

Inclusión

How School Leaders Can Accent Inclusion for Bilingual Students, Families, & Communities

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Schools can be welcoming and liberating. They can also be alienating and confining. Numerous factors influence how school communities are experienced, including the mission, cultural climate, internal and external organizational structures, as well as the role of school leaders, both formal and informal. It is a complex situation where each of these aspects plays a critical role in shaping the learning environment.

School principals, for instance, can structure school events in a manner that either promotes or inhibits school access to families, while teachers can enact or ignore culturally-responsive pedagogical strategies. Within the context of a growing pluralism in our school communities, the need for educational structures that encourage access and opportunity for students and families who have traditionally been marginalized is an urgent priority. The purpose of this article is to articulate a conceptual framework for school leaders that can promote such structures.

Marginalization in schools can manifest in multiple aspects, not limited to, but including race, ethnicity, social class, linguistic heritage, disability, sexual orientation, family structure, and religious tradition. This article will focus specifically on one group of traditionally marginalized students: those in linguistically diverse families.

I begin by describing the demographic imperative that this group presents in school communities. Next a conceptual framework for school leaders to approach linguistically diverse students and their families in an asset-oriented and inclusive

manner will be described. Finally, this conceptual framework will be applied through specific examples of in-school supports and home-school-community collaboration strategies.

Demographic Imperative

Linguistic diversity has been ubiquitous and contested throughout the history of the United States. Shifts in political, socioeconomic, and cultural forces have influenced how schools in both the public and private sectors have responded to linguistic diversity (Ovando, 2003). Currently, substantial demographic imperatives are pressuring schools to improve educational services for students from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009).

The primary impetus for such initiatives is in response to the rapid growth of the of linguistic diversity within the school population. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of bilingual students has increased from one in 10 students in the late 1970s to one in five students today (Planty, et al., 2009). In terms of the languages other than English being spoken, the vast majority of bilingual students speak Spanish (75%) or Asian/Pacific Islander languages (12%) (Planty, et al., 2009). Nearly one third of the Latino population of the United States (32%) are students in the school system, and the overwhelming majority of these students (91%) are U.S. citizens (Dolan, 2009). At current rates of growth, a majority of Americans will be bilinguals by 2044 (Crawford, 2005).

While the population of linguistically diverse students is growing rapidly, there are other factors that also complicate this trend. Two particularly salient ones are the factors of segregation and high stakes accountability pressures. Though officially

illegal, segregation in educational facilities persists. Segregation by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and linguistic heritage are all interconnected. As Orfield and Lee (2005) describe,

Segregation has never just been by race: segregation by race is systematically linked to other forms of segregation, including segregation by socioeconomic status, by residential location, and increasingly by language. (p. 13)

They point out that African-American and Latino students attend schools with disproportionately high poverty rates:

The average White and Asian student attends schools with the lowest shares of poor students. The average Black and Latino student attends schools in which close to half the students are poor. (p. 16)

Moreover, segregation *within* schools can further exacerbate disparities and programmatic service delivery structures tend to limit access to high quality teaching and learning environments for students who receive special support services, especially linguistically diverse students who receive bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

The pressures of high stakes accountability are another factor compounding the difficulties of the learning environment for linguistically diverse students. The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires schools to demonstrate substantive improvement in students' academic achievement, including students with limited English proficiency and students in protected classes, along with "major racial and ethnic groups" (Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians) (Capps, et al., 2005). Students from linguistically diverse families, who typically have lower rates of achievement in reading and math (Dolan, 2009), pose challenges to school leaders who are held

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accountable for students' poor performance on standardized achievement tests.

With linguistic diversity growing, segregatory patterns expanding, and high stakes accountability pressures looming, bilingual students often experience in-social isolation and academic confusion within the school community. How can school leaders, including principals, teacher leaders, and school board members cultivate effective teaching and learning environments that welcome linguistically diverse students and their families? A fundamental answer to this question can be found in a conceptual framework that allows these leaders to recognize linguistically diverse students and families as vital members of the school communities and to build on the assets of bilingualism. I call one such framework *inclusión*.

***Inclusión:* A Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual frameworks shape decisions and behaviors. In research, conceptual frameworks define what variables we pay attention to and how we expect them to relate to one another (Bickman, Rog, & Hedrick, 1998). Here, I use the term "conceptual framework" to signify the salient dimensions that shape educators' experiences of schools. Bowers (1984) states that "the conceptual maps on which daily life is based... [shape how] we organize and experience our cultural reality" (pp. 32-33).

As this implies, the conceptual frameworks school leaders hold will drive how they understand and respond to their school communities. Pink and Noblit (2005) make this point when analyzing school reform. The process of changing schools, they assert, has more to do with values and culture than it does with technical expertise *per se*. Pink and Noblit explain that conflicting values about the purposes of schooling complicate efforts to enact reform:

[T]he messy work of changing school culture and engaging in systemic reform requires altering the environment of schools even as we work to change the actions and beliefs within schools... Reforms based on instrumental rationality ignore both the value conflict and its essential message that schools are less about instructing facts and more about constituting culture. (pp. 3, 7)

While various and competing conceptual frameworks within an organization influence all members of school communities, here I have chosen to emphasize

those held specifically by school leaders. School leadership is broadly distributed through the roles and responsibilities of different individuals, including administrators (often principals), teacher leaders (who can also be department chairs), and other leaders in the school community (such as governance council members). School leaders in these various roles have considerable influence on reform within the school community. Accordingly, the conceptual frameworks that they hold are particularly important.

I submit that *Inclusión* is a conceptual framework for educators in general, and school leaders in particular, that will create welcoming and effective environments for linguistically diverse students and families. *Inclusión* incorporates the following four primary dimensions:

1. Linguistically diverse students are bilingual;
2. Language acquisition is sociocultural and developmental;
3. Service delivery systems should be best equipped to meet students' special needs;
4. Parent engagement is essential and ecological.

These four dimensions comprise a conceptual framework in that they create a lens through which school leaders can approach and engage linguistically diverse members of a school community. I will now describe each dimension in turn.

Linguistically Diverse Students Are Bilingual

First, the framework of *Inclusión* recognizes that students in our schools who come from linguistically diverse backgrounds are bilinguals. This is not a simple word game, as these students are innately bilingual. Brisk (2006) describes how this orientation directs schools to understand the value inherent to linguistic diversity:

Understanding bilinguals as unique individuals with more than one language available to them, rather than as the sum of two monolinguals, and influenced by a dynamic cross-cultural experience, rather than rigid cultural stereotypes, is vital for designing school policy, classroom practices, and assessment procedures. Bilingual students are especially successful academically and socially when they value and cultivate their bilingualism and feel adjusted to both their heritage culture and their host culture. Schools and families who promote bilingualism and sociocultural integration ease the

adjustment of children to the new social environment. (p. xvii)

Recognizing students from linguistically diverse backgrounds as bilingual does not imply that proficiency in English should be either presumed or ignored. Indeed, as the following dimension makes clear, building proficiency in English is a fundamental responsibility of schools. Rather, recognizing these students as bilingual foregrounds the fact that building on a student's native language is the most effective way to scaffold English language development (Goldenberg, 2008; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

Language Acquisition is Sociocultural and Developmental

In the second dimension of the conceptual framework of *Inclusión* language acquisition is viewed as both a sociocultural and developmental process. First, recognizing language acquisition as being sociocultural is grounded in the theory that learning is intrinsically social and that it is borne of social, historical, and cultural experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Gibbons (2002) connects this explicitly to the domain of learning language:

[W]hile we are all biologically able to acquire language, what language we learn, how adept we are at using it, and the purposes for which we are able to use it are a matter of the social contexts and situations we have been in: in a very real sense, what and how we learn depends very much on the company we keep. (p. 8)

In addition to being sociocultural, language acquisition is also developmental. Generally, individuals learn across receptive domains (listening and reading) before productive domains (speaking and writing) (Gottlieb, 2004). We develop different registers of language, which vary by topic, relationship between speaker/listener or writer/reader, and mode of communication (Gibbons, 2002). Developing a register of "academic English" is essential for success in schools (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Scarcella (2003) explains that:

Academic English arises not just from knowledge of the linguistic code and cognition, but also from social practices in which academic English is used to accomplish communicative goals. (p. 29)

Thus, the developmental dimensions of language acquisition are interconnected with the sociocultural.

Service Delivery Systems Meet Students' Special Needs

Third, the *Inclusión* conceptual framework emphasizes that students' special needs are varied, interconnected, and dynamic, and that they thus cannot effectively be met in a normal programmatic manner. "Special needs" is a broad umbrella term that includes conditions which entitle students to various support services (e.g., a student with a diagnosed disability who receives special education services) as well as conditions that disadvantage students but do not trigger legal entitlements (e.g., a student experiencing a family hardship who therefore meets with a school counselor). Many bilingual students are developing their proficiency in English and thus entitled to bilingual support services. In addition, bilingual students typically experience disproportionately higher rates of poverty and mobility.

Too often programmatic approaches to delivering services in support of bilingual students' special needs tend to be fragmented and inefficient. Such approaches leave different personnel and educators (e.g., special educators, bilingual resource teachers, and counselors) working in relative isolation, pulling students out of the regular classroom to receive special resources. These programmatic approaches do not typically support and build the capacity of the classroom teachers to more effectively meet these students' needs. As viewed within *Inclusión*, such service delivery can be integrated through teaming teachers, bringing resources to students, and building the capacity of the classroom teachers (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

Such integrated service delivery systems apply principles of universal design, anticipating the need to differentiate curriculum and instruction to meet students' special needs (Sailor & Roger, 2005). This approach to service delivery maximizes access to the core curriculum by ensuring that students spend as much time as possible integrated with their grade-level peers. It also builds the capacity of classroom teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners within their classrooms.

This dimension of *Inclusión* emphasizes that support services for bilingual students must be integrated into the broader service delivery system in the school. These supports should be delivered in manners that affirm the asset of students' home language as indicated in dimension one of *Inclusión* in support of language acquisition as explained in dimension two.

Parent Engagement is Essential and Ecological

The fourth dimension of the *Inclusión* perspective involves engaging parents, caretakers, and guardians. This framework recognizes that parent engagement is essential if schools are to meet their educational missions. Empirical evidence continues to demonstrate the critical role that parents play in successful student achievement (e.g., Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2009).

Parent involvement positively influences achievement when schools focus on specific learning goals, cultivate trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members, and share power and responsibility with parents (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Garcia and Jensen (2007) explain:

Children whose teachers recognize and take full advantage of home resources (including a child's home language and cultural practices) and parental supports tend to experience more optimal outcomes. (p. 82)

Inclusión recognizes that schools have the potential to successfully cultivate relationships with linguistically diverse families, including those who are migrant (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001) and immigrant (Perez Carreon, Drake, & Calabrese Barton, 2005). Parent engagement is not only essential, but ecological (Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez Carreon, St. Louis, & George, 2004). Being "ecological" involves not only what parents do, but also *how* and *why* it is that they do so. Parent engagement in school activities includes both the parents' personal experiences and their relationships to the entire school community, moving beyond the school building itself and into the community around it. Seeing parent engagement ecologically points to the importance of trust, cooperation, collaboration, and also to power (Warren, 2005), space, and capital (Calabrese Barton, et al., 2004).

In summary, I use the term *inclusión* to articulate a conceptual framework that school leaders can utilize to better serve linguistically diverse students. *Inclusión* guides school leaders to conceptualize students who are linguistically diverse as bilinguals and whose language acquisition is a sociocultural and developmental process. This framework recognizes that schools will most effectively meet students' special needs through comprehensive service delivery systems. Finally, within this framework parent engagement becomes a

fundamental responsibility of schools and occurs as an ecological phenomenon.

Applying *Inclusión*

Through the lens of *inclusión* school leaders are directed to reshape educational structures to encourage opportunity and access for bilingual students. Two good examples are in-school supports for bilingual students and home-school collaboration strategies for bilingual families. These models vary considerably, ranging from models which cultivate bilingualism (e.g., dual immersion and late-exit transitional bilingual classrooms) to those that minimize bilingualism (e.g., pull-out, English-as-a-Second-Language resource room support) (Ovando, 2003). Undeniably, the overarching model of bilingual service delivery in a school affects the delivery of in-school supports for bilingual students.

This dimension of *inclusión* directs school leaders to adopt school-wide models that affirm and cultivate bilingualism. A important consideration is that different configurations of linguistically diverse students constrain leaders' choices. For instance, a dual immersion model might be appropriate in an elementary school community with a significant population of bilinguals who speak Spanish, but not feasible in a secondary school community in which students came from multiple language backgrounds. However, the *inclusión* framework directs school leaders to structure certain in-school supports for bilingual students regardless of the particular model in place. These supports must assess English language proficiency levels, promote literacy, and provide access to the general curriculum.

To this end Brisk (2006) enumerates three core goals that schools should embrace for bilingual students:

1. Language proficiency to academic grade level;
2. Sociocultural integration to their ethnic community and the society at large; and
3. Academic achievement as defined by school for all students. (p. 67)

Teacher Preparation

The most important step in creating robust supports within schools involves bolstering the skills of the teachers working with bilingual students. While many bilingual students are working on developing their English proficiency they require dual support in language acquisition and content

mastery. To address this challenge, school leaders can prioritize bilingual-bicultural certification both in hiring and in professional development for teachers (American Educational Research Association, 2004).

Moreover, school leaders can ensure that all teachers recognize that they are, to some degree, language teachers (de Jong & Harper, 2008). Through professional development, teaming, and coaching, all teachers can grow in understanding the essential dynamics of language acquisition and how to effectively work with bilingual students in their classrooms (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000) describe what this can look like:

[Teachers] need to know something about how language figures in academic learning and to recognize that all students require instructional support and attention to acquire the forms and structures associated with it. This is especially true for English language learners. Often explicit teaching of language structures and uses is the most effective way to help learners. Teachers must recognize that a focus on language—no matter what subject they are teaching—is crucial. They must engage children in classroom discussions of subject matter that are more and more sophisticated in form and content. And they must know enough about language to discuss it and to support its development in their students. Academic language is learned through frequent exposure and practice over a long period of time from the time children enter school to the time they leave it. (p. 22)

These strategies address the common problems bilingual students encounter when they are placed with teachers, tutors, and aides who are ill-equipped to meet their needs. Following these steps will increase the opportunities for bilingual students to experience an optimal teaching and learning environment in which they engage in structured academic conversations, receive formative feedback, and develop fluency in speaking, reading, and writing.

Home-School Collaboration

The *inclusión* framework directs school leaders to engage in home-school collaboration strategies. Respecting and building on the home language of students is important for all members of the school community, as Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000) explain:

A recognition of how language figures in adults' perceptions of children and how adults relate to children through language

is crucial to understanding what happens in schools and how children ultimately view schools and learning. (p. 20)

Recommended home-school collaboration strategies begin with affirming the dignity of parents' languages within the school through signage, communication, and personal interactions.

The *inclusión* framework goes on to emphasize the importance of developing meaningful relationships with parents. Recognizing the "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004) within the home lives of children is a way for school leaders to do this. Recommended are home visits and conversations with parents. In this manner educators can learn about the social and cultural resources within families. These activities are critical because, as Warren (2005) points out:

Most teachers and staff commute to their schools and have little understanding of, or connection with, the lives of their students outside of school, in their families and neighborhoods. (p. 136)

Such efforts to increase collaboration between school and home are essential for the educational success of linguistically diverse students, as Brisk (2006) explains:

Getting to know the students and their families as well as welcoming their languages and cultures can build a coherent community where the bilingual program becomes an integral part of the school. (p. 66)

Conclusions

Inclusión is a conceptual framework for school leaders to develop welcoming and liberating school communities for linguistically diverse students. First, by approaching these students and their families as bilingual, school leaders recognize the inherent strengths they offer. Second, by seeing language acquisition as sociocultural and developmental, educators understand that developing proficiency in English takes place over time and throughout the school community. Third, by crafting systemic approaches to service delivery, school leaders create more dynamic, efficient, and responsive structures to meet students' special needs. Finally, by approaching parent engagement as both essential and ecological, school leaders undertake this complex task with savvy and in a sophisticated manner.

The demographic shifts in the United States are creating a more linguistically

diverse population. Schools play a critical role in this context:

As bilingual students' first intense encounter with the English language and with American culture and society, schools must overcome social attitudes opposed to the social and academic development of bilingual learners. Successful schools create a productive academic environment and an accepting community. (Brisk, 2006, p. 66)

The conceptual framework of *Inclusión* supports school leaders and encourages them to embrace the richness that linguistic diversity brings to school communities.

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