Equitable Education of English Learners in the Common Core Age: Implications for Principal Leadership

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This paper highlights the importance of school principals in English Learners' academic achievement in the age of the Common Core State Standards. Revising the curriculum of administrator preparation programs to include a greater emphasis on curriculum and instruction is one approach to enhancing principal leadership for English Leaners. Another approach is to reculture site-level instructional leadership through professional development to address the academic learning needs of English Learners.

Introduction

Dramatic demographic shifts are occurring in the student population in U.S. public schools. In that shifting demographic context, 43 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As a result, in most U.S. states, particularly California, today's principals face the daunting challenge of leading teachers' implementation of the language-intensive CCSS with large and increasing numbers of students who are learning English as a new language. One way to address that challenge is through reculturing principal leadership.

Mendoza-Reis and Flores (2013) have articulated a tri-level model for reculturing instructional leadership to address the academic learning needs of English Learners. Included in that model is the notion that the principal at schools with English Learners must be capable of instructional leadership that is informed in part by the knowledge of the teaching and learning of English Learners. Such knowledge encompasses at least familiarity with and ideally expertise in implementing some of the instructional approaches that are most widely used in teaching English Learners.

English Learners comprise almost one-fourth of the K-12 public school population in California (California Department of Education, 2014a, 2014b), and their numbers are high and rising in other U.S. states. Although school leadership quality is second only to quality of curriculum and teacher instruction among within-school factors related to student achievement, schools with large numbers of English Learners are more likely to be staffed by principals with lower levels of preparation and academic attainment (Mendoza-Mendoza-Reis and Flores, 2014). It is important, therefore, to consider how to address the learning needs of English Learners, particularly related to the CCSS, both in the preparation of principals and in reculturing instructional leadership at the school-site level.

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Background Context

The number of public school students in the U.S. participating in programs for English language learners (ELLs) increased by more than 400,000 between 2003-2012. While California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois remain the states with the most English Learners, the largest growth rates among that population are found elsewhere. During that time period, the numbers of English Learners more than doubled in Arkansas, Delaware, Kansas, Mississippi, and North Dakota. South Carolina's English Learner population more than quintupled. English Learners account for approximately one in every 11 public school students in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b).

While their numbers may be on the rise, an academic performance gap persists between English Learners and other students. For example, since 1996 non-ELLs consistently have outscored ELLs by 24 points on the Gr. 4 Mathematics National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—by 25 points since 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013a). Because the CCSS emphasize language and articulation of thinking in all subject areas (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014), the performance gap for English Learners could increase in the absence of instructional approaches that account for their particular learning needs. The concern about pedagogical capacity raises the issue of educational leadership preparation.

The effective teaching and learning of English Learners, indeed, ought to be addressed explicitly in Preliminary Administrative Services Credential Programs; however, the curriculum of those programs tends to include courses on leadership, management, human resources, legal issues, and the like to the exclusion of courses related directly to curriculum and instruction (see, e.g., California State University San Bernadino, 2014; San José State University, 2014). For veteran teachers who have developed instructional expertise related to teaching English Learners—through, for example, a master's degree program in curriculum and instruction or extensive professional development—the absence of English-Learner-focused courses in administrator preparation programs has less of a negative impact. But not all aspiring principals have developed that level of content knowledge and instructional expertise.

For example, a related and problematic phenomenon exists in districts that serve high numbers of English Learners and have trouble retaining principals. Accompanying the high demand for principals in those districts is a tendency to place young teachers who show promise onto the administrative fast track. That practice has two negative unintended consequences: it removes a developing, effective teacher from the classroom, and it fosters the preparation of a principal who, in the absence of significant professional development, will be inadequate as an instructional leader, given the current state of administrator preparation programs. Pushing newer teachers into administration further underscores the need to address in administrator preparation programs the teaching and learning of English Learners. One potential source to address said phenomenon may be the adoption of programs such as the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model.

Nature of the SIOP Model

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Model consists of 30 features grouped into 8 components. For example, content objectives and language objectives are two features of the lesson preparation component (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000). Since the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol was first published 14 years ago, it has become widely used

and in professional development and practice to meet the academic language and content learning needs of English Learners.

In addition, much research has been conducted on the SIOP Model. For example, Short, Fidelman, and Loughit (2012) used a quasi-experimental design across two school districts to examine the effects of 77 teachers using SIOP-based instruction on the academic language performance of 386 English Learners in middle and high schools over three years. Students' results on the Writing, Oral Language, and Total English (oral language, reading, and writing) scores of the IDEA Language Proficiency Tests indicated statistically significant differences favoring the treatment group.

In the intervening years since the SIOP was first published, more specialized versions of the model have appeared, including for elementary grade English Learners (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010a), secondary grade English Learners (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2014), and for particular content areas, such as mathematics (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010b; Mushi, 2011). Echevarria and Vogt (2010) describe how the SIOP Model can be used with Response to Intervention (RtI) to help meet the learning needs of English Learners.

One approach, then, to preparing principals to be instructional leaders who can address the academic learning needs of English Learners is to revise the curriculum of administrator preparation programs to include a greater emphasis on curriculum and instruction through pedagogical modeling such as SIOP.

Professional Development and SIOP

Another approach to reculturing instructional leadership to address the academic learning needs of English Learners (Mendoza-Reis and Flores, 2014) is through professional development. Extant literature related to the SIOP Model includes several descriptive accounts of its introduction through professional development at the school or district level to address the needs of English Learners (Fratt, 2007; Pascopella, 2011; *Principal Leadership*, 2012; Wells, Gambero, Allen, & Juarez, 2012). One of the authors of the SIOP Model — Short (2013)— provides guidelines for using the SIOP Model in sustainable professional development. O'Neal, Ringler, and Lys (2009) studied a state-wide effort in rural North Carolina to introduce the SIOP Model to 17 teachers through summer professional development. Data indicated significant differences between treatment and control teachers' respective levels of implementation of SIOP practices. Varela (2010) surveyed grade-level teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and English Learner teachers in both elementary and secondary schools in Virginia. Most teachers surveyed indicated that the SIOP Model addressed the primary instructional issues related to teaching English Learners. Another study of SIOP professional development took place in Long Island, NY, where Honigsfeld and Cohen (2008) examined a professional development initiative for 22 provisionally certified teachers that included both the SIOP Model and lesson study. The researchers stated that student artifacts demonstrated the SIOP Model's effectiveness. Friend, Most, and McCrary (2009) used standardized math and reading assessments as the outcome measure in their examination of the impact of a two-year professional development program for 70 teachers featuring the SIOP Model. The 235 participating English Learners in two Kansas middle schools had achievement gains that were statistically significant in comparison to English Learners throughout the state.

While the SIOP-related literature mentioned so far has not focused on any particular subject area, there are pieces that include a content focus. Bergman (2011) compares the

components and features of the SIOP Model with the characteristics of inquiry science and concludes that the two instructional approaches are complementary. Two separate publications focus on the same research through the Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE) that included 12 teachers and 1,021 students. One study (Echevarría, Richards-Tutor, Canges, & Francis, 2011) examined the effects of the SIOP Model on the acquisition of academic language and science concepts among Gr. 7 English learners. Assessments measured the acquisition of academic language and science concepts. Results indicated that students in the SIOP group performed better than controls, although not to a significant degree. The related study (Echevarria, Richards-Tutor, Chinn, & Ratleff, 2011) found that the extent to which teachers implemented the SIOP Model with fidelity was positively correlated with students' gains in their scores on reading comprehension tests related to the science content of the lessons taught using the SIOP Model. Echevarria, Short, and Powers (2006) compared the achievements of 346 Gr. 6-8 English Learners to examine the effects of nominated teachers' social studies lessons that were taught using the SIOP Model. Results revealed positive effects of the SIOP Model on English Learners' literacy achievement measured with the IMAGE writing assessment.

In light of the aforementioned literature related to successful professional development efforts focusing on the SIOP Model, it seems reasonable to consider that similar efforts could be beneficial toward reculturing instructional leadership to address the academic learning needs of English Learners. Moreover, given the current importance of STEM content in education (White House, 2009), a closer look at the SIOP Model specifically in mathematics instruction seems warranted. To address more precisely the achievement gap in the Gr. 4 NAEP Mathematics scores of English Learners, examining SIOP-Model teaching related to the topic of fractions, which is central to the Grades 3-4 CCSS-M Standards, would be particularly timely.

Finally, it seems prudent to strategically incorporate into the SIOP-Model teaching of Gr. 3-4 fractions the two recommendations for teaching English Learners that have strong evidence according to a recent U.S. Department of Education Institute of Educational Sciences Practice Guide (Baker, et al., 2014, p. 6):

Recommendation one

Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities.

- Choose a brief, engaging piece of informational text that includes academic vocabulary as a platform for intensive academic vocabulary instruction.
- Choose a small set of academic vocabulary for in-depth instruction.
- Teach academic vocabulary in depth using multiple modalities (writing, speaking, listening).
- Teach word-learning strategies to help students independently figure out the meaning of words.

Recommendation two

Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching.

- Strategically use instructional tools—such as short videos, visuals, and graphic organizers—to anchor instruction and help students make sense of content.
- Explicitly teach the content-specific academic vocabulary, as well as the general academic vocabulary that supports it, during content-area instruction.
- Provide daily opportunities for students to talk about content in pairs or small groups.
- Provide writing opportunities to extend student learning and understanding of the content material.

A carefully designed and sustained Gr. 3-4 mathematics professional development program focusing on fractions and taught using the SIOP Model, incorporating the recommendations above, could make a targeted contribution to the reculturing of instructional leadership to address the academic learning needs of English Learners.

Facilitating Reculturing

To facilitate the reculturing of instructional leadership to address the academic learning needs of English Learners, it is necessary to build related instructional capacity, which consists of instructional knowledge, tools, relationships, and organizational structures (Jaquith, 2013). Principals' instructional knowledge related to English Learners can be built through revised administrator preparation programs and professional development, which could also build teachers' instructional knowledge.

The SIOP Model can serve as a multi-faceted instructional tool. To be wielded effectively, principals need to foster collaborative and trusting relationships with and among teachers. With those relationships as a foundation, principals can put in place organizational structures to allow teachers to engage in ongoing, collaborative cycles of inquiry that focus on student work and are guided by DuFour's (2004) three crucial questions for professional learning communities:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

Summary and Conclusion

The role of school principals in the academic achievement of English Learners in the age of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is essential. One way to prepare site-level instructional leaders who can address the academic learning needs of English Learners is to revise the curriculum of administrator preparation programs to include a greater emphasis on developing aspiring principals' pedagogical content knowledge, particularly related to English Learners. Another approach to addressing the academic learning needs of English Learners is to reculture instructional leadership at the school-site level through professional development (PD). In any case, building instructional capacity though university programs or site-based PD, can certainly facilitate the reculturing of instructional leadership.

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