
Teachers at the Epicenter: Engagement and Resistance in a Biliteracy Program for “Long-Term English Language Learners” in the U.S.

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The United States is in the midst of an unprecedented demographic shift, as the number of minority students and those learning English grows at an exponential pace (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2007). Despite these increases in students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds with the asset of languages other than English, schools have largely responded by providing more (and only) English education, as opposed to bilingual programs that develop students’ native language and literacy skills as English is added to their linguistic repertoire. Although New York City has historically been supportive of bilingual education, in recent years there has been a drastic decline in bilingual programs due to a convergence of language policies within an overall context of language restriction in the United States (Menken, 2008).

This chapter shares findings from research about emergent bilinguals¹ who have attended U.S. schools for seven or more years and whose prior schooling has been linguistically subtractive – in the U.S., these students are referred to as “long-term English language learners” (or LTELLs). In this chapter, we document our efforts to implement a new biliteracy program to meet the needs of these students in two New York City high schools. Prior to our work in these schools, the native languages of long-term ELLs were not used in their education. In the 2008-2009 academic year, by

¹ ‘Emergent bilinguals’ are defined here as students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken, and who are receiving specialized instruction to learn English at school. While typically these students are termed ‘English language learners’ in the U.S., as García and Kleifgen (2008: 6) explain, “English language learners are in fact emergent bilinguals. That is, through school and through acquiring English, these children become bilingual, able to continue to function in their home language as well as in English, their new language and that of school.”
contrast, both of our research sites implemented a new program for Spanish-speaking LTELLs as a way to increase their literacy skills in English and Spanish and subsequently improve their academic performance.

This chapter focuses on the complex role of teachers in implementing new language programming that essentially changes schools from institutions that promulgate monolingualism to those that utilize and, ideally, embrace their multilingualism. More specifically, we examine the teaching practices of the classroom teachers involved in this project most of whom had never received prior preparation to work with emergent bilinguals, and document both their efforts and resistance to meeting the needs of these diverse students. We identify institutional and instructional features found to support the students, and those that stood in the way of their success. Specifically, we consider the teachers’ efforts to embed explicit language and literacy instruction in the following subjects: English language arts, English as a second language, math, science, and social studies as well as in a new course entitled ‘Spanish for native speakers.’ And, we examine these teachers’ collaboration with one another across the subject area divide; in traditional high schools, few opportunities are provided for collaborative planning, particularly across subjects. Examples from classroom observations illustrate how thoughtful instructional planning can increase student learning in terms of language and content, and likewise how the absence of such planning can further leave these students behind. Moreover, in this chapter we highlight the tensions that arise in educational contexts where multilingualism is being brought from the periphery towards the center of student learning.

Language Policy in the U.S and New York City

In the U.S., approximately 47 million people – 18% of the population – speak a language other than English at home and, if current immigration rates continue, this number will increase to about 40% by 2030 (Shin, 2003; National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). Emergent
bilinguals are thus the fastest growing population in U.S. schools – in 1990, one in 20 public school students in grades K-12 was an emergent bilingual while today the figure is one in nine; it is estimated that in 20 years this figure will be one in four (Goldenberg, 2008).

In spite of this growing diversity, or more likely in reaction against it, schools in the U.S. are increasingly likely to restrict the use of immigrant languages and instead teach emergent bilinguals solely through the medium of English (García, 2009; Menken, 2008). Zehler et al (2003) estimate that national enrollment in bilingual education programs has dropped from 37% to 17% over the past decade. Crawford (2007) among others attributes this loss of bilingual programs to the following policy changes: 1) the states of California, Arizona, and Massachusetts have in recent years passed anti-bilingual education legislation; and, 2) on a national level, federal education policy has promoted English-only schooling since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, in particular due to the law’s emphasis on high-stakes testing in English (Gándara & Baca, 2008; Menken, 2008; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Wiley & Wright, 2004). Thus, the vast majority of U.S. emergent bilinguals are educated only in English, in spite of ample research support for the argument that students who develop and maintain their native languages in school typically outperform their peers in English-only programs and experience academic success over time (Baker, 2006; Krashen & McField, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

New York City is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and city schools reflect that extreme diversity. Over 40% of public school students in the city speak a language other than English at home, and 14% are currently English learners (New York City Department of Education, 2008). In some cases, over 50 languages are spoken within a single school (García & Fishman, 2002). Thus, the city boasts a wide range of educational programming options for emergent bilinguals, including those in which students are taught bilingually and others in which they are taught monolingually.
Although New York City has historically been very supportive of bilingual education, and many such programs have proliferated since the 1970s, in recent years this has begun to change as the city echoes national trends. In the 2002-2003 school year, 39.7% of all emergent bilinguals were enrolled in bilingual education programs, while 53.4% were enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) programs. By the 2007-2008 school year however, just 25.2% of emergent bilinguals were in bilingual programs while 69.2% were in ESL (New York City Department of Education, 2008).

**Research on Long-Term English Language Learners**

The findings reported in this chapter are the most recent from a three-year research project we have conducted in New York City about long-term English language learners. In the city, such students comprise one-third of all emergent bilinguals at the secondary level (New York City Department of Education, 2008). Prior to our research, however, little was written or known about these students and programming for them in high schools was not differentiated in any way from that of other emergent bilinguals. As such, we found that high schools are generally not prepared to meet the needs of these students, and instead LTELLs typically attend ESL courses intended for new arrivals. One of the major findings reported in our earlier research is that the prior schooling of these primarily U.S.-educated students has been linguistically subtractive, in that their native languages have not been fully developed in school and instead largely replaced by English (Menken & Kleyn, in press).

We find that LTELLs typically fall into three main categories: 1) transnational students, who move back and forth between the U.S. and their family’s country of origin; 2) students who — while attending U.S. schools — have shifted between transitional bilingual education, ESL programs, and mainstream classrooms with no language support programming; and, 3) students who have received consistent subtractive schooling, due to enrollment in subtractive models of bilingual education and/or ESL throughout their educational careers. Thus these emergent bilingual students have had
limited opportunities for academic language development in either English or their native languages. As a result, although LTELLs are orally bilingual when using language for social purposes, they typically have limited academic literacy skills in English or in their native languages. As bilingual education programs in the city decrease overall, it is likely that more emergent bilinguals will experience linguistically subtractive schooling and over time become LTELLs.

Methods

Based on our prior research, we developed a program focused on academic language and literacy development both in English and Spanish, and implemented it in two New York City high schools serving Spanish-speaking LTELLs in the 2008-2009 academic year. In the city, small, specialized high schools where all of the students are emergent bilinguals have been proven successful (as in the International High Schools, cited in Ancess, 2003; Fine, Jaffe-Walter, Pedraza, Futch, & Stoudt, 2007). Unlike these high schools, our research project was implemented in schools where emergent bilinguals comprise only a minority of the total student population, and their needs are tangential to the school’s central focus.

We sought to support the development of students’ academic language and literacy skills in English and Spanish through a three-pronged approach, implementing the following course structure for ninth and tenth grade students:

1. Spanish Native Language Arts courses, to help students develop a strong foundation in academic Spanish language and literacy.
2. English as a second language courses, in which long-term English learners are taught separately from new arrivals so that instruction can focus on academic literacy in English rather than on the development of basic language proficiency.
3. Content-area courses—such as math, science, and social studies—that focus simultaneously on content, language and literacy learning (for further description, see Menken & Kleyn, 2009)
As part of this biliteracy project, teachers plan collaboratively throughout the year to create units of study that foster language and literacy skills in all subjects. They also participate in professional development meetings focused on theory, pedagogy, and application.

A total of 42 students were included in our final sample: 13 at School 1, 15 at School 2, and 14 at School 3. School 3 served as our control school, as it did not implement the program described above. School 1 is a large vocational high school, while School 2 is a small high school. As such, there were variances in the implementation of the program model, in that the student participants at School 1 were ninth graders, while School 2 enrolls combination 9th/10th grade classes due to the school’s small size. School 1 offered ESL, English language arts, and Spanish Native language arts to a cohort comprised solely of LTELLs, while for their math, science, and social studies classes LTELLs were mixed with other students. At School 2, LTELLs were mixed in with other students for all of their courses.

The findings reported in this chapter focus on the essential role of educators in program implementation. Our research findings are based on classroom observations, interviews, and professional development meetings, with ten teachers at the two school sites, conducted repeatedly throughout the year. Conducting periodic classroom observations was central to our research, as doing so allowed for the documentation of teachers’ usage of specific pedagogical approaches and their outcomes, and also their efforts to support the content and literacy learning of LTELLs (Genesee & Upshur, 1996).

Over the course of the school year, each teacher was observed 4-5 times by one member of our research team with content expertise in the subject area observed. We documented the extent to which teachers infused language and literacy methods specifically focused on the educational needs of LTELLs into their instruction; following each lesson, the observer gave the teacher two scores ranging from 0-1 (with .25 increments) – one for the teacher’s effort and the other for the teacher’s
implementation of language and literacy strategies. Two types of teacher interviews were conducted throughout the yearlong study. First, following each classroom observation, the research team member and teacher had a post-observation debriefing session where they discussed the lesson. In addition to the 4-5 debriefing interviews, each teacher participated in a year-end interview in which they reflected on the successes and challenges of the biliteracy program as a whole, as well as their own work with LTELLs in particular. The principal investigator (Menken) met periodically with administrators at each school to learn their perceptions of the program’s implementation. At the end of the year, an in-depth semi-structured interview was also conducted with administrators. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to themes that arose most frequently (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Findings: Teacher Engagement, Preparedness, and Barriers

One of the most significant factors impacting the efficacy of our biliteracy program was the level of teacher engagement with the program’s ideals and practices. After the project began in Fall 2008 we soon realized that we had underestimated the great impact of teacher engagement and preparedness on our efforts at language education policy implementation. There were also several institutional barriers that arose over the course of the project period, as a result of decisions made by school administrators, which impacted programming. While our program was in fact successful overall, in that the LTELL students at the two schools involved in our study made substantial gains in their reading comprehension in English and Spanish, and gains were greater than those made at the control school (as we report in Menken, Kleyn, Ascenzi-Moreno, Chae, Flores, & Funk, 2009), we realize the results of our program were limited, in that the program would have been more successful with greater engagement and preparation of the educators involved. Moreover, here we identify factors that should be considered in language education policy implementation efforts, particularly in schools that have for years promulgated monolingual ideology and pedagogy.
Over the course of the school year spent in the two participating schools, we found that teachers fell into one of three main categories when asked to change their programming and practices to meet the needs of LTELL students. The first group was comprised of several teachers at both schools who demonstrated enthusiasm from the outset; throughout the year, these teachers were eager for insights about the LTELL population and proactive in developing, implementing and evaluating effective classroom strategies to meet their needs. Other instructors, however, fell into the second group, in that they proved reluctant to modify or expand upon the teaching methods they employ with other student populations; consequently, the instruction they provided to the LTELLs in their classrooms departed in principle and practice from our model, and was not differentiated to meet the specialized needs of LTELLs. A third group of teachers made significant efforts to infuse a focus on language and literacy development into their lessons, but were not always effective in implementing their plans.

In order to quantify this observable level of teacher ‘fidelity’ to the biliteracy project, two evaluation measures were incorporated into our classroom observations: Teacher Effort (at infusing language and literacy) and Effectiveness (of the language and literary strategies they implemented), both of which were evaluated by our team during our observations on a scale of 0 to 1 at quarter-point intervals (as described in the methodology section above). Scores are shown in Table 1:

**TABLE 1: TEACHER EFFORT/LITERACY STRATEGIES – AVERAGE SCORES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts (ELA)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language (ESL)</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Native Language Arts (NLA)</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>n/a³</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²The ESL teacher at School 2 co-taught with other teachers, mostly in global studies (social studies); there was no independent ESL class. While his fidelity to the model was high throughout the year, only the teachers with whom he taught were evaluated.
The findings presented in the table support the existence of the three groups of teachers outlined above. The teachers in the top two rows received the highest scores, in that no teacher in this group received an effectiveness score below 0.75 in any single observation. Conspicuously, these three instructors – who consistently strove to implement language and literacy strategies and did so most effectively – were those for whom English language and literacy were already central to the curriculum: the ELA and ESL teachers. In contrast, no teacher in the other four subject areas ever received a single-observation effectiveness score above 0.5, with the lowest scores belonging to the math and science teachers at School 1, who consistently displayed strong resistance to the aims and approaches of the program. The other five teachers – spread among the four ‘non-English’ subject areas – represent the third group mentioned above, whose various levels of effort yielded mixed results. Ms. H, for example, made strong efforts to infuse literacy into her classroom, but found a number of obstacles in her way:

I feel like there are very few [ELL/LTELL] resources out there. I feel like people don’t consider math a literacy area. It’s like English, then global, the two main ones. Then science and math, like you don’t need to read to do math. Yes you do. (Ms. H, Math Teacher, School 2, Interview Transcript)

These and other challenges to teacher engagement – as well as key factors that foster it – are considered in detail below.

‘Language vs. Content’?

At first glance, the higher scores for ELA and ESL teachers might seem only natural. The teachers of these subjects (whom we call ‘Ms. K,’ ‘Ms. D,’ ‘Ms. S,’ and ‘Mr. N’) had stronger backgrounds in explicit language and literacy pedagogy, through both their training and prior teaching experience. Therefore, the changes they made to how they taught prior to participation in

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3 School 1 decided to eliminate 9th grade science for the cohort involved in this study, presumably due to scheduling pressures.

4 All teacher names are pseudonyms.
this project were more minor. In addition, language and literacy learning are central to the state-determined curricula they must cover. The teachers of other subject areas (called ‘Ms. N,’ ‘Mr. A,’ ‘Ms. H,’ ‘Mr. M,’ and ‘Mr. L’) faced the dual challenges of less experience with this type of instruction, and the need to teach content that was less explicitly focused on language and literacy (e.g., historical figures and events, mathematical and scientific formulas). The clear demarcation (see rows 4 and 5) between content teachers who put in significant effort and those who did not is worth noting here; teacher ‘buy-in’ to the very concept of language and literacy infusion was a factor that mitigated (School 2) or compounded (School 1) the difficulties already inherent in language planning for the content areas.

What about Native Language Arts?

What the ‘language vs. content’ divide does not easily account for are the lower evaluations of both Spanish teachers, whose pedagogical backgrounds presumably centered on language and literacy as much as those of the ESL and ELA teachers. Part of the explanation is that Spanish teachers are not prepared to teach Spanish to native speakers of the language who have experienced language loss, and who have low literacy skills in the language as a result. Additionally, neither school previously offered Native language arts (NLA) courses. At School 1, Spanish had previously only been offered as a foreign language arts course to be taken by native-English speakers; at School 2, Spanish had not been offered at all and the Spanish teacher had been teaching ESL. While the ESL and ELA teachers needed to adapt their previous curricula for LTELLs, Ms. C, the NLA teacher at School 1, could draw only from her experience teaching native-English speakers in a foreign language course, while Mr. R at School 2 was faced with creating an entirely new NLA curriculum from scratch. Mr. R spoke of this pressure early on when asked where he needed additional support:

The curriculum itself. I can plan a good lesson, but I need to organize that. I want to sit down with someone who is used to doing it. I have a curriculum that I have that I’ve been
working on with my mother-in-law (who was a teacher). I want to make it meaningful to me. What are the learning points, the four modalities [speaking, writing, listening, reading]? (Mr. R, NLA Teacher, School 2, Interview Transcript)

Ms. C did not settle on a textbook until several weeks into the school year, and felt much more effective after she did:

We tried to get a book that would fit all of my students’ needs. I met with Ms. J and [teacher name] and we came up with the idea that Navegando is good for them, because it has a lot of activities. They practice talking, reading and writing... I feel now that the follow-up is more specific. [The textbook]’s guided towards their needs. (Ms. C, NLA Teacher, School 1, Interview Transcript)

There were also significant individual differences between the two teachers that emerged over the course of the year. Mr. R expressed interest in LTELLs and their particular needs in early conversations, but proved somewhat less dedicated to actually implementing new strategies for his LTELL students as the year went on; in his final class observation, Mr. R’s effort was assessed at 0. By contrast, Ms. C overcame some initial unfamiliarity with how to help her students develop foundational native language literacy skills, and by spring was starting to receive 0.5s in both of her observation scores. Ms. C’s description of one of her later lessons reflect the work she had done, both on her own and in collaboration with the ELA and ESL teachers at her school:

[What’s working is] the fact that the [students] are writing and they have to write in English class and they have to organize thoughts, they’re writing narrative. They were writing that in the English class, it’s connected all the time. What they are writing in one class, they are writing in this class. (Ms. C, NLA Teacher, School 1, Observation 4 Notes)

The Assistant Principal also noticed Ms. C’s growth over the course of the project period:

... [Ms. C] made the greatest growth, the greatest leap. I think working with [researcher] was a great help. I saw a strong leap... someone who didn’t have a lot of experience, who struggled with some of the activities in class... to someone who was very confident in the classroom... [who] would do her thing, and do what she had to do, who felt very confident. So I saw tremendous growth, a tremendous change in Ms. C! (Ms. J, Assistant Principal, School 1, Interview Transcript)
Undoubtedly, differences in disposition among the various teachers involved in the study – e.g., Ms. C’s open-mindedness and work ethic, as well as the willingness of School 1’s other teachers to collaborate with her – impacted their levels of engagement.

**Teacher Engagement**

**Heightened Teacher Awareness about LTELLs**

It has been about four years since the New York City Department of Education began requiring schools to disaggregate the data they gather about emergent bilinguals by sub-group, including LTELLs. One of our primary findings has been that simply increasing teachers’ awareness about this population has improved the quality of services being provided to them. Before we began our study, the teachers in the participating schools had little to no awareness about long-term ELLs, and schools citywide had no educational programs in place specifically tailored to the needs of this population. This limited attentiveness is expressed by Ms. S:

> To be honest, I don’t think that we had ever given an actual direct thought to the idea that there are ELLs and there are long-term ELLs. Are we doing anything specific for those long-term ELLs? So the study certainly helped us to focus our energy and focus our strategies on them. (Ms. S, ELA Teacher, School 2, Interview Transcript)

Over the course of the biliteracy project period, teachers received ongoing professional development from members of the research team in formal group sessions and also in the one-on-one classroom observations and subsequent discussions described above. Towards the end of the year, Ms. K had come to the following understanding about LTELLs:

> They need a lot of structure, a lot more scaffolding, a little bit at a time. You can’t overwhelm them with too much…They need people to understand that they are LTELLs, to be patient with them, that it’s okay to use their native language, they still need to. I’ve learned for myself that there’s such a wide spread of LTELLs, there are those that are not as academic. They are not miscategorized or misprogrammed. They are not special education. (Ms. K, ELA Teacher, School 1, Interview Transcript)

Ms. K noticed that although there were differences in the students’ abilities, as a group they require additional support structures and time. She also noted that some LTELLs do not perform well
academically, but not as an outcome of learning disabilities, such as those evident in students assigned to special education classes.\textsuperscript{5} Ms. K understands that what this population of students requires most is their teachers’ awareness and appropriate modification of teaching strategies.

Mr. N, the ESL teacher at School 2, provides an example of what the ‘scaffolding’ for LTELLs that Ms. K refers to above looks like in the Global History classroom where he co-teaches with the social studies teacher:

What we did in Global was instead of giving them entire textbook chapters to read, which is something that a lot of teachers still do, we would take chunks that were important from the chapter and we would turn those chunks into double-entry journals where they’d have a chunk and had a question beside it. They had to read that chunk and then answer that question. I found that when we did that the LTELs were able to access the text more. (Mr. N, ESL Teacher, School 2, Interview Transcript)

In this excerpt, Mr. N clarifies how instruction is modified for LTELs.

Ms. N utilizes a similar scaffolding approach based on questioning in her science course, only she has students pose the questions. In her classes, students take notes, often by copying what is on the board, overhead or PowerPoint presentation. Because this approach does not guarantee students actually comprehend what they write, Ms. N has success with an activity she calls “know your notes.” Instead of the teacher asking students questions about what they copied, it is the students who must ask questions based on their notes and then pose them to their peers. This activity places students in the position of not only answering questions, but also asking them, which can be even more demanding. Further pedagogical strategies the teachers found successful with LTELs in their classrooms include: activating prior knowledge, oral language development, attention to vocabulary, and active read alouds (described further in Menken et al, 2009).

Moreover, by simply clarifying for teachers the diversity of the student population they serve, and highlighting the specialized learning needs of LTELs, the teaching practices of several

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\textsuperscript{5} Of the LTELs who participated in this study, none were identified as special education students or those with an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). However, we do recognize that there are LTELs who simultaneously labeled as special education students. It is likely their needs go beyond the approaches we describe here.
teachers changed in positive ways at the schools involved our study. As a result of this increased awareness, they identified and refined teaching strategies such as those described above, which they found were successful for their LTEL students.

**Teacher Collaboration**

Although collaboration among high school teachers is typically uncommon, and collaboration across content areas is even less prevalent at this level, our biliteracy program required teachers to plan together. In the summer of 2008, before the program began, the ELA, NLA and ESL teachers from both schools met with a few members of the research team to plan a linked curriculum, whereby different courses would reinforce and build upon each other. This was meant to set the tone for the remainder of the year, during which unit planning was intended to be collaborative across all three language teachers and courses.

The collaboration process took on different formats at each school. In School 1, the ESL, ELA, and NLA teachers continued to work together during their scheduled planning time, although the ELA and ESL teachers were in actuality able to work more closely with each other than with the NLA teacher. Nevertheless, the three teachers taught the LTEL students in back-to-back periods (with the ELA teacher having a double-period block). Ms. D speaks to the effectiveness of this working relationship, which was entirely new for the teachers at School 1:

> It’s been great collaborating with the ELA teacher. I don’t collaborate as much with the Spanish or other teachers. I needed to learn the ELA strategies, so that helped me a lot. Ms. K and I were just teaching point of view at the same time, so the students had just done it and they were like “I know that.” That was great to hear that…but also working that time into our meetings you know, it became necessary because of the study. But it was necessary anyway… (Ms. D, ESL Teacher, School 1, Interview Transcript)

As Ms. D mentions, the collaboration was very helpful, but did not equally involve all the teachers in the biliteracy program, largely due to scheduling issues. Nevertheless, even though she and Ms. K did not have the time to meet with the NLA teacher on a regular basis, their collaborative planning positively impacted the students in Spanish as well.
The similar focus embedded into course curricula allowed students to create connections around literacy in English and Spanish and to see how skills transfer across languages. Ms. C explains, “Students were reintroduced to the writing process in Spanish. This lesson is a review of what has been done in ELA, to connect students’ understandings of the writing process to NLA.” Thus, even a minimal level of collaboration positively affected students. Ms. J, the assistant principal at the school, summarizes the power of teacher collaborative planning and the discussions they had about their students:

Conversations, the teachers, like, with Spanish and English and ESL they taught along the same theme. And they planned together and they talked about the kids together, that this child did this in my room. This child is very quiet in my class. And this child does this. Just to have a conversation. And they also visited each other. That was great.

(Ms. J, Assistant Principal, School 1, Interview Transcript)

While collaboration was new at School 1, as it was a required component of the biliteracy program, it was already part of the school culture at School 2 prior to the start of our project. The teachers across all the content areas at School 2 select a common skill to teach each month, and address it in their own subject area. For example, teachers focused on comparing and contrasting one month and word sorts to develop content vocabulary another month. However, while the teachers at School 2 did come together to collaborate, their efforts were not centered on the needs of English Learners or long-term ELLs. It was not until the LTELL biliteracy program started and we began coming into the school for professional development sessions that the specific focus and collaboration around LTELLs began.

With the smaller size of School 2 and teachers’ closer working proximity, they were able to co-plan and also to co-teach. This was the case with the ESL and content teachers. In this collaborative team-teaching structure, the ESL teacher focused on the explicit literacy skills required to make the content accessible to students. Ideally, both teachers worked together as equals to bring language and content instruction to students in a consistent and uninterrupted manner. However,
this was not always easy, especially if the ESL teacher lacked content knowledge, or if the content teacher was not open to having another teacher in their room; at times, content teachers can see the ESL teacher simply as a paraprofessional or assistant there solely to help beginner ELLs (for further discussion of this common downfall of co-teaching, see Creese, 2005). Nonetheless, there were instances of successful team-teaching at School 2. The lesson summary below shows how the Math and ESL teacher collaborated:

Both teachers taught equally throughout the lesson. The focus on literacy was explicit through a sorting activity that centered on applying prior knowledge and specific vocabulary as it applied to the content of solving 2-step equations. The teachers worked together seamlessly so it seemed as if both were the math instructor, despite one of them being the ESL specialist. The students were quite engaged in the activity and the lesson appeared to be successful. (Ms. H and Mr. R, Math and ESL Teachers, School 2, Observation Notes)

Although challenging in terms of the time commitment required and interpersonal relationships between teachers, collaboration at both schools was viewed as a positive aspect for instruction and student learning. For LTELLs, the reinforcement of skills across their different courses allow for purposeful connections to be made rather than those that arise simply by coincidence. Also, co-teaching can ensure that students receive content and literacy instruction simultaneously. It is likely that an expansion of such collaboration, already in place to different degrees in both schools, would only deepen its positive impact on LTELLs.

Teacher Resistance

In all likelihood, every school (if not every professional institution) counts among its members both those amenable to new ideas and those less open to change, and neither school in the study was an exception to this rule. Given the creation of a new LTELL student cohort apart from other emergent bilinguals, a new program of study involving the addition of Spanish courses, and the explicit objective of developing unique classroom strategies for that cohort, our program was bound to meet a certain level of resistance from teachers of the second type, and this was indeed the case. Some teachers were relatively open about this:
The way we’ve been told now is maybe you have them in groups… with the curriculum we have now, I don’t know how we can do that. You will never be able to cover the curriculum. (Mr. M, Math Teacher, School 1, Interview Transcript)

Student collaboration was indeed something our team suggested for the LTELL classes, but, while perhaps not finding this particular approach problematic per se, Mr. M was in general resistant to new ideas. Mr. L presents an entirely different justification for avoiding group work:

I can’t do group work. That idea is not going to translate. There’s this belief that young people can work together. They’re so caught up in this self-entertainment that group work... is a non-starter.
(Mr. L, Social Studies Teacher, School 1, Interview Notes)

It should be noted that these views of student collaboration are at variance with those of other teachers in our program, but again, perhaps more significant are the phrases “will never,” “is not going to,” and “non-starter,” which indicate a priori rejection of the viability of group work with LTELLs, as opposed to consideration of its relative value after actually attempting it. Indeed, as far as could be told from classroom observations, Mr. M and Mr. L succeeded in avoiding group work throughout the course of the year. The lessons of both teachers were strikingly and consistently teacher-centered: students were given problems or questions to do independently and silently, and then had their answers checked by the teacher. In several cases when time grew short for the completion of a worksheet, the teacher hushed the students in order to spoon-feed them – orally or on the board – the answers they were supposed to have found but had not. ‘Crowd control’ was often mentioned as a reason for avoiding group work; interestingly, however, classroom management was a salient challenge in both classrooms, despite (or perhaps because of) this teacher-centered focus.

Mr. L and Mr. M demonstrated similar resistance to ‘razzle-dazzle’ (i.e., various methods of infusing language and literacy instruction into content areas) from the start of our research project, and this resistance also lasted throughout the project period. When asked to consider methods of
developing students’ vocabulary beyond mere impromptu, oral glossing of difficult words as he came across them in a text, Mr. L replied:

If I were to start doing razzle-dazzle, it’s going to raise the [students’] anxiety levels. I tried that a couple times [before the start of this program], but it didn’t work.
(Mr. L, Social Studies Teacher, School 1, Interview Notes)

Occasionally, apparent resistance or reluctance on the part of teachers in the program contradicted their outward affinity for the ideas behind the project. Mr. R, the NLA teacher, has already been mentioned in this regard: while never expressing the type of firm opposition to student collaboration seen above, he maintained strongly teacher-centered practices, with little student talk and minimal modeling or scaffolding for whatever independent work the students were required to do. Indeed, at one time or another, all of the teachers involved in the project expressed support for the concepts of native language support, additional scaffolding/modeling, and in general developing programming and instruction with the needs of LTELLs in mind. In spite of this ‘lip service’ to the ideals of bilingualism and language learning, some teachers never moved their support of these ideals from theory into practice. Additionally, as described in the section that follows, there were several external barriers that inhibited the engagement of the educators in the program.

Institutional Resistance

School Culture

The two schools we worked with had different climates. While the administration at School 1 began the school year stating a strong commitment to collaboration among the teachers, in actuality the only teachers who regularly collaborated were the ELA, ESL, and NLA teachers (with the NLA teacher less frequently involved). Over time, we found that limited opportunities for collaboration negatively impacted teacher engagement. The roots of this difficulty were both logistical – e.g., few or no designated periods for co-planning, either during or after school – and
cultural in nature. By cultural we mean that School 1’s teachers had evidently not been encouraged to work together in the past, and many were reluctant to do so for this program.

This was most notable in professional development sessions at the school, in which discussion of theories and practices for LTELLs were met with indifference from some of the faculty and administration alike, while model lessons demonstrating effective strategies were greeted more enthusiastically. Little value, in effect, was attached to the exchange of ideas among teachers; professional development was perceived as an exclusively top-down affair. Participants arrived late, wandered freely in and out of the discussion to attend to other business (e.g. cell phone calls), and – when one session ended at 5:03 instead of 5:00 sharp – a teacher asked the Assistant Principal in apparent seriousness if they would be paid overtime for the indiscretion. These behavior patterns indicated, in our view, a trickling down of an institutional ethos that devalued teacher collaboration and did not prioritize the needs of LTELLs.

On the other hand, School 2 paid greater logistical and cultural attention to the value of collaboration, with teachers participating more actively in discussion and viewing professional development and planning meetings as serious, worthwhile activities (though even more collaborative planning might have helped; see Mr. R’s comments below). It seems entirely reasonable to think that the lack of lowest-quadrant Teacher Effort scores (cf. Table 1) at School 2 might be related, at least indirectly, to this institutional culture.

Programming/Scheduling Issues and Spanish Instruction

Several difficulties with class scheduling and programming resulted in decreased teacher engagement, and a disproportional number of these problems pertained to support for the Spanish language programming that was such a crucial component of our efforts. Although both schools incorporated NLA classes into the LTELL program, sustained school support for these classes was lacking, reflecting a perception among school administrators and sending students a strong message
that learning Spanish was less important than other subjects. Both schools scheduled NLA classes either first period or last period, times when students were most likely to be absent – particularly given that LTELLs tend to be disengaged in schooling. Teachers referred to first period as “a buffer” (Mr. R); students came in late or left early because they did not consider it “cutting,” and generally perceived that the classes were not as serious as others.

Scheduling, of course, was not the only root of this perception; the institutions nourished it in other ways. While conducting student interviews at School 2 in early February 2009, our research team was surprised to learn that the LTELL students had taken an NLA course in the fall, but were no longer taking it and would not be taking it any more. The students had, in fact, lost their NLA class with the change in marking period; though the class was reinstated shortly thereafter, roughly a month had transpired without it, and another message had been sent to students about the class’s (un)importance.

At School 1, another institutional challenge arose when the integrity of the LTELL cohort was not maintained: new students were matriculated into the Spanish class throughout the year, requiring the NLA teacher to constantly deal with new class dynamics, the task of familiarizing herself with the language abilities of the new student, and meeting student needs in an increasingly heterogeneous classroom. In some cases, these new students were not LTELLs at all, a fact that cut against the very aim of the project. Though this phenomenon was unfortunately not limited to the NLA class, it was most acute in this class, and it contributed to the undermining of the Spanish class’s already fragile validity in students’ minds.

Absenteeism was a consistent problem in NLA classes at both schools, a fact that in its own way affected institutional ‘fidelity’ to the program model.

When I started with them the first period in the morning, that was in the beginning of the year, a lot of them were coming late. The other thing is they keep on sending me students to that class. I had one last week. There is one student in that class who I don’t
know yet. He was absent today. I would say almost every month a new student comes to that class.  
(Ms. C, NLA Teacher, School 1, Interview Transcript)

Another challenge was the lack of materials and planning time needed to successfully implement the NLA class. Teachers at both schools, but Mr. R in particular, felt alone in the planning and implementation of the program. Since the students were LTELLs, and therefore highly proficient oral speakers of Spanish (for social purposes) with low academic reading and writing skills, the class could not be taught as a foreign language class. Nor could the class be conceived as a literature class, since the students had widely varying Spanish literacy skills, inclusive of those with very rudimentary levels. These two modes – Spanish as a Foreign Language and Spanish Literature – are usually how Spanish is taught at the secondary level in the U.S., so both NLA teachers in our program needed significant support in developing a meaningful and skills-rich curriculum from scratch, one that was appropriate for LTELLs. However:

One challenge that really burns me is not having the support of the general school... the general school community. It’s pretty much on your own. And I think it’s something that the students have experienced, not having support from everyone. So that was a challenge. Also [another challenge] is engaging them. A lot of them went into class and said to themselves: I know this, I don’t need this. Students also get the message that the school does not prioritize the Spanish program. (Mr. R, NLA teacher, School 2, Interview Transcript)

Mr. R’s views stand in apparent opposition to our previous discussion of school culture: he teaches at School 2, which we described as significantly better at fostering teacher collaboration than School 1. In direct contradiction to its otherwise collaborative ethos, School 2, interestingly, displayed a lack of institutional support for the teaching of Spanish to LTELLs. Moreover, neither school administration saw NLA collaboration as important and in many ways undermined Spanish instruction altogether.

Class Size and Cohort Consistency

School 1 was, as just mentioned, inconsistent at maintaining the LTELL cohort. While the group of students remained more or less intact throughout the year in ELA and ESL classes,
enrollment in the NLA, social studies and math classes changed dramatically from marking period to marking period. This became abundantly clear in Mr. L’s social studies class, which swelled to 34 students by spring.

The powers that be decided to put them [ELLs and LTELLs] together, and it’s basically a joke.
(Mr. L, Social Studies Teacher, School 1, Interview Notes)

This poorly considered expansion had an effect on engagement – both of teacher and students – that is easy to imagine; the program was institutionally declared to be low-value. Moreover, larger class sizes reduced the possibility that a teacher already resistant to change would try new approaches:

34 kids to a room. There’s not even enough room for group formation.
(Mr. L, Social Studies Teacher, School 1, Interview Notes)

The Impact of Testing: Language vs. Content, revisited

All high school students in the state of New York need to pass a set of Regents exams (in math, science, social studies, and English language arts) in order to graduate. Teachers in our sample – particularly those of science, social studies, and math – mentioned the pressure of preparing students for Regents examinations as a primary obstacle to their implementation of explicit language and literacy activities. When asked how she planned for the content and literacy needs of LTELLs in her first observed lesson, School 2’s math teacher (Ms. H) replied that the content had been based directly on a mock Regents exam, and that she had not planned for literacy at all. As the year progressed, Ms. H agreed in principle with the possible benefits of emphasizing literacy in her content area, but felt unable to deviate from her standard plan of “drill and kill.”

When I know something will work [for the Regents] with literacy, I’ll insert it.
(Ms. H, Math Teacher, School 2, Interview Transcript)

Mr. A, a first-year social studies teacher at School 2, had a similar awareness of the fundamental value of explicit literacy instruction for LTELLs – even as a key to performing well on
standardized tests – yet found the need to cover the content necessary to pass the tests directly at
odds with the time needed to focus on language and literacy development. Both social studies
teachers at his school received prods from the administration for falling behind the set pace of the
Regents curriculum, a pace which Mr. N, School 2’s ESL teacher, referred to as “ridiculous.” By the
end of the year, Mr. A had come to see literacy as a precondition for this content-building with
LTELLs:

[Over the course of the program I’ve learned that] LTELLs lack basic literacy
skills needed to access information and do well on state tests, and these skills
must be built before students can fully demonstrate their knowledge and
understanding of concepts and information or do well on such tests.
(Mr. A, Social Studies Teacher, School 2, Interview Transcript, emphasis added)

The views of these two teachers to some extent bookend the ways instructors cope with the
difficulty of preparing LTELLs for Regents exams, with Ms. H viewing literacy as something one
might ‘insert’ if given more time or concrete proof of it bearing fruit on the Regents, and Mr. A
viewing the content ‘concepts and information’ as something LTELLs demonstrate knowledge of
only after their literacy skills are sufficiently developed. Both teachers face a similar challenge, one
that no content teacher in our program felt trifling.6

The looming specter of the earth science Regents exam obliged Ms. N to hurry through a
Regents-centered curriculum, as well as to herd her students through the requisite number of labs
(experiments) in order to sit for the test. ‘Completing’ a lab meant, for official purposes, having the
right answers written down in the right places; the class’s lab sessions, which might otherwise have
furnished an opportunity to explicitly teach science literacy and the metacognitive skills that go into
scientific thinking, instead centered around the spoon-feeding of answers to finish within the
allotted class time. Ms. N was under direct pressure from the administration to do this; she would

6 Mr. A resorted to a significant amount of Regents drilling and rote memorization with his 10th graders in the month
leading up to the exam.
hear from superiors if too few students completed labs. When asked what worked for her LTELL group in a particular class period, she replied:

They all completed the lab and made the connection to their lives. They have to complete a certain number (30) to take the Regents, so it is good that they finished.

(Ms. N, Science Teacher, School 2, Interview Notes)

As the year progressed, Ms. N reported success with vocabulary development, graphic organizers, and developing oral language as a springboard to academic language; but, throughout the program, Regents pressure provided a barrier to infusing attention to language and literacy development in her classroom.

In each of these instances, we see high-stakes testing force even those teachers expressing support for explicit language and literacy instruction to emphasize rote coverage over in-depth analysis, not necessarily because they think this is effective for LTELLs but because they feel pressure from administrators to cover content, and understandably want their own students to perform well on the exams. In the case of those teachers with predisposed resistance, standardized testing provides another incentive for leaving literacy and language to the English teachers.

**Discussion & Conclusion**

This chapter documents the essential role of teachers in efforts to re-envision schools from subtractive institutions that cause multilingual students to become monolingual over time, to those that actually embrace multilingualism and build upon the diversity of their students. Specifically, our work focuses on schooling for “long-term English language learners,” primarily U.S.-educated secondary students who, because of their prior schooling experiences, are orally bilingual when language is used for social purposes, but who have limited academic literacy skills in either of the languages they speak. In an effort to reverse some of the language loss these students have experienced and improve their school performance, we highlight efforts to change the programming and pedagogy these students received over the course of an academic year in two New York City
high schools. In specific, our project involved infusing explicit attention to academic language and literacy development into all subject areas and developing the students’ Spanish language skills.

While it might seem that promoting multilingualism would be easy within contexts of extreme diversity, such as New York City, our findings dispel such expectations. Our research examines the responses of teachers to new language education policies in their schools, involving professional development and teacher collaboration, as well as changes to programming, pedagogy, curricula, and materials. While these changes were found to have had a positive impact on student performance, results were limited in the absence of a full commitment to the program on the part of all teachers involved. As stated at the outset, and further detailed in Menken et al. (2009), the students in our sample made greater gains in their reading comprehension in both Spanish and English than the students in our control school, who actually performed worse in both areas over the course of the project period. These findings suggest that our project benefitted the student participants, in spite of the limitations that we highlight in this chapter.

Although our project was successful in this regard, our findings lead us to believe that it would have had an even more positive impact had all the teachers fully bought into the program model we asked them to implement. Instead, we found that the teachers participating in our biliteracy project fell into three categories, which highlight the extent to which they embraced or rejected the model: 1) those who made great efforts to infuse explicit language and literacy instruction into their courses, and were effective in doing so; 2) those who resisted the model and would not make any effort to focus on language or literacy development in their instruction; and, 3) those who made an effort but experienced limited or no success in their implementation.

Moreover, we argue that changing schoolwide approaches to language entails an identity shift among certain teachers, as well as a shift in overall institutional culture. As highlighted above,

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7 The findings from the control school are consistent with a study by Yang, Urrabazo, and Murray (2001) who found that without proper programming, LTELs do not continue to improve, and that they may perform worse over time.
the teachers who embraced our program and were most successful in their efforts to focus on the needs of LTELLs in the classroom were the teachers of English as a second language and English language arts. Over the course of the project, they were highly engaged and collaborative, planned consistently for language and literacy development, and they successfully identified and implemented strategies to meet the needs of their students. All of these teachers self-identified as language teachers, had been prepared to teach language in institutions of higher education, and had experience working with LTELLs prior to their involvement in our program.

While the Spanish NLA teachers also self-identified as language teachers, they did so as foreign language teachers rather than as native language teachers, and had not had prior experience teaching Spanish to LTELLs. Thus they felt better prepared to teach grammar, vocabulary, verb conjugation and basic conversation to native-English speakers than they did to teach Spanish literacy skills to native-Spanish speakers. As described above, institutional culture was an added challenge that particularly affected the Spanish teachers, who faced scheduling problems and cohort inconsistency, which sent students and teachers a very clear message that Spanish instruction was of lesser value than other subjects at both schools – even though these two schools had volunteered to participate in our biliteracy project.

The greatest resistance towards our program was from teachers of such subjects as math, science, and social studies. These teachers self-identify as content teachers and typically perceive of content as separate from language. Thus, many found it difficult to carve out time for language and literacy instruction within already tight schedules, while others rejected outright the notion that they were responsible for teaching both language and content, and would not try new approaches. Though many teachers came to see language and content as interconnected over the course of our project implementation period, they did not have the preparation necessary to explicitly teach language and literacy in their content areas. Within the U.S., content teacher preparation in
institutions of higher education does not typically involve preparation to teach language and/or literacy, particularly at the high school level. This oversight is compounded by the structure of traditional U.S. high schools, in which teachers are segregated by content area and receive few opportunities to collaborate across disciplines.

Our findings therefore have implications for teacher preparation programs as well as for research in language policy. First, in light of the focus of this volume, we suggest that all teachers – beyond only language teachers – must be prepared to face the realities of the multilingual rather than the monolingual classroom. In the U.S., this involves ensuring that teachers of languages other than English are prepared to teach native speakers as well as non-native speakers; and, this involves preparing all teachers to teach language and literacy required for their content area (Ramirez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2008; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Likewise, we must make certain that all teachers perceive of themselves as teachers of both language and content. Secondly, we argue that promoting multilingualism in classroom settings relies on teachers, who are at the epicenter of language policy implementation in schools. Although the central role of teachers has traditionally been overlooked in language education policy research (Menken & García, 2010), teachers must receive the attention they deserve in order for real change to occur.
References


