

**Building ESOL Networks (Project BEN) as Pathways of Change:  
Innovative Professional Development for Teachers of ELs and Teacher Candidates**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article provides an overview and the theoretical foundations of a professional development project to support both teachers of English Learners and teacher candidates who are being prepared to teach English Learners. The program design is rooted in Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLRT) and place-based pedagogy.

**NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) ADDRESSED IN THIS ARTICLE:**

1. A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.
3. A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry.

### Overview

Building ESOL Networks (Project BEN) represents an initial effort to address the absolute priority of developing partnerships with in-service teachers of English Learners (ELs) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) personnel for the purpose of improving the instruction of ELs in elementary schools. This project is embedded within a larger effort by the Department of Education to reinvigorate its ESOL Endorsement Program and signifies the start of a direct and collaborative relationship between our university's teacher candidates and highly-effective cooperating teachers for their clinical experience throughout the program of study. We hope to grow a mentor-mentee relationship as expert and novice teachers work together for the benefit of ELs in their school communities.

Developing partnerships between the home, school and community has been shown to positively impact student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2003) and for EL's families this need is critical (Coady et al., 2015). Thus, we seek to begin this work with two, high ESOL-dense schools. The term "high density" typically refers to schools whose population of active ELs exceeds 40% of the total student body population. These schools are often also Title I schools where children from low-income families make up at least 40% of enrollment. With this in mind, Project BEN's overarching goal is to develop, implement, and assess a professional development (PD) series – one face-to-face and two virtual sessions – in collaboration with an ESOL advisory board composed of ESOL specialists working in our county. The PD's intended outcome is to improve the instruction of ELs, develop teacher candidates' cultural competence, and foster collaboration between individuals in the school's professional learning communities (PLCs) and our university's teacher-scholars. Recent scholarship informs us that collaboration between mainstream teachers and ESOL personnel, who operate with specialized knowledge of instruction and assessment of linguistically diverse youth, creates an actionable synergy that is guided by co-construction of knowledge and brings together instructional strategies for the benefit of ELs (Bauler, Kang, Afanador-Vega, & Stevenson, 2019; Bell & Baecher, 2012; Martin-Beltran & Peercy, 2014).

Presently, there are approximately 4,200 English Learners (ELs) enrolled in our county's schools. To provide language services and comply with state statutes, school personnel are charged with assessing and placing students into ESOL programs to receive services from an ESOL-endorsed mainstream teacher through an inclusion model of instruction. Depending on the school's needs, the district may or may not allocate an ESOL teacher for the purpose of supplementing the instruction by entering the classrooms during mainstream instruction and working in small group settings with ELs. This instructional model, called inclusion with pull-in support, is the norm in elementary classrooms across our county. Though inclusion is an approved model of instruction under the mandates of our state's Consent Decree, mainstream teachers of ELs often report feeling underprepared to meet their students' needs (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011) and scholarship on the effectiveness of training through ESOL-infused teacher preparation programs is limited.

Through Project BEN, we seek to investigate the process and product of growth through collaborative professional development. To accomplish this, we will facilitate the formation of two Communities of Practice (CoP) to jointly and cohesively work throughout the PD series at the two schools. Moreover, school-based CoPs will be guided by the use of student achievement data to guide the instruction and development of action plans for ELs at the conclusion of the PD series.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLRT)**

Project BEN will base the framework of the professional development series on CLRT as it has been shown to be an effective approach to working with ELs and mainstream teachers (Coady, Harper, deJong, 2016; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). CLRT is grounded in sociocultural theories of teaching and learning where learning is socially constructed through collaborative work with varieties of resources and materials. Studies show that incorporating the intricacies of cognitive and sociocultural factors faced by ELs in schools can be mitigated by instruction that draws upon home literacy and value children's cultural awareness (Lowery, Oslick, & Pringle, 2019; Naqvi, McKeough & Thorne, 2013). Most importantly, CLRT emphasizes the need for educators to prioritize the role of language and culture in the classroom and deepen their understanding of ELs in mainstream education. In turn, educators gain the possibility to differentiate their teaching practice effectively for the specific ELs in their schools.

#### **Place-based Pedagogy**

Teachers of ELs in mainstream classrooms “need place-conscious teacher education programs” (Burton & Johnson, 2010, p. 384), which include a clear understanding of the community in which they (will) work, and a connection to local school placements (Gruenewald, 2003; White & Reid, 2008). Place-consciousness is essential to teachers' work because the educational policies they navigate, the instructional practices they implement, and the social processes that characterize schools directly influence their decisions (Ankeny, Marichal and Coady, 2019; John & Ford, 2017). Moreover, vast school districts, such as the ones found in our state, present great diversity both in environmental landscape and socio-economic background. Because we understand the potential influence of place-consciousness, we seek to collaborate with a rural and an urban school. These schools differ from one another in their geographical location, the communities they serve, and the local culture and customs. As such, we expect to find varied challenges to working with ELs as well as diversity in school culture and practices of professional learning communities (PLCs).

#### **Positive Effects of Project**

Project BEN will start in summer 2021 and its anticipated effects are two-fold. First, we expect that an ESOL advisory board will serve to advise the department in selecting field experiences for teacher candidates in tier II and tier III (student teaching) that lead to effective instruction, improvement in our CAEP/TESOL-accreditation evaluative scores and foster a relationship between district and school ESOL specialists and university supervisors. Second, we believe that Project BEN will have a positive impact individually on both in-service teachers of ELs and teacher candidates and grow a mentor-mentee relationship as expert and novice teachers work together for the benefit of ELs in their school communities. Outcomes and take aways from our experience will be shared after the project's completion.

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