Understanding How Principles of Professional Development Shape Bilingual Education

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**Introduction**

Bilingual education is characterized by the education of students in two languages with the goal of having students not just master concepts, but achieve mastery in both languages (Escamilla, Butvilofsky, & Hopewell, 2017). As we enter into a more globalized world, more and more students who speak one language at home and another at school or want to engage in other cultures would profit from bilingual education. Bilingual education has shown to provide benefits for students in a wide variety of areas, from cognitive to economic to academic (Lachance 2018). But as with any form of education, bilingual educators must be willing to learn and improve; often in a professional development setting. Professional development is important for all educators because it can improve student outcomes (Bayar, 2014). Educators in all subjects are exposed to professional development in order to improve, but due to concerns of remaining true to the goals of bilingual education, bilingual educators must be exposed to effective professional development specific to their field.

Therefore, this project will examine respected professional development models and principles in order to identify an effective model of professional development within the context of bilingual education that will strengthen educators use of effective teaching strategies. In order to achieve this goal, this essay will focus on first understanding bilingual education. Then it will identify defining principles in professional development in a conversation between different research studies and evaluate models for effective use. Following this, the project will seek to incorporate bilingual education into effective professional development models and identify unique needs of the field. After looking at an interview, this essay will synthesize the information to produce a recommendation for further research and clarity.

**Defining Bilingual Education**

Before proceeding into professional development, the definition of bilingual education must be elaborated on, because there is significant confusion as to what population is receiving bilingual education and what are the goals of bilingual education. Previously, bilingual education was defined as the education of students in two languages so that they will achieve content and linguistic mastery (Escamilla et al., 2017). However, confusion on this definition has lead to the clouding research into the effectiveness of bilingual education. For example, Cogner (2010) conducted a study about the bilingual students in New York and compared their performance on the Language Assessment Battery (LAB), an English proficiency assessment, to students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) population. The study found that the bilingual students took longer to obtain a passing score on the LAB in contrast to the ESL students (Cogner, 2010). This lead to Cogner (2010) concluding that bilingual education is less effective and further research into its effectiveness needed to be conducted. The issue with this study is that it did not take into account the goals of bilingual education. In this study, the goal was proficiency in one language: English, over the other: Spanish or Chinese (Cogner, 2010). In fact, bilingual learners have a smaller vocabulary in each of the languages they speak, but compared to their monolingual counterparts they still know a comparable framework and number of words to draw on (Escamilla et al., 2017).The goal of bilingual education though is not simply proficiency in one language, but in both, as well as understanding content.

However, despite the clear differences in goals between bilingual education and ESL there are some similarities that allow for some parallels to be drawn in their professional development needs. These similarities can be extended to foreign language classrooms as well because foreign language classrooms meet these categories as well. These include the knowledge second language acquisition, the use of productive classroom practices, and these classrooms are made up partially or in totality of students who are bilingual speakers (Franco-Fuenmayor, Padrón, & Waxman, 2015; S. Becker, personal communication, November 6, 2018). However, for clarification, students who are bilingual speakers may speak more than one language, but they might not be involved in a bilingual education program. Similarly, educators can be bilingual but not be involved in a bilingual education program. So while the three earlier mentioned parallels are significant, and can allow for some comparison, the difference between the bilingual education and the others is where the emphasis for language competency placed. In bilingual education it is upon both languages, in ESL and foreign languages it is upon only one.

**Professional Development**

Professional development is important for both experienced and inexperienced educators because it allows all to cultivate new skills and use best practices (Bayar, 2014). Professional development fills in the gap of practical application as teachers leave school and outcomes show that they are unprepared for their positions (Bayar, 2014). This is important because while experience brings wisdom, experience takes time to cultivate. Professional development helps to speed up the cultivation of wisdom. The aim of professional development is to improve practices used by teachers, to in turn affect the positive change in students (Kuijpers, Houtveen, & Wubbels, 2010). Ineffective professional development fails to achieve its aim and does not benefit the teacher or students. By examining professional development and its overarching principles and ideas, the wider principles can be tailored for bilingual education.

**Principles of professional development**

Bates and Morgan (2018) defined seven principles of effective professional development for educators. They include: content emphasis, active learning, collaboration, modeling, coaching, constructive evaluation, and a prolongation of professional development (Bates & Morgan, 2018). A professional development program reflecting these principles will feature multiple opportunities for teachers to speak to instructors and to each other. Likewise, Bayar (2014), in an interview with 16 teachers in Turkey, identified six principles that teachers deem crucial to useful professional development. These factors are: the professional development must complement a teacher’s needs, it must complement the needs of the school, teachers have an available role to help design and implement professional development, the professional development engages and demands hands on participation form the participants, a long-term commitment, and instructors of high caliber (Bayar, 2014). Professional development following these principles will have the ability to modify for the individual needs expressed by educators and administrators. These principles will be the starting place for evaluating principles of effective professional development.

Both of these models highlight the need for participation from the educators and a longer-term view of professional development. In fact, five of the principles from Bates and Morgan (2018) demand that teachers are active within professional development and of the five, most critical are coaching and constructive evaluation, because of how they increase teacher participation levels. Coaching provides crucial feedback after an observation and individualizes the approach of professional development instructors to address teacher issues while constructive evaluation allows for introspection about how the described practice in professional development would be applied to their classroom (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

All of these principles are significant to guide models of professional development. The emphasis of active involvement of teachers in the professional development and the longer duration of it will be the main importance looking forward into specific models of professional development. This is because active involvement encompassed so many sub-principles and because as Bayar (2014) indicated short term professional development has a smaller impact on student outcomes than long term professional development.

Kuijpers et al. (2010) identified a few different models of professional development. Some of the principles used are reflected in the school and teacher centered approach featured in Kuijpers et al. (2010), which is also seen in the professional development principles outlined by the Turkish teachers in Bayar (2014). For this reason, these principles of school and teacher-centered approaches will be joined with the other main principles of active learning and extended duration going forward into the evaluation of the models.

**Evaluating models of professional development**

First is the Joyce-Showers model. This model focuses on affecting teacher application of practices through enhancing teacher expertise and teaching practices; it centralizes on making changes through affecting the teachers (Kuijpers et al., 2010). Teachers, as the leaders of the classroom and where a lot of the application of professional development occur, are justified in being the center. The Joyce-Showers model also utilizes peer coaching, which extends the timespan of the professional development, in order to provide individualized feedback (Kuijpers et al., 2010). This model is strengthened by making the professional development over a long term period and its emphasis on the educator, a principle identified previously, but it is weakened by a lack of emphasis on active learning.

Kuijpers et al. (2010) also innovated from research a circular method of professional development. The outer circle, like the Joyce Showers model, focuses on educating teachers, allowing them to practice and then evaluating their practice (Kuijpers et al., 2010). The inner ring focuses on individual conferencing, observation and post-conferencing to focus on long-term application (Kuijpers et al., 2010). This model demonstrates all four of the principles of effective professional development: active engagement of educators, long duration, and adjusting professional development to address the needs of the teacher and the school. It is over an extended duration and demands active participation in the practice section. Furthermore, this model allows teachers and staff to be the ones focusing the aims of the professional development so that it will apply to the needs of their classroom and the school; this increases the implementation of the professional development (Kuijpers et al., 2010).

**Professional development in the Context of Bilingual Education**

In considering the needs of professional development, it is clear there is a deep need. Téllez & Varghese (2013) conducted an overview on the state of professional development for bilingual educators, and the state of affairs is rather dismal. There has been a removal of grants for professional development of bilingual education, professional development was found to be superfluous, and there is a politicization of bilingual education (Téllez & Varghese, 2013). Franco-Fuenmayor et al. (2015) concur, stating in their research that ESL and English Language Learner (ELL) teachers are not given information about bilingual programs. All of these thing cumulate into a need of high quality professional development for bilingual education. Téllez and Varghese (2013) argue that in order for bilingual teachers to receive the professional development and support that they need, they must become a champion in the local bilingual community to be the political voice of those communities. While this is valued and valid, another way is that bilingual educators can receive professional development that supports them in their unique role.

In their research articles, Lachance (2018) and Escamilla et al. (2017) feature two different types of effective practices for their bilingual students. Lachance (2018) extensively interviewed and observed two bilingual middle school science educators in North Carolina. From the study, some recommendations of practices were made for preparatory programs (Lachance, 2018). While the effectiveness of preparatory programs has been contested, these practices would still be useful as bilingual professional development because they are effective practices for a middle school bilingual classroom. These include how to teach in two languages as well as provide and then gradually reduce support in instructions so that students can grasp both the language and the subject of science (Lachance, 2018). Escamilla et al. (2017) pointed to a best practice in evaluating grading writing samples from bilingual students; evaluate writing both languages rather than just one to understand a holistic view of a students writing abilities. This practice would benefit from being shared in professional development because it follows the principle of centering around the school’s needs. As stated previously, a bilingual student’s vocabulary is represented by the sum of the vocabulary in both languages (Escamilla et al., 2017). Thus bilingual schools need to be using assessments that take into account their student’s abilities, and the professional development needs to reflect practices that do so. These practices could be shared in a professional development model similar to the two previous models identified in Kuijpers et al. (2010). As long as educators remain faithful to promote growth in both languages instead of just one, either model could be applied to bilingual education

An example of a professional development program specifically targeting younger students in preschool in developing their bilingual abilities is the Nuestros Niños School Readiness. Because this professional development program targets a younger aged population, it features different practices then previously mentioned. Castro et al. (2017) evaluated the outcomes of this professional development for the duration of two years; tracking data, observing classrooms and, of course, providing the professional development. Children were assessed in categories of social development, mathematics, language development and literacy development (Castro et al., 2017).

Like the Joyce-Showers model and the model developed by Kuijpers et al. (2010), the Nuestros Niños program utilized a combination of instruction, coaching, and communities of fellow educators (Castro et al., 2017). This professional development was also implemented over two years, meaning it meets the principle of an extended duration. Active teacher participation is featured through frequent reinforcement meetings and bimonthly meeting with a partner coworker to assist with the application of new practices (Castro et al., 2017). The final two principles remain: meeting individual needs of teachers, and meeting the individual needs of schools. These practices of active teacher participation also helped the Nuestros Niños School Readiness to meet the needs of the bilingual educators by providing feedback and communicating why practices were in place and adapt principles to unique situations (Castro et al., 2017). Finally this professional development is adaptive to the school because it met the needs of the school, even as the goal of the school was different than the professional development. The schools featured in the study were not examples of true bilingual education, but by focusing on both languages and improving student outcomes in their primary language, the study is also improving the English that the schools want an improvement in (Castro et al., 2017) This is because research supports that students improve in their first language before those improvements are transferred over to their second language (Castro et al., 2017).

**Primary Research**

Correlating to this topic, primary research was conducted. The goal of this interview was to explore the professional development experience of a foreign language educator. While this educator is not a bilingual teacher, she is a fluent Spanish speaker and is an upper-level Spanish teacher at Oscar Smith High School in Chesapeake, Virginia. Her experience teaching in a foreign language parallels the bilingual instructors similar role of language acquisition, and her experience with professional development as an educator assists in providing a real world experience of the discussed principles.

**Method**

This interview features Mrs. Becker, a graduate of Northern Iowa University and an upper-level Spanish teacher. She was interviewed over email. The interview consisted of ten questions related to her professional history, her professional development experience, and her experience with bilingual education. These questions were developed from preliminary research into the topic. Her answers and response are seen in Appendix A.

**Data**

Specific answers can be seen in Appendix A. In her responses Mrs. Becker noted her training at the University of Iowa and employment history as a Spanish teacher in Minnesota and Virginia (personal communication, November 6, 2018). She described her experience with professional development as helpful but her application of the professional development is limited by time (S. Becker, personal communication, November 6, 2018). This can be seen in the planning time available to her; daily she teaches three 1.5 hour-long classes and only has one planning block of 1.5 hours. Mrs. Becker did indicate an awareness of bilingual professional development even though she had not experienced it and she has taught bilingual students, even though they had already obtained fluency in the language they were learning (personal communication, November 6, 2018).

**Analysis**

Interestingly, Mrs. Becker indicated that she could not remember how prepared her education made her for teaching, and describes feeling challenged in her first few years and having to understand how to effectively perform her job as a teacher (personal communication, November 6, 2018). This is similar to the aforementioned research raised by Bayar (2014) that before service training left teachers unprepared. While Mrs. Becker is not a foreign language teacher, her interview answers indicated the value of professional development in education and the lack of full preparedness in preparatory programs. While she did not describe in depth the professional development she experienced, she indicated an issue also seen in the study of the Nuestros Niños School Readiness professional development, that there was obstacles to effective implementation; for Mrs. Becker, it was time, while Castro et al. (2017), it was the volume of paperwork (personal communication, November 6, 2018). Finally, Mrs. Becker indicated she has seen professional development for bilingual teachers. Because of the confusion revolving around question seven, which asked Mrs. Becker to define bilingual education, there is a limitation on what can be extrapolated as the context for the professional development on bilingual education professional development.

**Conclusion**

Looking at the research, bilingual education is a niche field with specific goals and practices that would benefit its students. Professional development that focuses on the needs of schools and teachers, and encourages active teacher involvement in an extended timeframe will improve student achievement and teacher practices.

A focus for future research would be an evaluation of further professional development models for bilingual education or the adaptation of traditional models, such as the one engineered by Kuijpers et al. (2010) to meet the needs to the bilingual education. Furthermore, research needs to be done more in depth specifically about bilingual learners in bilingual education classes. The difference between these students and ESL students or other programs that focus on the development of one language over another is clear, but a further examination into the overall benefits would be useful to bring more understanding to the niche field.

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Appendix A-Interview Questions and Answers

1. What college did you attend and what was your major?

University of Northern Iowa, Spanish was my major with a concentration in secondary education. I graduated in 1992.

1. How would you describe your school experiences as preparing you professionally for being a foreign language teacher?

I honestly don’t remember. The first few years of teaching were very challenging. It takes time to learn all the content, how to be discipline, and how to write lesson plans.

1. Describe briefly your employment history related to education

I taught in Spring Valley, Minnesota at a very small school for 6 years. I was the only Spanish teacher and taught levels 1-4. I moved to Franklin, Virginia for 1 year and then after getting married, I started teaching in Chesapeake, Virginia and have been teaching here for 19 years.

1. How did you become certified as an IB teacher?

You actually don’t have to become certified to teach IB. We do have to go to training though. I have taught IB for the last 13 years.

1. What kind of professional development has been made available to you as a teacher from both the city of Chesapeake and the IB program?

I have gone to one IB training and done one on-line as the money was low for several years. I am due to train again this year. We also have yearly meetings at the beginning of the school year for all language teachers in the district. I have attended conferences on my own time also both for IB and for world language training.

1. Have you found professional development to help you in your teaching practices?

Definitely. We just need more planning time to implement new teaching practices.

1. What would your define bilingual education to be?

College and professional development. I also strive to keep learning more Spanish all the time.

\*\*\*\*Note: A limitation of this study is question seven. This question was thrown out because of a grammatical error in the question, making the question unintelligible.\*\*\*\*\*

1. Do you have any experience with bilingual education? If yes, briefly Describe

We have a good number of hispanic students in our classes and the guidance counselors say they put them in Spanish to help them with English and so they feel more comfortable in a class where they hear their native language. I have mixed feelings about this.

1. Have you come across any professional development for bilingual teachers?

Yes, but I haven’t taken any of those courses.

1. Do you think prejudice against Hispanic immigrants affects how people view you as a foreign language teacher?

No, I don’t feel that way at all.