

The Pitfalls of Focusing on Instructional Strategies in Professional Development for Teachers of English Learners

By Daniella Molle

Introduction

For more than a decade, the professional development literature has shown that most teachers are not adequately prepared to teach English learners (ELs)—that holds true for both specialist and mainstream teachers (see, for example, August & Hakuta, 1997; Beykont, 2002). Research that focuses on professional development for teachers of ELs, however, is rare (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). Indeed, the dearth of such research is one of the principal findings of a review of the literature on this topic (Knight & Wiseman, 2006). As Knight and Wiseman point out, “clearly, professional development for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students is a neglected area of research” (p. 89).

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The need for such research has, however, never been more urgent. Federal mandates for disaggregated data by native language have helped show that the education that linguistically and culturally diverse students receive is far from equitable. Indeed, the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed that fourth-grade ELs are more than twice as likely as non-ELs to score

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below basic in reading and mathematics (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007), a gap that widens in eighth grade. ELs also have higher dropout rates and more frequent placement in lower academic tracks than non-ELs (Genesee et al., 2006). These findings suggest that many schools are unable to fulfill their obligation to provide an equitable education for *all* their students, and their EL students in particular.

In addition, the population of ELs is the fastest growing in the country and many regions of the United States are coming into contact with non-native English speaking immigrants for the first time. According to data from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, in the 2008-2009 year there were over five million ELs enrolled in U.S. schools in grades pre-K through 12. This represents a 51% increase in the EL population in ten years, compared to a 7% rise in the total school-age population. The growth is not equally distributed and while some areas in the U.S. have seen an expansion in the EL population of less than 50%, others have witnessed an increase of more than 200% (NCELA, 2011). The increase of the EL population, coupled with a growing awareness that inclusion in mainstream classrooms is preferable to, and in many cases cheaper than, the provision of pull-out services has brought a much larger number of teachers in contact with linguistic minority students. As the research cited in the previous paragraph indicates, many of these teachers find themselves ill equipped to meet the particular needs of this highly heterogeneous population.

The present article responds to the urgent need for research on professional learning opportunities specifically designed for teachers of ELs. Existing educational research that offers in-depth discussion of the learning processes in which educators engage during such professional development is still rather limited (though see, for example, Gebhard, Demers, & Castillo-Rosenthal, 2008; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Musanti & Pence, 2010). In the analysis included here, I apply a type of discourse analysis (microethnography) to examine the opportunities for learning that group interactional norms foster and foreclose. Discourse analysis has been shown to be particularly powerful in investigations of professional discourse and its connection to teacher learning (e.g., Borko, 2004; Horn & Little, 2010; Little, 2002). I use excerpts of social interaction during a professional development initiative to illustrate how the deficit views of students perpetuated by dominant discourses (Popkewitz, 2007; Swartz, 2009) become reaffirmed when educators are not provided with opportunities to analyze whether and how their instructional practices take into account the specific characteristics that set apart ELs, heterogeneous as they are, from other students.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

Most of the available literature on the teaching of ELs focuses on “effective” instructional practices¹ (e.g., Santamaria, 2009). We know precious little about how to help teachers of ELs acquire such practices (Knight & Wiseman, 2006).

Still, there is scholarly work that discusses how particular goals of professional development for teachers of ELs can be accomplished. Some of the work is largely theoretical (e.g., Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Johnson, 2006), while other work is largely empirical (e.g., Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006). In addition, some of the research focuses predominantly on technical solutions, while other research work focuses on transforming teachers' "habits of mind" (Meier, 1995) and in particular on fostering "political and ideological clarity" (Trueba & Bartolomé, 2000).

As Buxton, Lee, and Santau (2008) point out, one of the main stumbling blocks to increasing the quality of instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students is that "professional development tends to be 'strategy-focused' and rarely attempts to conceptualize or implement systemic ways to address the multiple challenges of promoting classroom practices that are both equitable and rigorous" (p. 509). I refer to this "strategy-focused" approach as *technical* because it frames the purpose of professional development as providing high quality tools that educators can use to help their ELs gain access to grade-appropriate curriculum (see, for example, Kaplan & Leckie, 2009). The premise that the acquisition of particular teaching practices (or strategies) and specific knowledge is the key to effective teaching for language minority students is pervasive in contemporary discussions of professional development for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Amaral & Garrison, 2007; Buysse, Castro, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010; Kaplan & Leckie, 2009). This approach has supported the use of scales of implementation of instructional strategies as a primary measure of the effectiveness of professional learning (see Bowers, Fitts, Quirk, & Jung, 2010 and Crawford, Schmeister, & Biggs, 2008, among others).

Technical approaches to professional development for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners are by no means without value and have been associated with EL student achievement gains, primarily in elementary school settings (Amaral & Garrison, 2007; Buysee et al., 2010). Some such approaches to professional development are rooted in the current literature on high quality professional learning and provide sustained, job-embedded opportunities for teacher learning that focus on the academic success of a particular group of students, foster reflective inquiry, and promote collaboration. The Achilles heel of such approaches is that they depoliticize language teaching by separating teacher-student relationships from the history of relations among dominant and marginalized groups (Bartolomé, 1998). As Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, and Gotanda (2002) maintain, the lack of acknowledgement of and consideration for the sociohistorical contexts in which classrooms are situated can be damaging to language minority students: without requiring "an intentionally racist campaign," technical approaches may represent "a collection of ostensibly racially neutral initiatives that result in consolidating racial inequality" (p. 338).

The technical view of professional development for teachers of ELs is, however, not the only one in the educational research literature. Other approaches to professional development for teachers of ELs exist which privilege the *quality of*

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life in the classroom over specific educational outcomes (Allwright, 2005). These approaches are grounded in the position that the academic success of ELs is contingent on educators' critical examination of their views of linguistically and culturally diverse students, the opportunities for engagement that they provide to them, and the extent to which the classroom learning environment can be actively shaped by students. In other words, the political approaches to professional development focus on habits of mind and work (Meier, 1995) rather than instructional strategies. As Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, and Teddy (2009) explain,

. . . when teachers are able to engage in critical reflection about the images they have of marginalized students and the resultant relationships they have with these students, they are more likely to be able to engage in power-sharing practices. This means that teachers who espouse and enact power-sharing theories of practice will better enable previously marginalized students to more successfully participate and engage in educational systems on their own culturally constituted terms. (p. 736)

In the U.S. context, the political approach to professional development can be seen in the work of a number of researchers, including Sonia Nieto (2000), Enrique Trueba and Lilia Bartolomé (2000), and Susan Johnson (2005). Nieto's (2000) work on equity is concerned first and foremost with the ethical dimensions of teaching and learning. She discusses the professional development of teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse students primarily in terms of "a teacher's journey" (p. 184) and outlines several components of that journey:

- ◆ facing and accepting one's own identity by engaging in critical reflection;
- ◆ learning about students' realities by learning about and with students;
- ◆ developing strong and meaningful relationships with students so as to help them feel that they belong in school and see themselves as learners;
- ◆ becoming multilingual by learning another language and multicultural through coursework and community service;
- ◆ developing a community of critical friends that makes change possible, decreases isolation, and fosters shared responsibility for students. (pp. 184-185)

Trueba and Bartolomé (2000) expand the literature on ethical relationships in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms by emphasizing the significance of "political and ideological clarity" for the practice of teachers who work with language minority students. Trueba and Bartolomé define political clarity as "the process by which individuals achieve a deepening awareness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to transform them" (p. 278). Ideological clarity complements political clarity by acknowledging the fact that the existing relationships between social, political, and economic forces on the one hand and school systems and practices on the other are not neutral but often support the interests of dominant groups. As Trueba and Bartolomé put it,

ideological clarity is “the process by which individuals struggle to identify both the dominant society’s explanations for the existing socioeconomic and political hierarchy and their own explanations of the social order and any resulting inequalities” (p. 279). Political and ideological clarity can help educators develop the awareness of and consideration for sociohistorical contexts that Gutiérrez et al. (2002) advocate. These processes encourage teachers and administrators to critically reflect on the influence of macro forces on the ways in which English learners are viewed and discussed in schools as well as on the structures and practices that are seen as effective in supporting students’ learning.

Johnson (2005) contributes to the politically grounded line of inquiry by discussing the intellectual tools that teachers need in order to be able to successfully teach language minority students. Johnson sees professional development for teachers of ELs as a collaborative activity whose ultimate goal is to foster “more equitable social roles” between teachers and students and among teachers (p. 243). Her vision of professional development is rooted in Giroux’s notion of *transformative intellectuals* as well as Dewey’s discussion of *intellectual tools*. Intellectual tools enable teachers to learn from their experiences, and they both assume and develop particular habits of mind: open mindedness (seeking alternatives), responsibility (recognizing the consequences of one’s actions), and wholeheartedness (continual self-examination). According to Johnson, intellectual tools of inquiry can lead to changes in teaching practice because they enable teachers to “confront taken-for-granted assumptions about what is and is not possible in the context in which they teach” (p. 248). Intellectual tools of inquiry should thus “permeate all the dimensions of [teachers’] professional development experiences” (p. 249).

It is essential that professional development provide spaces in which politically grounded discussions of language minority students can be fostered because of the strong connection between teachers’ beliefs about students (and students’ languages) and the instructional practices in which teachers engage (Relaño Pastor, 2008). This relationship has been explained by the term *language ideologies*. Language ideologies guide the learning activities in which teachers engage with students and reflect the ways in which teachers construct their students’ identities. According to Razfar (2003), “ideologies are not only ideas, constructs, notions, or representations, but they are also practices through which those notions are enacted” (p. 245). Language ideologies are rarely made explicit in classrooms but they are often visible “vis-à-vis the social organization of learning, the classroom discourse patterns, the literacy strategies employed by the teacher, teacher repair, and assessment of student work” (Razfar, 2003, p. 250). This line of research has illustrated empirically that teachers’ beliefs about the capabilities of English learners shape the learning opportunities available to language minority students in schools (Garcia & Stritikus, 2006).

In sum, the primary goal of professional development in politically grounded approaches to teacher learning is a change in classroom and school climate towards more equitable social roles and a movement away from deficit views of students. In

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the present article, I use the principles articulated in this literature as a foundation for my data analysis because these principles were also espoused by the designers of the professional development program under investigation and manifest in its curriculum materials. In the following sections, I describe the professional development program studied, setting and participants, and the methodology used. I then apply discourse analysis to investigate the extent to which the social interaction among educators who work with ELs reflects the principles outlined above: to facilitate an examination of teachers' practices in a way that takes into account the particular needs of language minority students and strives to disturb the deficit models of ELs implicit in dominant discourses (González et al., 2005). I demonstrate how a consistent focus on instructional strategies during professional development unintentionally reinforces deficit discourses about linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Professional Development Program

The professional development program that is the focus of the data analysis is entitled Content and Language Integration as a Means of Bridging Success (CLIMBS®). The program was recently developed by scholars at the Center for Applied Linguistics on behalf of the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium of states. CLIMBS is a semester-long professional development opportunity that targets teams of administrators, general education teachers, ESL/bilingual teachers, special education staff, and non-instructional staff. The program consists of five monthly face-to-face meetings. Each meeting is a day long and dedicated to a specific topic or module (see Table 1), except for the first meeting which covers two modules (Modules 0 and 1 in Table 1). An online component that includes discussion boards supplements the face-to-face meetings and is intended to enable educators to communicate with each other and reflect on their learning between the face-to-face sessions. The program has two main objectives: (a) to familiarize educators with research-based instructional practices that support the learning of ELs, and in particular raise awareness of the importance of academic language for the academic success of ELs; and (b) to facilitate the formation of professional learning communities among the participants, and specifically among participants who work in the same school or district.

CLIMBS is designed to expose teachers to new relevant information about the teaching and learning of ELs (through readings and collaborative activities) and to give educators opportunities to relate that information to their classroom context. The program provides numerous opportunities for discussion both within and across participating school-based teams. The assignments, which relate directly to teacher practice, require participants to, for example, compile information about an EL student, write language objectives for lessons, design a formative language assessment task, and modify lessons to include scaffolding for academic language learning.

Across the WIDA Consortium, the CLIMBS program has been offered to educa-

tors as a professional learning opportunity through their district, and in some cases with the support of the state as well. Educators are either released from school in order to participate or (if the meetings occur on weekends or after contract hours) receive a stipend, professional development credits, or graduate credits. Preliminary empirical research on CLIMBS indicated that the program (a) increased educators' awareness of the importance of academic language for the academic success of ELs, (b) helped educators better understand how ELs learn academic language, and (c) created a common foundation and a feeling of trust among EL/bilingual and general education staff (Molle, 2010).

Setting and Participants

The research site for the present study is a mid-sized urban district in the Midwest of the United States, which I call Lakeview.² The CLIMBS program was offered to secondary schools in Lakeview in the spring of 2008. At that time, there were about 20,000 students enrolled in the district's public schools, of which

Table 1
CLIMBS Modules

<i>Module</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Description</i>
0	Technology foundations	Participants become familiar with the online platform for the program.
1	Collaboration and professional learning communities	Participants discuss how professional learning communities can be created and sustained and how they benefit ELs.
2	Instructional	Participants discuss how to use the WIDA English language proficiency (ELP) standards in lesson planning and how to write language objectives for lessons.
3	Assessment	Participants discuss language vs. content assessment as well as interpretation and use of summative ELP assessment scores.
4	Building schema	Participants discuss three ways to scaffold EL learning: (a) linking new material to students' background experiences and cultures, (b) connecting past learning with new concepts, and (c) emphasizing key vocabulary.
5	Lesson delivery	Participants discuss instructional strategies that support academic language acquisition, including scaffolding strategies, grouping and interaction strategies, and strategies for adapting texts.

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20% were English learners. About 12% of the ELs spoke Spanish, while about 5% spoke Hmong. Similar to many districts across the country, the EL population in Lakeview had doubled in the last 10 years.

The district provides a range of services to English learners at the secondary level. Beginning ELs, who are not Spanish-speaking, are taught all content by ESL/bilingual teachers in self-contained classrooms. The district also provides Spanish bilingual classes in all the core subjects. Intermediate and upper-intermediate ELs can be mainstreamed for some of their classes or be taught in self-contained classrooms. The size of the self-contained classes varies from 10 to 20 students, depending on the students' proficiency levels in English. In 2008, the support programs for ELs at the middle-school level were more extensive than those at the high-school level, because in Lakeview there were about twice as many ELs enrolled in the middle schools as in the high schools. Since 2008, many of the programs available at the middle school level have also been made available at the high-school level.

The CLIMBS program was offered to staff from one middle school and one high school in Lakeview. The two schools self-selected: the administration and teachers there were most responsive when the district EL program coordinator advertised CLIMBS. The eleven participants in the program included: three English as a second language (ESL) and two ESL/bilingual teachers from the middle school, three general education teachers from the middle school, two general education teachers from the high school, and a secondary program support teacher employed by the district. All educators participating in CLIMBS had worked in the district for at least 2 years, and some had been in the teaching profession for as long as 25 years. Most of the general education teachers had received no training on working with ELs. The ESL and ESL/bilingual teachers were fully certified but had limited knowledge of certain aspects of the CLIMBS program, such as the WIDA English language proficiency standards.³

The sole facilitator of CLIMBS in Lakeview was the district ESL/bilingual program coordinator, Kate. She had worked as a program coordinator for the school district in Lakeview for several years and had 11 years' experience as an ESL teacher at the elementary and secondary level.

My role in the program was that of a participant-observer and assistant to the facilitator. I audio-recorded the conversations but at the same time I participated in the class activities. I helped the facilitator with technology, handed out papers, made copies, and so on. I sat at a different table at every face-to-face session of the program because I wanted to get to know all the participants. I took part in all the activities they did but did not participate in assignments they completed for homework. I had frequent informal conversations with the professional development participants about the program, the materials, their learning, and the contexts in which they worked. The participants shared with me their recommendations for changes in the program content and format. I was usually seen as the expert on second language acquisition and, as a WIDA employee, on WIDA products (such as English

language proficiency assessments and standards). In sum, I would characterize my role as an inside outsider. As a researcher rather than a teacher or administrator, I was an outsider. My participation in all the face-to-face meetings, however, gave me an insider status within the group of educators engaged in CLIMBS.

Data and Methods

The data used for this article is part of a larger study that focused on the social factors that shaped the learning environment of the CLIMBS professional program and on the learning that took place during the program. The data for the larger study were collected at two sites (an urban and suburban one) in the Midwest. The two sites had different facilitators and participants but used the same curriculum and ran the program simultaneously. The data collected include: audio-recordings and transcripts of the five face-to-face sessions, online discussions by the participants, program documents, assignments and other documents produced by the participants (including visuals, lists of points, etc.), semi-structured interviews with participants after the end of the program, pre- and post-program surveys, and researcher field notes. The present article uses data from the urban site, Lakeview. The analysis reported here relies primarily on transcripts of group conversations, though field notes and interviews are also used as points of reference.

The methodology I use for the foundation of my analysis is microethnography, which is a type of discourse analysis (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Erickson, 1996; Fitch, 2005; Streeck & Mehus, 2005). Microethnography seems particularly suitable for explorations of teacher learning (Horn & Little, 2010; Little, 2002). The focus of microethnography on social interaction as it unfolds in time enables researchers to describe learning environments and processes by tracing how certain topics of conversation are proposed and then picked up, ignored, or marginalized.

In exploring professional learning at a specific site, I focus on the discursive structures that guide the participation of interlocutors and so shape the learning opportunities available to them. I term these structures *discursive norms*, though other researcher refer to them by different names, including *group norms* (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001) and *conversational routines* (Horn & Little, 2010). Horn and Little (2010) define discursive norms as “patterned and recurrent ways that conversations unfold within a social group” (p. 184). From the point of view of microethnography, these norms are seen as structures that need to be continuously socially reaffirmed in order to continue to exist. In other words, they are characterized by both stability and impermanence. As Bloome et al. (2005) put it, at any moment “there are tensions and conflicts between the tendency for continuity (reproduction of extant... cultural practices and social structures) and change” (p. 52). Discursive norms are seen as highly significant in explorations of learning environments because they serve as a reference point for the participation of interlocutors and shape the

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learning opportunities that become opened up or foreclosed (Borko, 2004; Grossman et al., 2001; Gutiérrez, 1993; Horn & Little, 2010; Little, 2002).

My main unit of analysis is the *social event*. Social events are the focal units in the ethnographic microanalysis that Bloome et al. (2005) use. They are “a heuristic” and “a way to place emphasis on the dynamic and creative aspects of what people do and accomplish in interaction with each other” (p. 5). Bloome et al. define events as “bounded series of actions and reactions that people make in response to each other at the level of face-to-face interaction” (p. 6). After identifying the beginning and end of the event based on the words of the interlocutors and contextual cues, I transcribed the event and analyzed the utterances in each turn a speaker took. I coded the utterances based on both the communicative action that the interlocutors were performing and on the social significance that the action seemed to have. Table 2 demonstrates the coding of a few consecutive turns. In the

Table 2
Data Analysis

<i>Speaker Text</i>	<i>Social Interaction</i>	<i>Social Significance</i>
1 Mark: and, and i guess that's why i want to 2 go back to this because then i was 3 kind of venting to [Paul this week 4 about this. i did a mock trial in the 5 class this week,	Introduces a new topic and justifies choice of topic. States new topic (mock trial).	Introduces a difficult and puzzling experience (puzzling because the difficulty was not expected) related to the topic of the day.
7 Kate: [yah.	Shows she is listening.	
8 Kate: uh huh.	Shows she is listening and encourages Mark to continue.	
9 Mark: and i have one class and it's a lot of 10 the students Paul had the previous 11 year came to me the- this year. and 12 it's ahm, an ell class. and uhm, man. 13 we were doing like (1 sec) level 4 14 and level 5 stuff and it was a major 15 struggle.	Elaborates on the topic: describes the students in the class and then evaluates the mock trial experience.	Focuses discussion on EL students. Constructs students as unable to handle high level content.
	Exclamation “man” signifies frustration and surprise.	

example in Table 2, one of the participants (Mark) takes the floor by introducing a new topic for discussion (social interaction), and his framing of the topic as a “struggle” provides a problem for the group to discuss and attempt to solve at the same time as it casts EL students in a specific light (social significance).

The analysis of the social significance of the speakers’ contributions helped me better understand both the social relationships among them and the social construction of meaning. I was able to see how the participants socially positioned themselves within the group. In addition, I could trace the topics that were suggested by different participants and then picked up, elaborated upon, marginalized, or ignored. Such a two-pronged analysis allowed for a richer description in motion of the learning environment and provided evidence for explanations of why certain types of knowledge became sanctioned while others were ignored.

Analysis

The analysis reported here is a small part of a larger exploration of the learning environment and learning processes that took place at the two research sites during the CLIMBS professional development program (Molle, 2010). In working with the data for the larger study, I used field notes to search for instances of tension or conflict. I then transcribed select social events that took place on each face-to-face day at each site and analyzed those events from the point of view of discursive norms. I expected such social events to offer fruitful ground for the investigation of the continuity and change that characterize discursive norms (see previous section).

The larger study looked at both the structure and meaning of discourse (Bloome et al., 2005). In terms of structures, the research demonstrated that the discursive norms at Lakeview fostered patterns of social participation that were hierarchical, stable, and predictable. The interaction there during the CLIMBS program in many ways resembled the discourse patterns in a traditional classroom, with the teacher controlling topic selection, selecting speakers, and acting as the primary audience for participants’ contributions (e.g., Gutiérrez, 1993). In terms of meaning, the larger analysis showed that the discourse at Lakeview was strongly action-oriented. The discussions tended to focus on issues of classroom practice and how what teachers did could be improved.

The analysis presented here uses these background findings as a stepping stone but focuses on one very specific question: what is the implication of a technical approach to professional development for the learning that takes place in this group, and in particular for the construction of ELs that becomes dominant? Specifically, how do reinforced discursive norms bolster or disrupt the deficit views of language minority students reflected in dominant discourses?

The main source of data for the analysis presented here is a sixteen-minute-long discussion that took place on the second face-to-face meeting of the professional development program. The discussion represents a complete social event with

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clearly identifiable beginning and end. I selected this event for a number of reasons. First, the event was highlighted in my field notes as an instant of tangible tension among participants. Second, the construction of language minority students plays an important role in the interaction. Last, the event is illustrative of the technical approach to professional development that the analysis of the larger corpus of data (including field notes, interviews, and transcripts) had indicated as characteristic of the learning environment in Lakeview.

The main interlocutors in the event are Kate, Mark, and Paula. Kate is the district coordinator of ESL/bilingual programs and the facilitator of the CLIMBS program. She is White and in her thirties. She has experience teaching EL students in several states. Kate is organized, detail-oriented, and extremely knowledgeable about the ELs in her state and district. She does not really have the time to facilitate the program but has agreed to do so because she cares deeply about the success of the students and believes that the teachers in her district need to learn more about ELs. Mark is a high school general education teacher. He is White and in his thirties. Mark is considered by his colleagues to be a strong teacher who expects a lot from and gives a lot to his students. He teaches social studies to students in ninth grade. The ELs in his classroom are intermediate and upper intermediate in terms of their English language proficiency. Paula is the only participant of color at the Lakeview site; she self-identifies as being of Mexican heritage. Like Kate, she has taught ESL and bilingual classes in other states. At the middle school where she works, she is regarded as one of the star ESL/bilingual teachers. She teaches language arts and reading for Spanish speakers. She is in her early forties.

On the second face-to-face day of the CLIMBS program, the content discussed is related to the implementation of the WIDA English language proficiency standards in classroom planning and instruction (see Table 1, Module 2). The social event that is the focus of the analysis takes place in the morning, and is part of a conversation about how the English language proficiency standards can help teachers make decisions about structuring classroom activities, grouping students, and providing appropriate language supports. The focus of the conversation in the social event is an instructional activity (a mock trial) that Mark designed for his students. The social event can be divided into several phases based on the different topics discussed. The phases are of varying duration and involve different speakers. The division of the social event in phases is intended only to make the thematic flow of the interaction more visible to the reader and should not be interpreted as a suggestion that the conversation can be objectively divided into independent sections.

The social event begins with Mark expressing puzzlement and disappointment over the performance of one of his classes: a class that he describes as a “low-level class” in which a “larger portion” of the students are English learners (Phase 1 begins). Mark cannot explain to himself the students’ “struggle” with the assignment because he believes that he has taken all the steps necessary to ensure that students have enough time and resources to adequately prepare.

In the discussion that follows Mark's description of the problem, the facilitator and other participants offer suggestions for scaffolding strategies that Mark can use to help his ELs complete the assignment (Phase 2, see Table 3 for an example). These suggestions relate primarily to providing students with the opportunity to build the necessary background knowledge to complete the assignment (such as by providing a reference guide to the roles of witness, judge, and juror, as well as showing a video of a trial) and giving students enough time to prepare.

The interaction then returns to the frustration that Mark experienced with the "low-level" class (Phase 3 begins). At the end of this phase, Mark places the blame for the students' lackluster performance to the students themselves by providing a convincing demonstration that he did everything in his power to prepare them for the assignment (Table 4, lines 178-180).

In the next phase of the conversation (Phase 4 begins, Table 4 from line 182 on), Paula proposes an alternative interpretation of the event. Rather than seeing the class's performance as a failure, she suggests that the experience needs to be "celebrated" (line 196) because Mark did not lower his expectations and the ELs completed the assignment. What Mark needs to keep in mind, suggests Paula, is that the intended product of the assignment inevitably looks different because English learners are still developing their language skills.

Paula's comment is marginalized: no one responds to or follows up on her contribution. Instead, Kate directs the participants back to finding an explanation for the problem that Mark faces (Phase 5 begins). Paula joins the conversation again and suggests that Mark could have allowed the students to use notes. Mark rejects this suggestion because the language support he allows students to have is based on the way in which people behave in real-life trials. In real-life trials, witnesses do not use notes, only lawyers do.

When practical suggestions for what Mark can do differently seem exhausted, Kate shifts the topic of conversation slightly and highlights the relationship between ELs' language needs and their behavior (Phase 6 begins). She proposes that the mock trial assignment might have been difficult for students because they were asked to react on the spot. Such an activity is challenging for language learners who

Table 3
Introducing the Problem: Excerpt from Phase 2

58	Kate:	you know, thinking of a scaffold, so. for maybe, you know, could
59		you've created a- a cheat sheet,
60	Mark:	[i did that.
61	Kate:	[or something,
62	Mark:	i had a reference guide.
63	Kate:	ok,
64	Kate:	so the students had the reference guide and that was available to all,

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are still mentally translating from their native into the new language and thus take longer to make an oral contribution. Kate then connects this explanation to a strategy and suggests that Mark may want to increase his wait time. As a participant in the conversation, I offer that another challenge ELs face might have been cultural norms about behavior in a group, which foster cooperation rather than competition among peers. Paula re-introduces the issue of language skills by pointing out that any speaking task is difficult because students have to deal with the social aspect of speaking in front of others as well as the language aspect of thinking on their feet.

In its final phase (Phase 7), the discussion returns to a negative description of the students in the class. Mark comments on their sub-standard performance and lack of leadership skills. Shortly after his comment, the event ends and the participants move on to another topic.

The summary provided above may reinforce the impression that the interaction flows in a linear manner. A closer look at the topics discussed, however, reveals that the social event transcribed has a spiraling quality, as Table 5 demonstrates. There are two topics in particular to which the participants return repeatedly. The first one is the construction of the class and the students in it as sub-standard, and so problematic. The second one is the (largely futile) search for instructional strategies that Mark can use to help his students complete the assignment successfully.

Table 4
Shifting the Discourse: from “Problem” to “Celebration” (Phases 3-4)

178	Mark:	like i said, i had the reference guide and they had a packet, you
179		know. weeks in advance so they could, you know, read, and, get
180		into the role-playing situation. so. but like i said, if you [were a fly
181		on the wall and you watched [(this period)
182	Paula:	[i think your-
183	Paula:	[i think your assignment is fantastic. and actually, i want to
184		address this because i actually- my journal is basically on the
185		expectation. you gave the assignment, you expected them to do it.
186		and they did it! the other piece that i reflected on yesterday was that
187		we should expect them to do it (1 sec) but then also be accepting of
188		the variety and the range of product.
189	Mark:	uh hum.
190	Paula:	because the product you ended up with in one class was very
191		different from the other, and you just- and that's part of it, i mean,
192		they are still expanding.
193	(?):	uh huh.
194	(?):	uh huh.
195	Paula:	and i think you're right on, i think what- instead of feeling, "oh my
196		gosh, did i fail?" i think you need to celebrate the success that you
197		did not back down from that assignment and choose to do
198		something different for them. you expected them to do it,

Table 5 clearly illustrates the recurrent nature of the effort to find technical solutions to Mark's situation and of the construction of ELs as deficient. What Table 5 also shows is the futility of Paula's attempt to redirect the conversation. Her efforts to disrupt the dominant discourse about ELs remain isolated. As Bloome et al. (2005) point out, in interpreting the social construction of meaning we need to pay attention to both an individual's actions and the ways in which those actions are validated by others. In the focal social event, Paula's social actions are deprived of such validation.

Discussion

Using the social event analyzed above as an illustrative example, the discussion that follows strives to make visible the types of learning which the discursive norms that become prevalent at Lakeview promote. The analysis focuses on a social event in which a general education teacher is the center of attention because the professional development program was designed with such teachers as the primary audience. In addition, the social event illustrates communication between general education teachers and ESL/bilingual specialists, which the program was specifically intended to foster. The analysis suggests that discursive norms that support discussions focusing on classroom strategies limit what can be learned because they tend to place certain relevant and challenging topics out of reach. Such discursive norms can have unforeseen negative implications for the social construction of ELs in professional development settings. The mechanisms through which deficit views of students become involuntarily reinforced are discussed below.

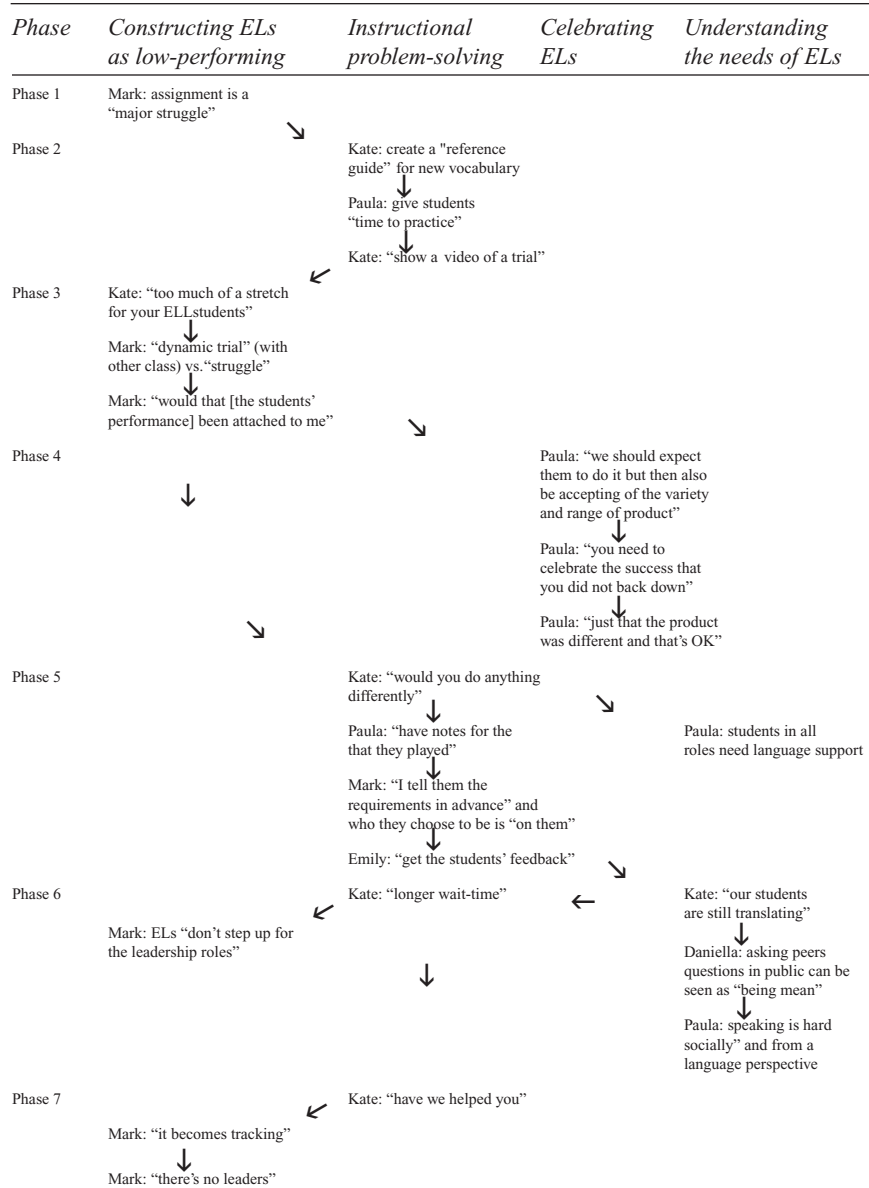
The emphasis on strategies at Lakeview is dangerous not because of what it asks of educators but because of what it does not ask of them. Discursive norms that privilege discussions of action above everything else push to the side important and politically charged questions about the relationship between linguistic ability and who ELs can be in the classroom (Trueba & Bartolomé, 2000). In the social event that is the focus of this paper, deficit views of students become reinforced primarily in the following three ways:

- (a) by viewing student performance as dependent on individual, innate characteristics;
- (b) by conflating the availability of time and information with preparation; and
- (c) by holding up the native English speakers' fluency and ease of speech as the standard.

At several points in the discussion, Mark talks about the lack of leadership he sees in ELs. He is dismayed that "it was a stretch to get lawyers" and explains ELs' reluctance to take on this role with lack of leadership. The role of the lawyer is, however, the most demanding one from both a linguistic and a social perspective. As

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Table 5
Thematic Flow of the Social Event



Mark himself points out, “they [lawyers] are controlling . . . the whole effectiveness of the trial, the flow.” In order to be effective lawyers, students need to be able to understand extended spoken discourse, quickly formulate questions, and express their opinion orally in a polished and persuasive manner. In the group discussion of the mock trial, however, these linguistic demands are alluded to in Phase 6 but never brought to bear on the claims that there are no leaders among ELs. The lack of consideration of the very strong relationship between a learner’s confidence as a language speaker and his/her willingness to perform particular oral tasks unwittingly perpetuates a misguided view of ELs as passive and timid.

The question of what constitutes adequate preparation for an assignment is essential in the work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. The discursive norms at Lakeview focus on the time and materials that Mark makes available to his students. According to these criteria, Mark does all that can be expected of him, and more. Mark stresses several times that the students should have been better prepared for the mock trial because they had the time to do so. When Paula asks whether the students had “time to practice,” Mark responds that “this was assigned weeks earlier” and did not culminate until “two and a half weeks after the fact that I first assigned it.” The false equation of time and materials on the one hand and preparation on the other disregards the social and linguistic requirements of the task. In the case of a demanding assignment like the mock trial, adequate preparation for English learners must include actual oral practice. If knowing what to expect may seem as sufficient preparation for native English speaking students, having actually done an assignment should be part of the preparation of language learners. The discursive norms in Lakeview, however, do not foster discussion of the ways in which teachers may need to transform their conceptualizations of time and practice in order to adequately take into consideration the language needs of ELs. Mark has no opportunity to reflect on how he *thinks* about students because the discourse forces him to focus on what he *does* to support them.

The third way in which deficit models of student become reinforced in the focal social event is that the EL students’ performance is held against the performance of native English speaking students in terms of the fluency and flow of their speech. When Mark describes the experience with his “advanced” class, he says that he had “a dynamic trial” that “flowed really well.” It is only logical that linguistically diverse students will come out at a disadvantage if their oral production is being compared to that of native English speakers. In such situations Paula’s point that we as educators need to accept a wide variety of products from a linguistic perspective is of primary importance. As she points out, an acceptance of a wide range of products allows us to “celebrate” the effort students put into an assignment. It seems that in order to preserve high expectations of content learning, we need to not be disappointed by but expect a linguistically and even socioculturally flawed student work. The flaws in such work are essential in helping us accurately evaluate the progress that our students are making.

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The first two mechanisms that reinforce deficit views of linguistic minority students seem rooted in lack of awareness of the relationship between ELs' linguistic and social needs on the one hand and their performance in the classroom on the other. This finding corroborates existing educational research that argues for greater awareness among teachers of ELs of the processes of language development and the various environmental factors that facilitate these processes (Collier, 1985; Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Johnson, 2006; Tarone & Alwright, 2005). The first and third mechanisms, however, clearly also lend support to the calls made by Trueba and Bartolomé (2000), Nieto (2000), and Johnson (2005) for a greater political and ideological awareness among teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The tendency to view "deficiencies" in students' performance as resulting from innate rather than contextual or processual factors, combined with the use of the native English speaker as a golden standard, can serve no other purpose but perpetuate dominant assimilationist discourses that denigrate the resources and achievements of ELs. To use Trueba and Bartolomé's words, "Hegemonic structures in classroom instruction work effectively in penalizing linguistically and culturally different students, especially students of color" (p. 278, 2000). In the present analysis, dominant deficit views of language minority students are perpetuated not through any malicious intent on the part of the educators but through reinforced discursive norms that privilege technical approaches to professional learning and preclude political, ideological, and ethical discussions of the ways in which we think about students.

A related question that perhaps needs to be addressed here is: are the deficit views of culturally and linguistically diverse students that become reinforced in the social event also mirrored in the relationships among their teachers? Is Paula's input marginalized because she is the only person of color? My analyses of Paula's contributions, which are largely ignored in other instances as well, point to a mismatch in social positioning. Her voice is often disregarded or misunderstood because her views of ELs and her notions of the purpose of professional development diverge from the ones that become predominant at Lakeview. In addition, she is never constructed as the expert on Latino students as single representatives of a particular race often tend to be.

Within the context of the social event, one unfortunate and unintended consequence of the technical approach to professional development is that it seems to severely curtail the opportunities for learning available to dedicated, reflective, and diligent educators like Mark. During the social event, Kate asks him twice if the discussion of instructional strategies helped him better understand what happened during the mock trial or what he would like to change the next time he assigns it. Both times Mark responds that he is unsure if he has learned anything. Once it becomes evident that he has used the strategies others can recommend to him, there is nothing little for Mark to gain. If there is no shift in perspective, if ELs are still seen in the same light, there seems to be no place for him to grow.

The relationship between the dominant discursive norms at Lakeview and the learning that takes place during the CLIMBS program can be seen not only in the recorded interactions but also in the interviews I conducted with participants after the program was over. Five teachers from the middle school volunteered to be interviewed, three of whom were ESL and two of whom were general education teachers. When talking to the participants about the focus of the program and what they took away from it, four out of the five educators listed “different techniques and strategies” as one of the main (or the main) things they learned. The two general education teachers explicitly stated that the program had helped them learn more about linguistic minority students. One of the educators said that she gained “more of a cultural awareness of the complications, especially of the Hispanic population,” and the other spoke of the “limitations” that ELs have in the knowledge and experiences they bring to school. The interview data thus indicates that deficit models seem to be left untouched even as teachers increase the number of instructional strategies they have to draw upon when working with ELs. The teachers’ comments about their students are indicative of the power and persistence of negative discourses about ELs and of the complexities inherent in professional development specifically designed for the teachers who serve them.

Future Research and Concluding Thoughts

The aim of the present article is to contribute to discussions of professional development for teachers of English learners. I demonstrate through the use of discourse analysis that if professional development is viewed primarily from a technical perspective, then deficit models of students may remain undisturbed and the opportunities for professional growth available to educators may become significantly restricted. My analysis contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence for the importance of one particular aspect of professional development intended for teachers of ELs: the opportunity for practitioners to lead inherently political discussions about the needs and capabilities of language minority students. The findings reported in the present article suggest that professional development for educators working with ELs creates rich opportunities for learning only if it situates discussions of instructional strategies that support the academic success of language minority students within ideologically and politically grounded discourses.

In the literature on professional learning communities, scholars often refer to the importance of relationships that both support and challenge participants (e.g., Grossman et al., 2001). Such relationships are essential in fostering reflection on practice, which is one of the main aims of professional development. What the present analysis highlights, however, is that the type of reflection that discursive norms facilitate guides the nature and extent of the learning that occurs. When the focus of a professional development event is exclusively on instructional strategies, the learning that happens is limited and may have the unforeseen consequence of

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perpetuating views of ELs as deficient and inferior to their native English-speaking peers. It is thus essential that professional development provide educators with opportunities to explore what they *do* with students as they simultaneously reflect on how they *think about* students.

The need to unpack how students' capabilities and their performance are judged is particularly acute when teachers discuss English learners because some of the steps educators need to take to support their students' academic success may clash with core values to which teachers subscribe. An example of such values is the commitment to an equitable classroom and high expectations for all. The belief that an equitable classroom is one in which all students are provided the same type of instructional supports and judged by the same standard ignores the strong relationship between students' academic English language proficiency and their ability to participate in the classroom learning community, process new content, and demonstrate learning. Professional development should encourage educators to examine the standards, assessments, practices, and beliefs guiding instruction in ways that take into account the language needs of ELs and at the same time build on the strengths of students and celebrate their ability to tackle challenging grade-level content.

There is another type of reflection, besides reflection on one's classroom practices, that also seems to shape in powerful ways the learning environment: reflection on the purpose of a professional development enterprise. The assumption of the technical approach that the primary purpose of the professional development is the acquisition of teaching strategies that can help students acquire academic language remains unchallenged in Lakeview. What explicit reflection on the purpose of professional development could make visible are differences in perception among participants (it is clear from Paula's contributions, for instance, that her notion of professional development is not limited to the technical approach). If reflection highlights divergent interpretations that are all seen as legitimate, then the content of professional development and the focus of the discussions that take place can be broadened to include a wider range of issues pertaining to the learning and teaching of ELs. As a result, additional spaces for learning can be opened up.

In addition to expanding what is seen as possible, both types of reflection outlined above can help make transparent the relationship between the views on ELs that become established in a community and dominant discourses. The official discourse in the U.S., as evidenced by the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 among others, portrays ELs as populations that are not thriving (Gutiérrez et al., 2002), are separate from "all children" and so are deficient in comparison to them (Popkewitz, 2007). If all discussion of broader issues pertaining to ELs is avoided, dominant discourses become implicitly reinforced because there is no opportunity for them to be brought to light and contested in the interaction among participants. Even though understandings of language acquisition, immigration, and culture unquestionably guide teachers' practices (Razfar, 2003), these important understandings

remain private and unchallenged when the focus of professional development is limited solely and exclusively to what one should do in one's classroom. Important as discussions about instructional strategies are, such discussions need to be framed within a discourse that examines the cultural, political, and ideological factors that shape the teaching and learning of language minority students in US schools.

The present article focuses on only one social event. This naturally limits the generalizability of the analysis as well as the scope of the work as a whole. It does, however, allow for greater depth and rigor, especially when the analysis is triangulated by other types of data (field notes and interviews in the present case). My purpose in zeroing in onto a specific interaction was to explore in detail the mechanisms through which deficit discourses of culturally and linguistically diverse students become unwittingly reinforced. Although key features of professional development for educators of ELs have been outlined in the educational literature, empirical explorations of the discourses in which pedagogical discussions about ELs take place and of the relationship between these discourses and the types of learning opportunities created for educators have remained rare. The need to explore in depth the processes of learning for those involved in the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students has never been more urgent.

Notes

¹ The term "effective" is in quotation marks, because whether or not practices achieve desired results depends very much on one's notion of worthwhile objectives; there is no consensus on what constitutes effectiveness in language teaching.

² All names of research sites and participants are pseudonyms.

³ The WIDA English language proficiency standards served as the basis for the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) English language proficiency standards. TESOL is one of the leading national organizations for English language teaching professionals. Both sets of standards are intended to guide ESL/bilingual as well as general education teachers in meeting the academic English language development needs of ELs.

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