



CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMONALITIES OF NEWCOMER PROGRAMS

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Abstract

Across school districts in the United States, the number of students from non-English speaking linguistic backgrounds has risen dramatically. Since 2000, the young dual language learner population in the United States has grown by 24 percent (Migration Policy Institute, 2017). Because of this growth, school districts need to provide newcomer programs that transition English language learners into the American school setting and most important provide culturally responsive teachers for these programs. This population represents the fastest growing segment of the student population in the U.S. by a wide margin including a growth rate of 95%, while the remaining population enrollment increased by only 11% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners was higher in school year 2011–12 (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.4 million students) than in 2002–03 (8.7 percent, or an estimated 4.1 million students). In contrast, during the latter part of this period, between 2009–10 and 2011–12, the overall percentage of ELL students remained about the same at 9.1 percent or an estimated 4.4 million students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Keywords: ELLs, Diversity, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Newcomer Centres, Bilingual Education

1 Introduction

The growth in the English learner population calls for provisions for the wave of newly arrived students through specialized programs to ensure a positive transition into the American school system. These statistics reflect the undeniable growth in the English language learner population that has compelled school districts across the nation to take a closer look at this student demographic that appears to be growing at rates far greater than any other population. Our schools have undergone a student population transformation. Anyone who takes a mere glance at our education system, whether through the lens of a teacher, an administrator, a student, a parent, a community member, a business executive or a policy maker can glean a rapid and profound diverse nation developing right before our eyes. The country's future demographic landscape can be predicted by simply setting foot into today's classroom. The diverse educational landscape in the classroom population is vastly different than its previous forms.

The students entering the U.S. public schools speak in excess of 60 different languages (Short & Boyson, 2004). The language barriers accounted for difficulties in communicating in English, associating with peers, responding to school expectations, and engaging in day to day activities inherent in a typical U.S. public school day. While the former contribute to the all around success of a public school student, no more essential is the necessity to be able to understand the academic school language in order to succeed academically. Other attributes associated with U.S. public schools are also affected by not only a language barrier but also assimilation and acculturation (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

It is difficult to calculate exactly how many students can be considered newcomers to the United States schools. In the U. S. schools, the number of students who do not speak enough English to academically succeed in an English-only classroom are categorized as Limited English Proficient (LEP). This determination is also concluded if a student is unable

to take a standardized test administered by the state (Friedlander, 1991). Limited English Proficient students are sometimes provided with special services within a school program, which are configured to assist them using an accelerated form of instruction designed to get them up to par with their English speaking counterparts as quickly as possible.

The idea that newly arrived immigrant students, especially adolescents, could be provided a set of experiences to help them become familiar with U.S. schools and to prepare them for the kinds of language and literacy needed to be successful in school was first developed in the late 1970s (Faltis & Coulter, 2008). Many adolescent immigrants enter secondary schools lacking or having interrupted schooling and gaps in their literacy development. Newcomer schools and programs can provide older students with a safe school environment and meet their educational needs, especially when they do not have to compete with students who are literate and accustomed to secondary school life (Faltis & Coulter, 2008).

Like most models and strategies, the ones geared toward meeting the needs of our English language learners are not immune from having their own set of strengths, limitations and weaknesses. The strengths are usually associated with responding to students' unique and individualized needs as well as high expectations and authentic teaching and learning. The weaknesses are typically found in programs and methods where there is little room or attention paid to differentiated instruction to take place. The expectations may also be set high, but little authentic and comprehensive support is provided to the student to meet the expectations set forth for them.

Deborah Short and Beverly Boyson (2012) articulated the following goals for assisting immigrants with limited formal schooling:

1. Help newly arrived students develop beginning English language skills.
 2. Develop appropriate content area instruction.
 3. Assist students acclimate to U. S. school systems.
 4. Build and strengthen students' native language.
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2 Methods

Nothing stands outside representation. Research involves a complex politics of representations. This world can never be captured directly; we only study representations of it. We study the way people represent their experiences to themselves and to others. Experience can be represented in multiple ways, including rituals, myths, stories, performances, films, songs, memoirs, and autobiography, writing stories, autoethnography. We are all storytellers, statisticians, and ethnographers alike (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000). Qualitative researchers study spoken and written records of human experience, including transcribed talk, films, novels, and photographs. Interviews give the researcher accounts about the issues being studied. The topic of the research is not the interview itself. Research usually naturally occurring empirical materials – tape recordings of mundane interaction, for example, constitute topics of inquiry in their own right. This is the topic of Anssi Peräkylä work (Peräkylä, 2002).

To explore the characteristics and qualities of effective newcomer programs, this study employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth view of the practices and learning strategies that are part of the teaching and learning in these programs. The analysis of the data gathered in a naturalistic inquiry began the first day the researcher arrived at the setting. The collection and analysis of the data obtained went hand-in-hand as theories and themes emerged during the study. This process can be clearly seen through the researcher's description of the on-site visits (Harris, 1991).

The data for this article was derived for a qualitative method, including in-depth interviews with students, faculty, and program administrators as well as student survey responses from various aspects of the newcomer programs as a way to provide the researchers and readers of the research a better understanding of what occurs when newcomer English learners participate in a newcomer program as they enter Texas school systems. Interviews and observations were recorded on legal pads and I-pads, which were later transferred with data from documents to 3x5 note cards with separate units of information placed on separate cards. Data analysis occurred throughout this research project. The sources of the data were interviews, documents, nonverbal cues, and other qualitative or quantitative information pools.

This research seeks, as described by Kincheloe (2008), to construct information that will be helpful to school districts in Texas that want to establish a newcomer program to assist newcomer English learners to become familiar with their new school environment while embarking quickly on the process of learning English. Case study is regarded as a method for gaining insight to a specific situation through an up-close and firsthand understanding (Yin, 2006). Researchers involved in case studies dedicate an extended amount of time at the research site and are involved in personal contact with the activities of the case, as well as engaged in reflection and reconsideration of the meanings of the processes of the case (Stake, 2008). Case studies can provide new meanings, contributing to a deeper understanding of a field's knowledge base (Merriam, 1998).

2.1 Educational Challenge

The students entering the U.S. public schools speak in excess of 60 different languages (Short & Boyson, 2004). The language barriers accounted for difficulties in communicating in English, associating with peers, responding to school expectations, and engaging in day to day activities inherent in a typical U.S. public school day. While the former contribute to the all around success of a public school student, no more essential is the necessity to be able to understand the academic school language in order to succeed academically. Other attributes associated with U.S. public schools are also affected by not only a language barrier but also assimilation and acculturation (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

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2.2 The Newcomer Student

A newcomer student is typically defined as a student who has been in the United States less than 2 years and whose English proficiency levels on initial placement inventories result in a pre-primer or beginning proficiency level. D.Short & B.A. Boyson (2004) listed three main categories of newcomer students:

Literate newcomers: students with on-grade-level educational back-grounds who have literacy skills and academic schooling in their own language

Newcomers with limited formal schooling (also known as Students with Interrupted Formal Education or SIFE students): students with disrupted or weak educational back-grounds and below-grade level literacy in their own native language.

Late entrant immigrant newcomers: students who enter after first quarter or semester.

Short states that, "students in each category stand to benefit from placement in a newcomer program as the program allows them to better assimilate to the U.S. school climate and culture as well as helps them gain a deeper understanding of its many nuances" (2004).

The newcomer students have a better attendance rate on average than U.S. born students, however, the dropout rates of the newcomer student is generally higher almost doubling in rate when compared to their same U.S. born ethnic group. The explanation is not as complicated as one might assume. The fact that the majority of newcomers are coming into the United States at the middle school or high school age, it is easy to see how time may not be their greatest ally.

Newcomers are a diverse group of learners. They differ in key factors related to academic achievement, the amount of formal schooling, the degree of literacy development in their native language, and their age at the time of arrival (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). Adolescent newcomers must quickly develop oral language skills and basic reading skills in order to acquire the academic content and the content area classrooms.

While many newcomer students are equipped with some former schooling from their native land, some newly arrived immigrants arrive at U.S. schools with little to no education at all. Those that do have some, typically have what is known as *interrupted schooling* where a student's

educational experience(s) may have been interrupted for one reason or another in their home country.

2.3 The Newcomer Program

The increase of newcomer programs appears to lack a nationwide strategic effort; it is instead a state-by-state response to a much-needed program designed to meet the needs of the continuous increase of non-English speaking students into U.S. classrooms. As a result, there is still relatively little data, documentation and recorded literature citing the benefits and challenges of newcomer programs across the country.

In the last decade, newcomer programs were extremely rare; however, a greater awareness and sharing of ideas (while still minimal) has inspired an increase in the number of newcomer programs existing in a variety of school districts across the United States. While each newcomer program has certain consistent elements, there appears to be areas among newcomer programs that differ. The differences range from the type of newcomer program model that is adopted and how it is administered to the less drastic and more subtle differences like calling a specific strategy, program or method by a different name than another newcomer program while referring to the same methodology or strategy. One of the most pervasive characteristics of a newcomer program is the goal of emphasizing a safe and comprehensive welcoming educational environment, which is aimed at building bridges between a newcomer student's native land and their newfound country. The benefits of the newcomer program have more than one beneficiary. The comprehensive nature of a newcomer program aims to include every aspect of the students' lives that may contribute to his/her academic success, assimilation and acculturation in U.S. schools.

Newcomer programs are categorized into three main program models: program within a school, a separate program at a separate site, and a whole school model. The program within a school is the most common of the three models. The rationale behind its popularity does not appear to be attributed so much to its heightened or overt effectiveness, but to a rather less academically related factor, money. Of the three programs, the program within a school requires less of an infrastructure as related to building materials and space as it relies on already established accommodations to be its catalyst for establishing itself; thus, requiring less monies to be filtered into the program. The newcomer's home school serves the students, which allows them to interact with the non-newcomer students across subject areas as well as extra-curricular activities such as band, music, art and physical education. Newcomer students may attend programs within a school for one or two class periods, for a half day, or a full day (Faltis & Coulter, 2008). Programs within a school take full advantage of the learning opportunity before them, by planning deliberate activities, events and even instructional settings geared toward intentionally placing the newcomer in the mainstream setting. This practice fosters a greater sense of immersion into the target language and appears to help facilitate the assimilation process at a faster rate than its model counterparts (Short & Boyson, 2012). Out of the three models, the program within a school requires the shortest amount of time for students actually be enrolled in the program. Once the newcomer is exited from the program, the student is placed in regular, mainstream classrooms within the same campus of his home school, only he/she is no longer in the newcomer building/classrooms. Some students choose to attend another campus once they are exited from the newcomer program (Faltis & Coulter, 2008).

Separate site boasts less than 25% of the newcomer program models currently existing (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2009). The newcomer program is typically housed in a separate location with all resources and accommodations devoted solely for the purpose of educating the newcomer student population the entire day. How the sites acquired the building space varied from program to program. Some campuses were formed from a former, shut down campus or from a space, their district may own but was not utilizing at the time. Separate site campuses typically operate on an all day schedule, much like that of a regular school campus. However, what goes on within the classroom walls can be quite different. Over 75 languages have been recorded as being used on one campus alone (Short & Boyson, 2004). Some students in a separate site model may spend part of the day at the newcomer school while others will only spend half a day, dividing their time between the newcomer campus and their

home school. Most students who attend separate newcomer programs typically stay for one year (Faltis & Coulter, 2008).

The whole school is the least common program model of all across the United States. The name allows one to infer that it is a financially demanding model, but one that has the ability to devote all its attention and resources to the newcomer student. This particular model is developed primarily for high school-aged students. They are typically a four-year program, which provides curriculum that leads to graduation.

According to Adger and Peyton (1999), feelings of frustration and failure among newcomer students are often reflected in higher than average dropout rates for this population of students. Given the high stakes, it is critical to focus on the educational experiences and outcomes for newcomer students that will increase academic achievement and graduation rates for immigrant students. It is critical to invest in practices that accelerate access to standards-based, quality instruction.

3 Conceptual Framework

Qualitative inquiry is not a single think with a singular subject matter. Jacob (1988) has observed that the effort to differentiate the qualitative/naturalistic (holistic-inductive) paradigm from the quantitative/experimental (logical-deductive) paradigm has created the impression that there are only two methodological alternatives. However, when one looks more closely at individual discussions, the apparent unity of the qualitative approach vanishes, and one sees considerable diversity (Jacob, 1988: 16). The qualitative research's conceptual framework was developed based on the research problem, objective & question(s). The goal of the conceptual framework is to illustrate the study's research approach by way of pictorial and text forms to ease readers' understanding of the research approach. Qualitative research can produce detailed information from where one can identify a number themes and patterns. The conceptual framework was then developed by summarizing the mental images of the themes and patterns that emerged from the data. A constant comparative method of data analysis was employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was utilized in this study as a means for deriving (grounding) theory in the analysis process. From the categories, grounded theories; that is, theories that follow from data rather than preceding them, were developed.

The analysis of qualitative data is best described as a progression, not a state; an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Marshall and Rossman (1989) explain:

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory. (p.112)

The Limited English Proficient Student Success Initiative (LEP-SSI) Newcomer Resource Project was a collaborative research effort between a south Texas university and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The study was guided by the following research questions, whose theoretical properties were generated by the process of collecting the data and recording the incidents by employing the constant comparative method:

1. What are the commonalities, characteristics, and qualities of an effective newcomer programs?
2. What classroom and community resources used by teachers, administrators and parents are the most impactful and have the most value added on newcomer students?
3. Which promising practices and research based strategies can be used effectively and practically in establishing a newcomer program?

Nine school districts in Texas that had established newcomer programs were selected for the study and a one to two-day site visit. The study was funded by the Texas Education Agency so that a resource could be provided to school districts who wanted to establish a Newcomer Center. The

school districts with these programs were gleaned from The Center for Applied Linguistics list of Newcomer Programs, and recommendations from ESL/Bilingual support personnel at Education Service Centers throughout the state. One or two day site visits were conducted which included interviews with district personnel, interviews with faculty teaching in the programs, and students attending the programs. During the classroom visits, an informal checklist was employed in order to identify promising practices and strategies. The checklist was developed by the researchers and based on the *Successful School Study of Quality Education for Limited English Proficiency Students* (Texas Education Agency, 2000). After the interviews were completed and classroom observation visits conducted, responses to the interview questions from the administrators, faculty and students were reviewed to establish trends related to the common practices and/or characteristics of the programs. The data from the classroom observations was analyzed, and a triangulation of the data was derived. Triangulation leads to credibility by using different or multiple sources of data (time, space, person), methods (observations, interviews, videotapes, photographs, documents), investigators (single or multiple), or theory (single versus multiple perspectives of analysis) (Denzin, 1992). These trends were then divided into the categories that were identified as important and increased the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The components of the newcomer programs included the following: Identification of newcomer students, newcomer program models, entry criteria for newcomer students, programming and curriculum, strategies and learning processes, transitioning to the regular school curriculum, family and community connections and professional development for administrators and faculty.

4 Newcomer Program Commonalities and Practice

4.1 Program models

Of the nine programs visited during the research study, seven of the programs followed the within a school model. The newcomer program classes were scheduled throughout the school or in a section of the school designated as the program classroom or classrooms. Students were a part of the regular school population during the day and interacted with their peers daily and in extracurricular activities. The schools consisted of mostly grades six to twelve, or grades eight to twelve. One of the programs was designated as an International School within a section of an established high school in the district. The program contained only grades nine to twelve. Newcomer students were assigned to a separate building of the high school and were able to participate in the extracurricular activities of the regular high school. However, during the school day, the students of the International School interacted with the students in their school. The third model was a separate site model in another district, whereby the newcomer program was housed as an International Academy, which had grades six to twelve. The students were able to stay at the high school academy during their middle school and high school years if they desired. As noted the newcomer programs had a variety of grade levels involved but followed mostly the within the school model for delivery and housing of the program.

4.2 Identification of Newcomer Students

All district programs identified newcomer students according to state guidelines for admission of students into bilingual and ESL programs. The districts had varied avenues for proceeding with the admission process. Three districts had a district-wide intake center, where the students are interviewed and given the appropriate state approved assessments. After their review, the students are assigned to the appropriate school in the district or to the newcomer program if it is in a separate location. The other districts visited had their students processed into the bilingual or ESL programs at the local school site, and then the students were referred to the newcomer program if it was not housed in their local school. Some districts utilized additional assessment measures when it was documented that the student had little or no formal schooling and/or interrupted schooling from the information obtained during the interview. The information from the interviews and the assessment was shared with the district Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) following the state

guidelines, whereupon a recommendation for placement was made. Most program entry criteria included being identified as a beginner on a state approved oral language proficiency test, a recent immigrant, and/or less than one year in the country. The decision to participate in a newcomer program was optional in the districts visited.

All newcomer programs visited allow the students to stay in the newcomer program for only six to nine months, or a complete school year, at the most. The one school district that had an International Secondary School Academy allowed the students to stay at the school until graduation. This school had a newcomer program as part of the total high school curriculum at the separate site.

4.3 Programming, curriculum delivery, and strategies

The models for instructional delivery (curriculum development) adopted by the districts emphasized the importance of planning and implementing quality instruction that integrated language and content, appropriate materials and highly trained teachers. Although models varied, coherence with regard to how academic content was delivered was pivotal to ensuring success and was evident. Commonalities between models included the following characteristics: language focus, quality classroom interactions, development of comprehension skills, and development of academic literacy that was reflective in nature.

One of the main strategies stressed in the programs was a focus on language. Educators were conscious of the language development level of the English language learners so classroom instruction could be tailored to the student's linguistic ability level. The importance of integration of all four-language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) was stressed throughout the curriculum to insure that all aspects of language development was enhanced. All programs had ESL courses or English language development courses that could be the equivalent to a sheltered language arts class a designated period during the day for promoting the students' English acquisition (Short & Boyson, 2004).

Quality classroom interactions was also a commonality among the programs visited. Curriculum development focused on learner-centered tasks that encouraged learners to speak in precise language that would allow them to develop academic language and maintain high academic rigor. Interactions were facilitated by establishing a positive rapport with students and between students with the presence of a non-threatening community in the classroom. Evolution of instructional methodologies is a dynamic process, thus in order to promote academic success, teachers have adjusted pedagogical practices to meet the needs of the students fostering experimentation with language and greater responsibility in learning. Interactions were strategic, purposeful and monitored.

Reading comprehension and literacy development is key for newcomer academic English language development so therefore it was the primary focus for the newcomer programs. Teaching for meaning is an essential component of instruction for English language learners and requires teachers to be knowledgeable about a variety of strategies that provide English language learners with meaningful opportunities to acquire language proficiency as they learn academic content. Teaching for meaning invites teachers and students to focus on the "big ideas" or "key issues" in the learning segment and engages learners in authentic contexts for developing academic knowledge related to the specific content area. Teaching for meaning helps the ELLs to build frameworks for comprehension and also provides opportunities for the students to engage in authentic conversations and participate in relevant learning experiences (Ovando & Collier, 1998; Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999). Instructional techniques in which teachers engaged the students in interactive activities complemented the curriculum development in both second language and content area classrooms.

Development of academic literacy was also another key consideration in the newcomer programs. Achieving comprehension through setting reading goals, interacting with texts, and accessing background knowledge is especially challenging for ELL students. Unfamiliar cultural assumptions and academic demands in content courses place a tremendous burden on learners who are simultaneously developing their language skills and learning content information. Therefore, it is important to create awareness in teachers of not only how one acquires literacy, but also how reading in the specific discipline may pose a challenge to the students.

Reflection and the development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies were also addressed in the newcomer programs. These strategies provided tools for learning that helped students develop an awareness of tasks necessary in approaching academic content and how these tasks can be monitored to gauge effective learning. As such, they are important to consider in educating English language learners who are still in the process of developing proficiency in the English language. The strategies assist students by providing them the “know how” to approach academic tasks in a meaningful manner so goals of learning can be met (Jimenez, Garcia & Pearson, 1994; Wong, Fillmore & Snow, 2003; Vaughn & Klinger, 2004). Tasks were repeated and structured to ensure learners were provided with opportunities to access the lesson objectives. Focus was placed on not only supporting students during these tasks, but also bridging them to independence in reading, writing and thinking.

The models for curriculum development supported district initiatives to increase student achievement and build capacity among teachers and administrators working with English language learners. Many of the strategies incorporated into the curriculum models can be used to address a wide array of standards, depending on the particular situation in the classroom. Each model promoted instructional practices that were interactive, structured and based on grade-level standards. Some of the most common classroom strategies/practices that were observed in several sites included the following:

Word walls – Key vocabulary and concepts which will assist students in the learning and understanding of daily content and classroom activities which are posted prominently in the classroom environment, and reviewed by the students throughout the lesson or unit (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Gibbons, 2009).

Cognate awareness – Cognates are vocabulary terms in two languages that are similar in both semantic and orthographic characteristics. Focusing students on cognate awareness can help foster student’s understanding of the English text and assist in comprehension of related words (Genesee & Riches, 2006).

Word Analysis- Focused instruction on the parts of a word and learning to analyze the structure of words to help students identify the meaning of words and builds their academic vocabulary (Goldenberg, 2008).

Concept definition maps – A visual organizer that helps students expand their understanding of a given concept. The organizer can be developed with pictures or without, and consist of a web showings relationship among the ideas presented (Goldenberg, 2008).

Semantic Maps – An excellent means for organizing new information introduced in a class. It is a graphic representation of knowledge. This strategy allow the students to display content in categories or through relationships such similar themes, concepts, topics or words. Students can relate new words and vocabulary to prior knowledge (Goldenberg, 2008).

Venn diagrams- This strategy is useful to help students “see” similarities and differences when comparing and contrasting content concepts, topics, or words. This organizer may consist of two or more overlapping circles (Iwai, 2007).

Story maps – A useful graphic organizer that can be used to help students organize events of a story. This strategy may be utilized as a pre-writing strategy or to aid in comprehension of text (Dickson, S.V., Simmons, D. C., & Kameenui, 1995).

Semantic attribute matrices – A graphic organizer useful in helping students identify relationships and categorize newly learned information. The chart lists traits or features that define members, a particular category, or a concept (Goldenberg, 2008).

Word bank – A useful strategy to present key vocabulary for a specific lesson or content. Students select items from the list provided to answer the assigned questions. The strategy is used in activities that check for comprehension or aid in discussion writing (Bongolan & Moir, 2005).

Sentence frames/Writing frames – This strategy supports the English learner in finding precise vocabulary to engage in classroom discussions or complete learning assignments (Gibbons, 2005).

Thematic units – This strategy provides an opportunity for integrating oral and written language production that is meaningful and provide a framework for learning experiences that can be scaffolded to support and

encourage social interaction and cooperative learning (Freeman & Freeman, 2002).

Use of Role Play – Provides an opportunity to engage in authentic conversations that focus on developing both social and academic language (Bongolan & Moir, 2005).

Note taking – builds upon the student’s ability to listen, summarize and record information. Note taking is the process of synthesizing information into their own word (Genesee & Riches, 2006).

Preview/Review – The lesson is first previewed emphasizing key vocabulary and concepts. Following the lesson, key vocabulary and concepts are reviewed (Goldenberg, 2008).

Pre-reading guides – A graphic organizer intended to prepare the English learner for a given reading selection. The strategy is useful in helping students prepare to read text selections in content areas (McLaughlin & Allen, 2002).

Use of Visualization- Employs generating a mental image of a given text. Allowing students to describe/illustrate the image provides opportunities for authentic use of language and demonstration of learning (Lin & Chen, 2007).

Think Alouds – Verbalizing thoughts aloud to help student’s monitor reading comprehension and help them to recognize strategies that could aid in comprehension of text (Baumann, Jones, & Seifert-Kessell, 1993).

Project based learning- Involving students

Teachers in the programs had a true commitment to meeting the educational needs of the students and had devoted their energy to developing a personalized and differentiated curriculum that would not only promote language development for the students, but also advance their academic success.

4.4 Professional development for administrators and faculty

As the different newcomer programs in Texas were visited and on site interviews were conducted, one of the observations was that investment in professional development in research-based models for instructional delivery varied according to resources available within given districts. Districts selected comprehensive models of instruction for preparing teachers to work with English language learners that best aligned with district generated guidelines. Professional development focused on scaffolding teachers’ understanding of how to maintain high academic rigor while promoting English Language Learners language development. Sheltered instruction training was prevalent as one of the main strategies for preparing teachers to work with newcomer students. Training in strategies to make content more comprehensible to the students was also a basic component in many workshops. One district, in order to ensure that teachers participated in the training, provided online professional development so that teachers could participate when it was most convenient for them. This opportunity was accommodating to the secondary faculty in particular since many of them were involved in after school and Saturday extracurricular activities with the students. Administrators were also involved with the newcomer program teachers in the professional development at the school districts visited since the district recognized that the administrators are key players in the education of English learners.

4.5 Exit criteria

The newcomer programs that were visited were consistent in the processes by which students are transitioned the newcomer programs to the regular English curriculum. The length of time in the newcomer program was one of the main criteria for transitioning students from the program into either the district’s bilingual or ESL program or the mainstream general education program.

Progress on state assessments, benchmarks, and teacher observations were some of the data used to transition the students from the newcomer programs into the mainstream English curriculum. If, in addition, the student passed the state assessment and end of course assessments in English, they were eligible for exit from the bilingual/ESL program.

According to state education, agency guidelines the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) are to monitor students' academic achievement and progress for two years after exiting from the bilingual/ESL program. The state education agency has specific exit criteria in all language skills areas to verify student proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. After exit from the newcomer programs, students returned to their neighborhood home campus and remained at the home school campus depending on the number of years or semesters that they are eligible to stay.

Some of the school districts hired "language coaches" to work directly with the former newcomer students. Some of the districts hired paraprofessionals to monitor student progress and to provide supplemental instruction to the former newcomer students. Some of the school districts already had established language centers in the schools, which also provided support for the newcomer students at their "home" campus. In other school districts visited, language support specialists monitor the students who are being transitioned to the regular school curriculum. Within the larger school districts, the newcomer teacher themselves are able to support former students as he/she transfers from the newcomer program to the regular curriculum. Students are able to transition from the newcomer program in a year or less and to receive additional support to be academically successful and feel the emotional and psychological support needed to succeed in the new school culture.

4.6 Family and community connections

Among the many facets of a newcomer program, family and community connections appears to be one of great importance and relevance. Services many range from educating parents to providing them with the necessary information needed to tap into the many resources available to them in the school district or the community. Parents bring with them a strong knowledge base of their native language and cultural attributes. Allowing them to be a part of their child is learning process within the newcomer program fosters a more authentic and whole family style of teaching and learning. For this reason, teachers and staff of a newcomer program were trained to be culturally responsive to their students and parents.

Welcome centers were a part of almost every newcomer program. Each program designed and operated the welcome center differently depending on the size, resources and needs of their newcomer population. Subsequently, each center offered different services and provided different types of newcomer program entry protocols. Some centers offered "ambassador programs" whereby parents and students who had been in a newcomer program for a period of time were able to welcome another family from their own native country and helped guide them through the educational system. Other welcome centers offered orientations, which included campus and city tours to help parents and families, orient themselves to the community.

Educating the parents whose students were in a newcomer program is a beneficial practice to follow to promote a greater effectiveness of the program. Some campuses had a parent room located on the newcomer campus. Parents participated in classes in English as a Second Language (ESL), technology, citizenship and GED preparation. Other campuses offered parents a refurbished computer and printer after they completed a technology course for one semester. Some campuses provided after school tutoring three days a week, where native volunteers from non-profit organizations provide language support.

Faith-based charities appeared to play a big role in most of the newcomer programs that were visited. They supported the programs with services such as providing food, clothes, subsidized housing and health screening for the newcomer families. Social workers dedicated to the newcomer programs were often times the liaisons between the program and the community outreach connections and partnerships.

Most newcomer programs offer their students additional services beyond English language and academic courses. Most newcomer programs utilized the current parent education centers to provide families with access to medical doctors, health fairs, and clothing closets. Other campuses also provided assistance with immigration issues and interpreter services. At one site, a social worker supported the newcomer programs in coordinating with local health providers and offered newcomer families

low cost health benefits and health requirements such as immunizations and vaccinations. There was a sense of family and the students are nurtured through various support systems during their enrollment in the program.

4.7 Cultural responsiveness an overarching component

Newcomer programs provide an avenue to culturally responsive classrooms. In addition, teachers are the key ingredient in a culturally responsive classroom. A need to analyze and address cultural factors as possible contributors to academic and challenging classroom behaviors is a way of minimizing the problem at hand. The need to consider cultural responsiveness in the classroom as a potential trigger for students' academic discrepancies and needs is both timely and urgent. To be culturally responsive and in order to foster a culturally responsive way of learning, the teacher must ensure that the students coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds feel welcome and can be academically successful. Culturally responsiveness also requires that teachers are *socio-culturally conscious, have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds and see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable.*

Having a prevailing attitude reflecting unity of teacher and student in the goal of mastering of material is an essential component of a culturally responsive classroom environment. Teachers collaborated and worked together to develop lesson plans, which were not only supporting the state curriculum standards, but will also supported the needs of the student demography. This critical characteristic was evident in the newcomer programs that were visited as part of this study. Especially in the lives of newcomer immigrant student populations who are not only adjusting and acculturating to a new country and way of life but also learning a second language, the importance of effective educators and programs is of the utmost need. According to Darling-Hammond (1996), "What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn." (p. 6).

5 Results

Over the past two decades, America's classrooms have undergone an unmistakable demographic change. Anyone who has come in contact with the school system-whether as an educator, student, parent, policy maker, or service provider-cannot help but notice the rapid, profound, and continuous diversification of this country's student population in every sense of the word: racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and social. The trend is hardly new in this country but its accelerated pace and overall impact on our society and education system is in many ways very different. The wave of immigration over the past two decades continues to have such a profound effect on our society that it can almost be regarded as the equivalent of a demographic revolution, and nowhere is that impact more obvious than in our schools.

Briefly, newcomer programs function as temporary stopovers- the equivalent of cultural and educational shock absorbers-for recently arrived LEP immigrant and refugee students. Whether they are, self-contained programs or operate as part of regular schools, all newcomer programs act as separate entities that place new arrival students in U.S. Schools in a drastically different education climate from that offered by the regular school program.

One of the goals of this ongoing research is to investigate and identify the consistent and constant elements present in an effective newcomer program. In doing so, we have visited a number of school districts who have instituted a newcomer program on a home campus or on a separate campus devoted entirely to the newcomer population. It is clear that different campuses implement a different version of a newcomer program based on the parameters that guide the implementation. The diversity of the student population, the number of newcomer students that arrive, the type of professional development and training of faculty and staff, and the allocated

funds for a newcomer program are all variables that help determine the type of newcomer program that is instituted in each district.

The findings have identified preliminary promising practices that appear to be commonalities among the most effective implementations across the visits of newcomer programs. This research is ongoing and will require a continued effort of observing, evaluating and documenting data in order to produce a document, which will be both practical and supported by the existing and developing research. The implications of this research are of importance and relevance. In addition, the timeliness of this study could not be more appropriate with the issues our nation is facing with regards to immigration and ensuring an equal educational opportunity for every student (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). A newcomer program is a clear effort to improve our schools and help promote academic success for our recent arrivals.

6 Conclusions and Future Study

Over the past two decades, America's classrooms have undergone an unmistakable demographic change. Anyone who has come in contact with the school system-whether as an educator, student, parent, policy maker, or service provider-cannot help but notice the rapid, profound, and continuous diversification of this country's student population in every sense of the word: racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and social. The trend is hardly new in this country but its accelerated pace and overall impact on our society and education system is in many ways very different. The wave of immigration over the past two decades continues to have such a profound effect on our society that it can almost be regarded as the equivalent of a demographic revolution, and nowhere is that impact more obvious than in our schools.

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