

Pre-service Teachers Immersion Experience to Learn About Diversity

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Introduction

The demographics of the United States of America (USA) population are increasingly diverse. Scholars point out that these changes are reflected in classrooms, with more teachers facing challenges in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Cervetti et al., 2015; Khong & Saito, 2014). By 2019, the group of CLD students already represented 10.4% (5 million) at the K-12 level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). This group is so linguistically diverse that a CLD student could feasibly speak one of 350 languages at home (Garcia et al., 2010). Yet, the disparity between the diversity of this group and the inadequate preparation of teachers has caused these professionals to need support from the educational systems to teach multicultural and multilingual students (de Jong et al., 2013).

Although most prior research has explored mainstream teachers and programs (e.g., science, social studies, and mathematics), there is some literature indicating that one of the implications of the continuing population changes is the likelihood that all teachers in the nation will begin to see CLD students in their classrooms (Babinski et al., 2018; Bauman, 2017; Cervetti et al., 2015; Khong & Saito, 2014; Lucas et al., 2018; Villegas et al., 2018). Therefore, we argue that this is a problem that may also be affecting school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers.

Since 2020, in the Agricultural Education teacher preparation program at Oregon State University, we have been innovating with an immersion experience for SBAE teacher candidates to be aware of the importance of being responsive to diversity. During this experience, teacher candidates generate awareness and reflection that would inform their instructional practices to serve all populations of students, including CLDs.

How it Works

At OSU we are committed to preparing SBAE teachers who are responsive to diversity. Therefore, we designed an immersion experience where student teachers experience the feeling of being a minoritized student in a classroom where the language of instruction is different from their native language. The experience, led by a bilingual instructor, comprises two parts; Part I is an agricultural *Immersion* lesson and Part II is the *Discussion*. For the *immersion* part, we selected a basic agricultural science topic to make it easier for students to assimilate the content. During Part I, students are provided with learning objectives which include identifying plant parts, defining their functions, and distinguishing plant types. It is offered entirely in Spanish, and is delivered using a presentation that contains short sentences and images on the topic. First, students are shown a simple illustration of a sexually reproducing plant. Each part is labeled with its name and function and is discussed. The next slide shows the same plant and parts but without labels. We wanted the students, through collaborative work, to remember the information and fill in the blanks in the plant. The use of short sentences and images makes it easier for students to associate concepts, even if the language is unknown. During the presentation, teacher candidates are asked to participate and answer questions as they would normally do in a class. Finally, time is allowed to ask questions about what was taught. Those questions are answered in Spanish.

During the *discussion* in Part II, they learn about teaching techniques that have been proven effective in teaching CLD students. Part II is offered in English. These techniques are *language content integration*, *cooperative learning*, *scaffolding*, and *audiovisual tools*. There are specific practices taught and examples provided to enact each of the strategies. For example, for *language content integration*, they learn practices such as allowing the use of the native language of the CLDs, compression activities, and teaching content-specific vocabulary. For the *cooperative learning* technique, they learn about the advantages of students working in heterogeneous groups, using graphic organizers, and the integration of student tutors. For *scaffolding*, the benefits of planned scaffolding and interactional scaffolding. Finally, for *audiovisual tools*, they learn about the importance of displaying posters of content in the classroom, reading out loud, and promoting conversations. After both sessions, we have a moment of reflection where students discuss how they felt about forced communication in another language and the importance of using the proper practices to achieve linguistic responsiveness.

Results to Date

Students are not warned that the class will be taught in another language. As instructors, we wanted to prevent them from mentally preparing or practicing Spanish vocabulary. Once the class begins, they are eager to know what it is about and have shown varied levels of engagement in the activities due to excitement and/or nervousness. The lesson has resulted in the student teachers contributing to the academic achievement of their students, valuing diversity, and implementing the practices learned, even with non-diverse students. This activity has also served as a positive reflection point in the program, and they have been able to change their teaching perspectives.

Future Plans/ Advice to Others

We plan to continue offering this lesson to prepare quality SBAE teachers who value diversity in the classroom. We encourage other preparation programs to integrate similar lessons so teacher candidates can start developing their sociolinguistic consciousness and implement appropriate instructional practices with CLD students.

Costs/ Resources Needed

This specific innovation does not require any monetary expenses. We recommend those looking to replicate this experience with the support of a bilingual/ multilingual instructor to assist in developing and teaching the lesson.

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