

THE EXTERN PROGRAM: AN APPROACH TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Fernie Baca Moore, Gerald W. Lundquist

Bilingual education was launched a few years ago with high hopes and expectations and federal support. It was, and is, viewed as an effort to enhance the educational opportunities for the nation's linguistically-different students. This student is characterized as: (1) having the highest dropout rate, (2) occupying the lowest educational level, (3) having experienced segregated education, (4) having experienced low teacher expectations, (5) suffering from cultural incompatibility with a dominant-culture-oriented curricula, and (6) being the victim of educational neglect. He has also been characterized as achieving at a lower rate; repeating grades more frequently; being under-represented in extra-curricular activities; entering institutions of higher education at half the rate of the dominant society, and, in general, benefitting less from existing educational opportunities. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. *The Unfinished Education*, Report II, Mexican-American Education Study, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971.)

Bilingual programs were launched at two levels: public schools and institutions of higher education. Public schools commenced to identify students who were linguistically different, assessed educational needs, developed instructional programs and hired educators who possessed skills and understanding in bicultural/bilingual education. Institutions of higher education sought personnel, developed curricula and instituted pre-service programs designed to prepare persons for positions in public schools. The general goal and purpose of both efforts, at the public school and higher education levels, were the same: quality educational programs for the linguistically-different student.

Early experiences with the bilingual program yielded some important learnings: (1) in order for bilingual education to be successful within an organization it needs a support system composed of administrators, school board members, pupil service personnel and instructional staff, (2) in order for a support system for bilingual education to develop, decisionmakers (identified above) need the opportunity to learn about bilingual education — its goals, procedures, expected outcomes and controversial issues;

and, in addition, there is the need to develop personal relationships between and among bilingual staff members and key decisionmakers within the organization, and (3) that institutions of higher education, in cooperation with colleagues in local school districts, can provide a vehicle for developing a support system for bilingual education.

Currently, Colleges of Education are devoting much of their effort to pre-service programs. There is precious little in college catalogs for the inservice needs of experienced educators. Many decisionmakers received their education years ago; in recent years they have been faced with the appearance of new theories and practices (e.g., organizational development, individually-guided instruction, bilingual education, community schools, et cetera) which are rapidly proliferating in response to changes in the social context of our society. Keeping current with these new developments is a herculean task — when most Colleges of Education focus on pre-service training. In addition, even if the classes exist, they, very often, are not offered at times or locations which make them accessible to experienced educators. Thus it is apparent that alternatives must be developed by institutions of higher education to better meet the growth and development needs of practicing educators. One such alternative for enhancing knowledge and skills in the area of bilingual education may be an "Extern Program."

Bilingual Extern Program: Description

We wish to note, at the outset, that the bilingual extern program described here represents the ideas formulated and developed at the University of Colorado at Denver in cooperation with the Denver Public Schools. This program has been in operation this past academic year.

The basic goals of the extern program are to provide experienced educators, who are in key decisionmaking roles within the school system, with additional knowledge, skills and sensitivities required to administer and assist educational systems — and particularly bilingual education programs — in more relevant, humane, effective and efficient ways. The program is designed to help decisionmakers to be more capable of responding effectively to the



needs of their staff, linguistically-different students and communities. The goals of the program are accomplished by making available both didactic and experiential training in ways providing practical knowledge, skills and theories drawn from the literature and research of the behavioral sciences which apply to bilingual education.

The extern program is designed as a full, academic-year program and can be implemented with from 25 to 70 participants. Participants (experienced educators) meet one weekend per month for nine months — from Saturday morning until noon Sunday. A location is selected for the training which provides facilities for overnight lodging, dining, and small-group interaction. Participants receive six semester hours of university credit for participation in the program.

The format of the program is flexible and provides for both didactic and experiential training in areas relevant to both the needs of the participants and the bilingual education program. The basic format for each weekend involves eight phases:

Phase 1 — Didactic input. The initial activity of each weekend involves a presentation on a topic related to the field of bilingual education. For example, a faculty member from the university might present a lecture on basic theories and approaches to bilingual education. This presentation would require about an hour.

Phase 2 — Synthesis and discussion of didactic input. Following the presentation, participants would spend about 30 minutes in small groups (five to eight persons) sharing reactions to the presentation and practicing any skill activities which may have been described.

Phase 3 — Participant problem-solving. After a short break, participants would again gather in small groups. They might be asked to specify, on paper, three concerns which they are currently experiencing relevant to their current position as a professional educator in the school system. The group would share their concerns with fellow group members and confer regarding alternatives for better coping with the expressed concerns. This activity would last for approximately an hour.

Phase 4 — Group problem-solving. The first activity of the afternoon (75 minutes) would involve large-group discussions and synthesis of both the morning presentation and the small-group activities. In this session, a spokesman from each small group shares with all the participants the concerns and possible solutions discussed in the small groups.

Phase 5 — Didactic input. Another input session (one hour) would be held in the late afternoon of the first day. This presentation is coordinated with the first presentation and designed to extend and build upon the ideas presented earlier in the day. Thus, for example, the second presentation might deal with explication of the needs of linguistically-different students in local school districts and a discussion on which approach to bilingual education would be most appropriate in meeting specific student needs.

Phase 6 — Synthesis, discussion and skill practice. The evening of the first day would be spent in small-group discussions of didactic input and in practicing skills which were presented and demonstrated.

Phase 7 — Didactic input. The first session on the



morning of the second day would involve additional input (90 minutes), however this input would be drawn from areas of the behavioral sciences outside education. Thus, for example, a state legislator might discuss problems of bilingual education as viewed from a legislative perspective. Obviously, the effort of this phase would be to stimulate and broaden the awareness of participants.

Phase 8 — Synthesis and discussion. For an hour after the presentation, the participants, in groups of five to eight, would discuss the reactions to input and identify implications for their own situations.

Wrap-up. The final activity of the weekend would involve large-group discussion of the activities for the weekend and the implementation of evaluation activities scheduled for the session. These eight phases would be repeated each weekend.

As described, the program is designed so that participants will obtain new information relevant to the field of bilingual education and have the opportunity to synthesize and develop personal meaning of that information by interacting with other professionals in a small-group format. In addition, participants will have the opportunity to express their individual concerns and develop alternatives for coping with them. Each participant is expected to share his concerns and assist others in developing alternatives. Finally, Phase 7 of the program is designed to provide educators with input from differing perspectives on bilingual education.

The extern program as presented here is built around monthly meetings and a year-long program which includes nine workshops, each encompassing three themes:

(1) understandings and skills relative to bilingual education, (2) participant problem-solving, and (3) bilingual education as viewed from different perspectives. The topical agenda for the year is developed through consultation with faculty at the institution of higher education, bilingual educators in the public schools and leaders of state organizations. Examples of weekend topics might include: Bilingual Education: Myth or Reality; Culture and Self Concept; Instructional Improvement Processes in Bilingual Education; and Cognitive Styles: The Bilingual Learner and Teacher.

Program Evaluation

As with any instructional program, the extern program needs an effective evaluation component. One approach would involve the use of two types of evaluation activities. First, the program participants could be assessed concerning their reactions to each phase of each weekend's activities. Thus, at the end of each weekend session, each participant is asked to rate each activity in terms of interest, content, organization, implementation, et cetera. These data will enable program organizers to improve the design and implementation of successive programs.

The second type of evaluation activity focuses on the degree to which the program participants actually make use of the skills and knowledge gained in each weekend experience. Since the needs and interests of the program participants vary depending upon their work settings (elementary vs. secondary, urban school vs. rural school, et cetera) individualization of evaluation would be required. Thus during the weekend, each participant would be

expected to formulate a plan-of-action relating to the material covered that weekend. This plan-of-action would be prepared in written form and would state what the participant planned to do, how he planned to implement this activity and a time-line for its completion. The participant would sign the action plan and would file a copy with the instructor.

Since participants and instructors would be meeting together for an entire school year, the use of action plans would make ongoing assessment and feedback possible. Consequently, as the participant implemented the action plan, he would be able to report results to the instructors and seek additional help in improving his skills or increasing his knowledge in the area. Similarly, if a number of participants were evidencing difficulty in employing, for example, linguistic assessments, the instructors might choose to devote additional weekend experiences to this topic. The net result would be continued development of participant skill levels and improvement of program instructional activities.

Advantages and Limitations

The bilingual extern program has certain advantages: (1) the weekend/overnight structure of the program has value in that it promotes informal as well as formal learning, (2) it allows for group cohesiveness to develop in a setting free from external distractions or the presence of a work schedule, and (3) the major components of the training include: (a) skills and understanding relevant to bilingual education, (b) skill practice and synthesis, (c) development of alternatives to the concerns educators bring to the training sessions, and (d) perspectives on bilingual education from those outside the education field. These are viewed as relevant factors in meeting both the needs of decisionmakers and the criticisms that higher education is currently receiving for not being responsive to the inservice needs of educators.

Although the extern program appears to have many strong points, there are potential drawbacks which should be acknowledged. First, the weekend/overnight format, when implemented throughout a full, academic year, could be costly in terms of money and time. While costs vary from area to area, we have been able to contract with a mountain resort facility for lodging, meals and training rooms at a rate of \$30 per participant per weekend. Thus, in addition to the cost of tuition, each participant is assessed \$270 (room and board) for the nine sessions.

Alternative sources for funds may be needed if the cost becomes prohibitive for the participants. One obvious possibility would be for the school districts to subsidize extern programs attended by their personnel. In addition, state departments of education might sponsor such a program, or at least provide small grants to help defray expenses.

While our experience with weekend training formats has been extremely positive, various problems may have to be resolved. For example, care must be taken to schedule weekends around sports events and holidays. Also, it may be necessary to develop alternatives to total weekend formats. One such alternative would be to reduce the number of weekends and add week-night training sessions.

The Saturday morning/Sunday noon time-block was chosen to limit costs and the nights educators and trainers would be away from home. Unfortunately, the overnight aspect of this program may foster family and personal stress problems. Awareness of these possibilities should help faculty members at institutions of higher education and participants confront and solve problems that do arise.

As presently conceived, the extern program could be seen as the sole province of the university. This is viewed as a limitation. In order to maintain the visibility of the program, it seems essential that school personnel and state department of education personnel maintain full involvement in both its development and implementation. In fact, it may be desirable and necessary for school districts to plan their own extern program with consultative input from institutions of higher education.

In some, the bilingual extern program appears to have great potential. Initial reactions from this program in the Colorado area lead us to be quite optimistic.

Fernie Baca Moore is Assistant Professor, University of Colorado at Denver, and Director, Multicultural/Bilingual Teacher Training Program. She teaches courses in both Multicultural and Bilingual Education.

Gerald W. Lundquist is Professor, Graduate School of Educational Studies, University of Colorado at Denver. He teaches a course in Organizational Development.