographics continue to reflect a growing school-age population from homes where a language other than English is spoken, teacher preparation programs may have to consider drawing from a pool of candidates that included foreign-trained individuals. The entrance requirements, as well as the preparation for licensure and certification may need to be re-examined. State licensure/certification processes may also need to be re-examined. Consideration of the teaching expertise that foreign teachers bring to the learning process through reciprocity agreements between state agencies and foreign countries needs to be addressed by state policy makers.

The alleviation of the teacher shortage facing many public schools in the U.S. requires input from various stakeholders at the local, state, and national level. The project currently under discussion may serve as one avenue to explore in alleviating the teacher shortage. Hopefully, more alternatives may be generated to continue the discussion.
References


