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## **Thinking Out of the Box: One University's Experience with Foreign-trained Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

Texas like many states is facing a teacher shortage. The author suggests that the teacher shortage should be considered in light of the diverse school population. Across states there is a need for well-prepared teachers to work with linguistically and culturally diverse school populations. Thus, areas such as bilingual education continue to be critical shortage areas. While different attempts are currently underway to increase the number of preservice bilingual educators, another way districts have addressed this issue is to employ foreign-trained teachers as paraprofessionals or as teachers. Recently, Texas passed a regulation that would allow legally residing foreign-trained teachers to become certified Texas teachers upon passing the appropriate teacher competency exams and demonstrating English proficiency. The passing of this "fast-track" regulation appears to demonstrate that the state board is thinking out of the box by tapping into a community's resources and acknowledging that immigrants can offer the community services beyond

menial tasks. However, the researcher cautions that such actions may not increase the number of teachers and may not assure teacher quality. To support this notion, the researcher offers an analysis of a university's experience with the integration of legally residing foreign-trained Mexican teachers in their bilingual education teacher preparation program. The researcher posits that increasing the number of qualified teachers does require for entities to think out of the box, such as tapping into a community's natural resources; nevertheless, any plan of action should be critically examined and deliberated.

Texas is facing many challenges in standardizing teacher certification. On the one hand, there is a predicted shortage of 600,000 teachers and on the other hand there is a call for improved teacher quality [State Board of Education (SBEC), 2000]. This predicted shortage for all teachers is not unique to Texas, but is an issue confronting states across the nation (Fetler, 1997). In examining demographic trends, the relative small number of minorities pursuing teaching careers, and thus a lower number of potential bilingual educators, is disproportionate to the increased number of language minority students [Texas Education Agency (TEA), 1994, 1999; Recruiting New Teachers, 2000]. Thus, bilingual education remains as a critical shortage teaching area (Flores & Clark, 1997). In Texas, approximately 17% of the early childhood (EC-K) and 17% of the elementary level (1-6) teachers teaching in a bilingual education setting are not certified as bilingual education teachers (SBEC, 2000). Confounding the shortage issue is that some bilingual education teachers, while able to demonstrate basic interpersonal skills in Spanish, lack academic language proficiency required for the teaching of abstract concepts (Guerrero, 1997, 1998 & 1999).

To alleviate the critical shortage for bilingual education teachers and the lack of academic language proficiency of some current bilingual education teachers requires that state universities, school districts, and the state board to explore the circumstances that have led to this situation. For example, the majority of bilingual education teachers represent minority individuals who have maintained their first language despite of subtractive language educational practices in the United States. Subtractive language education practices have existed in two forms. Prior to the onset of bilingual education, linguistic minorities were discouraged and punished for speaking their native language. With the onset of bilingual education, the native language has been seen as simply a means for acquiring English and not for the maintenance of the first language. This type of subtractive language schooling experience has resulted in loss of the native language (see Escamilla, 1994; Pease-Álvarez & Winsler, 1994).

Another factor to consider is that the demographic trends for minority teachers, and ultimately bilingual education teachers, will not likely change considering the barriers that exist for minorities in pursuing higher education. Subtractive schooling is evident in the form of "dumbing" of the curriculum for minority students (Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). Specifically, in pursuing teacher education, prospective minority teachers are often derailed from their goals because of high-stakes testing (Flores & Clark, 1997; Flores & Clark, 2000a; Valencia & Aburto, 1991a; Valencia & Aburto, 1991b; Valencia & Guadarrama, 1995).

Even if Unz and the "English-only" movement were to be successful in their mission to eradicate bilingual education, this action would not reduce the number of linguistic minority children in our society. In fact, California is one of the states that continues to have the largest number of language minority children (Waggoner, 1999). Studies have noted that most generalist teachers are not prepared to address the needs of

language minority students and often feel inadequate when working with this population (Monsivais, 1990; Hernández, 1995; TEA, 1995; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999). Another important consideration is that ethnic and linguistic minority students benefit cognitively and socially from their interaction with ethnic and linguistic minority teachers (Galguera, 1998; Snow, 1990; Valencia & Aburto, 1991a). Consequently, the need for well-prepared teachers who have specialized skills for working with language minority children is of great importance. Therefore, to address the current trends, entities must engage in recruitment efforts that tap into non-traditional pools of minority individuals.

A recent recruitment strategy has been to replenish the pool of bilingual education teachers with foreign-trained teachers. A case in point is that some Texas border school districts employ legally-residing foreign-trained teachers, specifically *normalistas*, teachers educated and certified in Mexico, as bilingual education teachers (see Schnailberg, 1994) or teacher aides (see Hewlett- Gómez & Solis, 1995). Another strategy has been to import teachers from Mexico and Spain for bilingual classrooms in California (Valadez, Etxeberria, Pescador, & Ambisca, 2000) and in Georgia (Maggs, 1998).

A more recent strategy for increasing the number of bilingual educators has been to certify legally-residing *normalistas* through Project Alianza (alliance), a teacher preparation initiative that is being implemented as a model at several universities throughout Texas and a university in California (Cantu, 1999; Supik, 1999; Cortez, 2000; Quezada & Inzunza-Franco, 2000). (Note 1) Universities involved in the project form an alliance to achieve Project Alianza goals of: a) increasing the number of certified or endorsed bilingual education teachers, b) recruiting potential teachers from the natural resources within the community, and c) creating models for the enhancement of teacher preparation programs and outreach strategies (Supik, 1999; Quezada & Inzunza-Franco, 1999). At the university level, the project assists participants by providing mentoring, advisement, course work, and financial support. The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) was selected to implement the project. Of the 200 applicants to UTSA's Project Alianza, the project committee interviewed over 50 qualified applicants and 25 have been selected for the project; approximately 20 participants continue in the project.

Early this spring, another teacher recruiting strategy was conceived when a new regulation was approved in Texas regarding foreign-trained teachers (SBEC, 2000). Passing the required state-mandated exit competency tests may now accredit foreign-trained teachers, who are legally residing in the state. The regulation **does** require that individuals demonstrate English proficiency. Essentially, this process would allow for legally residing licensed *normalistas* to pursue a fast track to obtain certification in the state of Texas. Prior to this regulation, foreign-trained teachers had to go through a university's accreditation office and obtain a deficiency plan. Although the new regulation is a positive step in the right direction in recognizing the potential of legally residing immigrants, and demonstrates that the board is thinking out of the box, this type of quick fix does not assure quality among the teacher ranks. There has been no research to date that links a teacher competency test with teacher performance (see Flores & Clark, 1997, 2000a). The board is assuming that if foreign-trained teachers can pass the required exit tests, they will be competent teachers. As Darling-Hammond (2000) observed, teacher qualifications are intimately linked with student performance. In addition, this fast-track certification contradicts what Texas is trying to do in revamping the teacher standards to improve teacher quality.

In light of Texas' new regulation that allows fast-track certification for

foreign-trained teachers, this piece reflects caution that arises from the Project Alianza experiences that one university has had in working with *normalistas*. The fast track certification promotes certain assumptions that may need to be clarified. School district personnel and others may make an assumption that these *normalistas* will be able to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of language minority children. A second assumption is that there will be a close match between the *normalistas* and language minority children. A third assumption is that these fast-track *normalistas* will be effective teachers. Lastly, there is an assumption that this regulation will radically increase the number of teachers.

First of all, important to remember is that many language minority children are U.S. born, not foreign born. Only 38% of all Hispanics are foreign born (Waggoner, 2000). Thus, language minority children's linguistic and socialization experiences reflect the diversity within U.S. society. Secondly, *normalistas* were socialized and prepared in a distinct manner than their first or second U.S. generation counterparts. Molina Hernández (1999) noted that *normalistas* entering into the California higher education system would have to adjust because of the differences in the normal teacher school preparation versus the university teacher preparation program. Thirdly, important to acknowledge is that *normalistas* were not prepared as bilingual education teachers and have taught in essentially a monolingual, fairly monocultural setting. Valadez et al. (2000) have noted the incompatibilities between foreign-trained teachers, from Mexico and Spain, and language minority children in California. Researchers have also cautioned that alternate routes for certifying teachers can be a dangerous practice (Berliner, 1987; Hidalgo & Huling-Austin, 1993). Teachers without a strong preparation often feel powerless to challenge the status quo within the school system (Flores, 1999).

A recent comparison of five bilingual teacher preparation programs with the *normalista* normal school preparation, led the authors to conclude that *normalistas* have been well prepared as teachers and for the most part would only require specialized course work in the area of bilingual education (Petrovic, Orozco, González & Díaz del Cossio, 1999). The subsequent paragraphs provide some support for this conclusion as identified through this university's experience with *normalistas*. All decisions regarding the project are discussed and determined by the Project Alianza committee, which consists of a director, a coordinator, and faculty advisors. For this current exploration, data analysis included document analysis, interviews, and reflections; these data assisted in identifying issues and in determining recommendations.

The UTSA's Project Alianza acknowledged that the *normalistas* are well-prepared in their normal schools; however, also believed that the integration of *normalistas* into U.S. schools would require the metamorfosis/metamorphosis of ideologies (Clark, work in progress). As Monzó (2000) noted in her own personal journey from being a paraprofessional to becoming a teacher,

To assume that teacher preparation merely adds pedagogy to an existing identity is take a very simplistic view of humanity. Becoming a teacher involves developing new identities and reconstructing some existing identities. Further teachers' funds of knowledge are not static, but evolve and are subject to interaction with others....

The faculty would agree that not only have *normalistas* been well prepared as normal teachers, the majority (90%) also have a high degree of academic Spanish as evident in their personal interviews and class assignments, as well some (25%) have content-specific knowledge in math, science, and literature. Nevertheless, although

*normalistas* bring these positive attributes, there are several factors that must be considered in certifying them as a bilingual education teachers and should be deliberated in designing a program of study, for example:

- Language Dominance
- Psychosocial Factors
- Datedness of Pedagogical and Content Knowledge
- Degree Equivalence and Program of Study
- Support Structures

## **Language Dominance**

In recruiting legally residing *normalistas* for Project Alianza, the committee conducted informal interviews with all applicants. Although the majority (95%) of the *normalistas* had lived either in Texas or the US for an average of 5 years, ranging from 6 months to 10 years, evident from these interviews, and later confirmed with formal assessment and during the initial phases of the project, specific needs were recognized. The following areas were addressed for this group:

- Second language acquisition and development
- English language skills development throughout the program of study
- Procurement of professors that understood needs of second language learners
- Supplemental instruction throughout the project

In order to immediately address the need for second language acquisition, the *normalistas* received intensive English instruction during the first phase of the project, which occurred during the spring of 1999. This phase focused on skill development, specifically targeting reading and writing skills assessed in the state mandated teacher entry exam, Texas Assessment of Skills Program (TASP). After this initial phase was completed, the students' feedback was one of great appreciation; they felt they had received a great basic foundation in English that would assist them in their formal course work. As indicated in the English instructor's reports, the majority (95%) of the *normalistas* had shown a great deal of growth and improvement in their English skills, nevertheless out of the twenty participants, initially only 3 passed all three portions of the TASP.

Therefore, it was evident that the Project Alianza participants would require continued second language support in the form of supplemental instruction, selection of appropriate personnel, and on-going English language development. Interestingly, a minority (10%) of the *normalistas* also needed to polish their writing skills in their native language. During the second phase the students enrolled in formal course work as determined by their specific certification plan. For the most part, students were placed in the same three out of four classes. This cohort was combined with a Title VII cohort participating in a "grow your own" federally-funded grant, which consisted of paraprofessionals pursuing their degree and certification requirements.

Their experiences as a combined group allowed for reciprocal learning to occur. At times, the *normalistas* served as mentors, especially when the situation called for the use of Spanish or for the reflection on a certain technique. In other classes, the roles were reversed; the paraprofessionals assisted the learning of the *normalistas* by giving examples of classroom reality as they had experienced as learners or as teacher assistants. They also served as English language models.

Initially, in the classes in which English was used as the means of instruction, several instructors allowed the *normalistas* to complete assignments in their dominant language. They further encouraged the students to submit their work in the second language and would provide students feedback as to how to improve their writing. These proactive techniques assisted in reducing the *normalistas'* anxiety about writing and speaking in their second language. Nonetheless, two years after the project began, there continues to be an ongoing focus to increase the *normalistas'* English proficiency. Currently, after 5-6 attempts, over half (60%) of the 20 participants continue to have difficulty in passing the writing portion of the TASP.

## **Datedness of Pedagogical and Content Knowledge**

Another issue confronted was the datedness of the *normalistas'* preparation; for the most part the majority (90%) had completed their program of study ten to fifteen years prior to applying to the project. This issue is problematic for any individual pursuing teacher certification after a long hiatus (Hidalgo & Huling-Austin, 1993). Moreover, unique to the *normalistas* is that although the majority (75%) of the *normalistas* had attended the same or similar teacher preparation programs at normal schools in the northern part of Mexico, the Project Alianza committee lacked complete familiarity with the content of their program of study. Thus, the committee concurred that an initial assessment would further guide them in determining a program of study for the *normalistas*. Although in the conversations and interviews with the *normalistas*, the committee was very impressed with their pedagogical and content knowledge, specifically for some *normalistas* in the areas of math and science, the committee also acknowledged that in order to get certified in Texas, all teachers have to pass the ExCET (Examination for Certification in Texas). Two ExCET tests are required for bilingual teacher certification, the Professional Development and the Bilingual Comprehensive; some bilingual teachers also take the Early Childhood. Each of these tests measures specific domains that a beginning teacher must know in relation to pedagogy and content. Thus, the committee determined that these exams would serve as an initial formal measure. In order to ensure that the project applicants would be equitably assessed, the committee decided to have these instruments professionally translated.

An experienced translator, educated in Mexico and familiar with the area of education, translated three sample tests in the areas of professional development, bilingual comprehensive, and early childhood. Once all the items were translated for each area, bilingual faculty reviewed the items to assure clarity and randomly back-translated a number of items to assure accuracy. These tests were given to all qualified applicants ( $n = 48$ ); important to note, the results were not used in the selection process. The results of these initial measures were examined employing item analysis. The analysis revealed demonstrated areas of strength and weakness for the group. However using the same passing standard as the state (70%), only one *normalista* passed the Spanish version of the bilingual comprehensive practice test. The initial findings assisted the committee in making decisions regarding course work for the selected participants. Thus, although well prepared as *normalistas*, the preparation did not necessarily assure success in the initial Spanish-version practice exit tests. A number of plausible explanations can be identified; similar to any experienced teacher: (a) what the *normalistas* had learned in their program of study has become implicit knowledge (See Schön, 1983, 1987); and (b) the *normalistas'* classroom experiences in the classroom guide their decision making (See Berliner, 1987; Flores, 1999).

Given that the pretest assessed all the qualified applicants, the committee decided

to give another practice test in English to the selected participants after the initial year of the program. With special permission from the Office of Teacher Certification and Placement, the participants were administered the English practice qualifying elementary professional and comprehensive exams; usually these exams are given only to completing teacher candidates. The results were much more promising for the qualifying professional exam than for the comprehensive exam. In the professional qualifying exam ( $M = 71, 47\%$ ), four of the participants ( $n = 16$ ) passed the test. For the qualifying comprehensive exam, none of the 23 participants passed the comprehensive exam ( $M = 54, 54\%$ ). In examining the passing participants data revealed that the four passing participants were about to complete their program of study because they had previous college course work at the local community college prior to enrolling and participating in the project. Since then three of these four have completed their certification program of study and have passed the professional exam. In addition to having more course work, these individuals also had a higher level of English proficiency. These findings suggest that the *normalistas* level of English along with pedagogical and content knowledge will likely determine their outcome on the state's mandated tests. However, a word of caution is necessary, the practice qualifying exams although closely correlated with the state's mandated tests, are not 100% predictors of outcome. Additionally, the only qualifying comprehensive exam available is the one administered for all teachers; one has yet to be developed for the bilingual candidates. Moreover, the findings have to be considered in light of the fact that the over half (63%) of the participants lacked another year or more of course work before being eligible to taking the university qualifying exams. Nevertheless, these qualifying exams are used at the university to determine eligibility for taking the state's ExCETs and, therefore, the committee agreed to consider the outcome of the findings in guiding further decision-making. Unfortunately, competency exams often create a high-stakes situation in which minorities are kept from achieving their educational goals (Flores & Clark, 1997; Flores & Clark 2000a; Valencia & Aburto, 1991a, 1991b; Valencia & Guadarrama, 1995).

As the *normalistas* proceed in their program of study, they have confirmed and revealed how a paradigm shift is occurring within their thinking specifically in how to best teach specific content or how to approach reading instruction (Pérez, Flores, & Strecker, in press). Thus, the *normalistas* are engaging in critical reflective thinking and comparing what they had learned as *normalistas* and what they are learning as incipient bilingual education teachers. The critical reflection enhances their ability to make informed decisions.

Noteworthy, although the current state regulation would allow foreign-trained teachers to simply to take the state-mandated test, evident in this analysis is the likelihood that the majority (80%) of current participants would not have been successful in simply taking the ExCET without any course work or the development of English language skills. Further, their program of study has been purposefully crafted to assist the *normalistas* in challenging preconceived notions and to update them with current content and pedagogical knowledge.

## **Psychosocial Factors**

Apparent in the initial interviews with the *normalistas* was that our bilingual education teacher preparation program would have to address psychosocial factors such as, ethnic identity, acculturation level, bi- or multicultural perspective. This need was further underscored during the initial phase of intensive English development. Some (20%) *normalistas* revealed that they had been against bilingual education for their own

children because of preconceived biases. They were concerned with the level of Spanish being used in the classroom and they were concerned that their children would not acquire English. Some (30%) *normalistas* did not understand why so many Mexican Americans experienced failure in the U.S. and believed that some Mexican American simply did not take advantage of the opportunities provided within this country. A minority (20%) of the *normalistas* was repulsed by the Mexican American use of Spanish, specifically when code-switching.

These expressed beliefs were also verified in formal studies conducted with *normalista* applicants prior to matriculation into Project Alianza. These studies demonstrated the relative nature of ethnic or cultural identity; for some individuals ethnic identity often represents their sociopolitical awareness as a minority group within the U.S. society. Flores & Clark (2001, 2000b) studies revealed that these legally residing *normalistas* aspiring to be bilingual educators were more likely to ethnically identify with their country of origin. These researchers indicated that the *normalistas* may lack experiences within a sociopolitical and historical context in which one is not the majority power holder. On the other hand, a previous study, Clark & Flores (in press) surmised that Mexican American preservice teachers ethnic identity labels demonstrated a continuum from Mexicano to Hispanic. Thus, Mexican Americans may choose their ethnic identity label based on their personal affiliations and experiences within a sociocultural-political context. Conversely, the *normalistas* ethnic identity was rooted in their Mexican experiences.

Clark and Flores (2000b & 2000c) also revealed that while the majority of the *normalistas* had a positive and high teaching efficacy, some *normalistas* had an external locus of control in regards to their teaching efficacy. Thus, these *normalistas* are likely to use external factors, such a family, home and community, to explain their inability to teach. As Flores and Clark (2001) concluded, this type of explanation promotes deficit thinking.

In another study, Clark and Flores (2000a) noted a high degree of academic language use and proficiency and positive attitude towards Spanish, bilingualism, and bilingual education for the *normalistas*. However, as indicated by the multivariate results, simply having a high degree of use and a positive attitude towards Spanish did not guarantee a positive relationship with bilingualism or bilingual education. Interestingly, for example although bilingualism was valued by the *normalistas*, this was found to be in contraposition with their notion that bilingual education may conflict with the attainment of American values and may cause bilingual children to have an accent in English.

Therefore, the program advisors determined that although the *normalistas* had a strong sense of national identity as *Mexicanos*, they lacked an awareness of what it means to ethnically identify self and they lacked knowledge of the Mexican American struggle. Evident was the need for course work that reflected the U. S. sociocultural, historical, and political context. There was another need to assist the *normalista* to identify self from a bi or multicultural perspective and to examine biases in relation to teacher efficacy. This is being addressed through course work and seminars. Formal course work was also needed to gain understanding of bilingual children's language development, specifically examining the phenomenon of codeswitching.

## **Degree Equivalence & Program of Study**

One of the most difficult issues encountered was determining a program of study based on the degree equivalence. In Mexico, over the last fifteen years there has been



different means of acquiring a *licenciatura* (licensure, equivalent to Bachelor's degree). As the committee became familiarized with the Mexican licensing system, this issue became less cumbersome. For *normalistas* having a *licenciatura*, a post baccalaureate certification program was designed. Although it would have been much simpler to just accept *normalistas* with *licenciatura*, a decision was made to accept non-licensed *normalistas*, especially if they had been working as paraprofessionals in the field. Thus, for *normalistas* who have less than *licenciatura*, the committee is working with the teacher certification department to design a degree program that determines the course work that should receive credit and addresses their needs. This process has been to date one of the greatest challenges. Specifically, the *normalistas'* certification program addresses the aforementioned issues through the following course work:

- Foundations of Bilingual Education including sociocultural, historical, and political topics
- Bilingual content methodology including native language and second language instruction theory and instruction
- Dynamics of language and culture, specifically sociolinguistics, communicative competence
- Field experiences and student teaching

Despite the fact that the *normalistas* had taught in Mexico, the committee conceded that the field experiences were necessary in preparing them for the realities of the U.S. classroom. This notion has been supported through the data gathered from the field experiences (Pérez, Flores, & Strecker, in press). All *normalistas'* field observation evaluation ratings have ranged from above average to excellent, with the majority (75%) of the supervising teachers providing additional positive feedback regarding the *normalistas'* performance. Depending on the field experiences feedback and evaluation received for each individual *normalistas*, student-teaching may not be necessarily required.

## Support Structure

One of the most important components in this project has been the ability to provide a support structure for the *normalistas*. Fortunately at this university, a coordinator provides and monitors these support structures for the project. In fact, the role of the coordinator is considered to be pivotal in assuring the success of project participants.

Navigating the university is often a complicated and cumbersome process that often discourages even the traditional university student. During the initial recruiting and application stages, it was evident that the applicants would require assistance for navigating the university system. Therefore, much guidance was given to the applicants in completing the task of matriculation into the university. Also as aforementioned, the *normalistas* are placed in their classes as a cohort; their classes and university instructors are carefully selected to assure that they have opportunities to be successful in attaining certification as bilingual educators.

Prior to attending UTSA, most of the *normalistas* had been under-employed in menial jobs; nevertheless this was their source of income for their families. Thus, the need for financial assistance was great and financial support is making the attainment of bilingual certification a reality. Although the project provides financial assistance, the *normalistas* were also guided to other forms of financial assistance available through the

university's Office of Financial Aid. Most *normalistas* did not know that they were eligible for federal moneys or the process of how to obtain these funds. Throughout the project, *normalistas* have opportunities to also meet informally as a cohort to build collegiality and moral support. This process has greatly assisted them as they encounter academic, financial, or personal challenges in their lives. Nevertheless, to date, 3 individuals of the original cohort left the project due to personal or financial challenges.

In sum, from this university's experiences, minimal support structures include: (a) guidance and mentoring, (b) financial assistance, and (c) motivational support. During the past year, the three completing *normalistas* were subsequently hired as bilingual education teachers. As novice bilingual education teachers, they have concerns as all new teachers do, but have expressed that they know that they have the UTSA's Project Alianza community to provide them on-going support.

## Conclusion

This preliminary analysis reveals that a university can assist in the integration of foreign-trained teachers. Project Alianza has assisted the *normalistas* to navigate the university system to assure that they receive maximum credit for their credentials and that a program of study is clearly outlined so that they may pursue their teaching credentials in a timely manner. In addition, the project provides financial support for tuition and books as well as psychosocial support in the form of mentoring and monthly activities.

The *normalistas* face challenges as proud individuals. Their professionalism has earned them admiration from other students. As one student revealed, "*I see how hard they have to work, because English is not their dominant language, and I tell myself, if they can do it, so can I.*" The integration of the *normalistas* with the other bilingual teacher preparation students has resulted in the realization that one group can contribute to the other's learning. When both groups took a course on Mexican American history and culture, the *normalistas* learned first hand about the Mexican American's experience with language discriminatory practices, such as corporal punishment for speaking their first language. The *normalistas* expertise in math and reading pedagogy is of great resource for preparing preservice teachers to work with recently immigrated students.

The faculty has noted that the *normalistas* are very competitive, but that this competitiveness is to assure group success, not individual success. Other students have also taken note on the positive aspects of group versus individual competitiveness. As a bilingual teacher preparation entity, this university's experiences with the *normalistas* has been challenging and rewarding, to say the least much has been learned. Of greatest concern is the *normalistas* English language proficiency because this may likely determine whether or not they will be able to be successful on the required TASP and ExCET exams. Engaging in critical dialogue regarding the on-going experiences will likely assist this university in creating a stronger bilingual education teacher preparation program for foreign-trained teachers and may assist other teacher preparation entities in their efforts.

Therefore, thinking out of the box to alleviate the teacher shortage requires much more than a state regulation; to remedy the teacher shortage in bilingual education and the call for quality teachers require careful thought and deliberation. Given the encountered difficulties experienced by the majority of the UTSA Project Alianza's *normalistas*, the fast-track certification for foreign-born teachers regulation may not likely make a difference for increasing the number of quality teachers. Recently in Texas, to address the current 45,000 teacher shortage, another regulation was considered

that would have allowed bachelor's degree holders to teach in the public school (SBEC, 2000). Districts hiring these non-certified "teachers" would be required to provide mentors. These fast-track non-certified teachers would be required to enter into a teacher certification program after 180 days of employment and pass the appropriate ExCET exams, but the proposal did not appear to have any other requirements. This current proposal was seen as controversial; thus, it was rejected and sent back for further deliberation. However, Education Commissioner Nelson (2000, as cited by Gutierrez) suggests that although this proposal was not perfect, the proposal was a means to address the current teacher shortage.

The message that comes from these fast-track certification trends is that anyone can be an effective teacher and that teaching does not require specialized preparation. Unfortunately, non-certified teaching candidates will likely end up in low-income, mostly minority schools as is presently the case (SBEC, 2000). In discussing this new proposal with two principals, both expressed cautions in hiring non-certified teachers because they have noted differences between fully certified teachers and alternative certification teacher candidates. These administrators remarked that non-certified teachers not only lacked pedagogical knowledge, but also lacked content knowledge. Hopefully, the lessons learned to date will assist in critically examining this fast-track trend.

## Note

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