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Video-Anchored Distance Learning: The Professors Plus Model

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The United States educational system has entered an era of growing diversity in the mainstream classroom; a record 42 percent of public school students are language-minority students. In addition, there is clear evidence that K–12 teachers are not prepared to effectively support or accommodate diverse student populations in the regular classroom (Clair 1995; Faltis, and Hudelson 1994; Golinhick 1992; Landers, Weaver, and Tompkins 1990; Penfield 1987; Rosenthal 1992–93; Simms and Leonard 1986). Locally, the state of Utah has experienced a dramatic increase in enrollment of second-language students, leaving large numbers of in-service teachers in need of bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching endorsements. Preparing teachers to respond to the needs of students who are diverse in culture, language, or learning is paramount if public schools are to equitably serve all students (Darling-Hammond 1997; Goodlad 1998; Kohl and Witty 1996; LaCelle-Peterson and Rivera 1994; Lucas, Henze, and Donato 1990).

In 1997, Brigham Young University, through its university–public school partnership, responded to local needs by developing a Bilingual/ESL Endorsement through the Distance Education (BEEDE) program. In developing the BEEDE program, the university–public school partnership had to resolve two major difficulties. The first was how to create learning-centered curriculum taught in a distance education format. The second was to develop a framework through which regular classroom teachers would be even more able to respond to the needs of students in their classroom who are culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse. In this paper, we will provide a brief description of BEEDE; secondly we will introduce the “Professors Plus” delivery system and articulate the ways in which it utilizes what we know about learners and distance education. Finally we will examine the “Inclusive Pedagogy” framework that enables teachers educated through the BEEDE program to respond to diversity in their classroom.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BEEDE PROGRAM

The BEEDE program’s overarching purpose is to advance the education of language-minority students through teacher development. The program meets this purpose by developing teachers who know how to learn and grow as educators. Participants, in particular content-area teachers, will be able to work with linguistically and culturally diverse learners in the regular classroom in ways that reflect pedagogic practices that are inclusive of all learners. Completion of the entire BEEDE program results in participants being granted a bilingual/ESL teaching endorsement. This paper focuses specifically on the first of these courses,
"Foundations of Bilingual Education." The program will eventually include six courses and a forty-hour practicum.

**Overview of the Professors Plus Model**

A distance-learning format was selected over traditional university-centered courses to deliver professional development that could be adjusted at multiple school sites to the needs of rural, suburban, and urban populations and the work schedules of in-service educators. Distance education is valued because it affords flexibility of scheduling, but most distance-education formats are either frozen or interaction may seem artificial. Therefore, in addition to video anchoring the content, we decided to use a certified on-site facilitator. The video anchoring ensured consistent, high quality content delivery. In fact, recent and past research reviews dealing with television instruction demonstrate that students perform as well on outcome measures in television courses as they do in traditional courses (Chu and Schramm 1975; Whittington 1987).

The on-site facilitator would also allow us to pay more attention to the conditions of learning, the environment for learning, and relationships in learning. The BEEDE program uses the Professors Plus delivery system. The Professors’ part of the delivery system includes the development of carefully crafted video segments and an instructional guide, all of which enhance learning and transfer. These video segments create, in essence, a visual textbook. Using a strategy of show, not tell, the video segments capture audience attention and contextualize key teaching points. The perspectives of various university professors and researchers highlight content that is juxtaposed against the real-world voices and examples of students, educators, parents, and other community members. This makes the relationship between theory and practice immediately visible.

The Professors’ part also includes development of an instructional guide that supports active learning, encourages thoughtful, analytical reflection, and above all, models appropriate strategies teachers can use with language-minority students. The instructional guide for each session of the course is divided into three sections: “Get Into,” “Move Through,” and “Reach Beyond.”

The Plus part of the delivery system is an on-site, master’s-prepared facilitator with extensive public school classroom experience. Unlike teacher-proof curriculum, this system recognizes the vital role a teacher can play in creating a learning environment and in supporting the learning of all students. To this end, the materials created provide the facilitator with all the tools needed to be successful in creating this environment and teaching the content. In this program, the facilitator is responsible for creating a sense of community among learners. Employing teacher immediacy to foster interaction, the facilitator shares objectives, uses active learning strategies to promote student engagement, provides opportunities for performance, assesses learning, and communicates with professors when problems arise. Using Professors Plus allowed us to focus on responding to what we know about student learning in a distance education environment.

**Student Learning Variables and Design Implications for Telecourses**

Researchers have identified student-learning variables that contribute to effective and meaningful learning in college students and adult learners (Angelo 1993; Ference and Vockell 1994; Forsyth and McMillan 1991; Morgan 1991). These variables provide the basis for student-centered instruction and thus direct the ways in which telecourses are structured, designed, and taught. In articulating the relationship between student-learning
variables and the instructional design environment of the telecourse format, we begin by identifying what student-centered instruction is. Next we articulate how to use organization and planning to achieve clarity. Then we consider how to motivate students, develop learning communities, employ teacher immediacy to foster interaction, use active learning to promote student engagement, and finally use feedback to promote learning.

Student-Centered Instruction

Student-centered instruction promotes student learning and related outcomes. Student-centered instruction is clear and understandable (Lowman 1984), is responsive to the ways in which students learn and communicate (Kolb 1984), acknowledges students’ interests and motivations (Forsyth and McMillan 1991), and honors the social nature of learning (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 1991). Additionally, it is engaging (Bonwell and Eison 1991) and focuses on the explicit needs of learners for meaningful and timely feedback (Van Houten 1980).

Achieving Clarity through Organization and Planning

Professors provide instruction that is clear and easy to understand using distinct examples of ideas and concepts, pointing out topic transitions, and consistently identifying key points (Pascarella and Terenzini 1994, p. 586). At least one study suggested that instructor clarity accounts for as much as 52 percent of the variance in mean class achievement (Hines, Cruickshank, and Kennedy 1982).

Course developers achieved clarity by creating detailed, precise syllabi and interactive study guides (Cyrs and Smith 1992). These syllabi and study guides are often broader in scope and more specific in content than those prepared for conventional courses. Some professors refer to these materials as “extended syllabi.” In particular, interactive study guides are designed to counter the “couch potato” phenomenon: They are structured to move students from passive reception to active learning and engagement during course sessions. Additionally, they provide students with visual representations of knowledge structures, intricate processes, and other complex phenomena.

Another benefit of these guides is the assistance they give to students in managing the flow of information presented during telecourses and in understanding the relationships between concepts or processes. Extended syllabi are designed to compensate for the absence of informal instructor/student interactions that would typically take place before, during, or after conventional course sessions. Extended syllabi also help students know exactly how to proceed with course assignments, how to make the most of each Professors Plus session, how to prepare successfully for examinations, how to develop and submit assignments of quality, and how to monitor personal progress in completing courses.

Another crucial aspect of clarity was achieved through planning clear objectives and related learning activities for each course session. Advanced preparation and planning were essential. Video-anchored course content by its very nature is a team process, frequently involving several other professionals in developing and delivering the instruction. Professors who are accustomed to planning their instruction several hours before they enter their conventional classrooms and who use these same habits of preparation for distance education will disappoint themselves and their students. Successful distance instruction requires more extensive planning and collaborative work with other professionals than does conventional instruction.

Also, clarity was achieved through careful selection of course content. Rather than “covering” course content, professors work at uncovering difficult-to-understand concepts and themes. They
do this by directing their teaching and learning activities to concepts that would be difficult for most students to understand on their own. Additionally, professors segment their sessions into manageable and interesting sections. Cyrs and Smith (1992) have often referred to these sections as “lecturettes.” These lecturettes are precise presentations designed to keep students engaged and alert. These presentations are generally followed by activity-oriented student tasks. Like the typical sequences of the television news, these learning segments are a mix of explanations, illustrations, and questions. However, unlike the news, students are required to engage in some activity that ensures learning. Learning activities are done individually, in dyads, or in small learning teams at each receiving site.

Carefully selected graphics, engaging video segments, and other computer-generated animations also contribute to clarity. Unfortunately, many professors are not accustomed to thinking or communicating visually and do not understand how to utilize fully the visual strengths of television. However, with appropriate support from instructional designers, graphic artists, and other visually-oriented production personnel, professors learn how to use television to heighten the clarity and engagement of their instruction.

Stimulating Motivation in Students

Intrinsic motivation generally hinges on students’ curiosity (McKeachie 1986), their desires to achieve, their expectations of success, and their goals for learning (Forsyth and McMillan 1991). Curiosity is aroused by stimuli that are novel, but not so different as to be incongruous with the students’ prior knowledge or experience (McKeachie 1986). Novelty is introduced in several ways:

1. Asking unexpected questions that cause students to analyze their prior knowledge in new ways

2. Providing brief start-up activities in which students predict the relationship between prior knowledge and new content

3. Introducing case studies as vehicles for making sense of new content

4. Interjecting pair and share activities in which students briefly work with partners to answer questions, make predictions, or summarize new information

5. Ending each class session with a preview of the next session

Students’ goals for learning and their expectations of success are also important motivators. Each course allows students to use the course syllabus to define their goals for learning and to outline what responsibility they will take to achieve these goals. Students also set benchmarks for progress to be evaluated at regular intervals. Facilitators provide feedback throughout the course so that students continue to be motivated by their progress and achievement.

Developing Learning Communities

Distance learners, by definition, are not in the immediate presence of their professors, so essential interactions among and between professors, facilitators, and students that help clarify information will be crucial. Therefore, it is crucial to establish learning communities at each site are established (Verduin and Clark 1991). These communities provide opportunities for students to teach each other, to clarify course-related questions and assignments, to receive academic and social support, and to develop relationships that extend beyond the duration of bilingual/ESL endorsement courses. Some students may volunteer to host study groups.

Another approach that may be employed for connecting students is the establishment of a listserv or electronic bulletin board. Through this connection, students, facilitators, and professors may
freely interact through e-mail. Questions, responses, or comments may be shared by e-mail with all course participants, several participants, or just one student. Also, professors may use the listserv for informal interactions with students.

Employing Teacher Immediacy Behaviors to Foster Interaction

Teacher immediacy behaviors (Sanders and Wiseman 1994) are essential to good distance instruction. Teacher immediacy behaviors invite interaction, suggest approachability, and foster positive affective outcomes in students. Course designers assist on-site facilitators and professors captured on video segments to vary their vocal expressiveness, to smile with appropriate frequency, and to establish eye contact with students at a distance by frequently relating to television cameras. These behaviors contribute positively to students’ feelings about their learning and the efforts they devote to course activities and assignments.

Using Active Learning to Promote Student Engagement

Unfortunately, much of what is offered through telecourses is the “talking head” or lecture-based teaching. Research regarding this teaching approach and its effectiveness in promoting quality learning is not encouraging (Bonwell and Eison 1991; Johnson, Johnson and Smith 1991; Meyers and Jones1993). Active learning involves more than listening, being alert, and paying attention. It consists of being actively involved in discussing problems, seeking solutions to case studies or dilemmas, responding to simulations, participating in games, and making decisions. Course development teams created learning experiences that promote engagement rather than passivity by carefully considering the objectives of each course session, the nature of the subject matter, and the capabilities of students in the target audience.

Several prominent researchers and practitioners have provided recommendations for moving students from passive to active learning habits. The recommendations center on creating interactive study guides (Cyrs and Smith 1991); developing critical thinking skills through debate teams, critical incidents, dramatizations, and scenario building (Jones and Saffrit 1994); employing embedded questions for immediate student responses in video-anchored presentations (Cennamo, Savenye, and Smith 1990); applying alternative formats for lectures (Bonwell and Eison 1991); and using cooperative learning groups (Johnson, Johnson and Smith 1991). These approaches are used in the courses developed for the BEEDE program, particularly those centering on critical thinking and problem solving.

Using Feedback to Promote Learning

Feedback is essential for students to create meaning from that which they have learned. Students develop as learners when appropriate feedback alerts them to the accuracy of their work and deters them from learning things that may have to be unlearned later (Angelo 1993; Van Houten1980). Often students decide whether they will stay with a distance course based on the feedback received on initial assignments and exams. If the feedback is late, not very specific, and inappropriate to students’ entry level skills or knowledge, they may withdraw from the telecourse or commit less energy to it (Egan, Ferraris, Jones, and Sebastian 1993).

Timely and efficient feedback will be provided by course facilitators. Feedback is also critical for professors. As each course is developed and field tested, participating students will have opportunities to give precise feedback about the learning activities and the instructional quality of the mediated segments.
Inclusive Pedagogy: The Program's Conceptual Framework

The Foundations of Bilingual Education course is pivotal in establishing the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework as a way of learning about language minority students. Inclusive Pedagogy is a conceptual framework for professional growth that enables educators to respond in educationally appropriate ways to the linguistic, cultural, and learning diversity of students in their classrooms. Inclusive Pedagogy is defined by five characteristics: collaboration, guiding principles, essential policy, critical learning domains, and classroom strategies. Each characteristic is defined by standard, goal questions that promote common understandings, and a reflection-for-change question that promotes united advocacy. Inclusive is used to reflect common understandings and Pedagogy is used to remind teachers that every teaching act is an act of advocacy. In the BEEDE program the focus is on ESL students; however, the framework, in other educational contexts, is used to address the needs of all special population students: ESL, multicultural, learning disabled, and gifted/talented.

Participants in the BEEDE program are asked to demonstrate their understanding of language minority students through a portfolio framed by the characteristics of Inclusive Pedagogy:

1. Collaboration: Meeting the needs of today's language-minority students demands collaboration across academic disciplines, institutions, and school-home cultures.
2. Guiding principles: Effective instruction for language-minority students must be guided by theoretical and moral principles.
3. Essential policy: Essential policy must be an integral part of advocacy for language minority.
4. Critical learning domains: Learning involves cognitive, social/affective, and linguistic development.
5. Classroom strategies: Teachers must know the what and the why of effective classroom strategies for language minority students.

The Inclusive Pedagogy Framework serves as the lens through which the factors impacting the school experience of language minority students in the United States are examined.

Evaluating Course Impact and Effectiveness

The BEEDE program targeted improving teacher knowledge and effectiveness as a means of improving language minority student learning. To date, a judgment on the effectiveness of the BEEDE Program with its Professors Plus model is based on the use of the Foundations of Bilingual Education course—the first course of seven in the program. During the autumn of 1999, Foundations of Bilingual Education was offered simultaneously to diverse groups in multiple locations (for example, a group of thirty in-service educators and a separate group of thirty preservice teacher candidates).

Using the university's standard seven-point Likert scale evaluation form, the Foundations of Bilingual Education course received a mean rating of 5.34 from the in-service group and a mean of 5.2 from the preservice group. Regarding the Plus portion of the course (e.g., the on-site facilitator), the student ratings suggest the facilitator was able to ensure consistent, high quality content delivery (in-service group mean = 6.06; preservice group mean = 6.0). These ratings provide evidence that the Professors Plus model can be successfully adjusted to educate different groups of learners in diverse settings around learners' work schedules.
In addition to this data, their portfolios also demonstrated their understanding of the characteristics of Inclusive Pedagogy and their ability to articulate the connections between course content and their professional experience. Ongoing evaluation of this program also includes other data sources, such as running records, focus groups, surveys, and video-based case study methods that allow student feedback to improve course development and future teacher development efforts. Based on preliminary findings, the Foundations of Bilingual Education video-anchored course effectively met its stated purpose, goal, and objectives.

CONCLUSION

In the development of the BEEDE Program, we took seriously the need to use what we knew about learners, learning environments, and teaching. Because we needed to reach active professionals working in a variety of settings with flexible scheduling, we selected a distance education format. We knew that learners who are actively engaged in content and part of a community are more likely to both learn and use course content. The literature on in-service education alerted us to the fact that teachers are more likely to try out new methods and strategies for teaching when they collaborate with other professionals in their own setting. This led us to commit to using a facilitator as part of the course delivery system.

We knew that trying to teacher- or student-proof curriculum is pointless. Therefore, instead, we created materials and teaching tools that required facilitator and student participation to be successful and drew out the best teaching efforts by the on-site facilitators. One of the biggest difficulties in educating teachers to work with diversity is the past experience of the teachers. Through the use of learning communities and the portfolio, we created the strongest environment possible for supporting teachers in reconsidering their beliefs and theories for working with diverse students. Finally, we embedded instruction in a framework that teachers could readily use to help them become better teachers for all students.

By attending to what research has taught us about teaching, learning, and distance education, we are better able to design instruction that supports rather than hampers teachers and learners. More importantly, we have created a system in which the use of technology improves what can be done without it. The Professors Plus model shows promise for distance education but also for solving the problems universities face in their increasing use of adjunct professors and graduate assistants. Through our commitment to the evaluation of teacher learning, the Professors Plus model will enable us to better understand teacher development and improve the quality of in-service education offered through distance education.

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