

# **Instructional Leadership to Enhance Alternatively Certified Novice Bilingual Teachers' Capacity**

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## **Abstract**

This study determined that alternatively certified, bilingual elementary school teachers' needs with respect to capacity. Following a phenomenological multiple case study, three areas were explored: the support and professional growth needs of teachers, the strategies and sources that best meet those needs, and the work experiences of these teachers in high poverty, urban elementary schools. Using purposeful sampling, three first-year teachers, their mentors, and principals were selected for the study. Data sources included individual and triad interviews, observations, and field notes. Findings suggest that alternatively certified teachers' have varied needs and may linger in the survival stage for a longer period of time than generally anticipated, that support for their development may come from different sources but the teacher's principal and mentor constitute most important sources of support, and that these teacher face challenging situations, but rely on an intrinsic sense of calling to teaching and to work with students from poverty and who speak a language other than English.

## **Introduction**

The current demographic changes create new challenges for public schools. For instance, today's demand for new teachers is more geographic and subject matter specific than ever before. The demand for new teachers is increasing due to the

shortage of qualified teachers. Tell (2000) suggests that as many as half of the nation's public school teachers will reach retirement age by the year 2010 and that half of all new teachers leave the profession within 7 years. Further, it is reported that traditional teacher preparation programs will graduate only about half of what will be needed to serve an increasingly diverse student population by the year 2010 (Tell, 2000). Approximately 250,000 persons have been certified to teach through alternative certification programs since the 1980s (Feistritzer, 2005).

The challenge of attracting quality teachers is accentuated by increased pressures for school accountability at both national and state levels. Consequently, principals struggle to maintain a staff of qualified teachers willing to serve in urban schools (Jones & Sandidge, 1997).

As a result, schools in urban areas are turning more frequently to a variety of alternative certification programs to recruit teachers in high need areas (Kwiatkowski, 1999).

Few studies have focused on the various aspects associated with the teachers' certification and needs (Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2000; Ovando & Trube, 2000; Stoddart & Floden, 1995). Moreover, information specifically related to the development and capacity-building needs of first year, alternatively certified teachers who begin their careers in high poverty urban schools is limited. As the number of these teachers increases, it is imperative to examine how schools attempt to address their needs so that they become effective teachers. Thus, this paper presents the results of a study conducted to determine alternatively certified bilingual elementary school teachers' capacity needs. It includes a brief discussion of the theoretical perspective, the modes of inquiry followed by a summary of the findings, conclusions, and implications for instructional leadership.

## **Theoretical Background**

Instructional leadership of principals has been recognized as an essential component in assuring that highly qualified teachers are hired. However, recruiting, developing, and maintaining teachers have become challenging tasks not only because teacher preparation programs are not graduating the number of teachers needed to serve an increasingly diverse school population but also because more states are embracing alternative teacher certification programs. While these programs attempt to prepare quality teachers, principals face the challenge of socializing them into the practice of teaching in diverse school settings. As previous research suggests, "principals should take an active instructional leadership role when working with teachers from alternative certification programs by providing direct guidance or by ensuring that curriculum specialists, colleagues, or mentors provide such guidance" (Ovando & Trube, 2000, p. 363).

A persistent shortage of bilingual teachers is most severe in elementary schools in urban areas where the most English language learners live (Barron &

Menken, 2002). Increasing pressures for school accountability, at both national and state levels, coupled with federal mandates for highly qualified teachers in schools with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students also accentuate the challenge of attracting and keeping quality teachers for high poverty, urban schools. For instance, the shortage of bilingual teachers has given rise to a number of non-traditional or alternative preparation programs.

Although the quality of alternative teacher certification programs varies substantially (Allen, 2000) due to their responsive nature, they are increasingly popular in those areas where needs are greatest (Feistritzer & Chester, 2001). In Texas, for example, a successful model has been developed in which districts, state agencies, and colleges work together; and policymakers expect all teachers to meet the same standards and pass the same tests as the traditionally trained teachers (Tell, 2000). In 2001, 45 states reported the development and implementation of one or more forms of alternative teacher certification programs, up from eight states in 1983, and an estimated 150,000 or more people had been certified through these programs (Feistritzer & Chester, 2001; Kwiatkowski, 1999). Yet, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996; NCTAF) noted that "programs offering a few weeks of summer training before new hires are thrown into the classroom . . . have proven to be lower in quality than the programs they aim to replace" (p. 53).

Even though few studies have focused on the actual effectiveness of alternative certification programs to improve the quality of teaching or the effect of these programs on student achievement (Allen, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2001), requirements for licensure through alternative programs vary widely. Further, high-quality alternative teacher certification programs do have some identifiable characteristics. For example, candidates already have a bachelor's degree, pass a rigorous screening process and meet high performance standards for certification. The high-quality programs include coursework but are generally field based and emphasize working with a trained mentor teacher before and during teaching (Feistritzer & Chester, 2001; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

Alternative teacher preparation programs vary in nature, scope, and focus accentuating differences in teachers' readiness to teach. According to previous research, a main difference between traditional and alternative programs is that traditional certification programs attempt to prepare teachers for the schools we need whereas alternative certification programs try to prepare teachers for the schools we have (Hawley, 1992, as cited by Ovando & Trube, 2000). For this reason, alternatively certified teachers may tend to have different needs that require both structural and professional support and the principal is in a key position to provide the instructional guidance that these teachers need, particularly during their first year of teaching.

Because instructional leaders influence the working conditions in which teachers work, it follows that teacher attrition and retention is frequently connected to administrative support from the principal (Billingsly, 1993). Similarly,

higher levels of influence in decision making can mediate the effects of poor facilities, lack of resources and over crowding in high poverty, urban schools in teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001). In addition, research suggests that teachers who report higher levels of principal support are less stressed, more satisfied, and more committed to their jobs (Billingsley & Cross, 1992).

The ongoing support and professional development in building the capacity of teachers to be effective in diverse situations has been recognized (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999) as essential. Similarly, a number of instructional leadership behaviors have been linked to higher probability of new teachers' effectiveness. These include: (1) orientation procedures (Brock & Grady, 2001); (2) visibility and accessibility (Blase & Blase, 1998; Hope, 1999); (3) feedback and praise (Blase & Blase, 1998; Warren & Wait, 2001; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000); (4) availability of resources (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999); (5) granting autonomy or supporting creativity (Blase & Blase, 1998; Marlow, Inman, & Betancourt-Smith, 1997); (6) support for classroom management/backing up teachers with student discipline problems (Ballinger, 2000; Billingsley, 1993); (7) consideration of the teaching load, class structure, class size, or potential discipline problems in making work and class assignments for new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997, Billingsley, 1993); and (8) instituting and facilitating an effective mentoring program (Ax, Conderman, & Stephens, 2001; Billingsley, 1993; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Hope, 1999).

Previous research further suggests that principals may develop structures to support new teachers within a collaborative culture with a strong focus on orientation to the ethos of the school (Blase & Blase, 2001; Smith & Scott, 1990). The principal's most substantial impact on the new teacher's capacity, effectiveness, quality, growth, development, and retention may occur indirectly and at the organizational (school) level. For instance, Johnson and Birkeland (2002) state, "... our work suggests that schools would do better to rely less on one-to-one mentoring and, instead, develop school-wide structures that promote the frequent exchange of information and ideas among novice and veteran teachers" (p. 36). Thus, although direct and personal administrative support of new teachers is viewed positively as one component of a supportive professional environment, it is not always sufficient to meet the needs of new bilingual teachers in high poverty, urban schools (Marlow et al., 1997; Johnson & Birkeland, 2002).

Structures developed by principals to support new teachers within a collaborative school culture include coaching, open dialogue, reflective conversations, training in theories of teaching, and learning for all staff, teamwork, and peer observations (Blase & Blase, 2001). These serve to enhance the teaching capacity of all new teachers, but not necessarily of bilingual alternatively certified teachers. While, organizational level strategies that principals use such as providing vision and leadership or changing school governance or organization are seen to build teaching capacity in new teachers, Ovando and Trube (2000) reported that principals who use such strategies did not perceive a significant

difference in how these strategies were used with alternatively certified teachers as opposed to traditionally certified teachers.

Further, it is also important to acknowledge that the role of instructional leadership in supporting and developing new teachers is complex. Individual, direct, and personal strategies are effective in mediating some of the problems that new teachers experience and in developing capacity, although not sufficient in isolation. Therefore, instructional leaders are in search of strategies that they can employ to build teaching capacity at both the individual/personal level and the organizational level. Most significantly, the literature suggests that new alternatively certified teachers might be more effective, more satisfied, and more likely to stay in a school where instructional leadership sustains a school-wide professional culture of collaboration and collegial interaction. As schools continue to recruit and hire these teachers, school leaders need to be prepared to provide the kind of support needed to assist them in their efforts to become successful teachers.

Recent research questioned and evaluated the effectiveness of both traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2001, Goldhaber & Brewer, 2001), and suggested additional exploration of the demands imposed on new teachers, particularly those from alternative paths. According to Darling-Hammond et al.,

... a responsible research and policy agenda that builds on the evidence currently available about teacher education and certification should aim to illuminate more fully the specific aspects of teachers' knowledge and skills that make a difference for student learning and the way in which the features of different teacher education models-how they organize the acquisition of content and teaching knowledge and build knowledge about practice as it is applied-are related to different teaching outcomes. (2001, p. 71)

These researchers further argue that future studies,

... should aim to understand how different teacher certification strategies encourage or discourage the construction of programs that produce well prepared teachers who stay in the profession, and how state policies distribute well prepared teachers equitably to all children in the state, regardless of race and income. (2001, p. 71)

Consequently, it is imperative that researchers and professional practitioners engage in collaborative efforts to search for better ways to prepare and support teachers that can be effective with all students.

Finally, it is imperative that future research be conducted following a theoretical model that might serve as a foundation to explain the levels of needs of new teachers. Some prior studies have been conducted using models of teacher

development, suggesting that teachers tend to move through a progression of stages of development (Katz, 1972; Moir, 1990).

Katz (1972) identified four developmental stages that take place during the first several years of teaching. In the first year and first stage, survival, teachers focus on coping with the daily demands of their job. In the second year and the second phase, consolidation, the teachers begin to focus more on the individual needs of students and quality of instruction. During renewal, the third stage that typically occurs during the third or fourth year of teaching, teachers are competent in providing daily instruction but are self-motivated to learn new ways to improve instruction. With maturity, teachers are inclined to seek to make a greater impact and gain deeper knowledge about their practice.

Similarly, Moir (1990) suggests that teachers move through five phases of development, and sometimes back and forth between phases, during the first year of teaching. Further, Moir (1990) notes that new teachers begin with an anticipation phase characterized by excitement and apprehension. Second, overwhelmed by the situations they encounter during the first month or so of school, new teachers experience a survival phase when they focus on the day-to-day routines followed by a disillusionment phase characterized by high stress, self-doubt, disappointment with the requirements of the job, and often, illness. The fourth phase, rejuvenation, usually beginning in the spring semester, is marked by feelings of accomplishment and a more hopeful attitude. At the end of the school year, teachers experience the reflection phase wherein the teachers develop a vision for the following year and renewed anticipation.

Previous studies affirm that teachers may reach a professional maturity stage through various levels of development; however, it is not clear whether alternatively certified bilingual teachers also develop through those same stages. Alternative teacher preparation programs vary considerably; therefore, differences in the manner in which teachers develop or progress through these stages could be expected. In addition, others indicate that principals perceive that alternatively certified teachers have different levels of capacity than do traditionally certified teachers. As a result, these teachers require even more guidance in instruction and that principals give more formalized feedback to alternatively certified teachers (Ovando & Trube, 2000). However, the professional development needs of alternatively certified bilingual teachers have not been the focus of recent research.

## **Purpose**

The ongoing debate about non-traditional preparation programs and the related research has yielded relevant information in two areas. First, the variations in pre-service training warrant consideration of support systems in the early service years because variations in training generate differences in teachers' skills and knowledge of pedagogy and content. Second, and perhaps more importantly,

there remains a larger concern about quality and effectiveness of bilingual teachers from non-traditional preparation programs who begin their careers in high-poverty, urban schools.

Therefore, this phenomenological multiple case study (Taylor & Bodgan, 1984; Van Manen, 1990) was designed to explore the perceptions of alternatively certified bilingual elementary school teachers serving in high-poverty urban elementary schools. The study focused on three areas: (a) the support and professional growth needs of these teachers, (b) the strategies and sources that best met those needs, and (c) the work experiences of these teachers in high poverty, urban elementary schools.

## **Modes of Inquiry**

This study employed a qualitative research method of inquiry with a phenomenological approach. The purpose of a phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, and to identify phenomena through the perceptions of the actors themselves in a particular situation (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Phenomenology focuses on how individuals interpret their experiences and the meaning of those experiences regarding the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, the main concern was to understand the meaning the participants constructed from their experiences (Merriam, 1998). Incorporating the elements of qualitative design as conceptualized by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002), the focus of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the cases of three elementary school teachers' experiences.

Further, the researchers studied the phenomenon in its natural context so that the perspectives of the participants could be captured. According to Merriam (1998), the sample in a qualitative study is typically purposefully selected, not random, and small. So, in an effort to constrain external influences and to maintain focus on the analysis of the experiences of the first year teachers, a small, somewhat homogenous sample group was desirable. The methodology of this study was grounded in phenomenological case study (Merriam, 1998) and sought to reach a deep understanding of participants' perspectives through in depth individual and group interviews.

To this end, a three level sample selection process was completed. The first level involved selecting a school district that served students in a high-poverty urban area. The second level called for selection of schools that met specific criteria, such as that the student population included 50% economically disadvantaged and at least 40% received bilingual instruction. The third level of sampling required the selection of three bilingual first year teachers. Other participants included these three teachers' mentors and principals making up three triads of three participants each.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the most significant instrument and the validity and credibility of the research depends to a great extent on the skill



**Table 1.** The Nine Participants

	<i>School A</i>	<i>School B</i>	<i>School C</i>
School details	609 Students 42% ELLs 83% Poverty	654 Students 55% ELLs 90% Poverty	597 Students 60% ELLs 93% Poverty
3 - First year teachers	First year teacher, Hannah	First year teacher, Christie	First year teacher, Marco
3 - Mentor teachers	Mentor teacher, Kim	Mentor teacher, Hector	Mentor teacher, James
3 - Principals	Principal, Irma	Principal, Mary	Principal, Linda

*Note:* ELL = English language learner

and competence of the researcher. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) note, “only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of the separate realities” (p. 39). Furthermore, Kvale (1996) affirms that “the outcome of an interview depends on the knowledge, sensitivity, and empathy of the interviewer” (p. 105). Thus, the researchers of this study had extensive experience in conducting qualitative research and served as collaborative focused observers (McEwan & McEwan, 2003).

### ***Data Sources***

Three sources of data were employed in this study. The first source of data included individual interviews with the three novice alternatively certified bilingual teachers. These interviews were conducted using open-ended questions, offering flexibility in probing and exploring unanticipated responses (Patton, 2002). The second source of data called for interviews with the triads, using open-ended questions. A third source of data included observations of how the participants experienced and interacted in their own work environment. Field notes were used to record observations of the social environment, informal interactions, and non-verbal communication (Merriam, 1998).

The purpose of the interviews was to collect in-depth data about the three teachers' experiences in terms of their support and professional development needs. According to Patton (2002), qualitative interviews are founded on the premise that the perspective of the interviewee is both knowable and able to be made explicit. Similarly, Kvale (1996) notes that “interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understandings of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (p. 105). Thus, 15 in-depth interviews, conducted using a three-stage design, were the primary source of data collection. First, a group interview was conducted at each school with the



**Table 2.** Three-Stage Interview Design

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Round</i>	<i>School A</i>	<i>School B</i>	<i>School C</i>
Stage 1	1st round interviews	Interview with the triad: Hannah, her principal, and her mentor	Interview with the triad: Marco, his principal, and his mentor	Interview with the triad: Christie, her principal, and her mentor
Stage 2	2 <sup>nd</sup> round interviews	Individual interview with Hannah	Individual interview with Marco	Individual interview with Christie
	3 <sup>rd</sup> round interviews	Individual interview with Hannah	Individual interview with Marco	Individual interview with Christie
	4 <sup>th</sup> round interviews	Individual interview with Hannah	Individual interview with Marco	Individual interview with Christie
Stage 3	5 <sup>th</sup> round interviews	Interview with the triad: Hannah, her principal, and her mentor	Interview with the triad: Marco, his principal, and his mentor	Interview with the triad: Christie, her principal, and her mentor

first year teacher, the principal, and the mentor. Then, a series of three individual interviews were completed with each of the first year teachers. Finally, another group interview was conducted with each teacher, his or her principal, and his or her mentor (see Table 2).

Principals and mentors were selected as participants due to the perceived notion that their support leads to teachers experiencing less stress, more satisfaction and commitment to their jobs as suggested by other authors (Ax et al., 2001; Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Marlow et al., 1997). The principals and mentors were able to contribute firsthand information and their personal perspectives of the first year teachers' support and professional growth needs because they were highly involved in the experiences of the first year teachers. Including them as a secondary source contributed to an enhanced triangulation of the data.

Interviewing each triad (first year teacher, principal, and mentor) as a group provided opportunities to observe interactions, to compare the perspectives of the participants, and to confirm or disconfirm the development of understanding or interpretation.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was completed inductively to organize the data in order to capture emerging themes. Thus, the process started with coding each participant's responses (Kvale, 1996). Following procedures detailed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the process of coding the transcripts began with selecting and highlighting

meaningful chunks of text. The chunks of text were then condensed or summarized and labeled by writing descriptive code words in the margins of the transcripts. Each interview was coded in this manner. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to be meaningful and useful, a unit of data must reveal information that is relevant to the study and must be able to stand alone.

Next, to organize the data, categories were developed using the “step-by-step process” (Merriam, 1998, p. 180) of grouping or funneling related items into patterns, sets or clusters to which labels were attached. These categories were constructed by repeatedly looking through the transcripts with marginal notes and the field notes and grouping related items. As the interviews progressed and emerging topics were further explored, the researchers continued to look for new patterns in the coded data and checked earlier interpretations with subsequent responses/field notes to determine if the developing patterns were supported or needed to be modified (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As Merriam (1998) states, “. . . data often seem to beg for continued analysis past the formation of categories. A key here is when the researcher knows that the category scheme does not tell the whole story—that there is more to be understood about the phenomenon. This often leads to trying to link the conceptual elements—the categories—together in some meaningful way” (p. 188). Thus, the third level of analysis involved interpretation of the relationships between the categories. The categories were crosschecked with the observation records and field notes to confirm emerging themes. These themes were used to organize and present the findings.

## **Findings**

Findings of the study are discussed according to the three areas of focus of the study. These include the support and professional growth needs of alternatively certified teachers, the strategies and sources that best met these teachers needs, and their work experiences in high poverty, urban elementary schools.

### ***Support and Professional Growth Needs***

Several areas of support and growth of alternatively certified bilingual teachers emerged from the data. These included recognition and appreciation, self confidence, self reliance, personal and collegial interactions, additional pre-service experiences, technical information about school operations and curriculum, and more time to reduce the stress level associated with an overwhelming initial year of teaching.

***The need for recognition and appreciation.*** The data revealed that the teachers experienced a need for recognition, appreciation, and a feeling of value. Praise from the principal was found to enhance not only teachers' morale and self-confidence but also the level of effort they put forth and their instructional practices.

Participants shared that being told, “we appreciate what you’re doing with these kids” made their hard work seem worthwhile. One teacher described how the principal’s appreciation motivated her, and said,

I feel like that she’s been so supportive all year. . . . Just knowing that she thought I was doing a good job, . . . whenever I felt like things were really bad, or I didn’t know what I was doing, at least knowing that Irma had that opinion and expectation for me, made me kind of keep going, like, okay, well, I’ll figure out some way I can get through this.

Referring to the lack of recognition, another teacher added, “I think that a big problem with, maybe, burnout, is, you know, teachers not feeling recognized or not feeling like all this hard work they’re doing is appreciated or seen.”

***The need for self-confidence.*** As suggested by Gold (1999), according to these teachers, there are periods of self-doubt or lack of confidence and, consequently there is a need for affirmation and support. Initially, one teacher reported that she felt that not being able to handle student discipline on her own, for example, was a sign of failure. As a result she was reluctant to ask for assistance and her self confidence was diminished. These teachers all spoke of a lack of confidence in themselves, their knowledge of the curriculum or content, their pedagogical ability, and/or their classroom management. The data revealed that, at times, the teachers questioned their effectiveness in terms of student performance, citing difficulties or uncertainty concerning, for example, transitioning students to English or preparing students for the state test that is given in the spring. As one teacher, said, “You doubt yourself. . . . It’s like, well, maybe I’m not doing what I need to be doing, and the kids aren’t getting it, so . . .”

***The need for professional autonomy.*** The data also revealed that teachers feel a need for autonomy. In spite of occasionally questioning themselves, the beginning teachers reported a need for professional autonomy. Being able to handle the demands of the job independently was very important to the beginning teachers. For example, the beginning teachers reported the importance of being able to make effective decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. Moreover, they believed that every teacher makes decisions about what happens in his/her classroom and that autonomy to be a professional was a norm or a standard. As a beginning teacher expressed, “I want to be sure that I can do it on my own.”

Teachers spoke of feeling trusted and confident when the principal left them alone. One said, “. . . when you have a good relationship with your principal, and she trusts you, . . . you feel free and you feel confident.” And, indeed, principals used walkthrough observations to identify teachers who might need help. As one principal said, “. . . when we walk the building, it’s more to identify who needs more support.”

***The need for personal and collegial support.*** Guiding and supportive personal and professional relationships emerged as another area of need. However, the data revealed that the mentors' role in supporting the beginning teachers varied considerably. In some cases, the mentor was the primary source of information, resources, and support. In others, this was not at all the case. In addition to the support and guidance provided by the mentor, the beginning teachers spoke to a need for conversation and interaction with others such as colleagues, peers, friends, and family. One of the new teachers, for example, expressed his desperation when he was unable to find support. He said,

If I did not see that support, and, um, I would go home frustrated. I would cry. Cry. I would cry; I'm a grown-up man . . . and cry. I remember . . . going into the corridors after an exam. . . . [I] didn't know what in the world I was doing. No help. I would go and cry in the corridors. In the lunch, on the way to lunch, or pulling out of lunch, because of desperation. What direction do I go? What do I do here? I don't know!

***The need for technical information.*** Information needs related to school operations, pedagogy, and curriculum also emerged from the data. However, these needs varied amongst the participants. For instance one teacher reported a need for assistance with discipline and classroom management, whereas all teachers were able to get the information they required about school operations from their mentors or other school staff.

Bilingual curriculum and materials were problematic for the beginning teachers, as they reported a great deal of difficulty obtaining bilingual resources and information about how to use them. The participants were particularly uncertain about what to do with classroom materials such as mathematics manipulatives and supplemental textbooks. For instance a participant who was the only bilingual fourth grade teacher in her school, expressed frustration that she had many resource materials but no one to tell her what to do with them, and stated, "Well, the resources, knowing how to use the resources that I have was always kind of stressful."

***Pre-service professional development needs.*** According to these teachers, the pre-service professional development experiences afforded by the Alternative Certification preparation program were adequate. However, the need for more field-based experiences before being assigned to their own classrooms and more explicit instructions relevant to their grade level and subject also emerged from the data. As a teacher explained, ". . . it's totally different being in the classroom and being able to pull it off." The fourth grade teachers who participated in the study were not always able to utilize their pre-service preparation because most of their pre-service training was directed toward strategies for the primary grades. As a teacher explained,

. . . the only thing that probably comes from [the] alternative certification program being so fast is you don't really have a whole lot time to be student teaching to really see how these materials are implemented in the classroom.

***The need for in-service professional development.*** The data indicated that the alternatively certified teachers continued to attend classes at the Alternative Certification Program during the first teaching year and also had field support from the program. However, in-service professional development was seen, in the words of a participant as “a double edged sword. I need to be with the kids but if I'm not getting what I need, they won't either.” Another participant was very emotional about her frustration with time wasted in “new teacher training” on her campus that replicated training she had already had.

In-service professional development experiences were valued only when the teachers could see how the training was immediately applicable to their own classroom situation and addressed their own needs. All of the principals provided campus level training and offered or suggested professional development for the beginning teachers. However, knowing whom to ask, what to ask about, or when to ask was not always as clear to the beginning teachers.

***The need to manage time and stress.*** Management of time and stress associated with several job-related duties emerged as another area of need. The teachers, reported being tired, overwhelmed, drained, frustrated, and stressed. They also indicated that there was too much paperwork, too many useless meetings, and it was impossible to get everything done. These beginning teachers were not alone in expressing a sense of stress and pressure of never having everything done. As a teacher said,

I'm sorry, no matter how much I try, I can't get through that whole [curriculum guide], nine weeks, to where they're going to understand everything. Um, that's one thing, I feel overwhelmed. Um, paperwork. Oh, my God. Totally overwhelming.

Another teacher reported similar feelings, and said,

For me it was overwhelming. It was too, too much, to really figure out. . . . And I never had that time or presence of mind.

### ***Strategies***

All teachers agreed that at least three strategies had potential to satisfy their capacity needs. First, the teachers drew from a variety of personal background experiences. Coming to teaching with diverse family and work histories, each of the new teachers employed relevant experiences. Second, the first year teachers

used learning from professional development experiences to solve problems and improve their teaching practice. Third, the first year teachers learned and grew from reflecting about their performance when they tried different techniques and when they made mistakes.

***Personal prior knowledge and background experiences.*** Using alternatively certified bilingual teachers' prior knowledge and background emerged as an effective strategy. The teachers employed personal background experiences to meet the demands of their positions. For example, a teacher referred to her experience of learning Spanish as a second language and how it helped her as a bilingual teacher. Prior work experiences were also utilized. One teacher had been a substitute and learned to manage student behavior. He said,

So I keep a routine, right there. I limit my misbehavers. The misbehavers immediately move closer to me, in the beginning. That's what I learned from being a sub. Because a sub is a terrible job. A sub, you come to classes, you come [to] this jungle, every day a different jungle in different parts of the world. (Laughter) Right?

Another teacher relied on her previous experiences as teacher assistant in the middle school. These were particularly helpful with classroom management. She explained,

The middle school kids helped a lot because. . . It is still a little bit hard to, like, think of myself as being like the authority to a bunch of other people. Even if they are little people. . . Yeah, [laugh] I have a hard enough time being the boss of me. But working with the middle school kids, . . . I realized I did have to assume an authority position and learned how to do that. Might have helped this year—I already knew that.

***Learning from professional development experiences.*** Applying the learning gained from professional development emerged as another strategy. The alternatively certified bilingual teachers indicated that they employed techniques learned from professional development experiences as a strategy to solve problems and to improve their teaching practice. Further, the participating bilingual teachers reported that they gained most from attending in-service training that they personally selected and that was specific to their teaching assignment.

Yeah, about. . . January, maybe, I was having a hard time. My kids are all very fluent readers but their comprehension was very, very low. And I was having a hard time getting them to slow down and to, um, monitor themselves when they were reading. So I picked up something at the alternative certification program . . . which I use all the time now. So it helped a lot . . . the strategy.

**Reflective practice.** Engaging in reflective practice emerged as an additional strategy. The teachers shared that they learned when they engaged in self-evaluation or reflection about their performance as they tried different techniques or made mistakes. On-the-job training characterized by trial and error and reflection was used, for example, to manage curriculum. One teacher described employing different strategies such as informally analyzing achievement results, and then adjusting her practices. Another teacher and her principal also spoke to the value of reflecting on mistakes as a learning experience. After trying a strategy or teaching new material, the beginning teachers described how they would either formally or informally assess their own effectiveness and the effectiveness of the practice. They also cited instances when they learned from mistakes by working through problems. For instance, a teacher described her trial and error method of learning and self-talk. She processed mistakes saying when people would tell her she should not try something, she would try it anyway and then, if it didn't work she would reflect and say ". . . [I] should have listened." Another teacher reflected on her need to learn by experiencing. She used her experiences to make changes that improved her teaching practice.

I'm such an experiential learner. And I need to go through a lot of things, I need to go through a whole year and make some mistakes and figure out how I want to fix the mistakes so I know what I want to do better.

### **Sources of Support**

While all the teachers in the study relied on specific strategies to enhance their professional capacity, the data also revealed that several sources of support are available for these alternatively certified bilingual teachers. The school principal and the teacher's mentor and emerged as primary sources of support.

**Instructional leadership support.** Teachers indicated that the principal instructional leadership was an important source of support. Teachers reported that the principals were accessible and approachable but also acknowledged that, at times, they would have liked to see more of the principal. At the same time, they also believed that the infrequent contact with the principal demonstrated the principal's confidence in them. One said, "So that [being left alone] tells me, 'Okay, she thinks that I don't need that much help.'" Principals agreed that when the teachers were doing well, they did not visit their classrooms as often. As a principal indicated, referring to a beginning teacher who was doing well and, "We really try hard to not forget that [she's] out there and . . . to do a lot of walkthroughs in her room and give her feedback."

Additionally, the data revealed that teachers and their principals singled out a variety of strategies that they deemed particularly useful. These included: writing positive notes to teachers, providing clear procedural information in a handbook, making more frequent walkthrough observations for beginning teachers,



scheduling team planning meetings, meeting with individual teachers to discuss problems or student performance results, sending curriculum specialists to the classroom, and being available to talk to teachers or answer questions as needed. At the same time, one principal said she preferred that new teachers be more assertive about asking for help.

I like it when new teachers, or any teacher, has enough confidence to say, 'That's not enough. I need more.' Because what I've found happening, what my perception is, that we are offering the help, it's here, if they want it. . . . And their perception is, that's all I can expect. That's what's reasonable.

***The teacher's mentor.*** Beginning alternatively certified bilingual teachers are assigned a mentor teacher as a part of the induction process. The mentor teacher starts by establishing a professional relationship with the beginning teacher so that a productive working environment may lead to enhancing teachers' professional capacity. Thus, the mentor was in a position to provide support in the form of timely advice or information about the existing demands of the job. The most common areas of need addressed included school procedures and curriculum implementation. In each case, the beginning teachers voiced appreciation for the mentor's practical knowledge and acknowledged very specific ways in which the mentors helped them. For instance a teacher described the emotional support she received from her mentor.

Kim [mentor] makes me feel like I don't have to be perfect, which is the biggest weight for the first year teacher. . . . She's been really helpful in telling me that I am doing the best I can and, I just, sometimes I have to go home even if it's not all done.

Acknowledging that the role of the mentor is not to provide the whole range of support that beginning teachers need, the three teachers described three very different examples of the mentor–teacher relationship. Each mentor–teacher relationship had varying levels of trust and rapport.

One of the three teachers acknowledged that his mentor made time to answer questions and assist him when help was needed. Moreover, the introvert nature of the mentor was appreciated, which, according to the teacher, served to balance the teachers' tendency to be more extrovert. The teacher also acknowledged and appreciated that his mentor allowed him "space" and freedom to make independent decisions while also providing him with materials and advice or food for thought. However, the mentor–teacher relationship was also seen as cold or unfriendly at times due to a more businesslike/professional tone. Yet, according to the third teacher, there was a lack of rapport due to gender, social differences, and family situations. The mentor reported feeling "frustrated" and "guilty" that he was often unable to help the teacher. As a result, the teacher openly sought to

relate and get coaching support from other teachers. These examples illustrate the varying nature of the mentor–teacher relationship.

### ***Other support***

The complex nature of the demands and challenges associated with the first year of teaching are such that teachers also rely on other school personnel for assistance. Other education professionals such as secretaries, para-professionals, and custodial personnel also emerged as sources of support. These individuals provided pedagogical and personal assistance through both structured ways and informal interactions. As a mentor noted, to acquire help and support, the teacher “. . . asks *everybody!*” A teacher further acknowledged that the custodian was able to provide information because, “she knows everything.” Additionally, clerical personnel, curriculum specialists, other teachers, and secretaries emerged as sources of support. As a teacher noted,

So I think the community of teachers whether it’s in formal meetings like it’s a formal time to share ideas, formal time to plan together. But I think there’s also lots of informal passing of ideas, informal, like ‘Oh, I’m making a copy of this do you want it?’

Further, recognizing the contributions of grade level teams as supportive, another teacher observed,

I think the support here that I’ve gotten is excellent. I do not want to leave this school. . . . I’ve never felt . . . completely alone. . . . So . . . that’s why I want to stay and teach here rather than just leaving. ‘Cause I was just going teach until the alternative certification program was over and go back home. But now I’m staying. So, that’s because of my team.

Additionally, the data revealed that other sources of support may come from outside of the school setting, especially from families, friends, and teachers’ alternative certification cohort group. For instance a teacher indicated that talking to people who were not connected with the school was most helpful. She said, “And I feel more comfortable talking to my cohort because they’re not in this school . . . I think having them helps me a lot.”

Family as a source of support may include adults as well as children. For example, a married teacher reported that talking to his wife for an hour or so every night and discussing ideas with his 12-year-old son before trying them in his class was very useful. Yet another teacher related that she appreciated the perspective of friends who were not educators. She noted,

I was so overwhelmed. And a lot of my friends, when I’d be talking about how upset or nervous I was, they’d be like ‘Well, that’s okay, Hannah, I

mean fourth grade, I don't even remember.' You know? And they'd very much have this feeling of, like, it's okay.

### ***Experiences in High Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools***

Alternatively certified bilingual elementary school teachers' experiences in high poverty, urban elementary schools may reflect challenging situations. However, these experiences tend to result in a strong personal sense of calling to teaching, and dedication to their students. The teachers reported that after they started working, they soon realized that they became passionate and deeply caring about their students. They further recognized that teaching provided them with unique opportunities to help students and to become role models. For instance a teacher described the ability to be a positive role model for his students as "replenishing," and stated,

These kids need role models. . . . This is very important for me for many reasons. This is part of my history, being, you know, son of a migrant family. . . . I was [the] son of a migrant family of four. . . . I'm putting my heart in everything I do.

Each of the teachers reported becoming energized and sustained by their students' academic success or progress. The following teacher comment reflects such feeling.

And I talk to them about my parents and how they crossed over the river illegally. Because they have family, maybe their parents, some of their parents. And, at first they were like, "We can't talk about that." But after I told them, you know, that's where I'm from, so we can talk about it. If you feel bad because they sent your uncle back to Mexico, you can come talk to me, I won't tell anyone. I think that's good, I made a connection with them. . . .

Although the particular circumstance of poverty and working with students whose home language is other than English created a challenge for these teachers, their connection with the home environment and families of the students was also a source of reward. Once teachers develop the capacity to work in such circumstances, teachers come to believe that their work is important. As a teacher put it,

But, you know, like, these kids, they can't do that because they never get it at home, like, or they don't get the extra . . . maybe half of my class, you know, their moms can't write or can't read. You know, they're just not going to get a lot of the stuff that I can do for them here at school. So, it's like, kind of like (gasps), it's all me! I have to do it here at school! And I have all these great things that I can do. And I have closets full of

stuff. But somehow I have to pull all that together. And I can't mess it up because really does matter.

## **Conclusion**

Alternative teacher certification has gained attention and recognition as one avenue to respond to the current demand for more qualified teachers, particularly in strong areas of need such as mathematics and bilingual education. While previous research casts some light on the benefits of hiring alternatively certified teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2001, Goldhaber & Brewer, 2001; Ovando & Trube, 2000), few recent studies have focused on specific areas of teaching, as is the case with bilingual education. Thus, this study attempted to determine the professional capacity needs of alternatively certified bilingual elementary school teachers. Following a qualitative approach, participants were selected purposefully. A total of three triads (three teachers, their mentors, and principals) were interviewed using open-ended questions.

Findings suggest that alternatively certified teachers' perceived capacity development needs fell within eight categories. These included recognition and appreciation, self-confidence, professional autonomy, personal and collegial support, technical information, pre-service and in-service professional development, and management of time and stress. The needs reflect the survival stage of teacher development that is characterized by high stress and self-doubt (Moir, 1990) and suggest that alternatively certified, bilingual teachers in high-poverty elementary schools may linger in the survival stage for a substantially longer period of time than generally anticipated. True to the notion of survival, teachers in challenging situations may respond to the overwhelming stress and workload by focusing on daily demands and requirements. As suggested by the Charles A. Dana Center (1999), making teaching materials and curriculum resources readily available for beginning bilingual teachers in high poverty, urban schools, may help to alleviate this stress.

Further, findings indicate that the strategies employed to meet the capacity development needs of these teachers are varied. These included using prior knowledge and background experiences, applying learning from professional development experiences, and engaging in reflective practice. As others affirm, in schools where building capacity for learning communities is a goal, "it was a commonplace in these schools for teachers to reflect on their practice and examine educational alternatives" (Sackney, Mitchell, & Walker, 2005, p. 5). Further, this confirms the notion that "professional reflection constitutes a valued strategy for enhancing professional practice" (Ovando, 2004, p. 34) and that several forms of professional reflection should be promoted.

While the principal was found to be a primary source of support, beginning bilingual elementary school teachers from alternative certification programs require more support than that which is currently available from principals in

challenging high-poverty, urban schools. Thus, there is a need for additional forms of support. As others report, school leaders “must promote creative types of support and must expand the availability of resources so that teachers and other school personnel . . . may participate in capacity building efforts beyond the school” (Ovando, 1999, p. 97).

The findings also suggest that support for novice alternatively certified teachers may come from different sources and that teachers may benefit from a school infrastructure designed to provide sustained collaboration and collegial interaction. In addition to the principal, the teacher mentor was also found to be an important source of support. However, the effectiveness of the mentor support is somewhat dependent on the mentor–teacher relationship. Some criteria that contribute to a mentor’s effectiveness such as proximity, similarity of grade/assignment, and teaching experience (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999) have been identified. Therefore, instructional leaders may increase the effectiveness of the mentor-teacher relationship by careful selection of the mentor and ensuring the mentor’s availability.

Moreover, even though the principal and the teacher’s mentor play a key role in the capacity development, support for alternatively certified bilingual elementary school teachers may come from the entire school community rather than from single identified mentor. Multiple mentors or collaborative support systems may reduce the negative effects of strong needs of new teachers. Such arrangements may serve to provide emotional support, reduce teacher isolation; improve teacher performance; and increase teacher satisfaction and retention (Ax et al., 2001; Billingsley, 1993; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Hope, 1999). As earlier research indicates, a collaborative culture may meet the needs of teachers in matters of curriculum and instruction and lead to greater alignment between standards and goals for improved teaching and learning and consequent higher student achievement (Schmoker, 2002; Smith & Scott, 1990).

Findings also indicate that alternatively certified elementary school teachers face challenging situations; they rely on an intrinsic sense of calling to teaching and to work with students from poverty and who speak a language other than English. In addition, these alternatively certified teachers felt a sense of reward from connecting with students’ home environment and families. It can also be asserted that the sense of calling of alternatively certified bilingual teachers may be the driving force to motivate teachers to enter and stay in the field. Teachers who enter teaching after experiencing a lack of fulfillment in another career may feel a particularly strong sense of reward, commitment to the students, and/or dedication to the profession.

Given the increased stress and workload associated with the challenging student demographics, alternatively certified, bilingual teachers in high-poverty schools may require a great deal of additional support. A number of social factors associated with poverty and cultural and linguistic differences of the student population make the bilingual classrooms even more challenging than most. Poverty

is, for example, associated with less access to formal learning, fewer resources, greater health problems, and greater incidence of developmental delays (Garcia, 2001). Moreover, bilingual teachers have the added challenge of delivering instruction in two languages, and in the case of these novice teachers, the challenge of high-stakes testing may also be overwhelming. Logically, pre-service and in-service professional development needs also may be different. Similarly, curricula and resource management may be different in the context of bilingual elementary education. Therefore, bilingual pedagogy, bilingual instructional issues, and bilingual resources require increased attention.

Additionally, it can be concluded that teachers with non-traditional preparation may experience limited pre-service training, especially field experiences, which may intensify their need for professional capacity building support. As researchers at Harvard University's The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (cited in Blair, 2003) found, prospective alternatively certified teachers who ended up in drastically different teaching assignments at all grade levels were provided with the same information and pre-service training and many completed their pre-service training lacking fundamental skills or strategies that they could apply. This limited pre-service training adversely affects teachers' capacity to present the grade level curricula, to manage issues specific to bilingual education such as transitioning students to English, or to prepare linguistically diverse students for high-stakes testing.

Therefore, instructional leaders may find it effective to seek and hire alternatively certified teacher candidates who express a strong sense of calling and a willingness to utilize strategies such as employing personal background experiences, applying professional development learning, and engaging in reflective practice. Alternative certification programs are known for capitalizing on candidates' background experiences. Such is the case when beginning teachers are accepted in an alternative certification program specifically because of their bilingualism, maturity, and accumulated work experience (Stoddart & Floden, 1995).

Alternatively certified teachers may need more and differentiated pre-service and in-service training and support that are focused on their assignment and the actual context in which they are teaching. As Gordon (2004) affirms, professional development must be need-based and focused so that teachers feel empowered to teach in high poverty schools. Additionally, the induction year support may have to be somewhat customized to the individual circumstance of the teaching assignment and designed with consideration for applicable personal background experiences, academic training, and work experiences that alternatively certified teachers bring to the profession (Ovando & Trube, 2000).

In many ways, the strong needs of first year, alternatively certified teachers and the instructional leadership support that they experience act as opposing forces. The overwhelming needs inhibit growth, while the support boosts the teacher's successful entry into the profession. Therefore, instructional leaders must search for innovative ways to enhance personal capacity of alternatively

certified bilingual teachers so that all students, regardless of the school context in which they are, may indeed experience academic success. As others note, “building personal capacity entails a deep and critical deconstruction and reconstruction of one’s own knowledge and ways of knowing” (Sackney et al., 2005, p. 3).

Finally, it can be asserted that instructional leadership that provides tailored support and meaningful capacity building opportunities for alternatively certified bilingual teachers can ameliorate the intense needs of the new teachers, ensure effective teaching and successful implementation of the instructional program in a school. This supports the notion that, “the leadership in the school provides the synergy by which organizational capacity building takes place” (Sackney et al., 2005, p. 3). Alternatively certified teachers may further benefit from more focused support from the instructional leader, a quality mentoring program, and a school infrastructure designed to provide sustained collaboration and collegial interaction aimed at the success of all teachers and students.

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