

## Helping Teachers Thrive on Diversity and Change

By **Hee-Won Kang**

Increases in the number of language minority students have resulted in increased numbers of teachers trained to teach them. In California, the number of qualified teachers increased 31.3 percent from 1994 to 1995 alone (Macías, 1995). Along with the quantity of teachers, the quality of training that they receive is being addressed in some areas. New standards and systems of training teachers to teach language minority students are evolving to meet the demand for increased quality and quantity of teachers.

One example of this is the new system in California for multiple-subject and single-subject teaching credentials with Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development/Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD/BCLAD) emphases. Teachers gain knowledge and skills in three domains for CLAD emphasis (language structure and first/second language development; methodology of bilingual, English language development, and content instruction; and culture and cultural diversity) and six domains for BCLAD emphasis (adding methodology for primary language instruction; the culture of emphasis; and the language of emphasis) (Walton & Carlson, 1994). These domains encompass a comprehensive range of knowledge and skills that addresses the needs of second language students and teachers.

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However, training in these domains may not be

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enough to prepare teachers to meet the needs of and effectively educate their language minority students. Needs and problems of language minority students in specific educational situations may vary considerably. Teachers may often need the skills to analyze needs and develop unique solutions to particular problems. This is particularly true in times of increasing reform and restructuring of schools, during which teachers may be assuming new roles and responsibilities to discover and develop programs that work for their particular student populations.

Many states are mandating site-based management (Holcomb, 1993) which may be increasing opportunities for teachers to assume increased decision-making power in curriculum and other areas. Local districts and schools in some areas may assume greater control and flexibility in programs that were federally and/or state mandated. For example, in California there is increasing pressure for greater control at the local school district level over development and implementation of programs for language minority students (Macías, 1995). As schools implement new types of programs (such as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English), many content-area teachers may hold increased accountability for the language development of their language minority students.

Assuming many of these new responsibilities and designing or adapting instruction to meet specific needs of language minority students may call for the development of new skills. There are skills and knowledge outside the domains discussed above, particularly in areas such as research, program and curriculum development, staff development, and collaboration, that teachers may need to develop to meet the challenges of specific educational situations they may face. In proposed CLAD/BCLAD programs in California, research, program and curriculum development, staff development, and other skills are emphasized in domains of learning for those who are training to be CLAD/BCLAD specialists (a different program than the ones for multiple-subject and single-subject CLAD or BCLAD credential seekers). But development of these skills should not be limited to those training to be specialists. I think that multiple-subject and single-subject teachers with CLAD/BCLAD emphases also need to develop these skills so that they can be in a better position to collaborate and work with specialists, colleagues, and other professionals to collectively analyze and solve problems instead of mainly relying on specialists or outside experts to do so.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance for teachers to develop knowledge and skills in the areas of curriculum development, action research, staff development, and collaboration. It makes sense that if we are to hold teachers accountable for their students' learning, then they should have more responsibility in deciding how to help their students learn. Teachers can use these skills to find unique solutions to specific problems and needs of their language minority students. With such knowledge and skills, teachers may be in a better position to function more effectively in restructured and reformed school environments. In traditional school cultures, such training may help teachers become a force in pushing for and

shaping any needed changes in curriculum and other areas. This paper will discuss specific skills that teachers may need and how teacher education programs can help teachers develop such skills.

## **Curriculum Development**

The planning, design, and development of programs and curricula that promote the academic language development of second language students can occur at different levels. As the curriculum planning and construction process involves collective uniformity among teachers, the endeavor of local districts to develop programs and curricula often involves centralized planning at the district level. However, meeting specific needs of students requires flexibility and responsiveness on the part of teachers (Monson & Monson, 1993). To ensure that curriculum meets the specific demands of their often varying educational situations, needs, and student populations, there is a need for decentralized, school-based planning to work together with district-wide planning committees (Stewart, 1993).

I believe that teachers can and should take a more active role in designing, developing, and evaluating programs and curriculum that meet the specific needs of their students. As with F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin (1988), I think we should take an interest in “shifting the curricular emphasis from the prescriptions of outside developers, policy makers, academics, and others to the decisions of teachers” (p. 147).

There are sound reasons for teachers to take increased roles in not only implementing but also in adapting and developing curriculum. Externally designed and produced curriculum materials cannot take into account the variety of different educational contexts, demands, and needs of the classes in which they are used. Rather than just implement “teacher-proof” curriculum materials in specific ways for specific intentions as prescribed by its developers, teachers need to know how to discover the potential of curriculum material through inquiry, action research, adaptation, and development of curriculum to meet their own intentions and students’ needs:

[curriculum implementations] are thought to be failures because the intentions of developers and implementors do not show up unambiguously in classrooms.... As teachers we must trust our own personal practical knowledge...and decide what is needed in the particular mix of our classrooms. We do not want these matters decided by others. Good curriculum materials have many different potentials for different people in different circumstances. As teachers, we must realize this potential. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 152)

Recognizing the potential of content-area curriculum for second language students is critical, particularly when materials and instructional activities may not have originally been designed with language minority students in mind. Teachers need the abilities and decision-making power to utilize the curriculum to its fullest

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potential for language minority as well as mainstream students. Teachers need to be able to select, organize, adapt, and create curriculum materials to meet the academic language, literacy, and learning needs of students, which may vary from class to class and school to school. Different classes may contain relatively different mixes of linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as different mixes of native and non-native speaking students, and curriculum must take these factors into account (Fillmore, 1989).

Selection of multicultural content and emphases may vary depending upon the composition of the class. The organization of language content in the class may differ according to immediate needs of the class or other classes with which the class content is coordinated. Certain curriculum materials may be less comprehensible than others and require considerable adaptation and supplementation to make them comprehensible to second language students. Some instructional activities may not provide opportunities for the kinds of language comprehension, use, and negotiation of meaning conducive to language acquisition. Well known instructional approaches and strategies that are implemented with success in some instructional situations with some student populations may not always work so well in others. In fact, they may sometimes produce negative results when they are implemented uncritically (Bartolome, 1994). In short, teachers need to be able to select, organize, adapt, and develop instructional activities, techniques, and materials to fill in certain voids between what is commercially available and what is needed. Approaches, methods, techniques, and materials for helping language minority students develop second language and literacy skills as they are learning content area material are still evolving, and teachers can play a very substantial role in their evolution.

Increased responsibility for curriculum development among teachers may mean more preparation than teachers currently receive. Teacher preparation for curriculum planning receives relatively little emphasis in many colleges of teacher education (Silberstein, 1982; cited in Ben-Peretz, 1990). In general, there are a variety of skills and knowledge that teachers could develop that would prepare them for increased curricular roles and responsibilities. Teachers could learn tasks, processes and steps in various curriculum development models. Teachers may need to learn certain analytic methods and tools for effective analysis of needs and existing curriculum, including different methods of information collection, various methods of needs assessment, and various frames of curriculum analysis, such as Curriculum Item Repertory, Curriculum Analysis Matrix, and sets of structured questions for analysis of syllabi.

Teachers could also develop discourse and text analysis skills to determine what academic language and skills their students will need to develop. For curriculum planning, teachers could learn different planning frameworks, such as factor inventories and rating scales, as well as principles and guidelines to plan and teach courses. For design, teachers need to learn how to articulate goals, develop and sequence objectives, design learning activities, and develop evaluation procedures.

They could learn principles for organizing, sequencing and integrating content. For developing an integrated curriculum, teachers could use planning models for making curriculum connections (Palmer, 1995) and knowledge of different integrated curriculum approaches (Beane, 1992). They could learn adaptation skills to make the curriculum more comprehensible to language minority students without watering down the content of the curriculum. They could also learn guiding principles of curriculum implementation. These and other skills would be very useful for teachers to be able to organize, develop, and create a curriculum that is accessible to all of their students.

### **Action Research**

Developing and implementing an effective curriculum involves research and evaluation of what student needs are, what the language and learning demands of different educational situations may be, and what instructional activities and materials work best in the classroom. Action research can be an important part of both curriculum development and professional development among teachers. Changes and innovations in educational programs and curriculum are basically dependent on changes in individual classrooms and teachers (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Research, particularly action research, gives teachers the tools to make such change for themselves and other teachers:

...action research transfers ownership of the change process to the teachers. They are the researchers, the developers, the innovators, and the evaluators....who better to analyze teaching and learning than the teachers themselves through the agency of action research? (Holly, 1991, p. 135)

Action research can be a matter of doing research and then taking action on the basis of the research (research for action), taking action that is accompanied by research (research in action), or taking action that is followed by research (research of action) (Holly, 1991). It is usually cyclical in nature.

In whatever form, action research can be a way for teachers to not only discover and solve problems in classrooms and schools but also of trying out or creating methods, techniques, and materials while assessing their affect on the learning of their students. Curriculum development skills alone may not be enough. With the diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, learning styles, relative mixes of students, and other factors, such practitioner research and reflection is important for teachers to analyze language demands and student needs and to find what works in their particular educational situations. Designing and developing curricular solutions to problems may be more effective if such solutions are evaluated and revised to meet specific needs as they are being implemented.

Again, though the emphasis is on expanding the role of teachers, it does not mean lessening the role of specialists or other researchers. Action research is commonly conducted in collaboration with other teachers, university professors,

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specialists, etc. Teachers need the research skills to define problems, collect and analyze data, and plan, implement, and evaluate action programs on a more equal basis in collaborative action research and to avoid being simply coopted by other professionals. Teacher education programs can provide information concerning models and stages of action research, data collection methods, data analysis skills of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing-verification, problem analysis and formulation, planning, implementation, and evaluation of action programs (Holly, 1991).

### **Staff Development**

For effective staff development that is concerned with the specific problems and needs of students in specific educational situations, teachers may need to become more involved in their own staff development. Traditional methods of staff development, often one-shot workshops given by outside experts, frequently have problems associated with lack of focus on immediate problems, concerns, or needs of schools, teachers, or students (McLaughlin, 1991; Fullan, 1982; Lieberman, 1995). Today's teachers should be exposed to more of a variety of methods of staff development workshops, including some that give teachers more of a role in their professional development. Also, as teachers themselves grow professionally through inquiry and action research, they may want to share their knowledge with other teachers and conduct workshops themselves.

Staff development that is conducted within the context of teachers' own classroom settings, according to the RAND Change Agent Study, is one of the factors that enable and sustain teachers' professional growth and vitality (McLaughlin, 1991). Professional development can occur when teachers inquire into their own values and practices, and from this perspective, staff development "depends less on expert workshops and more on teacher-led activities, such as study groups, curriculum writing, action research, peer observation, case conferences, program evaluation, trying out new practices, teacher centers, and participation in outside events and organizations" (Lieberman & Miller, 1991, p. 107).

This is not to exclude the role of experts and specialists in staff development, as they can bring valuable knowledge and expertise in innovative practices that may work in different situation. But teachers should not rely solely on them for professional development. Peer-oriented types of staff development can be done even in conjunction with expert workshops. An additional problem with traditional workshops given by outside experts is a lack of follow-up or support by either staff developers or schools (McLaughlin, 1991; Fullan, 1982; Lieberman, 1995). Peer coaching is one peer-oriented development activity that can provide such follow-up. Programs that incorporate peer-coaching as follow-up to staff development workshops have been found to be more effective than traditional workshops and supervision (Munro & Elliott, 1987).

To help present and future teachers assume these responsibilities and work collaboratively for professional development, teacher education programs can also include training in skills of critical inquiry and reflection. They can also help teachers acquire knowledge of models, strategies, steps, and guidelines concerning peer observation, peer or team coaching, teacher support team building, and other types of programs for collaborative staff development. Observation skills as well as skills in using and creating coding sheets are useful. For peer coaching and other collegial types of staff development, leadership, communication, trust-building, decision-making, and conflict management skills are also necessary (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Knowledge of effective training design is important for teachers to help other teachers develop skills taught in staff development and transfer them to the classroom. For example, findings of some studies support the incorporation of four components in staff development: theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and continued support such as peer coaching (Showers, 1985). These skills and knowledge would help teachers assume more of a role in the professional development of themselves and their colleagues.

### **Collaboration Skills**

Underlying the discussion of curriculum development and coordination, action research, and staff development is not only the idea that teachers can take responsibility for these activities, but also that they can do so in collaboration with teachers, specialists, administrators, and other professionals. To encourage teachers to choose to collaborate in these areas as well as take individual action when necessary, teachers need the organizational frameworks and cultures within schools in which to work collaboratively with others. Teachers may also need certain skills and strategies to be able to work effectively in collaborative types of activities.

Teacher education programs can help teachers develop knowledge and skills in communication, teaching analysis skills, conferring skills, group process and management of personal relations in a group, task allocation, peer group feedback, problem solving approaches, consensus building, introspection, effective questioning strategies, conflict resolution and management, and other human relations, communication, and collaboration skills (Alvarez, 1992; Ben-Peretz, 1990; Murphy, 1990; Smith & Scott, 1990). Other useful knowledge that can help teachers work collaboratively in restructured schools, according to Joseph Murphy (1990), is knowledge of organizational sociology (knowledge of how schools function, school cultures, obstacles against and leverage points for change, etc.) and knowledge concerning the politics of education (nonrational aspects of political process, various models of influence, significance of conflict, etc.).

### **Training in Teacher Education Programs**

Experiences in teacher education programs may contribute to professional

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isolation and dependence on outside experts for curriculum and training among some teachers. Conversely, teacher skill and confidence in finding, developing, and testing their own solutions to educational problems, taking more charge of their professional development, and working collaboratively with others can also have their beginnings in teacher education. Training in these skills can be incorporated into existing coursework in teacher education programs. Some programs, such as those at Sonoma State University and California State University, Fresno, are integrating field experiences throughout much of their program rather than have one semester of student teaching at the end. Courses that have practicum components taken concurrently are ideal for including training and practice on the type of curriculum, staff development, and action research skills mentioned above.

Observation assignments that students are generally given in teacher education coursework can include peer observation and coaching of classmates as they try out materials and instructional activities they have learned in methods or materials development classes in their field experiences. Other activities and assignments to help students gain experience in curriculum development, staff development, and action research skills can replace previous course assignments that may be similar but are oriented toward specific instructional goals or include such emphasis on skill development.

For example, courses that have students give group or individual presentations can incorporate class training in effective workshop design and staff development skills to change such assignments into mini-workshops. Curriculum units and lesson plans that are assigned can be oriented toward a particular educational situation such as the students' field experience. Instead of creating static, general lesson plans for hypothetical classes, students could create lessons for specific needs and situations. They could then evaluate and revise such lessons as they implement them in their field experience. In formal, extended periods of student teaching, student teachers can collaborate with master teachers and university faculty to conduct action research, using research skills they have developed in preceding or accompanying courses that include training in action research skills.

One example of how development of these skills can be integrated into regular teacher education coursework is a course the author taught on reading/language arts instruction in the elementary school that was coordinated with initial teaching assignments for the students. Normally, assignments included observations of elementary school classes, development of two lesson plans, two assessments of reading skills, and reports on articles in practical journals to introduce future teachers to professional resources. All of the assignments were individual. The author decided to give students the option of doing a collaborative action research project in their student teaching assignments that would still incorporate elements of the individual assignments but that would address a particular educational problem or need that the students would identify. Instead of reporting on journal articles, the students could include information from the articles in their rationales



for certain activities or techniques they planned to try out in their field experiences for the project. One of the lesson plan assignments could be done collaboratively to design the action plan for the project. Students could use observations and one of the assessment assignments to collect data on either a problem to address, evaluation of the activity or “action” they had implemented, or both.

As well, courses can also help students develop collaborative skills by encouraging collaborative as well as individual work. Courses that assign curriculum and material development projects can provide a framework for students to collaborate on these projects. Elements of peer teaching and coaching can be incorporated into classroom activities and assignments. Participation in such collaborative groups and activities itself can help lead to development of cooperative skills.

### **Concluding Remarks**

These are a few of the ways training in such skills can be directly and indirectly incorporated into teacher education for K-12 teachers of language minority students. The main point is that teachers, in preservice and inservice teacher education, should have the opportunities to develop skills in individual and collaborative research, curriculum development and coordination, and staff development. This will allow teachers to take increasing roles in discovering, developing, critically implementing, and evaluating what works most effectively in their classrooms and schools as well as add to the database of general information on educating language minority students. Change and innovation in teaching language minority students can and should come from the bottom up (teachers and students) as well as from the top down (administrators, government agencies, outside experts, etc.). Helping teachers develop the tools to participate in the evolution of programs and curricula for K-12 language minority students will benefit students and teachers alike.

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