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# Creating Conditions for Transforming Practicing K-12 Mainstream Teachers of English Language Learners


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# ***Creating Conditions for Transforming Practicing K-12 Mainstream Teachers of English Language Learners***

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Critical incident reflection journal writing provides a rich source for identifying high impact components of Project Alianza, a graduate course for mainstream secondary teachers funded by a US Department of Education Title III Professional Development grant. In this narrative pilot study featuring one strand of existing data, the co-authors, who are also co-instructors and co-researchers, begin the first rounds of analysis to identify emerging key conditions and contributing factors featured within specialized graduate courses for encouraging dispositional change and professional efficacy toward English language learners (ELLs) in practicing K-12 mainstream educators. Using Mezirow's adult transformational learning theory (1991), Kegan's stage theory of development (1994), and Kegan and Lahey's notion of resistance to change (2001) as a conceptual lens, the researchers conduct narrative textual analysis to consider implications for professional developers and continuing education instructors who hope to encourage the development of inclusive school and classroom environments for English language learners. This study also serves as a pilot for future study of the larger existing data pool.

In 2008, we (Adams and Brooks) designed and taught the first Project Alianza courses, offered free of charge to practicing middle and high school teachers from four local school districts identified as partnership districts in conjunction with a U.S. Department of Education Title III National Professional Development Grant and hosted by the College of Education at Butler University, a small, private liberal arts university in Indianapolis, Indiana. These two courses represent a year-long commitment by volunteer participants who completed for-credit graduate classes that include studies in inclusive schools, basic second language acquisition, second language literacy development for adolescents,

and content-based instruction for students who are English language learners (ELLs). Participants engaged in inquiry projects that result in locally designed and implemented school change projects culminating from research conducted by participants with ELLs from the partnership schools. Between Fall 2008 and Spring 2011, approximately 255 practicing secondary educators from four partnership school districts completed the two courses associated with Project Alianza.

The partnership school districts were selected by Brooks, the principal investigator (PI) of the grant, by virtue of the ELL enrollment data, published standardized test results for ELLs, and the district's expressed commitment to engage in meaningful ways at a central office and building leadership level with Brooks and Adams, the lead instructor and project manager of the grant. In the year prior to the first cohort of teacher participants, Brooks and Adams spent significant time meeting with curriculum directors, assistant superintendents, English as Second Language (ESL) directors, and secondary administrators for the purpose of building strong, collegial relationships, examining district enrollment and standardized testing data, requesting feedback on the emerging course design, and providing a basic foundation for the coursework in which local secondary teachers would engage the following year in the first cohort. The investment of time with administrators resulted in our developing a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the local culture in each district, which in turn resulted in the development of curriculum based on local needs rather than university assumptions.

Additional outcomes of the rich partnership approach include

- strong district leader and building administrator awareness of the coursework and the needs of the participating teachers,
- deeper, more sophisticated contextual understandings and stronger commitments from all partners, and
- projects that reflect more robust commitments to improved instruction and advocacy for ELLs.

Because the courses are taught on site after hours at a local school within each partnership district (instead of asking teacher participants to drive to the university), the result is a teacher participant cohort with a strong district identity that keeps course content in constant relationship to and in tension with local classroom teaching. An additional key factor is that we are both former secondary teachers from one of the partnership districts and bring our own unique experiences, perspectives, and local histories to the course instruction. This deep relationship between the university and partnership school districts provides a space in which the faculties can co-construct professional practices that are embedded in educational theory and research.

As stated previously, participation in this project requires a two semester commitment from teachers, during which teacher participants meet once a week

for nearly the entire school year. As we will speculate later within the analysis portion of this article, we believe that time is a key factor of the success of the program. In exit data, teacher participants overwhelmingly cite time to think, talk, and collaborate as one of the most meaningful components of the project, often adding that teachers seldom are provided this kind of time within the constraints of the school day. The fall semester's course focuses on the creation of inclusive school communities and classrooms, while the spring semester turns toward more explicit instructional support for the development of academic language and the enrichment of content knowledge for ELLs. During class meetings, teacher participants engage in pair and small group activities called *protocols*, many of which originate from the work of Critical Friends Groups<sup>1</sup> or CFG's. These pair and group activities ensure that each teacher participant gets to know every other participant from the district over time, creating another strong bond often absent between teachers from different schools. Teacher participants also engage in teacher action research that culminates in the development and implementation of a school change project within each school represented within the cohort.

The graduate level courses in which teacher participants enroll are taught by Adams and Brooks and feature assignments tailored for the specific needs of secondary mainstream content area teachers of ELLs. Course readings are selected which are both relevant and accessible to the teacher participants; these course reading selections have been fine-tuned over time by feedback from each cohort and by Brooks' and Adams' observations of the impact of each selected text.

Each semester's culminating assignment is a writing assignment called the *critical incident reflection journal*, an assignment that was inspired by the work of Murray (1995); each teacher participant follows a prescribed writing template designed to invite different levels and kinds of observation, description, analysis, multiple perspectives, and explicit connections to course readings and activities. These critical incident reflection journals, now accumulated over three years' worth of cohorts, provide a rich source of data and insight into the meaning making, developmental growth, and personal learning of each teacher participant. The present study is the result of the early examination of these journals and focuses on early initial analysis of a portion of the writing produced by approximately 255 teacher participants, resulting in more than 500 critical incident journal writing samples amassed since 2008. The results of this pilot study will inform future research and analysis of the writing samples on a larger scale.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Deep, sustained change in educational practices only occurs when teachers change their beliefs, instructional materials, and approaches to teaching (Fullan, 1999; 2007). Too many school change initiatives start with professional development

focused on improving teachers' pedagogical skills without engaging in a process of reculturing a school (Fullan, 2007). These school improvement initiatives often treat surface level issues without addressing the deep, systemic issues that perpetuate educational inequalities for marginalized students (Eubanks, Parish, & Smith, 1997). Traditional methods-based professional development initiatives are incomplete when teachers do not engage in deep conversation, critical self-reflection, and professional problem solving as regular components of their professional lives (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007). Teachers need systemic support to engage in these activities so that they can make meaning together in order to make significant changes in their professional practices.

Our theories and research on the transformation of beliefs and professional practices are informed by adult learning theory, most specifically:

- Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991);
- Kegan's theory of "orders of consciousness" and constructive developmentalism (Kegan, 1994); and
- Kegan and Lahey's theory of immunity to change (2001).

While it is beyond the scope of this study to delve deeply into adult learning and transformational learning theory, a basic understanding of adult development is helpful and has informed our own teaching practice, as well as provided us with insights into the conditions in which adults are most likely to learn, change, and grow. To that end, we provide here a rudimentary, foundational understanding of these theories. We will turn first to what has been most useful to us from Jack Mezirow's (1991) landmark text, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*.

Within the purpose of considering adult learning, Mezirow (1991) defines transformative learning as "reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes" (1991, p. 223). Mezirow first became interested in transformative adult learning as he observed his wife's experience of returning to graduate school later in her adult life. He speculates that adult education (specifically graduate school) provides an environment in which participants are able to "become more imaginative, intuitive, and critically reflective of assumptions; to become more rational through effective participation in critical discourse; and to acquire meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, integrative, discriminating, and open to alternative points of view" (1991, p. 224). Our grant course content was developed in an attempt to create these conditions, specifically focusing on three elements identified by Mezirow as primary actions in which transformative learning happens:

- Excavating and naming assumptions;
- Exploring and taking on multiple perspectives; and
- Engaging in critical reflection.

In addition to course activities, protocols, and text-based discussions, the critical incident journals feature specific attention to naming personal, often previously unconscious assumptions held by the individual and to identifying the possible multiple perspectives held by other people involved in the incident selected for description. Mezirow (1991) further elaborates, explaining that transformation is

the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

One of the identified goals of the project and the graduate courses is to create conditions in which teacher participants uncover unconscious biases or prejudices held against ELLs, biases which, when unexcavated, can result in an unconscious decision to “under teach” students (Delpit, 1995).

Mezirow (1991; 2000) and Kegan (1994; 2000) both use constructive developmentalism to identify and describe the big block stages of human development through which most humans pass at fairly predictable points during young adult and older adult development. The *socialized mind* stage is Mezirow’s term for the time in which young people make decisions based upon external authority (e.g., parents, teachers, community leaders exerting behaviors or discouraging disobedience out of fear of consequences) and when older teens or young adults begin to see themselves as members of the larger community. As a person enters the mid-twenties, Mezirow (1991) believes the *self-authoring mind* period begins, often continuing into middle age for many. The self-authoring mind locates authority internally (e.g., choosing to conform to internalized rules of behavior because it is the “right thing to do” instead of merely avoiding punishment). Mezirow claims that many adults do not progress beyond the self-authoring mind stage, perhaps due to a lack of need or a lack of opportunity.

The *self-transformed mind*, if it develops at all, emerges during middle age. The focus of authority becomes more complex in the self-transformed mind state, and the adult becomes aware of multiple sources of decision-making authority and understands that there are multiple possible realities. Instead of seeing only one right and one wrong possible choice, the adult faces a complex decision-making process based on the careful consideration of multiple possibilities and in the face of potential disapproval. In other words, the adult understands that what is “right” under one set of circumstances might be wrong under another, and accepts that other people in other circumstances might make a completely different decision for equally valid reasons. The self-transformed mind is capable of imagining and accepting a multicultural world and multiple viewpoints simultaneously.

## Kegan's Orders of Mind

Kegan (2000) refers to his stages of development as *orders of mind*, which are based on children's' evolving ability to distinguish between the subject (the child) and an object (everything and everyone else). As Eberly, Rand and O'Conner (2007) summarize,

one can think of the first and second orders as egocentric (me), the third order as ethnocentric (us), and the fourth and fifth orders as worldcentric (all of us). If teachers grow from egocentric to ethnocentric, they don't stop caring about oneself, but that care and concern is now extended to families, the community, nation, and so on. With the growth from ethnocentric to worldcentric, that care and understanding is now extended to all people regardless of race, class, creed, gender, etc. The higher level of development offers teachers greater flexibility in navigating the increasingly complex territory of our educational system. ( n.p.)

Our friend and colleague, Ross Peterson-Veach (2010), has identified three types of learning based on his understandings of Mezirow and Kegan's work:

- Transmissional learning, in which the learner is shown or told new information or skills;
- Transactional learning, in which the learners exchange information, experiences, or skills with other learners; and
- Transformational learning, in which the learner's perspective shifts.

The third type of learning, transformational learning, is what Elmore (2004), Eubanks, Parish, and Smith (1997), and Fullan (Fullan, Watson, & Kilcher, 1997; Fullan, 2007) indicate is necessary for deep implementation and sustained educational change to occur.

Kegan (1994) takes care to distinguish between the root meanings embedded within the words *information* and *transformation*. Kegan claims that, "This kind of learning cannot be accomplished through *informational* training, the acquisition of skills, but only through *transformational* education, a "leading out" from an established habit of mind" (p. 232). We observe that this "leading out" is the root meaning of the Latin word, *educare*, from which we get our English word, education. Kegan (2000) elaborates, saying

At the heart of a form is a way of knowing (what Mezirow calls a "frame of reference"); thus genuinely transformational learning is always to some extent an epistemological change rather than merely a change in behavioral repertoire or an increase in quantity or fund of knowledge (p. 48).

Kegan's (2000) word study of the word *trans-form-ative*, points out that it is the form itself that is changed, and *not the content*. Kegan offers the metaphor of informative learning as pouring new liquid (content) into an existing cup. What is poured into the cup might change, but the cup maintains its shape. By contrast, transformative learning creates conditions in which *the cup itself changes size, shape, color, etc. as a result of the content that is poured into it*.

While this simple metaphor is helpful, the reality is that moving from one level of subjectivity to another is painful, chaotic, and often associated with a crisis event in the person's life (death of a loved one, divorce, massive failure, violent incident, any kind of life-altering trauma). During the shift between objectivity and subjectivity, we become suddenly sensitized to the existence of beliefs that hold us prisoner and to which we have previously been blindly obedient. At this point adults are poised to question and critique these norms and practices which were previously unquestionable. While many experience a liberating effect from discarding old beliefs to take on new ones, Kegan soberly reminds us that the grief experienced by those moving between orders, particularly between the third and fourth orders, is quite real and often carries along significant personal consequences. Kegan (1994) emphasizes that,

In loosening our identification with our former loyalties we at once seek to preserve this distance and are frightened by it. Our conflict is noticeable to us now and useful in preserving an emerging differentiation. But since we are still more identified with our third order construction than the emerging fourth order construction, we also experience the conflict from the point of view of the third order. We see ourselves abandoning our psychological duty or sacred oath. We may feel guilty about those who may not be safe or able to survive without us. We may be fearful for them or for ourselves now bereft of the protections afforded by our faith. Most of all we may feel a basic sense of wrongness or disorientation at having become so "plural", entertaining, albeit fearfully or guiltily, so many new possibilities. (p. 263)

In our project courses, we have challenged practicing teachers to identify family values, religious beliefs, political, and racial biases, etc. in order to understand the identities they have taken on in this third order of mind development, and we ask them to make conscious decisions about whether they will continue to hold to those beliefs in the face of new, potentially transforming knowledge. Kegan (1994) claims that possibly 75% of American adults do not move into the fourth order of mind. His book, *In Over our Heads* (1994) is largely a project of demonstrating the impossibility of requiring adults to work, think, and perform from a fourth order ability level if they have only achieved third order development.



If Kegan is correct, the professional implications of this idea are profound for anyone seeking to broaden the worldview of adults. This concept explains the often baffling and frustrating exchanges with adults who are in the third order of mind stage and who cannot yet readily consider the possibility of multiple perspectives or multiple possible realities. In light of this theory, it is therefore a bit unrealistic to expect a 20-year old to bring a critical perspective to the institutions that are still shaping her. In our work with practicing teachers, we now understand better the shocked reactions we have observed in teachers when we ask them to bring a critical perspective to the institution of the school or even their own classrooms.

### **Kegan and Lahey: Immunity to Change**

Kegan and Lahey's theory of "immunity to change" (2001) builds upon Mezirow's transformational learning theory, identifying what results when adults are asked to function at orders of mind they have not yet reached. Kegan's stage theory suggests that humans have the potential to progress through five orders of mind; in Kegan's theory, all adults do not necessarily move through all five stages. Kegan and his colleagues' (Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008) research demonstrates that,

We may unwittingly hold expectations that adults, educators, or even change leaders will automatically possess these capacities...research with large samples...suggests that roughly one-half to two-thirds of the adult population in the United States has not yet fully developed self-authoring capacities (Kegan, 1994, 2001). Thus, many change leaders in the education sector likely face a gap between the demands of the role and their own mental capacities. These demands are more complex than individuals' abilities to meet them. (p. 440)

Kegan and Lahey (2001) believe these demands cause adults to cling to "competing commitments" in which self-professed goals are actually denied by quite reasonable, self-preserving fears and assumptions. For example, a teacher might express a desire to change her teaching approach, but subconscious fears of loss of control or of peer disapproval undermine her progress toward implementation of change. Kegan and Lahey (2001) claim that while this teacher "holds both commitments, neither is able to dominate, thus creating a kind of "dynamic equilibrium" (p.5) that preserves the current system and sustains [the teacher's] Immunity to Change" (Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008, p. 448). Kegan and Lahey (2001) note that successful interruption of this immunity to change is best accomplished over time and with the assistance of a coach, a therapist, or a teacher, and is not generally achieved in one brief "aha!" moment.<sup>2</sup>

## **Implications of Mezirow, Kegan, and Kegan and Lahey's Theories for Our Project**

As we stated earlier, the course work and the two assigned critical incident reflection journals are based upon three practices we believe create conditions in which practicing teachers, most of whom we identify as being in the third order of mind (Kegan, 1994; 2000) or self-authoring mind stage of adult development, (Mezirow, 1991) experience the necessary conditions in which to experience transformation. To review, these practices are:

- Excavating and naming assumptions;
- Exploring and taking on multiple perspectives; and
- Engaging in critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991).

In light of our understandings of the developmental needs of adult practicing teachers, we have put Mezirow, Kegan, and Kegan and Lahey's theories to work to create graduate course conditions in which we seek to not only choose carefully the content (the liquid) we pour, but more importantly create conditions in which the teachers (the cups) themselves are changed, to return to Kegan's (2000) metaphor. In short, we seek to present texts, narratives, experiences, and encounters which generate dissonance and crisis-like conditions in which teacher participants name and question their current self-authoring/third order assumptions, biases, beliefs, and practices in order to push them toward self-transforming mind/fourth order development.

As we have taught these courses within our project cohorts, we have indeed observed and experienced the immunity to change Kegan and Lahey (2001) identify and take seriously Mezirow's (1991) reminder that questioning what we believe and our associations is personally painful. We see ourselves as more than instructors, often choosing to take on the additional roles of coach and even therapist (Kegan & Lahey, 2001) as we support and encourage those who wrestle with this transformation. The project extends over an entire academic year because we understand that this transformative growth takes time.

The two critical incident reflection journals written by each teacher participant provide a structured processing opportunity in which teacher participants are asked to put into writing an incident which reveals their current thoughts, feelings, and actions in light of course readings, activities, discussions, and projects. These critical incident reflection journals provide a window into teacher participants' developmental progress, one that allows us to identify key high impact components of the courses so that we as course creators and instructors understand which instructional practices are most likely to promote transformation of teacher participants.

## METHODS OF ANALYSIS

After initial review of a subset of the available journals (two years' worth of participant critical incident reflection journals ( $n=135$ ), ) we selected text portions that connected personal change to specific course components (e.g., specific texts, activities, discussions, or interactions from the course). We then sorted the text portions into emergent categories using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). During this pilot stage of the study, we limited this coding to axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). This axial coding resulted in 212 selected excerpts, which were then sorted into five large categories, two of which will be the focus of this article. The two selected categories are:

- School Change Projects
- Course Interactions.

These categories became the subject of our analysis and our interpretation in light of adult transformation theory.

## INTERPRETATION OF ANALYSIS

### School change projects

Early in the first semester, each teacher participant is required to interview one ELL from their school. Many teacher participants report this is their first significant conversation with an ELL; frequently teachers admit this with a bit of embarrassment, stating that they had subconsciously avoided talking with ELLs out of fear of language barriers or fear of their inability to relate to students. One participant reacted with surprise after a day-long excursion with ELLs, expressing his amazement at realizing that the ELLs were “just normal kids like all the others.” Another noted, “For years I have been afraid to talk to ELL students. Yes, I said afraid. There have been many times that I have ducked into rooms to avoid meeting them in the hallways.” Others saw immediate changes in their classroom and instructional relationships with the students whom they interviewed:

Following the interview, Gustavo<sup>3</sup> did more work when he was in class. He asked me for assistance in a quiet manner. He always said hello to me in the morning and when he saw me in the hallway. We were starting to build the kind of teacher to student relationship that will help students thrive. I also was able to see past his exterior and really see his struggles and strengths. Without my initiating the discussion outside of class time, this much progress would have not happened in class.

Interviewing struggling ELLs provided the initial impetus for connecting with an ELL student for many of the teacher participants. This foundational experience provided teachers with the confidence and understanding that they needed to develop a different relationship with their ELL students. Once they saw that they could relate to them and the students welcomed their overtures, many teachers overcame their fear of initiating a relationship with their ELL students. These interviews also were a data collection opportunity for teacher participants, who then took what they learned about the individual student and compiled their observations with building partners in order to create a school change project that directly addressed student needs that emerged from the interview data.

The resulting school change project proposals provided yet another opportunity for rich engagements with ELL students and, often, their parents. In one local school change project group, significant personal changes were visible in the reflections written by those teacher participants. This excerpt exemplifies the prior assumptions some teacher participants held about ELLs and their parents prior to their first parent meeting:

I had a conversation with someone else in the class and they were really impacted by these [school change project] events and expressed how they would be ashamed to even talk about how she and her husband had responded [to immigrants] in the past. Not only this conversation, but also many other chances that I have had to interact with those whose eyes are being opened to a whole new world through this class, has really shown me that I need to be much more of a voice, help others see reality, and give people access to the truth. Assumptions and misperceptions can really build up unnecessary walls that prevent healing and inhibit extraordinary change from occurring. This goes for me, who made obvious assumptions about most “Americans” and those who had misperceptions about illegal immigrants and those from other countries.

One of the most important components of the school change project is that teachers engaged in the project together as a school community to build supportive relationships with one another and to challenge one another’s prior assumptions. Working together, socially constructing meaning, and contributing diverse skills, talents, and understandings provided a strong model of the kinds of teaching we hope to see teacher participants enact in their own classrooms. Strong, new relationships created a sense of safety for greater risk taking and support for deep examination of fears and underlying assumptions about ELLs and parents. These relationships often were new for teachers who might have taught in the same building for years without any significant collaboration prior to Project Alianza:

The most meaningful thing that has come out of Alianza has been the relationships I have built within my building. We have built a cohesive group that laughs, cries, shares ideas, challenges, and improves together. We have opened the door to very uncomfortable topics in our school and with our kids but we have also begun to change them for the better. There is strength in numbers.

Additionally, teacher participants indicate that time is a major contributing factor in creating, supporting, and maintaining supportive relationships between teacher participants. Time is rarely protected within the school day for uninterrupted discussions among colleagues; meeting weekly after school for an academic year and engaging in school change project groups provide focused and extensive time for teachers to talk about their learning and their work.

Other participants indicate that the school change project caused them to see themselves as part of an emerging school leadership group, often causing teachers to begin to identify themselves as advocates and resources on behalf of ELLs:

Being a member of Project Alianza has helped me see that a community of teachers can do so much more for our students. In addition, Project Alianza has opened doors for me to discuss ENL concerns in the most positive way I can with people who can actually change things. As a result of Project Alianza I've had the opportunity to communicate more with administration, other staff, the director of curriculum, and other members of the [school district] administration office who make financial decisions. For the first time this year, I feel like [the district] cares and they want to help through our limited resources. I honestly feel like we're trying to do more and we're asking how to do it better. I admit that I was part of the problem for thinking so negatively about how our district views ENL students.

Our emerging themes regarding the school change projects are helping us to understand the role that project-based learning can play in transforming the culture of a school as well as in helping teachers to develop the capacity and agency to support ELL students. The teachers who engaged in these projects often developed the confidence and skills necessary to more effectively teach and advocate for their ELL students.

### **Course Interactions**

Teacher collaboration on the school change projects, as well as engagement in provocative, critical text-based small group discussions provided the context for teachers to support each other and challenge each other's thinking. Several younger teachers with only one or two years of experience were surprised and

gratified to find themselves leading and facilitating professional development sessions in their schools alongside seasoned veterans:

The learning community allowed for further discussion, practicing of the protocols, learning new protocols, and an examination of how we were all applying the text and what we were learning. This group further became the force of an incredible change at [our school]. The information and protocols has gone beyond Project Alianza and to many other staff members as our team as shared and taken on leadership roles. For me, this role is where I developed. I feel that I grew to be not only a teacher and program developer, but I have a turned a corner to being a respected leader, community organizer, and cultural-changer. By developing this onsite group a foundation for future Alianza student support and recruitment has been established as well as a framework for the work to continue over the long term versus it ending when the grant is finished.

These new roles indeed resulted in the first Project Alianza cohorts providing strong encouragement and motivation for future teacher participants to commit to forthcoming cohorts. Young, enthusiastic teachers frequently served to inspire confidence in their more seasoned counterparts, sometimes resulting in strong, personal mentoring relationships in which both parties benefitted professionally. Older, more experienced teachers reported examining their own biases and assumptions about ELLs and their parents:

I have heard many comments from respected colleagues and have allowed myself to fall prey to the same bias; that the parents just don't care because they haven't taken the time to learn the language though they came here for various reasons. I have used this as an excuse not to take the time to figure out ways to reach them, because there is a language difference between us. This doesn't sit well with me because I never thought of myself as having this kind of bias. The various readings in this course, and the conversations with my colleagues who are taking this course, have really opened my eyes to this bias and made me want to do something about it.

Teacher participants were pushed to examine themselves in light of course readings, course discussions, and emerging personal relationships with other Project Alianza participants. Several reflected on their growing awareness of the implications of race and white privilege (McIntosh, 1988):

In fact, earlier this semester, I was discussing this with another student in our Butler class. We were discussing the articles about black and white identities. I was telling her how naïve I feel as a result of my

background. [She] is African American and has therefore grown up dealing with other issues than I did. She asked me if she was the first black friend I had ever had. I had to think for a few moments, and then I had to honestly say that yes, she is the first real black friend I ever had. I do not feel as though this is due to any racial prejudices that I have but rather due to the environments in which I grew up. However, it does help explain how I have a hard time relating to and understanding some of my students. Many times, we just don't know what we don't know. Our prejudice and misunderstandings can be unintentional. When I first started teaching, I didn't understand a lot of things about my students. Although I really cared about them, I sometimes did things that weren't in their best interest because I just didn't know any different.

Even though this teacher is in the process of questioning the impact of her white privilege and her own racial identity, this quote exemplifies the impact of the structured, challenging discourse created by the small group discussions in which participants engage during course sessions. These discussions are most provocative and transformative when teachers from multiple backgrounds, races, perspectives, and generations discuss course readings from their own perspectives and listen deeply to each other's stories and perspectives. These challenging discussions do not happen haphazardly or accidentally; we do not automatically know how to talk with one another in these ways, but we must instead learn to use structures that will open safe spaces in which each voice is expected, necessary, and heard. Turn-taking mechanisms, or protocols<sup>4</sup>, ensure that no one voice dominates the discussion, that no one is silenced, and that multiple learning preferences are honored. This practice serves as yet another model for valuing the multiple perspectives and assets ELLs bring with them into classrooms:

Teachers have commented over and over that this has been the best start in their careers. I have seen agreements made with kids, compass points on student rosters, and numerous protocols used in the first few days of school. When things should be crazy, the teachers have really been focused and have used so much from our week.

Not only have the protocols been useful in helping teacher participants learn to engage in meaningful conversations, but these protocols were taken directly back into classrooms and implemented with students, becoming infectious as other teachers noticed and wanted to know more about how to engage students in productive and constructive small group engagements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS

From this early analysis, we are learning about the power of teachers engaging in collaborative projects that emerge from student-identified needs within a structure that provides time and opportunity to transform the ways that teachers see themselves in schools. This transformation in teacher roles is important because in many schools English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioners are often viewed as the only educators responsible for the education of ELL students, and content area teachers are viewed as having no role or little responsibility for educating these students (Brooks, Adams, & Morita Mullaney, 2010). Yet ELL students need content area teachers who see themselves as having the capacity and the responsibility for teaching and advocating for their needs. School change projects pushed Project Alianza teacher participants to take on expanded roles as ELL advocates and teacher leaders who can inspire and support their colleagues for improved instruction of and interaction with ELLs. As teachers change their beliefs and professional practices, they share these pedagogical and personal shifts with their colleagues, resulting in a changed school culture that more deeply appreciates ELLs as contributing members of the school community and recognizes their academic potential.

We believe that the school change projects and the course interactions in Project Alianza provide dissonance, time, space, and opportunity to begin making the shift from Mezirow's (1991) *self-authoring mind* stage and Kegan's (1994) third order stage to the *self-transformed mind*, (1991) or fourth order. The conversations with colleagues and students allow teachers to explore multiple realities and add personal voice to key theories and research. Throughout their critical reflection writing, teachers identified the interactions with each other and with their ELL students as the impetus for making changes in their beliefs and professional practices. Furthermore, the school change projects provided critical incidents that encourage teachers to step out of their comfort zones in order to try new professional activities and become advocates for their ELL students. These incidents caused many teachers to rethink their roles and relationships in regard to educating ELL students.

We conclude this early analysis by turning back to Kegan's cup metaphor. We are not under any illusions that through one concentrated, tailored graduate school experience we successfully changed the cups' (the teacher participants') basic, elemental properties, even with our carefully selected liquids (course content and course structures). There is, however, ample early analysis evidence that our approaches and the conditions created within the Project Alianza experience have caused small cracks and fissures to develop, cracks which might continue to widen and ultimately burst open as teacher participants examine their biases, try on new advocacy identities, and explore thoughtful pedagogical approaches.



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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For more information about Critical Friends Groups and protocols, please visit [www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org)

<sup>2</sup> To see the Immunity to Change map and some examples, please see the Harvard Business Review article, which may be accessed at [http://www.harvardmacy.org/Upload/pdf/Kegan article.pdf](http://www.harvardmacy.org/Upload/pdf/Kegan%20article.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> All names of teacher participants and students have been replaced with pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on protocols, please visit [www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org)