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Recommended Citation

Mahn, Holbrook, et al. "Teaching/Learning Centers: Professional Development for Teachers of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students." *Language Arts*, vol. 82, no. 5, National Council of Teachers of English, 2005, pp. 378–87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41483502>.

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Source: *Language Arts*, Vol. 82, No. 5, Rethinking Professional Development (May 2005), pp. 378-387

Published by: [National Council of Teachers of English](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41483502>

Accessed: 29/05/2014 17:51

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Teaching/Learning Centers: Professional Development for Teachers of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students

A classroom is set up as an on-site teaching/learning center to facilitate the collaborative work of teachers teaching teachers.

Holbrook Mahn
Dee McMann
Sandra Musanti

Kay glances over at Trang and Maria as the rest of her class is busy finishing stories in writing workshop. The girls' blank stares fall to equally blank sheets of paper, avoiding Kay's eyes. Their obvious lack of engagement evokes feelings of frustration in Kay, as both Trang and Maria speak very little English, and Kay does not speak their native languages. She is a veteran teacher, but her teacher education courses and the district professional development have not prepared her to help Trang and Maria. She has tried working with them individually, but she isn't always sure what to do, and she has 20 other students who need her time and attention as well. While Kay feels isolated in her concern, she knows that she is not alone, that increasingly teachers throughout the country are facing a situation similar to hers.

Nearly half (45%) of classroom teachers in the U.S. work with English language learners, yet only one out of eight teachers (12%) is trained to work with linguistically diverse students (McCloskey, 2002). When teachers lack a common language with their ESL students, teaching



them how to read and write in English becomes particularly challenging, and if their efforts fall short, their feelings of frustration and inadequacy may mirror Kay's.

One day near the end of the school year, Kay attended a meeting of the school staff at which we proposed that her school participate in a professional development pilot project for teaching literacy to linguistically and culturally diverse students. At the meeting, we described the Teaching/Learning Centers (TLC) professional development model we were piloting in five elementary schools. After we described the model and discussed it in depth with teachers and administrators, they voted on whether or not to participate. Discussion and decision making by those involved is foundational for the TLC model of professional development.

THE TEACHING/LEARNING CENTERS PILOT PROJECT

The goal of the two-year pilot project was to build a collegial school community in which teachers could collaborate in developing effective language and literacy instruction for first and second language learners. We recognized that sustained periods of time are needed during which practicing teachers can work with other teachers to consider new ways of teaching and to think about ways to help students in their particular schools and social-cultural contexts. Such transformations in practice entail a reexamination of the beliefs and theories that guide practice (Guskey, 1986, 1995). The TLC model encourages sustained collaborations, in which teachers observe, model, reflect, dialogue, read, study, and support each other as they implement new ways of teaching/learning (Meyer, 1998). One-shot, one-size-fits-all ap-

proaches common to professional development efforts today promote neither reflection on practice nor the ongoing dialogue with colleagues necessary for true transformation of teaching (Little, 1987).

The TLC model is based on the assumption that the best foundation for meaningful, sustained, and transformative professional development is laid when teachers assess the particular needs for their school site, plan and implement professional development grounded in immediate classroom experience, and establish opportunities for ongoing dialogue and reflection among themselves. Packaged programs conceived by administrators, publishers, testing companies, or politicians—far removed from the everyday classroom realities faced by teachers like Kay and by students like her English language learners—start not with teacher and student needs but with the promotion of programs and political expediency. In contrast, the TLC model reflects qualities valued by Virginia Richardson (2003). She contends that successful professional development:

1. is schoolwide;
2. is long-term with follow-up;
3. encourages collegiality;
4. fosters agreement among participants on goals and vision;
5. has administrative support;
6. provides a vehicle for the funding to make it possible;
7. develops buy-in among participants;
8. acknowledges participants' existing beliefs and practices; and
9. makes use of outside support.

THE TEACHING/LEARNING CENTER CLASSROOM

In the TLC model, time and space are created to inspire schoolwide

sustained, reflective, professional conversations addressing instruction that makes curriculum accessible to all students. This model honors teachers' voices and expertise and establishes an environment in which teachers' collaborations and teaching/learning experiences can bring about long-term and substantive change. Because hands-on classroom experience is an essential component in effective professional development, we established a Teaching/Learning Center in a designated second-grade classroom at each of the five elementary schools selected for our pilot project. Two teachers—called TLC co-facilitators—who were experienced teachers of second language learners, staffed these centers.

An ESL-endorsed teacher from each school site was teamed with a district-assigned resource teacher to co-facilitate the Teaching/Learning Center classroom. It was through this process that Emily, a resource teacher, and Megan, a school-based teacher, were chosen to be co-facilitators of the Teaching/Learning Center at Kay's school. They were jointly responsible for teaching the second-grade class while providing professional development for the staff through their invitations for teachers to spend a full week participating with them in the TLC. The co-facilitators for the five sites were selected and recruited in consultation with principals, resource teachers, and district professional development staff. All of the co-facilitators met biweekly with Karin Rich and Dee, the district TLC coordinators, and Sandra and Holbrook from the university.

To make the experience appropriate for all teachers, the TLC classrooms reflected the student population of the school as a whole. The five sites reflected different programs in the district—dual language immersion,

bilingual, and ESL students in mainstream classes. Other teachers at the school sites—referred to as *guest teachers*—individually participated in the TLC for a week of professional development focusing on effective methods of teaching language and literacy to all their students.

When we presented the TLC concept to the selected sites at the beginning of the new school year, we re-emphasized that participation was voluntary. We indicated that there

jointly discussed the guest teacher's questions and literacy activities that would model sheltering for the English language learners. During the TLC week, a guest teacher spent time with one of the co-facilitators in teaching the TLC classroom's students, while the other facilitator was teaching the guest teacher's class. At other times, the guest teacher taught in her classroom with one of the facilitators. Both co-facilitators collaborated with the guest teacher in the

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were expectations for guest teachers to collaborate in pre- and post-conferences with facilitators and to submit a reflective piece on their experience in the TLC. Guest teachers received a small, grant-funded stipend for the extra time they spent during their TLC week. A schedule for fall semester was provided at these start-of-the-year staff meetings so that guest teachers could sign up for their week. Visits to the TLC were scheduled every other week, with the intervening week available for reflective conversations with the guest teacher who had finished a week, and planning sessions with the guest teacher scheduled for the following week. Guest teacher visits started several weeks into the term to allow the co-facilitators time to adjust to team teaching and to build a community with their students in the TLC classrooms.

A meeting between facilitators and guest teachers to plan the week's instructional activities for both the TLC and guest teachers' classrooms preceded the weeklong experience. During the planning meeting, they

TLC and in the guest teacher's classroom. In this way, co-facilitators garnered insights into the guest teacher's teaching/learning context and community and the backgrounds and needs of the guest teacher and her students. This understanding helped shape professional development to specifically address these needs and to "answer in practice" questions that guest teachers posed during the TLC week. The three teachers worked closely together teaching the two classrooms, observing, modeling, and discussing effective ways to help second language learners with literacy acquisition.

KAY'S TLC WEEK

Kay had many questions about teaching her linguistically diverse students and was enthusiastic about professional conversations, so she was among the first at her school site to sign up for a weeklong TLC experience. In her first planning meeting with Emily and Megan, she described her concerns about meeting the needs of Nguyen and Al-

berto, English language learners in her new second-grade classroom. While she knew that her class included students who varied greatly in their exposure to and experience with the academic English of school, she wasn't sure how to bring all of them into the instructional life of the classroom. Supporting beginning language learners appropriately in a classroom with students across a continuum of language and literacy experience can be daunting.

Kay brought strengths to this conversation that would serve her well in the collaboration. She believed that writing, like reading, is not only a learning outcome, but also a tool, accessible to all students, that can vastly expand one's learning capacity. During the previous year, she had implemented a writing workshop in her classroom, and she continued to refine routines and instruction that embodied her commitment to writing and her belief that all students can write. Her school had used Fountas and Pinnell's (1996, 2001) work on balanced literacy for professional development, and she was familiar with balanced literacy strategies and the notion of a gradual release of responsibility to students. The power of scaffolding students' learning through demonstrations such as modeled or shared writing was familiar to her. The role of balanced literacy strategies as a vehicle for demonstrating and scaffolding literacy (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001; Routman, 2000) was a common thread in the TLC seminars, as well.

Emily, Megan, and Kay decided to build on her strengths and interests during their work together and in so doing, they developed a level of trust that allowed them to teach in front of each other and to reflect honestly on their teaching. They

planned a writing task that aligned with the second-grade Social Studies curriculum, supported students' progress toward Language Arts standards, and actively involved all students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing with their peers to further their language and literacy development. The task would culminate in individual books based on the students' neighborhoods. It was decided that Emily would implement the activity first in the TLC classroom, anticipating and modeling specific strategies that would be helpful to Nguyen and Alberto, and then, with support from Megan, Kay would present it in her own classroom, making any necessary adjustments to the lesson she had observed in the TLC.

Read-aloud was a familiar event in Kay's classroom. Multiple read-alouds helped build and extend prior knowledge for all students, and they also provided a model for peer talk around additional "neighborhood texts" that the teachers gathered as resources. Structured peer interaction around visual materials provided the opportunity to acquire and extend new vocabulary and sentence structures, while making connections to and extending students' notions of "neighborhood."

Over the next two days of writing workshop, specific vocabulary and language structures were generated, acted out, practiced orally, and displayed visually. Neighborhood sketches from a bird's eye view (a perspective that required modeling!) boosted participation by all students, provided another focus for peer interaction, and generated more information for written texts. As students began the shift to writing their books, Emily modeled using the many resources that the group had generated, explored, and rehearsed to write a text built on a pattern and directional phrases

("This is my _____ in the middle of my neighborhood," "Across the street from my house is a _____"). For some students, Emily's modeled writing was enough to get them started. Other writers and language learners who needed more support were gathered to re-visit her model and do their own shared writing as a small group. They were then better able to make the shift to the guided writing task.

While some of the students in the TLC classroom were challenged to create this basic frame, many were ready for more attention to crafting their work. For all students, Emily modeled basic directional phrases, adding details and personal connections, sequencing by physically manipulating pages of text, adding transitional words as needed, and editing. Ultimately, all students in the class created an illustrated text that reflected personal experience and knowledge. The books were aligned with content area studies and demonstrated use of particular vocabulary, structures, and organizational patterns. While completed texts varied greatly, each student participated in all phases of the project.

Based on her observations and reflections with Emily and Megan, Kay knew that she would focus on activating and building on prior knowledge. She wanted to structure peer interaction to provide supported rehearsal for beginning language learners, and she decided to emphasize demonstration and the use of visual resources to help Alberto and Nguyen. She was enthusiastic about having Megan's support when she tried the same activity with her own second-grade class, especially after seeing firsthand the points at which scaffolding for Alberto and Nguyen would need to be more explicit. While completing this activity extended beyond her TLC

week, Megan was available to help get it started and to work with Kay as questions arose.

Days later, the three teachers sat with the student texts from the two classes. They enjoyed the stories, admired the children's thought and effort, and made notes about accomplishments and instructional next steps for individuals, small groups, and each class as a whole. Kay was pleased with the effort and participation of her beginning language learners, who were active participants at every stage. She was also pleased and surprised with her comfort level in teaching in front of other adults and then reflecting on that teaching with them.

THE TLC SEMINAR

Kay's willingness to inquire about how to meet Nguyen's and Alberto's needs and then to reflect on her own practice in dialogue with her colleagues exemplified two central components of the TLC project. Throughout, we relied on teachers collaboratively inquiring into their practice and reflecting on their experience to help guide us in making any necessary adjustments in the project. We also had the expectation that co-facilitators and project staff would reflect and dialogue about our work in the TLCs to support one another. Co-facilitators assumed substantial responsibility in establishing working relationships with their teaching partners, teaching their second-grade classrooms, and working with guest teachers. To develop a support system and to work together in constructing an understanding of basic concepts underpinning the Teaching/Learning Centers, we established an intensive three-week seminar during the summer preceding the inaugural year of the TLC and held biweekly seminars during the school year. For their participation in summer

seminars and biweekly seminars, co-facilitators received credit toward graduate degrees. To further support co-facilitators, Dee and Karin, who were working in the district Department of Language and Cultural Equity, received release time and additional support from the Training for All Teachers grant to help organize and coordinate seminars and to support co-facilitators.

The summer seminar was divided into two weeks at the beginning of the summer and one week right before the start of the school year. During the first two weeks, we read, dialogued, brainstormed, and reflected as we developed a common understanding of the theoretical foundation and the pedagogical philosophy that would guide the professional development in the TLC. We focused on the importance of teachers understanding “basic constructs of bilingualism and second language development, the nature of language proficiency, the role of the first language and culture in learning, and the demands that mainstream education places on culturally diverse students” (Claire & Temple, 1999).

During summer and bi-weekly seminars we also discussed team building (Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997), collegial collaboration and community building (Wenger, 1999), sheltering content for second language learners (Echevarria & Graves, 1998), theories of teaching/learning literacy in first and second languages (Au, 1993; Freeman & Freeman, 2000; Gibbons, 1991, 2002; Routman, 2000), and the role of inquiry for teachers and students engaged in literacy activities (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). A key part of our inquiry explored how we could get guest teachers to fully appreciate the importance of getting to know their students and the diverse ways they made meaning of

their linguistic and cultural experiences. Our challenge was to develop new approaches to teacher education “based on the belief that English language learners’ access to challenging content can be enhanced through teaching strategies that provide multiple pathways to the understanding of language and content” (González & Darling-Hammond, 2000).

We examined our basic beliefs about teaching/learning processes and how they would play out in practice. Doing so helped us develop a common theoretical understanding of the literacy acquisition process of second language learners that guided our teaching methods and strategies and supported conversations with guest teachers. We hoped to give teachers tools to understand and extend literacy instruction in order to make it more accessible to and supportive of students acquiring English as a second language. This support extends to

We examined our basic beliefs about teaching/learning processes and how they would play out in practice.

those students new to classroom academic English. That often meant considering the difference between “just good teaching,” as we sometimes hear effective sheltered instruction described, and “good teaching” that included an explicit focus on the language of instruction and the strategies necessary to support all students in taking advantage of that instruction—building bridges between classroom literacy practices and the resources and needs that all students bring to

those practices. For all of us, this required a reflective stance toward our own teaching and a shift in patterns of classroom interaction. Our intent was “to transform the interaction patterns in classrooms—how teachers talk to children, how children talk to each other, how teachers and children position themselves relative to sign systems and knowledge systems” (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996, p. 49).

The seminar provided an opportunity to enhance that reflective stance as we discussed questions that guest teachers posed during their time in the TLC—questions like Kay’s about refining balanced literacy instruction to better meet the needs of her diverse students. As a group, we considered the implications for literacy instruction in classes made up of students along a broad continuum of language proficiency. A particular interest was working with guided reading groups. When working with students in temporary, fluid groups for reading and other literacy-building activities, teachers tend to focus on a child’s instructional level of reading and writing. With English language learners, it’s especially important to consider overall proficiency in all modes of the new language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Oral language proficiency and literacy proficiency can often be very different, depending on the student’s experience and education. In Kay’s class, Alberto was quite proficient orally, but had very little experience with English literacy. Nguyen didn’t speak much at all, but was able to read far more than his oral language would indicate. It’s essential to recognize both language and literacy proficiency in the support we offer students before and during their reading, as well as in the response options after reading.

Co-facilitators spent seminar time developing examples of guided reading lessons that took both language and literacy levels into consideration based on students in their classrooms. Texts were chosen not just for their reading level, but because they supported language learners with rich vocabulary development, pattern and repetition, close picture-text match, and syntax that reflected oral and written language structures. Emily and Megan took this information and experience back to the TLC. This helped Kay refine her planning for Alberto, Nguyen, and others in her classroom.

The co-facilitators also discussed characteristics of guided reading that incorporated sheltering techniques, effective practice that could be made more explicit for guest teachers visiting the TLC. These characteristics included pre-reading experiences that build on students' prior knowledge, previewing text and pictures, acting out text or role-playing, teacher modeling and extending language, re-visiting text for multiple readings, and demonstrations through shared reading and writing. The role of the students' first language as a bridge to English proficiency was also considered. Classroom life provided opportunities throughout the day for students to read independently in their home language or to use resources in their home language to scaffold content learning. Out of good intentions, the family of one of Kay's language learners was trying to avoid using the native language at home, despite their very limited understanding of English. Kay was able to reassure the parents about using the child's first language of Spanish at home for a wide range of purposes, including reading aloud. Immersion in a rich first language environment at home

supports students' acquisition of English. The study and support of the TLC seminar helped both co-facilitators and guest teachers alike have the confidence to share that message with families determined to support their child's education.

The seminars also provided the group with the opportunity to share experiences and seek advice in addressing challenges that the teams of co-facilitators faced. Each TLC was different, reflecting the style and personalities of co-facilitators, their students and colleagues, and the particular school context. Each TLC was also situated in a unique school community where a language and literacy development plan appropriate for its students was needed. As we developed a shared stance, honest dialogue, and a level of trust that allowed depth in reflections, the co-facilitators prepared themselves to go through experiences with guest teachers. The willingness of guest teachers to reflect on their own practice often determined the success of their experience in the TLC.

We expected that the experience and background of the guest teacher would dictate the quality of the conversation. But in looking back at all our TLC experiences, it became clear that it wasn't the topic chosen or the skill of a teacher that dictated the quality of the conversation, but it was the willingness of an individual to be reflective about their practice that made the difference. (Isabel, TLC co-facilitator)

LESSONS LEARNED

Guest Teachers' Reflections

In reflective responses after their weeklong visits to the TLC classrooms, guest teachers underscored the value of interacting with and learning from their peers. They emphasized the power of peer model-

ing, observation, feedback, and dialogue. They appreciated the fact that they could focus on their needs and get assistance suited to their particular teaching contexts. We conceived of this project as unique and evolving, growing organically in the different contexts provided by the five sites—a concept captured by a guest teacher, Gloria, who observed: "The TLC is a living, changing environment, open to new ideas, with resources to lend for starting new growth outside the TLC."

Along with learning specific techniques and strategies to scaffold instruction and to make language more accessible to students, clearly defining language objectives, using slower rates of teacher speech, and providing lots of opportunities for cooperative learning, guest teachers also learned the importance of an overarching concept behind the TLC project—sheltering of content for second language learners can benefit all students.

A number of guest teachers reflected on the tension between working collaboratively with another teacher and their prior experience of isolated teaching. Others echoed Kay's previous experiences with teaching in front of other adults, who often were there to evaluate her performance. Some teachers were anxious about the disruption of their regular routine inherent in the TLC week. "Having teachers come through our program has been a wonderful opportunity to get to know each other, share ideas, and collaborate. It is also a source of anxiety and stress, because of the disruption it can create in the involved classrooms" (Christy, TLC co-facilitator). Meyer (1998), however, points out that a disruption of the day-to-day routine is often a needed stimulus for genuine reflection and a transformation of practice.

Co-Facilitators' Reflections & Professional Conversations

Team teaching in the TLC classrooms involved an active partnership that required more than just dividing up tasks and curriculum. Co-facilitators learned to jointly plan and make decisions about what curriculum to teach. They found themselves focusing on the impact that their teaching was having on students and in so doing came to understand their students better.

I'm learning new ways of teaching, . . . identifying with the fears and inhibitions that ESL learners feel. I think that unconsciously many ESL students feel that they should know many things that they don't, and they feel ashamed at this perceived lack. Like me, they try to cover up what they don't know. Covering up makes it harder to learn. . . . I learned new and better managing techniques, sheltering strategies, and efficient routines. . . . (Susan, TLC co-facilitator)

Being a co-facilitator and a team teacher involved new challenges, unknown tasks, and risk taking, as well as learning about collaborating with peers. It meant learning how to hold professional conversations beyond the informal, occasional exchanges on the run during lunchtime or before and after school.

Throughout the TLC experience, co-facilitators and guest teachers emphasized the value of peer dialogue, especially because they were conversing about a concrete collaborative effort.

The chance to work in each other's rooms enriches the professional dialogue immensely. We are able to discuss specific students and lessons at a much deeper level than if we are just describing our experiences. (Betty, TLC co-facilitator)

The fact that teachers get together to talk does not guarantee deep and thoughtful conversations. There are certain necessary conditions to promote in-depth reflection about teaching: teachers need to trust, support, and respect each other and need to share the motivation to further their knowledge and improve their practice by reading and studying together (Guskey, 1995; Smylie, 1995).

Because of our shared passion for second language learners, our common professional readings, and our work with the same group of students, Mary [my co-facilitator] and I were able to have deep conversations about our practice and were able to reflect on the implications of different approaches with second language learners. By having a safe place to turn to for support, I know I was far more reflective and took more risks in trying new things than I would have had I been working by myself. Mary was there to offer encouragement, ask questions, and give support. (Elizabeth, TLC co-facilitator)

Deep and thoughtful conversations were engendered by the co-facilitators jointly reading books and articles that spoke to their needs and that offered practical solutions. For example, in our seminar study of *Learning to Learn in a Second Language* (Gibbons, 1991), we re-visited the importance of language objectives, considered in our previous conversations to be a key component of effective sheltered instruction. Gibbons defines language objectives as the functions, structures, and vocabulary that students will need in order to accomplish their work and the planning for the instruction that will give them access to that knowledge. For second language learners, the subtleties of language and text structure are often not readily apparent,

and do not become so without conscious intervention by teachers. First language learners who have not acquired these language functions and structures through usage and experience will also benefit from this instruction.

For Elizabeth, who was teaching Spanish language learners in a dual language classroom, providing a rich language environment for her students was essential. The explicit teaching of language that Gibbons described helped Elizabeth and Mary consider that this might be the scaffold students needed to further their successful language learning and refine their skill and fluency in reading and writing. The teachers realized that their students might well grasp the general concept or task they were working toward, but lack the smaller, specific pieces that would get them there successfully. Elizabeth and Mary decided to incorporate specific language instruction into their planning, actually adding a new place in their lesson plan book to identify language objectives for lessons and units of study. This meant closer attention to specific student strengths and needs as well as to the characteristic functions, structures, and vocabulary of the texts students were being asked to read and write. At the same time, Elizabeth noted, "The only way I will include these in my teaching is if I am looking for authentic, purposeful situations where students need to use this language, and then I will give them explicit instruction so they can understand the subtle differences."

A TEACHING/LEARNING COMMUNITY

Successful professional development goes beyond the classroom and involves the extended community (Wenger, 1999). At the same time

Research on Professional Development

Over the past decade, research on professional development has focused mainly on characteristics researchers and practitioners believe are important to its effectiveness. These factors include teachers' inquiries, content and pedagogical knowledge, the provision of sufficient time and resources, collegial and collaborative exchange, long-term engagement, and school-based study groups. More recent studies look at the content of these professional development communities, including challenges teachers face in light of today's political realities and mandated one-size-fits-all practices.

Long, S. (2004). Separating Rhetoric from Reality: Supporting Teachers in Negotiating beyond the Status Quo. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55, 141–153.

This article describes the experiences of teachers involved in long-term professional development within two 3-year studies. The thick description illuminates barriers teachers find to negotiating beyond the status quo and asks teacher educators to take an honest look at how they might work with teachers to effect change.

Nieto, S. (2003). Challenging Current Notions of "Highly Qualified Teachers" through Work in a Teachers' Inquiry Group. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54, 386–398.

A small group of teacher researchers met for a year to explore the question of what keeps teachers going. Rather than "best practice" or prescribed pedagogy, this group found that a combination of interrelated conditions and values keep excellent teachers going, including love, autobiography, hope, anger, intellectual work, and the ability to shape the future.

Karen Smith

that co-facilitators were creating a community of learners in their multilingual and multicultural classrooms, they were also engaged in the construction of a community of learners including parents and other teachers and students at school. TLC opened time and space, within a school, for teachers to have ongoing, reflective, collegial conversations about a subject of urgent professional concern—improving language and literacy instruction for English language learners. This motivated them to further their un-

derstanding of the complex articulation of a multiplicity of factors in the learning process. They were prompted to inquire about culture and its impact on classroom interaction through both student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships.

In order to influence the school culture, sustained opportunities for teachers to study and share as a community need to be created. At a number of the TLC sites, established literacy study groups provided a place for professional study and dia-

logue that coincided with the aim of creating a broader Teaching/Learning Community. The discussion in teachers' study groups helped to create a community through the collective construction of knowledge. "I was curious to see the components of balanced literacy (guided reading, shared reading, etc.) used with ESL students. This was the most beneficial part of the TLC experience for me. I was able to observe other teachers incorporating some of the literacy components that we have studied over the years" (Michael, Guest Teacher). Teachers acquired a common language around literacy and language development as they learned about literacy instruction through ongoing reflection and theory exploration grounded in their own practice.

Seminar discussions, the book on sheltering (Gibbons, 1991), Karin's article on sheltering in a district newsletter, assignments to observe one another's teaching, and planning sessions and demonstrations by Dee and Karin in our classroom helped to move me into the place where I could transfer theory into practice. (Joan, TLC co-facilitator)

CHALLENGES IN THE TLC PROJECT

Part of the success of this pilot project was dealing with ongoing challenges faced by co-facilitators and guest teachers as we moved back and forth between theory and practice. These challenges existed on a number of levels:

- learning about team teaching and then having to implement it;
- learning about collegial dialogues and then having professional conversations that moved beyond the superficial;
- studying and constructing concepts about literacy learning in TLC

seminars and attempting to implement those concepts with guest teachers.

These responsibilities were on top of the demands of teaching students in the TLC classroom.

Even though guest teachers had a full week in the TLC and the co-facilitators were available on-site for further assistance, many felt that the time spent in the TLC could have been longer. They reasoned that it took some time to develop trust and a common understanding, both of which are essential ingredients to professional conversations that probe the foundations of one's values, beliefs, and attitudes toward teaching. Discussions would often remain on the surface, reflecting the isolating nature of teaching and the feeling of insecurity perpetuated by a system in which teachers are often being scrutinized and judged.

There was also a tension between co-facilitators not wanting to be seen as "experts" but rather as collaborators in learning and their awareness that they had important knowledge to convey and expertise to share. At times they could be explicit, but at other times they wanted guest teachers to come to their own understandings. Cofacilitators also saw themselves as co-learners with guest teachers.

Some of our guest experiences went really well, but others were only okay. I tend to feel responsible if the guest teachers' time with us doesn't go too well. My first instinct is to jump in and try to fix things. But I'm learning that it is often better if you let teachers and students come to their own conclusions. (June, TLC co-facilitator)

This was sometimes reflected in differences between what guest teachers wanted to do in the class and

the broader objective of the TLC—to focus on literacy acquisition of English language learners.

We also learned the importance of the administration supporting this type of effort if the school as a whole is going to be transformed into a Teaching/Learning Community. This remains a challenge, as teachers and administrators alike are buffeted by changing dictates at the district, state, and federal levels and remarkable demands on their time. An administrative issue that received a lot of attention from the very beginning of the project was the funding of the extra classroom teacher for the TLC. While the district was able to release five district-assigned resource teachers for the initial two-year pilot, the district and individual school sites would have to reprioritize their budgets if TLCs were to be placed in all of the district's schools and bring about a systemwide transformation in practice. For the schools, this would have to include taking a fresh look at aspects of site budgets, such as how Title I monies and bilingual funds were being allocated. In the five sites school administrators began looking at ways to provide an additional FTE (full-time equivalent) to maintain the TLC when the district's two-year commitment of the five resource teachers expired. While the TLC model has not been adopted districtwide, it continues to provide a model for effective professional development.

CONCLUSION

As we put theory into practice, we relied on co-facilitators to use their knowledge and experience to collaborate with guest teachers in meeting the needs facing them in their classrooms. We developed the TLC model based on the kinds of

knowledge that teachers "offer about the realities of classroom life and the lives of children and about the efficacy of theories, models, and methodologies that teachers are directed to implement in their classrooms" (Gallas, 2001, p. 507). Traditional approaches to professional development that do not listen to teachers' perspectives often do not get to the heart of the problem, and even if problems are identified, solutions are not long-lasting. These approaches leave very little room for thought or creativity and develop neither knowledge nor curriculum.

In the past 20 years, teachers have seen an explosion of new ideas and programs for improving classroom instruction. Extensive in-service training initiatives have become the traditional vehicle for conveying new pedagogical strategies. Unfortunately, teachers have typically been viewed as recipients rather than as decision-makers or active participants in staff development programs. Staff development is often seen as 'training' or 'in-servicing' in which experts teach teachers predetermined instructional methods. (Dalton & Moir, 1992)

In such professional development, the voices of teachers are silenced and their everyday experiences are discounted. In contrast, the TLC model of professional development builds on the concept of *teachers teaching teachers* and exhibits the essential characteristics of effective professional development. Our hope is that the experience with this project will encourage and inform other professional development efforts aimed at building teaching/learning communities in which culturally and linguistically diverse students are provided with opportunities to successfully acquire English language literacy.

Authors' Note

The narrative with Kay is a re-creation based on actual TLC experiences. The names of the students and the teachers in this article are pseudonyms. The project grew out of a joint University of New Mexico and Albuquerque Public School District task force formed to ascertain ways in which the university teacher education programs and the district professional development programs could effectively prepare all teachers to educate linguistically and culturally diverse students. At the conclusion of the task force, Mahn secured a Title VII USDE Training for All Teachers Grant and, in collaboration with the Department of Language and Cultural Equity of the Albuquerque School District, developed the TLC project to meet this goal. We would like to thank all of the TLC co-facilitators who made this project possible and the many APS administrators who helped on this project. A special thanks goes out to Karin Rich and Michele Minnis for their thoughtful dedication to this project.

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