

# A Conceptual Framework of Bilingual Special Education Teacher Programs

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## 1. Background

An increasing number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are coming into the educational system (Grossman, 1995; Kai & Gardner, 1997). Yet, because few university programs prepare teachers to serve language minority students with special needs, culturally and linguistically, students with special needs do not receive an equal and appropriate education (Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Gersten, & Woodward, 1994; Ortiz & Garcia, 1990; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Their school programs are inadequate and their teachers are under prepared. They are at higher risk for misplacement in special education (CEC, 1994).

Thus, it is important for the field to improve the way in which teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional students are prepared. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the dual professional and teaching competencies of bilingual special education teachers to guide colleges and universities to include these areas in their special education teacher preparation programs. The preparation of bilingual special education teachers requires a holistic curriculum that includes several areas of emphasis such as language proficiency, appropriate assessment, planning and delivery of instruction, culture, and professionalism.

Effective instruction of bilingual special education students requires mastering and using appropriate planning and delivery of instruction, as well as teachers' knowledge and abilities of students' cultural and linguistic characteristics and instructional needs. To accomplish successful teaching and learning, teachers are required to: (a) provide students with English language development instructional activities, (b) use students' native language for instruction, (c) be knowledgeable about subject content and its appropriate delivery, and (d) implement appropriate techniques assessment for diagnosis and instruction. Thus, teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs requires unique teaching competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). These competencies are formally learned and practiced at the college level, especially in initial teacher preparation programs.

Few institutions of higher education in the United States offer specialized teacher training in bilingual special education. Most teacher training institutions who offer a bilingual special education program rely heavily on providing the prospective teachers general and separate training in special education and bilingual education (Pond, 1996; Ortiz & Garcia, 1990). When these teachers are hired by school districts, they lack the skills to adequately teach culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. In many instances, school districts find themselves providing in-service training for the bilingual special education teacher who works with linguistically and culturally diverse students with disabilities. Many of these teachers may not be able to teach content in two languages, they may not understand the process and development rate of second language acquisition, cannot differentiate language and cultural differences from learning disabilities, and may not be able to properly deliver instruction to these students (Baca & Cervantes, 1998). Because of the above vacuum, we propose that college/university programs need to provide prospective bilingual special education teachers an appropriate bilingual special teacher education program. Traditional teacher training programs have not prepared educators to be effective in educating bilingual special education students who may have different language and cultural characteristics and needs from the mainstream student (Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Ortiz & Garcia, 1990). These teachers need to be prepared at the college/university level to learn, practice, and employ approaches and modalities that accommodate the distinctive backgrounds and learning styles of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. In order to prepare effective bilingual special education teachers, college/university programs must provide a curriculum that provides specific

competencies in the field of bilingual special education.

Bilingual special education teachers must know the content, the knowledge and ways of delivering the instruction in order to well-serve bilingual special education students to acquire subject matter knowledge and skills, and develop cognitive and linguistic skills. As the population of bilingual special education students increases in United States' schools, so does the need for educator properly trained in bilingual special education.

## **2. Theoretical background**

The areas of bilingual proficiency, assessment, culture, planning and delivery of instruction, and professionalism are important components in this study. In June 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was amended by Public Law 105-17. This law is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, known as IDEA 97. As a result of IDEA 97 and state new requirements there is a need for a different type of bilingual special education teachers. Meanwhile, school districts are expected to align their programs to meet IDEA requirements and university schools of education are expected to prepare prospective bilingual special education teachers.

A review of the literature provided a theoretical rationale for the identification of each of the behaviors or competencies identified in these five areas:

### *2.1. Proficiency in two languages*

Bilingual special education teachers must enhance linguistically and culturally diverse students by acknowledging their individual language skills (Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Noel, 2000; Ovando & Collier, 1998). The competency of language proficiency has been a crucial issue in the field of bilingual special education. Researchers such as Brantlinger & Guskin (1985) and Sugai (1987) stated that language is an intrinsic component of culture and it is a medium through which other aspects of culture, including the content of formal education are expressed and transmitted. Chomsky (1965) viewed language learning as cognitively based emphasizing the innate contributions and abilities of the learner. Krashen (1982) believed, like Chomsky, that the language the learner brings to the classroom provides a strong foundation for learning and academic development. Cummins (1984) believed that the students' native language (cognitive and academic) proficiency facilitates second language acquisition. According to Cummins (1981, 1984) the common underlying language proficiency principle of instructional time and academic achievement through the majority language contributes to students' second language acquisition and mastery of subject content. Cummins verbalized this idea by saying that instruction in the native language is effective in promoting proficiency in second language provided there is adequate exposure to learn a second language (Cummins, 1981). Later on, his work demonstrated a relationship between language proficiency and achievement.

In addition, other authorities in the field of language proficiency (Harley, Allen, Cummins, & Swain, 1990) have stated that the recent movement toward communicative language teaching has been associated with a broader view of language that includes not just its grammatical aspects but also the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts and the ability to organize one's thoughts through language. Emphasis in language teaching is expressed in attempts to develop students' sociolinguistic and discourse competency in addition to their grammatical competency. Therefore, teachers in bilingual instructional settings need to be bilingual in order to use both languages for instruction and assessment.

### *2.2 Assessment*

Assessment occupies a prominent place in the diagnosis and evaluation of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Knowledge of assessment procedures is an important competency in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers, especially the process of collecting data for the purpose of (a) specifying and verifying instructional problems or strengths, and (b) making decisions

about students (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1998). Assessment helps to gather information that describes how an individual is functioning and it also provides information that describes how that individual has functioned in the past (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1998). Researchers in the field of bilingual special education have agreed that inappropriate bias assessment affects culturally and linguistically diverse students' academic achievement (Baca & Cervantes, 1998). Public Law 94-142 mandates assessment and evaluation of students based on team decision, not only on test results but on a comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluation. Back in 1974, the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (1974) indicated that "an assessment should be on the student's educational functioning in relation to the academic program of the school; and the results of this assessment should be comprehensive, using a full range of available instrumentation and observation, including diagnostic tests and other appropriate formal and informal measurements" (p. 27). Therefore, there is a need to address this issue in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers at the college/university programs.

### *2.3 Culture*

Another important competency of bilingual special education teachers is the component of culture. Bilingual special education teachers need to be aware that language is a core value for a cultural group, it will also play a crucial role in the development of the students' cultural identity and self-concept. Cushner, McClelland, & Safford (1992) suggested that culture plays a role in students' learning. Culture is a socially constructed and dynamic phenomenon; it is shared by a group who decides through a process of interaction what ideas, attitudes, meanings, and hierarchy of values belong to that group. Culture is a set of ideas that is passed on to the young as a means of nourishing the next generation (Cushner, et. al., 1992). Culture is frequently viewed as a dynamic and evolutionary entity, which includes cultural elements and behavioral patterns that are subject to change over time (Grant & Sachs, 2000; Hunt, 1975; Noel, 2000; & Weinreich, 1974). Culture is also viewed as a representation of meanings and values given to products, symbols, and processes that a group of people share and cherish (Andrade, 1984; Erickson, 1986). The culture of a group of people includes all the system, techniques, and tools which make up their way of life (Seville-Troike, 1979). The competency of culture in the bilingual special education teacher college/ university program must provide the tools, knowledge, meanings, expectations necessary to prepare teachers to educate the linguistically and culturally diverse students with special needs

### *2.4 Planning and delivery of instruction*

Another critical variables in the education of bilingual special education students is academic instruction that has a high standard of excellence. One of the most contested issues in teaching the linguistically and culturally diverse student with special needs is related to the effective methods of instruction. The quality of academic instruction is often lacking in many classrooms (Kozol, 1991). Thus, culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities are at even greater risk of being placed in a classroom in which little attention is given to academic instruction. Brophy (1986) explained that "the most consistently replicated findings link students' achievement to their opportunity to learn the material, in particular, to the degree to which teachers carry the content to them personally through active instruction and move them through the curriculum at a brisk pace (p. 1069)." Brophy (1986) mentioned that students learn more when their teachers' presentations are clear and when the instruction is delivered with enthusiasm. Also, students learn more when the information is well-structured and when it is sufficiently challenging and well sequenced (Brophy, 1986; Schunck, 1981; Smith & Sanders, 1981). Edmonds (1979), for example, discussed that schools, which are instructionally effective have a climate of expectation in which students are not permitted to fall below a minimum and motivate students through an efficacious level of achievement. Thus, bilingual special education teachers working with linguistically and culturally diverse students with disabilities must remain constantly aware of students' academic instructional needs and characteristics. These teachers need to challenge and motivate these students.

The "type" and mode of instructions is an important issue in the bilingual special education classroom.

For example, in special education, most of the recommended instruction is "direct instruction". Direct instruction is recommended as an effective mode for guiding students in the learning of basic skills. It is also recommended for selecting instructional goals and materials and actively monitor students' progress; and promoting extensive content coverage and high levels of students involvement (Rosenshine, 1976; Brophy, 1979). However a significant number of language minority students work better in small groups and on individual tasks. Thus, bilingual special education college/university programs need to address these issues and provide a variety of instructional modes in the preparation of teachers working with linguistically and culturally diverse students with special needs. All the above issues are important areas in helping students to promote academic achievement.

## *2.5 Professionalism*

Teacher professionalism is an important issue that must be addressed in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers. If teachers have undergone a process of training and have developed the knowledge and skills to deliver good quality education (Avis, 1994), they will be better equipped to deal with the challenges that student diversity bring to the classroom. Teacher professionalism must be viewed as a constant learning process to enhance students' learning and performance. For example, teacher training needs to address the issue of student diversity and the challenges that students' diversity will bring to the classroom (Avis, 1994). Different models of teacher training have been listed in the literature, one frequently mentioned is using the reflective practitioner model as an initial approach in the development of this "new" professionalism (Avis, 1994; Schon, 1987; Shulman, 1998).

In initial teacher education programs, reflective practice has evolved toward studying teacher's cognitive processes - their thoughts, judgment, decisions, and plans (Shavelson & Stern 1981; Shulman, 1998). This self-reflective approach has moved the field of research on teaching closer to a consideration of the underlying knowledge that informs teachers' plan and decisions (Grossman, 1990). Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, (1987) defined six categories of using reflective teaching as a way of expanding teachers' professionalism. These are: (a) knowledge of content, (b) knowledge of pedagogy, (c) knowledge of learners and learning, (d) knowledge of context of schooling, (e) pedagogical content knowledge, and (f) knowledge of educational philosophies, goals, and objectives. On the other hand, Elbaz (1983) included five categories of knowledge in her vision of "reflective practitioner:" (a) knowledge of self, (b) knowledge of the milieu of teaching, (c) knowledge of subject matter, (d) knowledge of curriculum development, and (e) knowledge of instruction. Prospective teachers need to be familiar with these processes because they reflect teachers' professionalism, which in term and time will be reflected in the classroom. In addition, bilingual special education teachers need to be familiar with other strategies and means which will help them in their individual professional growth

## **3. Methods**

This researcher sought to answer the following two research questions: (a) What were the curriculum competencies perceived by bilingual special education field specialists as essential in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers at the college/university preparatory level? (b) Are there any significant differences among the responses of teachers, administrators/ supervisors, clinicians, and professors/ researchers related to required competencies in the area of language proficiency, assessment, cultural, planning and delivery of instruction, and professionalism of bilingual special education program?

### *3.1 Participants*

One hundred participants were randomly selected to participate in the study, they included an equal representation (25 in each group) of the following professional groups: bilingual special education teachers, administrators/supervisors, clinicians, and professors. The 25 bilingual special education teachers who answered the questionnaire were teaching bilingual special education classes in New York City. The

25 administrators/principals were working as principals or assistant principals supervising special education program in New York City public schools. The 25 clinicians in this study were New York City public schools evaluators, psychologists, and social workers in charge of assessing the evaluation of bilingual special education students and they were all members of the Committee of Special Education. The 25 professors/researchers were at the time of study teaching courses related or in the area of bilingual special education at colleges and universities. The field specialists were all working with culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. Participants were asked to read a list of competencies and to identify those they thought should be "required" to demonstrate by teachers working in bilingual special education classrooms.

### *3.2 Instrumentation*

The major source of data collection was a questionnaire developed by the author titled The preparation of bilingual special education teachers at the college level. It was developed by combining special education and bilingual education interactive components of the already existing standards from the National Association for Bilingual Education (1992) Professionals Standards for the Preparation of Bilingual/Multicultural Teachers and standards from the Council of Exceptional Children (1993) Council of Exceptional Children Common Core Knowledge and Skills Essential for all Beginning Special Education Teachers. The questionnaire consisted of items divided into five areas: language proficiency, assessment, planning and delivery of instruction, culture, and professionalism. Participants were asked to read a list of 55 competencies and to identify those they thought should be "required" to demonstrate by teachers working with bilingual special education classrooms.

The reliability of the questionnaire was obtained by combining responses and calculating the value of Cronbach's Alpha for the entire scale. Frequency distributions and descriptive statistics were obtained for all questionnaire competency scores using SPSS frequency procedures.

## **4. Results**

All field specialists' participants identified the five areas (language proficiency, assessment, planning and delivery of instruction, culture, and professionalism) as important and necessary components in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies and cumulative percentages of perceived required bilingual special education teachers' competencies by field specialists.

Language proficiency was perceived as the most necessary required area for bilingual special education teachers (85%). Among the behaviors/competencies identified by the majority of field specialists, the following five were the most mentioned: (a) proficiency in two languages; (b) knowledge of second language acquisition theory and second language pedagogy that focus on second language teaching and on the integration of language and content; (c) understanding of the nature of bilingualism and the process of becoming bilingual; (d) understanding of structural differences between the child's first language and second language; and (e) exposure to classroom experience in teaching English as a second language.

Table 1  
 Frequencies and Cumulative Percentages of Perceived Required Bilingual Special Education Teacher Competencies By Field Specialists (N=100)\*

	Language Proficiency		Assessment		Culture		Planning & Delivery of Instruction		Professionalism	
No. of Items	8		10		9		21		7	
Opt. Participants	Req.	Opt.	Req.	Opt.	Req.	Opt.	Req.	Opt.	Req.	Opt.
Bilingual Special Education Teachers (25)	177	23	200	50	148	77	399	126	12	51
Administrators/ Supervisors (25)	181	19	22	23	187	38	452	73	124	51
Clinicians (25)	170	30	205	45	167	58	427	98	110	65
Professors/ Researchers (25)	154	46	185	65	140	85	380	145	114	61
Total	682	118	817	183	642	258	1658	442	472	228
Accumulative Percentages	85%	15%	82%	18%	71%	29%	79%	21%	67%	33%

Req.= Required competencies      Opt.= Optional competencies      \*N=100 field specialists

All four field specialists' groups identified the area of assessment as a very important component in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers (82%). Participants (teachers, administrators/supervisors, and clinicians) identified them as necessary required competencies. Behaviors identified as of primary importance include the following five: (a) using assessment information in making instructional decisions and planning individual students' programs and suggesting an appropriate environments; (b) promoting and encouraging students' self -assessment of their skills and abilities; (c) using various types of assessment procedures appropriately; (d) familiarity with the appropriate application and interpretation of score, grade score versus standard score, percentile rank, age/grade, and equivalents; and (e) familiarity with typical procedures used for screening, pre-referral, referral, and classification

All field specialist groups identified the area of culture as an important component in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers (71%). Those behaviors/competencies identified by the four groups of field specialists were: (a) describing approaches to develop awareness in the learners' value of cultural diversity; (b) providing discussions of the effect of cultural and socioeconomic variables on the students' learning style and on the students' general level of development and socialization; (c) recognizing and accepting different patterns of child development within and between cultures in order to formulate realistic objectives; (d) planning strategies to respond positively to the diversity of behaviors involved in cross-cultural environments; and (e) providing field experiences in order to assist children to interact successfully in cross-cultural settings.

Bilingual special education field specialists perceived each of the 21 competencies in the area of "Planning and Delivery of Instruction" as a required component in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers at the college level (79%). These behaviors identified in this area include the following five: (a) knowledge of basic classroom management theories, methods, and techniques for students with exceptional learning needs; (b) teaching students to use thinking, problem solving, and other cognitive strategies to meet their individual needs; (c) developing comprehensive individualized student programs.; (d) utilizing innovative teaching techniques effectively and appropriately in the various content areas and in two languages; and (e) selecting assessment measures and instructional programs and practices that respond to cultural, linguistic, and gender differences.

The area of professionalism was perceived as the least important competency (67%). Responses related to specific behaviors varied by individuals and by groups. However, the indicator of "Promoting

and maintaining a high level of competence and integrity in the practice of the profession" was perceived as the most essential competency in this area.

## 5. Discussion

All field specialist groups identified the areas of language proficiency, assessment, culture, planning and delivery of instruction, and professionalism as important components in the preparation of bilingual special education teachers. The results of the investigation suggest that college/university bilingual special education teacher preparation programs need to include in their curriculum, courses, and field experiences in all the above areas. The difference among participants is interesting. For instance, the most interesting finding is that professors/researchers differ from practitioners and yet they play the primary role in preparing new teachers, especially in the areas of second language acquisition. For example, the competencies of proficiency in two languages and understanding bilingualism were perceived to be less required skills by professors/researchers; however, administrators, clinicians, and teachers perceived these two skills as required. Darling-Hammond & Sclan (1996) stated that in an educational system designed to celebrate diversity and include democratic values, both minority and majority children need minority role models. Further, there is an increased demand to prepare qualified bilingual special education teachers. Again, the area of assessment is an important component in special education particularly with the re-authorization of IDEA 97, which requires that states include alternate assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs. Another interesting example is the area of culture in which professors/researchers perceived the competencies related to approaches to develop awareness, accept differences, and discuss cultural variables are important but not as highly important as teachers. In reflecting on the different components and characterization of culture, it should be clear to provide a meaningful and positive attitude and awareness of the thinking, believing, and valuing that our schools encourage in students. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers education programs promote and encourage these types of competencies.

The United States student population is growing more ethnically and linguistically diverse. The mismatch between the racial and ethnic profiles of teachers and their students reduces the likelihood that teachers will connect learning to all their students in a meaningful way (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). Further, educators who work with culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs can do much to ensure that these challenges are properly addressed in the instruction of these students. Finally, the area of professionalism it is difficult to see how the competency of participating in conference is perceived as not such an important item in teacher preparation, when in fact participating in conferences enhances professionals' knowledge base in the field.

Faculty and administrators in bilingual special education college/university preparatory programs need to look at these areas very carefully and incorporate them in their curricula. Teachers, administrators/supervisors, clinicians, and professors/researchers must work together with a shared clear mission which is translated into outcomes that are centered around culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs.

Colleges/universities must provide courses in the areas of bilingualism, assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, planning and delivery of instruction to effectively educate these students and multiculturalism in order to effectively prepare prospective bilingual special education teachers. It is imperative that colleges and universities prepare future generation of teachers that would be knowledgeable in these pedagogical processes. Teachers who are given directions through courses, theory, research, and field experience would develop the skills necessary to educate successful culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs.

## 6. Implications for practice

One of the main concerns of colleges and universities is the shortage and need of qualified bilingual faculty to address and train prospective teachers. We recommend that the faculty be provided with necessary resources and incentives to become knowledgeable in the field of bilingual special education. It is the responsibility of Schools of Education to prepare all teachers to provide quality education for all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs. Universities are constantly revising and developing new programs. And, although, programs have been developed or revised many of these programs do not address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs, especially of those students of urban areas.

Colleges and universities' administrators should encourage bilingual special education student teachers to participate and join organization as well as attend conferences. They should allocate monies in their budget for sending representatives of bilingual special education student teachers and bilingual special education professors to attend professional organizations and to present at these conferences. By allowing these professionals to learn new innovative practices and put them into practice, colleges/universities are participants of adequate change and reform in the field of bilingual special education.

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