



## **Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department**

### **Reflections and Lessons Learned**

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#### **Abstract**

In 2007, the Multilingual/Multicultural Teacher Preparation Center, a teacher education program, was featured in a *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 34(4), special issue on diversifying the teaching workforce. Though this center has since ended due to the disbandment of the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department, this commentary describes components of the program that remain and lessons that were learned.

#### **Introduction**

“The M/M Center: Meeting the Demand for Multicultural, Multilingual Teacher Preparation” (Wong et al., 2007) described a program that was part of the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department (BMED) at California State University, Sacramento. As Wong et al. noted, “the Bilingual Center was formed in 1974 and

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was shaped by a wave of state and federal civil rights legislation that made specific provisions for bilingual education” (p. 1). As a consequence of the legislation, there was funding for attracting bilingual candidates, initially for graduate-level programs to train potential university-level, mainly Chicano, faculty, followed by a focus on in-service teachers, counselors, and administrators. Federal funding allowed for recruiting and training preservice candidates for bilingual certification in Spanish and Cantonese. In more recent years, recruiting has focused on Spanish and Hmong bilingual teachers without federal funding.

Since the 2007 publication of Wong et al.’s article, the BMED, along with the Multilingual/Multicultural Teacher Preparation Center (M/M Center), has been disbanded as a consequence of the reorganization of the College of Education, which came about because of a combination of (a) university administration’s push to reorganize to save cost, (b) a reduction in the number of bilingual candidates in the credential and graduate programs, (c) interpersonal conflicts within the department, and (d) a desire of some faculty to be integrated into the teacher education department to have a greater influence on all credential candidates. No one factor leading to reorganization can be easily identified. The reorganization as it now stands was finalized by a majority vote of the college. Minority lobbying for a continuation of some semblance of a BMED, one with an urban focus, failed.

The original BMED faculty consisted of 14 tenure-track faculty members: three Mexican American, three White (bilingual Spanish), two Chinese, two African American, one Native American, one Puerto Rican, one Hmong, and one Japanese. After the establishment of BMED, there were retirements, faculty leaving for other institutions, and faculty who moved on to new positions. In the current credential program, the following BMED faculty continue to be involved in the training of teachers: three Latinos in the secondary program and one Latino and two Whites, bilingual in Spanish, at the elementary level. The faculty they joined now include two African American, one Latino, four Asian, and the majority White faculty. This is all to say that diversity in the faculty is not as it was originally intended. Faculty diversity is an important consideration in any program purporting to recruit, train, and retain teachers of color. Ideally, the faculty represent the teacher candidates of color and the public school students we are targeting.

In this commentary, we will describe components of the BMED approach that remain after the disbandment, including the recruitment of candidates of color, program design and curricula, and retention approaches that we think should be, but are not typically included, in the characterization of credential programs.

### **BMED Recruitment**

Recruitment, initially the voluntary responsibility of one of the original BMED faculty, has morphed into a full-time staff position. The present Educational Equity Coordinator, an alumna of BMED, serves as an advisor for all students in the college

and continues to focus on recruiting students of color for the credential program, especially Hmong and Spanish bilingual teacher candidates. Her main function is as an advisor, but she has several other responsibilities. She has developed a peer mentor program, which includes outreach in K–12 and community colleges, test preparation and tutoring of potential candidates, and candidates in the program. She is a member of important college and university committees, including the university educational equity committee and the college scholarship committee. She networks with campus programs, including the College Assisted Migrant Program and the California Mini-Corps programs. She also hires and places potential candidates in schools as instructional aides. These are mainly schools with teachers and administrators who are BMED alumni.

Undergraduates are the primary source of credential candidates. There is just one course, a course focusing on language acquisition, currently offered at the undergraduate level in the College of Education and taught by former BMED faculty. The greatest number of candidates have undergraduate majors, which waive subject matter test requirements for teaching at the elementary or secondary levels. Satisfying the subject matter requirement by either having the appropriate major or passing the appropriate tests is by far the most difficult requirement for qualifying for the credential programs. Except for the Child Development major, which was originally established to prepare students for the elementary teaching credential program, advising for subject matter waiver majors is under the purview of departments located in other colleges, physically distant and administratively separate from the College of Education. The courses are also taught by faculty in these departments. However, we believe faculty and/or staff in the College of Education should have control of the development of subject matter requirements and subject matter advising for credential candidates. This alone could significantly increase the number of qualified candidates for the credential programs.

Faculty impact the recruiting and retaining of students of color through their participation in screening/selecting, advising, and instruction of these students. It is important to note that during the best days of the M/M Center, students were impressed that we had the majority faculty of color interviewing, teaching, and supervising in the credential programs. Candidates frequently commented that the faculty cared about their backgrounds, spoke their languages, and came from backgrounds similar to their own. When the program was part of the BMED, led by activist faculty of color, a specific mission of the department was to recruit and retain faculty of color representing the demographics of our students. We were, at one point, willing to delay hiring—and risk losing positions—if we did not have the desired candidates. As Wong et al. (2007) noted, we were initially successful in recruiting and retaining these faculty.

It is worthwhile to also indicate that the dean of the college, when the original Bilingual Center was established, was a civil rights activist and highly supportive of the bilingual certification program. He, Dr. Tom Carter, as Wong et al. (2007)

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noted, supported hiring bilingual faculty. These faculty, in turn, were instrumental in hiring more faculty with bilingual and multicultural foci. The hiring of a core social activist faculty fostered a continued focus of the college on bilingual and multicultural education through nearly four and half decades. After more than four decades of preparing teachers of color, mainly bilingual teachers, but also a core of African American teachers, many of our graduates teach in local school districts, more than a handful are administrators, and several have become college faculty. Notably, four are superintendents, and several are at the director or associate superintendent level. These graduates contribute to establishing rich pipelines for recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers and administrators.

The need for multicultural teachers of color in general, especially African American teachers, is a concern in our program, as it should be in any program purporting to focus on recruiting educators of color. Teaching in the public schools, especially in the inner-city schools, does not seem to be an attractive professional goal for high school students. Currently, faculty are actively involved in developing ethnic studies curricula at the secondary level, which, in addition to empowering students of color, may encourage some of these students to pursue teaching as a profession.

For the success of any future Grow Your Own (GYO) efforts, there needs to be staff, faculty, administrators, and alumni who are involved in recruiting efforts. Ideally, faculty in the College of Education should teach courses in the subject matter preparation programs and, along with staff, serve as subject matter advisors. Most obviously, advising should be housed in the College of Education, where students could receive one-stop services. Ideally, the College of Education, which has the faculty with the necessary knowledge and experience and the greatest vested interest in encouraging students to pursue a teaching career, should administer the subject matter advisors with oversight by the dean.

### **BMED: Program Design and Curricula**

The most distinctive program feature of the M/M Center at its height was the ethnically diverse composition of the candidates and their instructors, which led to strong consciousness about issues of race, language, and social justice. As previously noted, the faculty were Latino, African American, Asian, Native American, and Southeast Asian. The candidates were mainly Latino, but also African American, Southeast Asian, and other groups. People of color were the majority in the program, and this was empowering for most of the candidates. An African American alumna stated, "It provided a safe haven for those who had experienced trauma, discrimination and oppression throughout their lives." As we move forward, it is important that minority candidates continue to be empowered and that those who need support receive special attention.

As Wong et al. (2007) noted, race and language-conscious program development characterized the program's history. All course work emphasized multicultural

content, and student teaching fieldwork in low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse schools involved the application of theory to practice. Presently, the Spanish and Hmong candidates take a specially designed lower division bilingual methods class in their respective languages. These are the only classes that are taught in the target languages. Teaching in target languages has always been a challenge for the bilingual component of the program.

Related to language competency, it should be noted that control over testing for language competency was lost while BMED still existed. It is not clear exactly why this happened, but it was due partly to a lack of faculty and/or commitment to establishing standards and preparing students. The candidates now have to take a state standardized language test. The test requirement for language has negatively affected the numbers of candidates who ultimately obtain the bilingual certification in Spanish and Hmong. Saddled with a series of required tests, especially in the elementary program, students, even with financial assistance, often choose not to seek certification beyond the basic credential, especially if they know they will be able to gain employment without the extra bilingual certification. Ideally, we should have at least continued administering the language tests, free to our students, with standards determined by the faculty overseeing the tests. Language competency in bilingual education is a critical issue that deserves local, state, and national discussion.

Finding good student teaching placements with teachers and students of color is probably the greatest challenge in determining the success of students. A good placement includes a cooperating teacher who shares the theoretical perspective on which the program is based and encourages the student teacher to put in practice what is taught in the classes. Teaching styles, compatibility of the personalities of the cooperating teacher and student teacher, and student receptiveness to having a student teacher are also important. An excellent candidate by any measure can fail miserably if put in a situation where the cooperating teacher is not supportive and/or the classes are rife with behavioral management issues.

In summary, candidates of color should continue being empowered, and those who need support should be given the necessary attention. Race and language consciousness should and do characterize the present credential program, due largely to the passionate work of professors who were former BMED faculty. If possible, classes should be structured to replace test requirements for language competency requirements. Field placements need to be impeccably selected.

### **BMED: Retention**

Retention of teachers is a problem in the public schools, especially retention of teachers in historically disenfranchised and oppressed communities. The following is a description of factors related to retention of our teachers and also suggests how we should move forward.

***Language, Culture, and a Living Wage***

Bilingual certified teachers teaching in schools where the students speak their language tend to be retained and stay in the profession for long beyond the average teacher. This is a hypothesis that seems to be verified by the 100 plus teachers with whom we have kept in touch. The reasons are numerous. First, the probability of having a positive teaching experience is high if the teachers teach in their home communities or communities with similar demographics. These communities reflect the students' backgrounds, languages, and cultures. The teachers are special from day one and can make the students feel as though they are special. They can communicate with parents and guardians who may not be able to communicate comfortably in the majority language or dialect. Second, especially for first-generation college graduates, teaching does provide a stable, living wage and benefits, including good medical coverage and retirement. It is not surprising to find our graduates owning homes in the suburbs of the communities in which they teach. These are individuals who appreciate more than most the benefits of being full-time professionals. Most are able to assist their parents, many of whom worked in the fields as migrant farmworkers.

***Placement and Follow-up of Graduates***

Faculty have assisted graduates of the program in finding teaching positions and in supporting them while they are in their positions. It is important that graduates are mentored in the selection of schools. Teachers, especially novice teachers, need assistance in determining the best fit for their skills and personalities. Some factors are clearly more important than others in determining whether teachers are retained or choose to be retained. For example, if the administrator in charge is supportive of a teacher, novice or tenured, he or she will likely be retained. The administrator in charge, in our experience, is usually the principal, but a vice principal may be assigned the task of evaluating the teacher. Supportive administrators will assign new teachers to classes where the probability of a positive experience is more likely and there are few management issues. Assignment to difficult-to-manage classes may lead to even the most skilled and dedicated novice teacher leaving a school and, perhaps, the profession.

There have been occasions when teachers in danger of losing their positions, usually because of classroom management issues, asked one or more of us to come into classes to provide support. In two cases, a university professor provided an independent evaluation of teachers, contrary to the administrators' evaluations, and worked with the teachers until they were awarded tenure. Both of these teachers are still working approximately 10 years later. One of the teachers was assigned a class known (by other teachers) to be an extremely difficult class to manage, and the teacher eventually found a position in another district where she was successful and obtained tenure. It should be noted that often a difficult class is one involving

just one or two students whom no one, including the administrator in charge, psychologist, special education teacher, parents, or guardians, are unable to manage. The key takeaway from these two teachers is that maintaining contact with graduates increases their probability of success in the profession and keeps us informed of the effectiveness of our program in general. It is the ultimate measure of accountability.

## **Conclusion**

GYO programs for educators of color require staff, faculty, and administrators in the College of Education, who are passionately and personally committed to the cause. Effective recruitment programs are especially essential, and exemplary programs with the appropriate curricula are essential not just for training candidates but also for long-term recruitment. Curricula for bilingual candidates should include a process for assessing language competency, an aspect of bilingual education that deserves critical discussion. A missing element in most programs is the immediate and long-term follow-up with graduates, which increases the probability of retention of educators. Follow-up of graduates of any program completes the cycle of recruitment, preparation, and retention of graduates. It should be noted that the college has started a teacher retention network in cooperation with the local county office of education.

A reality is that when bilingual education was originally required by law, we had more bilingual teacher candidates. With the shift to focusing on English language learning, a result of legislation that basically banned bilingual education, the need for bilingual teachers decreased. Most recently, California Proposition 58 (2016) repealed legislation that required English-only instruction, although not as powerful as the original requirement that instruction be provided in the home language if there were 10 or more such students in a grade level. Nevertheless, this proposition might lead to a greater interest in bilingual education and an increase in bilingual teacher candidates. Relatedly, Sacramento State recently received a grant that focuses on recruiting and providing training for bilingual teachers, including in-service teachers, who will be able to teach in Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, and Arabic. Taken as a whole, these recent developments may better position us to continue advancing the original mission of the M/M Center in new ways.

## **Reference**

- Wong, P. L., Murai, H., Berta-Ávila, M., William-White, L., Baker, S., Arellano, A., & Echandia, A. (2007). The M/M Center: Meeting the demand for multicultural, multilingual teacher preparation. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 34(4), 9–25.