

Bilingual ESL Program Administration: The Principal's Role and Function— A Survey of NJ Coordinators Perceptions

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Let's get started.....

1. What does your principal know about 2nd language acquisition theory?
2. What would you want your principals to know about second language learners?
3. Assuming that there is a lack of knowledge on the part of your principal, do you think the absence of knowledge influences the services their students receive in the school or district?

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Introduction:

To determine how well informed principals were about bilingual education programs as perceived by the bilingual/ESL coordinators with whom they shared program and student responsibility.

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The study focuses on New Jersey schools, principals as leaders, and leadership as a practice and a craft.

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What does the literature says about the principal's work?

The ISLLC (Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium)

...has established rigorous standards that establish performance goals for effective leadership along with the knowledge, disposition and performance indicators to help define each standard. These comprehensive guidelines developed by the Council of Chief State School officers in 1995, and revised in 2008; provide the framework for school leaders of the twenty first century. (Shipman, Queen, Peel, 2007, pp.xi-xii)

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Sergiovanni (2007) described the principal conceptually as a

- “Strategic problem solver, cultural leader, barterer, and initiator” naming only a few characteristics of an effective principal/leader (p. 19).
- “Schools need special leadership because schools are special places.” (2007, p.1

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according to Gonzales and Huerta-Macías, “strong mention of dealing with the culturally, ethnically, or linguistically diverse student” has been omitted in the development of the literature related to the leadership and role of the principal (1998, p. 213). Quotation mark

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Executive Director of the Association of School Administrators (AASA)

How ironic that a country that encourages the learning of a second language at the secondary level would suppress the maintenance of that second language for kids already fluent in the language. As an educator, I always have believed you teach best when you build on the knowledge base the student already possesses. If a student speaks Spanish and little English, then it makes sense to use Spanish as the language of instruction while English is being mastered (2008 November, New Jersey's Immigrants-A Small State/A Significant Immigrant Population

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Why is New Jersey important to the discussion on Bilingual/ESL ?

Public school language development programs are the gateway to human development for children, the foundations of cultural identity formation for families and communities, and the prerequisite tools for educational attainment in all curricular areas.

(Mitchell, Destino, Karam & Colon-Muñiz, 1999, p.87

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More importantly,

- Almost one fifth, or 19.5%, of N J residents are foreign born
- Approximately 1.7 million immigrant reside in the state.
- Approximately 40 to 45% of the state's population are immigrants
- The immigrants are also diverse, coming from many countries and regions of the world and are represented as follows:
 - 43% from Latin America, 30% from Asia, 20% from Europe and 5% from Africa.
 - 27% of these immigrants speak a language other than English in the home.
- Over 200 languages are spoken by the state's immigrants.
- Of these, 56% speak Spanish and 44% speak other languages. Presently, it is unknown how many children of undocumented immigrants are attending New Jersey schools.

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New Jersey 2006-2007 state profile of (LEP) students

- 81 districts with bilingual education programs
- 471 districts (of 613 New Jersey school districts) serve LEP students
- 61, 828 LEP students reported as of this date.

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- The survey was developed through an examination of limited literature that referenced issues identified as important in defining a principal's role and responsibilities as well as “delineating role relationships between program support staff and instructional mentors.” (Valverde, 1978)

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- The survey questions included in this paper focused on two specific areas. First, a description of the coordinator's job duties in the school or district, evaluations, attendance at out-of-district meetings, providing materials and resources to bilingual students and staff. Second, the coordinator's perceptions of the principal's role in the bilingual/ESL program were described. The survey also allowed for narrative responses. Although the survey was primarily quantitatively descriptive in nature, qualitative and narrative constructs were added to the discussion where relevant.

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Methodology

Purpose of the study was multifaceted

- to determine how well informed principals were about the bilingual education programs
- to examine the principal's role based on the perceptions of the bilingual/ESL supervisor or equivalent
- Ultimately, to establish areas in which ELL/ students could be better served if the principal, were better trained to handle the issues related to a pluralistic school population (Lumby, 2007).

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- Six districts were not included in the survey gathering process because a contact person was not listed and/or the district did not have a significant bilingual/ESL population.
- Responses were received from 27%, or 20 districts, of the targeted population.

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Survey examined four areas:

- 1) the duties of the bilingual/ESL supervisor or equivalent
- 2) the principal's role in bilingual/ESL program administration as perceived by the program coordinator
- 3) the knowledge base of the principal in bilingual/ESL theory, process and pedagogy as perceived by the coordinator, and
- 4) narrative response.

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- There was an even split amongst the coordinators on the question regarding the principal's attempt to mainstream the various cultures and languages in the school and whether principals were sensitive to the needs of bilingual/ESL students regarding the testing program.

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- 35% agreed that principals emphasized teaching to the test before the students were English proficient.
- There was a significantly positive correlation between coordinator perceptions of the principal being knowledgeable of bilingual/ESL and how involved the principal was in confronting issues with non-English speakers.

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- Significantly more coordinators saw their principal as a partner in supporting bilingual/ESL education where 80% said “yes” and 20% said “no” to the question.
- One respondent said, “I would have to comment that from my experience, principals vary greatly on their knowledge and/or acceptance of the needs of the ESL population. I think if they had a better understanding of how ESL students learn, their overall view would improve.”

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- Another respondent wrote, “Sometimes principals say that they are supportive of ELL and in actuality they are not. They force teachers to abandon teaching in the native language and demand that they use English only.”

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There was a significantly positive correlation between principals being seen as too busy to become involved in issues affecting non-English speakers and being seen as unsupportive of ELL students.

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- Supervisors who perceived principals as too busy to become involved with ESL issues also saw principals as unsupportive of ELL students.

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- Supervisors who believed principals were too busy to become involved in ESL issues were less likely to believe principals were providing equal resources to ELL and English speaking students.

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- Finally, there was also a significantly positive relationship between principals being too busy to become involved in ESL issues and being seen as not understanding the ESL theory.

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- Positive perceptions of principals by coordinators were reported when the items were related to the principals' involvement with the coordinator.
- Items that dealt with the principals' sensitivity to bilingual students and their needs were answered negatively.

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- *Principals and Parents*
- Coordinators' perceptions of principals in the following areas show a negative correlation: meets with bilingual parents, is sensitive to ELL issues, meets with [bilingual] teachers, provides equal resources [to bilingual students].

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Principals and Second Language Theory

- There was a significantly positive correlation between principals being seen as unsupportive of ELL students and being perceived as not understanding the language acquisition theory.
- Coordinators who saw principals as unsupportive to ELL students were also likely to perceive principals as not understanding the language acquisition theory.

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New Jersey Bilingual/ESL Requirements and Goals

The most interesting aspect of New Jersey's educational goals for its bilingual/ESL population is that New Jersey expects that "50% of all LEP students will increase one level of English language proficiency after each year of English language instruction."

(Retrieved November 4, 2007)

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These goals raise the following questions:

- (1) Is this expectation reasonable considering the nature and theories of second language acquisition?
- (2) How functional are LEP students in monolingual programs if they are hurried through to become immersed in English language classrooms?
- (3) How important then, is it for the building principal to understand and be knowledgeable of bilingual/ESL theory in order to provide a moral imperative to their school leadership in addressing the issue of equity and educational opportunity to the ELL students?

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Instructional Leadership and the Bilingual

- According to M. Fullan (2003) :
- *We are beginning to obtain a glimpse of the new moral imperative of school leadership. At the school level ...the moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passion and commitment of teachers, parents, and others to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap. (p. 41)*

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The Need for Quality Instructional Leadership

- Sanchez and Cali (1979) as well as Valverde (1978) noted that little research has been affected in the area of administration that speaks to the supervision of bilingual and ESL programs.
- Valverde (1978) asserted the importance of a knowledgeable person in charge of a successful program when he wrote “...a genuine sensitivity toward the culture(s) carried by the students” as well as “a thorough knowledge of the philosophy and theory concerning bicultural education and its application.” (p. 338)

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The 1979 Comparative Study

- In 1979, Sanchez and Cali undertook a comparative study of the roles and functions of school principals and bilingual program administrators in several states, namely, Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Texas, and New Jersey...
- The study was supported by the National Dissemination and Assessment Center at California State University, Los Angeles, California.

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Summarization

- Adding to the conspicuously scant information available on school leadership in the context of understanding second language learners was a secondary goal of the researchers.
- The primary focus of this study was on the schools' leaders and leadership as a practice.
- Starting with the literature review, the researchers established a foundation for identifying the need and purpose of the study.
- References to other scholarly works on leadership helped to connect the importance of the principal's leadership role in schools

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- The findings of this study corroborated much of what Sanchez and Cali (1979) established through their study which covered several states.
- Both studies had a common thread of interest in the investigation, as stated in the Sanchez and Cali study, which was 1 to determine:
 - The judgments of bilingual program directors regarding factors they feel are related to success/failure in the accomplishment of the bilingual program administrator's role, including observations on suggested training and background aspects needed by bilingual program administrators. (Sanchez & Cali, 1979, p.3)

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- The findings further indicated that the lenses of the ELL coordinators surveyed served as filters that enabled the researchers to obtain a snapshot of the principals' role as it related to his/her ability to lead schools with non-English speakers.
- Several shortcomings perceived by the coordinators surfaced after reviewing the survey data.
- The most problematic behaviors centered on interpersonal skills.

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- Leaders must recognize that their own cultural competence, as well as that of their teachers and staff, is necessary to better connect with English Language Learners and their families in helping them to realize their educational aspirations. (Paz, 2008, p.37)
- Finally, to what extent can we generalize these findings to principals and school leaders who are out of bounds of this study?
- Despite the low response rates, the researchers believe that were the study to be expanded to a national level, with some modifications to include a larger pool, the potential exists for collecting sufficient data to substantiate the evidence learned on a small scale.

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Conclusion

Despite the low response rates, the researchers believe that were the study to be expanded to a national level, with some modifications to include a larger pool, the potential exists for collecting sufficient data to substantiate the evidence learned on a small scale.