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**Improving Principal Quality for Schools with English Learners:
Reculturing Instructional Leadership**

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**Improving Principal Quality for Schools with English Learners:**
**Reculturing Instructional Leadership**

Introduction

In this chapter we draw attention to the importance of school leadership on the academic achievement of English Learners. Furthermore, we suggest that school leaders can play a key role in advocating for equitable policies that will improve the academic achievement of English learners. We know that in terms of *within-school* factors related to student achievement, school leadership quality is second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teacher instruction (Heck & Leathwood, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The literature is also clear on the fact that the influence of school leadership has on student learning is not so evident in low-performing schools (Riordan, 2003). Furthermore, studies on the principal labor market, while scarce, document the unequal distribution of school leader quality. Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng (2010) report that low-income students, students of color, and low-performing students are more likely to attend schools led by (a) novice or temporary principals, (b) leaders who do not hold advanced (master's) degree and (c) leaders who attended less selective colleges. This uneven distribution in quality of school leadership places English Language learners in jeopardy before they even begin the schooling process. How to improve the quality of leaders who can successfully transform schools with English Language learners is a pressing issue for everyone, particularly for leadership preparation programs and district, state and national agencies.

We posit that Principal quality in schools with English learners can be improved through a renewed focus on "Instructional Leadership" that addresses the needs of

English learners. We know today that transformative change begins with effective

leadership. Without vision, pedagogical knowledge, understanding and wisdom,

educational transformation cannot succeed. Without personal and ideological clarity, a

shift from a deficit school culture to a respectful and culturally inclusive one, a school

(leader, teachers, staff, students, parents and community) cannot effectively transform.

Specifically, we propose that a re-culturing in schools will occur when school leaders: 1)

Practice an advocacy stance towards English learners; 2) Improve their own knowledge

base about the teaching and learning of English learners; and 3) Develop an ideological

clarity that will transform schools for English learners. We propose a tri-level framework

that addresses an (1) Institutional Level; (2) Pedagogical Level; and (3) Personal Level

(see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Reculturing Instructional Leadership: A Conceptual Model

| Institutional Level | Pedagogical Level | Personal Level |
|---|---|---|
| Identifying and addressing institutional inequities by<br><br>a) identifying structural barriers to student achievement<br><br>b) taking an "advocacy stance" as leaders | Instructional Leadership that defines content knowledge necessary for leading schools with English Learners:<br><br><br>a) Pedagogical Knowledge<br>b) Sociocultural Knowledge<br>c) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy<br>d) Language & Literacy Acquisition and Development in L1 & L2 | Exhibiting Ideological Clarity by:<br><br><br>a) Self examination and transformation of deficit assumptions, beliefs and attitudes about English Learners<br>b) Naming, interrogating, and transforming deficit assumptions, beliefs and attitudes about English Learners with teachers |

Adapted from Mendoza-Reis, Sarellano-Quintanar, & Flores, 2009

At the Institutional Level, we suggest that leadership in schools with English

learners engage in an advocacy leadership that challenges the existing status quo and the

role that schools play in maintaining a system of disproportionate school failure among

non-dominant students, and in particular, English learners.  When school leaders

recognize the  system of inequality, they are better able to support their staff in

addressing the inequalities through a responsive pedagogy. School leaders must be ready

to examine and interrupt all school and district policies that lead to institutional

inequities. They must analyze, disrupt, and transform the structural barriers that

contribute to such policies. At the Pedagogical Level, we focus on a re-culturing of

Instructional Leadership that goes beyond mainstream approaches. We propose that

school leaders overseeing the education of English learners must have a sound

pedagogical knowledge base that addresses a strong foundation in professional

development, language and literacy/biliteracy development, knowledge about culturally

relevant instructional practices and language acquisition/development (oral/written and

first (L1) and second (L2) languages) theories and best practices. At the Personal Level,

we stress the importance of school leaders' ideological clarity (Bartolome, 2000) as well

as the ongoing personal critical reflection and transformation of deficit assumptions,

beliefs, and attitudes about English Learners. We believe that when school leaders have

ideological clarity, they are able to lead their school personnel through similar

transformational processes.


      We set the context of this chapter with an overview of the academic achievement

gap for English learners. We review literature that includes advocacy leadership,

instructional leadership, teacher and principal development and professional

development, and we suggest that to improve the quality of principals in schools with

English learners, Instructional Leadership must be mediated through different approaches

and a certain knowledge base. We highlight an exemplary model of culturally responsive

professional development for teachers of English learners—CLASE, The Instructional

Conversation Model—a research project from the Center for Latino Achievement and

Success (CLASE) as examples of the type of professional development that instructional

leaders ought to engage in order to transform schools for English learners. The final

section of this chapter makes recommendations to policy makers about essential steps in

re-culturing instructional leadership.

*English Learners and the Achievement Gap*

English Language Learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing sector of the public

school population. Over the past 15 years, the number of ELL students has nearly

doubled to about approximately 5 million. By 2015, it is projected that ELL enrollment in

U.S. schools will reach about 10 million. And, by 2025, it is predicted that nearly one out

of every four public school students will be an English Language Learner (The National

Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational

Programs, NCELA, 2007).[1] On March 23, 2007, Peter Zamora, Co-Chair of the Hispanic

Education Coalition to House Education and Labor Committee, Early Childhood,

Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee responding to NCLB policies

reported that the academic performance levels of ELLs are significantly below those of

their peers in nearly every measure of achievement. In addition, in the 2005 National

Assessment of Educational Progress it was reported that only 29 percent of ELLs scored

at or above the basic level in reading, compared with 75 percent of non-ELLs (National

Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP):

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[1] See also www.ncela.gwu.edu/expert/fastfaq/4.html

Reading and Mathematics (Washington, D.C.).[2] Gandara & Rumberger (2007) have

reported that the academic achievement of English learners has lagged considerably

behind the achievement of students from English speaking background. They concluded

that the achievement gap for ELLs could only be attributed to seven conditions of

inequity severely impacting their opportunities to learn, these are:

1. Inequitable access to appropriately trained teachers

2. Inadequate professional development opportunities to help teachers address the

instructional needs of English learners.

3. Inequitable access to appropriate assessment to measure EL achievement, gauge their

learning needs, and hold the system accountable for their progress

4. Inadequate instructional time to accomplish learning goals

5. Inequitable access to instructional materials and curriculum

6. Inequitable access to adequate facilities

7. Intense segregation into schools and classrooms that place them at  particularly high

risk for educational failure

As one can see, these inequities are significant. A position that "blames the victim" can

no longer be accepted as a rationale for the "lack of achievement" of ELLs. Given this

context, we argue that school leaders need to be supported to develop the knowledge,

skills and dispositions necessary to address these inequities so that they can fully

participate in developing equitable policies that in turn, can lead to the implementation of

educational practices that will contribute to closing the achievement gap.


## Level One: Institutional Level

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[2]  See also http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2005

***Advocacy Leadership***

For many years, while our student population in our public schools was becoming increasingly diverse, our leadership preparation programs remained focused on a universal, one-size-fits-all model of leadership (Mendoza-Reis, Ritchie & Lindstrom, 2005). More recently, studies of educational leadership generally acknowledge that contemporary administrators must be equipped with different skill sets in order to be successful and that these are centered around an advocacy stance and cultural proficiency (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Lindsey, Roberts, & Terrell, 2005; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Riehl, 2000;). In this chapter we also support the idea that schools with diverse students require a new kind of thinking, different lenses and new kinds of dynamic leaders who can effectively close the academic achievement gap between mainstream students and English learners.

In the book, *Advocacy Leadership: Toward a Post-Reform Agenda in Education,* Gary Anderson (2010) notes that "[a]n advocacy leader believes in the basic principles of a high quality and equitable public education for all students and is willing to take risks to make it happen" (p.13). Anderson argues for a rethinking of leadership that includes both authenticity and advocacy that will challenge the status quo. Advocacy leaders will be prepared to identify and change policies on behalf of English learners. Cultural Proficiency in leadership is defined by Lindsey, Roberts and Campbell-Jones (2005) as "the state of honoring the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups" (p.4). The authors describe six essential elements that school leaders use to develop cultural competence: valuing diversity, assessing school culture, managing the dynamics of

difference, adapting diversity, institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources, and inclusiveness. They also describe a culturally proficient school culture as "Policies and practices of a school or the values and behaviors of an individual that enable the school or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment" (p.146).

Both advocacy leaders and culturally proficient leaders do not hesitate to confront a pedagogical school culture that creates obstacles and barriers towards closing the achievement gap. Instead, they reject a culture of deficit thinking and they are quick to notice inequitable policies that may affect academic achievement. They also engage in interrogating such policies with teachers, district office, communities and families and they challenge the "sacred cows" in education such as teacher and student placements, discipline policies, assessment, and transportation decisions that may have contributed to inequitable policies. In sum, these new leaders change the pedagogical culture of their schools by ensuring that teachers develop advocacy and cultural proficiency skills in order to transform schools with English Learners (Mendoza-Reis & Smith, in press).

## Level Two: Pedagogical Level

### *Instructional Leadership*

There is substantial research that supports the critical role the principal plays in supporting teachers and leading schools in their efforts to implement effective practices that boost student achievement (Fullan, l998; Hart & Bredeson, l996; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Levine & Lezotte, l990; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). In this regard, instructional leadership must include a commitment to effective and meaningful teaching and student learning (Prawat & Peterson, 1999). In 1983, Purkey and Smith reviewed the literature on effective schools and found strong leadership to be a major

component of successful schools. Hallinger and Heck (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between leadership and student achievement and found similar results. In a study by Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) the authors concluded that school leadership "is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (p.5). These studies have contributed to the current stance that instructional leadership is an important component of school improvement. However, as noted earlier, it is the low-performing schools attended by non-dominant students, and in particular, English learners, that are most likely not to have leaders with the necessary instructional background to lead school improvement efforts.

How then, do these leaders supplement their preparation so that they can be effective in schools with English learners? How do they become instructional leaders? The answer lies in the types of professional development planned and enacted at schools. It is thus important for all school leaders particularly those who lead schools with English learners, to understand what constitutes quality professional development. We suggest that, in order to recognize quality professional development and to effectively lead schools, principals must first possess a deep knowledge base about teacher development, in particular on how teachers change practice in terms of their own developmental scale. Useful here is a pedagogy guided by sociocultural theoretical perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogy, and language acquisition/development across curricular contexts. Vygotsky's sociocultural theoretical framework related to teaching, learning and development is pivotal in understanding how to organize the teaching/learning of ELLs to the potential. From a sociocultural perspective, educators see the teaching/learning

situation deriving the view that: 1) knowledge is socially constructed, i.e. it is through

social interaction ("instructional conversations") that knowledge is first shared and then

becomes internalized at the psychological level; 2) the zone of proximal development is

the distance between where the learner is developmentally and his/her potential; 3) we

must teach to the potential not the developmental level; otherwise, the learners will not

grow; 4) in order for the teacher to teach to the potential teachers must use meditational

tools to bridge and make visible the goals, processes, and the learners' "coming to

know;" 5) once the learners' own the knowledge, they can then appropriate it, i.e. make it

their own to then use it and apply it across multiple social contexts; 6) thus, the teacher

becomes the sociocultural mediator, a human tool that scaffolds/mediates deliberately

with intent to organize teaching/learning to the potential and across social contexts; and

7) this internalized knowledge then can be used by the learners to innovate and create

new knowledge. These are important sociocultural principles that locate learning and the

school as a microcosm of the necessary integration of social and cultural histories and

trajectories (Portes & Salas, 2011).

### Level Three: Personal Level

#### *Ideological Clarity*

By examining, naming and interrogating the deficit assumptions, beliefs, and

attitudes about English Learners, educational leaders are able to not only address these

insidious perceptual roadblocks to academic success but also be able to transform and

reculture the school's teaching/learning social, political, and personal environment

(Flores, Cousin & Diaz, 1991). Freire's (1987) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* posits that we

as educators need to name and interrogate our generative themes and pose them as

problems before we can transform our world. In our schooling practices related to

English Learners, one of our generative themes is that of the deficit ideology about

language, culture, and class. Thus, in order to dismantle and transform this perspective in

ways that shift from a debilitating paradigm to a productive and humane one (Portes,

2005), we first have to name these myths. The following are but a few of the deficit

"myths" concerning English Learners:

- English Learners are "at risk" of failing school because they do not know English
  and lack prior knowledge, experiences, and vocabulary.

- English Learners fail because their parents do not care, cannot speak English, and
  do not read to them.

- English Learners do not do well on achievement/standardized tests because they
  are poor, do not care, and do not speak English.

We offer a counter-response to these myths in the hopes of advancing ideological clarity

in the field.

*Myth #1—English Learners are "at risk" of failing school because they do not know*

*English and lack prior knowledge, experiences, and vocabulary.* This myth is only true

because we believe that it is true. Every child or student brings a wealth of "funds of

knowledge" (see González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) to school that includes social,

cultural, and linguistic assets and social networks. A child's or student's mother tongue is

an asset, not a detriment. A child's or student's culture and family experiences are assets

not disadvantages. Moreover, a child's or student's "vocabulary" repertoire is always

growing across the lifespan. By focusing on the "lack of" assets, we undermine the

students' academic success from the start. Vygotsky (1978) would posit that we are

organizing failure by creating a "negative zone" (see also Diaz & Flores, 2001).

Myth #2-- *English Learners fail because their parents do not care, cannot speak English,*

*and do not read to them*. Many educators believe this myth because English Learners'

parents do not come to the school or do not participate in open house or other school

functions. Many Latino parents abide by the cultural beliefs that teachers hold a position

of high regard around the notion of "encargamos a nuestros niños a los maestros." [We

entrust our children's to you, the teachers.] (Flores, Cousin & Diaz, 1991). In addition,

administrators and teachers fail to realize that parents and grandparents and other

community educators, such as Sunday school teachers for example, engage children in

sustained literacy practices daily or in a weekly basis (Baquedano-López, 2008; Heath,

1983). As it has been amply documented in the literature of Latino parents, parents do

care, but they may not know how to help their children navigate institutional

requirements. This is very different than assuming that parents do not help their children

at home.

Myth #3—*English Learners do not do well on achievement/standardized tests because*

*they are poor, do not care, do not speak English.* While these ideas may find correlates in

some achievement measures, educators need to take into consideration that standardized

tests are culturally biased and are not usually normed on working class students. Indeed,

why would we require a non proficient English Learner to take a standardized test in

English when s/he is not a proficient speaker, reader or writer of English? The obvious

result is that the student does poorly on the test.

The process of engaging oneself and the cadre of teachers at a school site has to be very strategic and focused. For example, we recommend that these myths be typed on a sheet of paper and that under each one, pairs or triads have to discuss and write down rationales regarding why one would believe or not that the myth is true. Afterwards, each group would share and critically discuss these points of view with the rest of their colleagues. A presentation of the "Intellectual Presence of the Deficit Views of Spanish Speaking Children in the Educational Literature during the 20th Century" (Flores, 2005) would be helpful in demonstrating how negative "labels" have been used to describe English Learners. Such derogatory labels and deficit ideology impede students' growth as the "Pygmalion effect" has documented, i.e., beliefs and perceptions taint/guide a person's behavior. Another conversation piece is the article *"Transforming Deficit Myths of Language, Culture and Learning"* by Flores, Cousin, & Diaz (1991), which illustrates a case study and journey of how an entire elementary school named, interrogated and transformed deficit ideology about language, learning and culture.

There is a body of research (Bartolome, 2000; Bartolome & Balderrama, 2001; Bartolome, 2007; Alfaro, 2007; Assaf & Dooley, 2010) that documents how ideology governs teachers' ways of teaching and responding to students of color, students of poverty, and students who speak another language other than English. Bartolome (2000) states that ideological clarity requires that teachers' individual explanations be compared and contrasted with those propagated by the dominant society. It is hoped that the juxtaposing of ideologies forces teachers to better understand if, when, and how their

belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and support unfair and

inequitable conditions. (p. 168). Assaf and Dooley (2010) report that "over 80% of

ethnically and linguistically diverse students live in poverty yet most of the current

teaching force and those coming into teaching have been raised in monolingual, middle-

class homes in rural and suburban communities…" (p.153). Their study examined the

difficulty of preparing beginning teachers to experience the complexities of teaching

multicultural and linguistically diverse students literacy. They specifically investigated

eight teachers' ideologies and the tension and struggles that they faced in teaching

culturally and linguistically diverse students. In *Ideologies in Education: Unmasking the

Trap of Teacher Neutrality,* Bartolome (2007) calls for the need to expose the invisible

(yet pervasive) oppressive dominant ideologies. There is an impending need to "articulate

their existence" and to understand the negative impact these ideologies have on education

(Bartolome, 2007). Alfaro's (2007) case study adds to the task of developing ideological

clarity in the idea that teachers also have the experiences of marginalization. They learn

and struggle with their own ideological disconnects, i.e. between what they believe and

what they actually do. Illuminating a case study of a teacher, Alfaro (2007) notes the

ways the teacher, Carlos, "struggles toward ideological clarity illustrate the multiple

issues imbedded in the epistemological journey of becoming a bilingual teacher with

courage, solidarity, and ethical commitment." (p. 247) Leaders and teachers need to not

only denounce harmful ideological practices, but also transform them to more caring

(Valenzuela, 1999 and Noddings, 1984, 1992) and nurture supportive ways of teaching

within our schooling contexts. Similarly, Bartolome (2008) writes about the ideological

and political aspects of teachers' caring and love but warns of condescending and deficit

views on students of color. She then raises the issue of "authentic caring" or "cariño" as not enough to provide high quality instruction. Instead, she argues for genuine communication (verbal and nonverbal) done in respectful and caring ways. Through the engagement of "authentic caring" and "cariño" leaders and educators can embrace change and transform the deficit ideology that paralyzes teachers to move beyond the status quo and the perception the low-status groups as deficient across the dimensions of language, culture, and cognition.

**An Illustrative Case: The Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education (CLASE) and the Instructional Conversation**

Most recently, the Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education (CLASE) at the University of Georgia, Athens, has been active in building upon the Instructional Conversation concept first developed by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence Center (CREDE),[3] basically the premise that culturally and linguistically diverse students' comprehension is increased through informal discourse (talk) with teacher and peers. In this model the teacher assists students' learning throughout the conversation by modeling, questioning, restating, praising, and encouraging. In ongoing research conducted by the CLASE Center, the focus is on deconstructing the Instructional Conversation in ways that teachers can readily adopt for use in their classrooms. The program includes the following components:

*1. Workshop-Model Training.* A five-day, all-day workshop providing orientation to

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[3] See website: http://www.cal.org/crede/

Instructional Conversation (IC) pedagogy. The workshop includes theory, research,

practice, and planning guidance integrated to model the activity and interaction in an IC

classroom. The workshop involves teachers in role-playing as students in IC with the

leader and as teacher in simulated IC with peers.

*2. On-Line NEA Course*: *Effective Teaching in Diverse Classrooms.* This 20-hour course

contains explicit instructions, supporting articles and other text, suggested trial activities,

self-assessment tools, and, most important, high end performance of IC, shown in

professional quality video, in ELL classrooms much like their own. Teachers are

expected to complete this course in the fall of implementation.

*3. Individual Coaching.* A coach is assigned to visit each teacher or classroom in the

treatment group on a bi-weekly basis from September through April. Each visit includes a

discussion of the teachers' goals, a classroom observation and data collection, and a

coach--teacher debriefing, providing data and dialog about the teacher and students'

performance, as compared with the indicators of the teacher's phase-in plan for

implementing the pedagogy standards.

*4. Follow-Through Coaching.* Coaches and the teachers in the treatment group in each

building meet regularly to discuss their IC classrooms' development, share activities and

experiences, problem solve, and offer ideas and suggestions.

      Teachers participate in the study for two years, the first of which provides time to

practice and perfect the intervention, and the second comprises the experimental year.

During the two year cycle teachers are observed (1-2 hours) by researchers and

videotaped twice yearly for both research purposes and improvement of practice. Their

coaches visit them on a biweekly basis during their practice year and as needed during

the experimental year. Students report liking this participatory pedagogy where teachers

talk less, challenge students at higher levels to learn by sharing their thinking out loud,

and thus expose their zones of proximal development regularly. Our assessment of the

CLASE Instructional Conversation Model is that it meets all the criteria for productive

professional development and we consider it has the potential to effect needed changes in

teacher practice not only for ELLs but all students. Unfortunately most school leaders are

not familiar with such advances nor understand the connection it has to meeting common

core state standards.

### Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

In this chapter we have addressed the issue of principal quality in schools with

English Language Learners. We have suggested that for leaders of these schools, the

traditional leadership preparation models are not sufficient. We have proposed a model

for improving the instructional leadership skills of school principals using a tri-level

framework that focuses on (1) institutional level, (2) pedagogical level, and (3) personal

level. In closing, we offer the following policy recommendations:

• **Effective Curricular Leadership** is perhaps the cornerstone in the

transformation of a low performing school to a high performing school despite poverty,

underfunding, and everyday instructional challenges. The essential elements of a

curricular leader are threefold: 1) posses and use leadership advocacy; 2) implement

effective pedagogical knowledge; and 3) engage staff in systemic ideological clarity.

Therefore, it is highly recommended that principals with ELL children embrace and

develop these *reculturing* curricular elements.

• **Effective Professional Development** is most effective when it is intensive,

sustained, job-related and focused on the content of the subject that teachers teach. This may also include coaching. Thus, we highly recommend implementation of an integrated model such as the one we outline in this chapter.

　　　**• Rejection of Deficit Ideology about Class, Culture, Language, and Race/Ethnicity** is perhaps one of the most pivotal goals in order to move beyond the pervasive "blaming the victim" syndrome that we find rampant in our schools. We highly recommend that school staff name, interrogate, and transform these deficit views of children of color, children of poverty, and children who speak another language other than English.

　　　**• Engaging in Ideological Clarity** is a very healthy and necessary in order to acknowledge how one's beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes govern leaders' actions, especially regarding the teaching/learning and assessment of the children/students that schools are entrusted with. We highly recommend that principals lead their staff in the ideological clarity process in order to transform the culture of the school to a "can do" one.

　　　**• Reframing the Teaching of English Language Learners** in a sense rejects deficit ideology and engages ideological clarity. This reframing develops pedagogical knowledge about the 1) teaching/learning of language, literacy and culture in L1 & L2; 2) using culturally relevant pedagogy; and 3) use of foundational and current language acquisition theories and practices.

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