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Developing Agency for Advocacy: Collaborative Inquiry-Focused School Change Projects as
Transformative Learning for Practicing Teachers

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Abstract

Many mainstream educators of English language learners (ELLs) have experienced neither adequate pre-service preparation nor appropriate in-service professional development. Yet, ELLs are one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States. While practicing teachers typically espouse the view that all students can learn, they often lack the knowledge and skills necessary to support ELLs in their academic and language development. This gap in preservice teacher education programs often leads general education teachers to rely heavily on bilingual paraprofessionals and language teachers for educating ELL students. This paper describes a 5-year professional development initiative, Project Alianza, during which the researchers provoked dissonance through texts, narratives, experiences, and encounters to push teacher participants to name and question their current assumptions, biases, beliefs, and practices. A teacher inquiry project emerged from the Analysis of participant writing suggests that a teacher inquiry project caused teachers to make changes in their beliefs and professional practices as they developed a sense of agency for educating and advocating for ELL students.

Developing Agency for Advocacy: Collaborative Inquiry-Focused School Change Projects as Transformative Learning for Practicing Teachers

Schools across the United States are becoming increasingly more culturally and linguistically diverse. The number of students who are English language learners (ELL)¹ has increased by 57% over the past ten years (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). At the same time, too few teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach ELL students (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2010). Unfortunately, while only about one third of ELL students pass the mathematics and reading components of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), more than two thirds of their native English speaking (NES) peers passed these standardized tests (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). While standardized tests are not the only, or even the best, indicator of academic development, this achievement gap is still alarming. Lack of teacher preparation to teach ELL students is likely a contributing factor to this achievement gap (Brooks, Adams, & Morita Mullaney, 2010; DeJong & Harper, 2005).

Although most teachers enter the profession with the espoused belief that all students can learn, deficit perspectives regarding ELL students often develop as ELL students do not perform as well as their NES peers. Teachers' lack of understanding about the importance and practice of culturally and linguistically responsive instruction often influence this shift from an asset to a deficit based view of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Gorski, 2009; Medina, 2012). In our own research, we have found that not only do many teachers develop a deficit view of their ELL students, but they also develop a belief that they do not have

¹ Regarding terms: Many acronyms are employed by both scholars and teacher practitioners, resulting in a confusing "alphabet soup" of letters. In this article, students who are learning English as an additional language will consistently be referred to as "ELLs" by the authors. Participant quotes will variously use terms such as ESL, ENL, etc. to refer both to language learners and to the language development programs/courses. Language teacher specialists may be referred to as "ESL" or "ENL" teachers.

the capacity to teach these students (Brooks, Adams, & Morita Mullaney, 2010). This deficit view of their ability to teach ELL students effectively often leads to an overreliance on English as a second language/bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals to assume full responsibility for all aspects of the education of ELL students. This lack of shared leadership for educating ELL students means that ELL students are often marginalized within their schools; their needs are not typically taken into consideration when administrators and teachers make programmatic and instructional decisions (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010). School change initiatives should challenge this marginalization by developing a model in which language specialists and general educators share responsibility for educating ELL students (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010; Davila, 2005; Hoo-Ballade, 2004; Tupa & McFadden, 2009).

Literature Review

It is perhaps tempting, and even customary, to cast immediate blame upon general education teachers for ELL performance and to frame struggling mainstream teachers as a problem in search of a solution. Indeed, in recent years criticizing teacher performance has become fodder for legislatures, news pundits, bloggers, and even late-night television comedians. It seems everyone is entitled to an opinion on how teachers are doing; a simple internet search using terms like “teacher failure” or “teacher performance” will produce thousands of results, most of which are opinion pieces written by those outside the teaching profession. As former urban public school teachers, we know experientially the challenges inherent in teaching diverse learners; it is in no way our wish to add any fuel to the bonfire consuming the public imagination regarding the fitness, knowledge, or performance of practicing teachers.

However, it is sadly apparent that few teacher licensure programs require significant preparation for linguistically diverse students and school reform and professional development

(PD) initiatives often ignore the needs of these students. As a result, in our work in local public schools, practicing mainstream teachers regularly report that they feel inadequate, are struggling to teach ELLs, and are eager for new approaches that will increase ELL comprehension of content, engagement in the classroom, and improved performance on assessments.

Unfortunately, as Teemant and Reveles (2012) indicated, “(ESL) scholars have not specifically developed a professional development strategy for mainstream educators” (p. 17).

Effective Professional Development for Mainstream Teachers of ELLs

Fullan (2007) claimed professional development is rarely “powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and the school” (p. 35). These professional development initiatives often do not follow what the literature indicates in high quality professional development. For example, Louks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, and Stiles et al (1998) proposed seven “principles” for “effective professional development experiences,” stating such PD must:

1. Be driven by a well-defined image of effective classroom learning and teaching.
2. Provide opportunities for teachers to build their knowledge and skills.
3. Use or model with teachers the strategies they will use with their students.
4. Build a learning community.
5. Support teachers to serve in leadership roles.
6. Provide links to other parts of the education system.
7. Provide opportunities for teachers to continually assess themselves and make improvements to ensure positive impact on teacher effectiveness, student learning, leadership, and the school community (p. 36).

However, Alberto Rodriguez (2010) critiqued Louks-Horsley’s et al.’s (1998) principles, pointing out the “silences” these principles ignore, by which he means, “the lack of purposely naming and

addressing issues related to teaching for diversity (i.e. culturally inclusive and socially relevant pedagogy and/or addressing the learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students)” (p. 924). Many other researchers on effective professional development have echoed many of Rodriguez’s and Louks-Horsley’s principles (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Rance-Roney, 2008; Rueda, 1998). In essence, these scholars concluded that effective, transformative PD for mainstream teachers of ELLs requires substantial investments of time, sustained teacher engagement, and rich opportunities for teachers to try out new approaches as they simultaneously try on new identities. One way to create these conditions is rethink current practices of teacher professional learning communities (PLC’s).

Professional Learning Communities

While there are several forms of PLC’s (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996), the Dufour model of PLC (Dufour & Eaker, R., 1998; Dufour, 2004) has become nearly synonymous with PLCs². Dufour’s approach is shaped by a concerted emphasis on three questions:

1. What do we want each student to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty? (Dufour, 2004, p. 8).

Dufour, in his publication, “In Praise of Top-Down Leadership” (2007), contended that school administrators are obligated and authorized to insist that teachers participate in PLCs, yet also insisted that administrators “must encourage people throughout the organization to examine and articulate their assumptions. They must help build shared knowledge and encourage learning by

² As Dufour himself acknowledges, nearly any local group of teachers meeting during the school day may be referred to as a PLC (2004, p. 6); in our experience, where there are PLC’s in place in a district, it is Dufour’s books we generally find on the bookshelves. When we use the term *professional learning community* with educators, unless we are careful to specify our definition of PLC, most unfortunately assume we mean Dufour’s model.

doing. They must create new experiences for people that call upon them to act in new ways” (2007, p. 42). What is glaringly absent from the Dufour model is how to manage the inherent difficulties of “articulating assumptions” or “acting in new ways” where and when educators are not safe to do this work honestly and without fear of repercussions when evaluators are present. While we agree that educators working together is necessary and potentially productive, McDonald et al (2007) have diplomatically described a lack of good faith or an absence of trust in these mandatory PLC settings (p. 2), pointing out that educators who are asked to engage in PLC work explicitly focused on inequities may be reluctant to reveal their own shortcomings, struggles, and biases while administrators with evaluative power are present. In our experience, while most educators understand and respect the need for PLC groups in their schools, they unfortunately conflate PLC’s with other forms of professional community as if they were interchangeable. When Dufour’s (2004) model of PLCs is enacted, PLCs lack the capacities and possibilities inherent in other sorts of PLCs based on voluntary association and participation, where trust is built and earned over time, rather than demanded.

Deep, sustained change in educational practices only occurs when teachers change their beliefs, instructional materials, and approaches to teaching (Fullan, 1999; 2007). Too many school change initiatives start with professional development focused on improving teachers’ pedagogical skills without engaging in a process of reculturing a school (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). These school improvement initiatives often treat surface level issues without addressing the deep, systemic issues that perpetuate educational inequalities for marginalized students (Eubanks, Parish, & Smith, 1997). Traditional methods-based professional development initiatives are incomplete when teachers do not engage in deep conversation, critical self-reflection, and professional problem solving as regular components of

their professional lives (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Murray, 1995). In this current study, we examined how graduate coursework through university-school partnerships created space in which many teachers questioned their beliefs about teaching ELL students, made changes in their professional practices, and addressed systemic issues, thereby developing a sense of agency for teaching and advocating for their ELL students.

Method

Context of the Study

Taking the aforementioned principles of effective professional development for teachers into mind, we designed a professional development initiative called Project Alianza. We applied for and were awarded a U.S. Department of Education Title III National Professional Development Grant that was hosted by the College of Education at Butler University, a small, private liberal arts university in Indianapolis, Indiana from 2008-2012. This study focuses on coursework created between 2008 and 2010 by approximately 162 practicing secondary educators from four partnership school districts who successfully completed the two graduate courses taught by Brooks, the principal investigator, and Adams, the project director. Completion of these grant-funded graduate courses represents a year-long commitment by volunteer teacher participants. Participants engaged in inquiry projects that result in locally designed and implemented school change projects culminating from research conducted by participants with ELLs from the partnership schools.

Because Project Alianza courses were taught on site in each district, the result is a teacher participant cohort with a solid district identity that permitted constant refinement of course content within authentic relationships between Project Alianza professors (Brooks and Adams) and Project Alianza participants. An additional key factor is that Brooks and Adams are both

former secondary teachers from one of the partnership districts; this set of insider experiences, perspectives, and knowledge of local histories richly shaped course content design and instructional approaches.

As stated previously, participation in this project required a two semester commitment from teachers, during which teacher participants met once a week for nearly the entire school year. The fall semester's course focused on the creation of inclusive school communities and classrooms, while the spring semester turned toward more explicit instructional support for the development of academic language and the enrichment of content knowledge for ELLs. During class meetings, teacher participants engaged in pair and small group activities, or protocols, borrowed or adapted from the work of Critical Friends Groups or CFG's. These pair and group activities ensured that each teacher participant got to know every other participant from the district over time, creating another strong bond often absent between teachers from different schools and across grade levels. Teacher participants also engaged in teacher action research culminating in the development and implementation of a school change project within each school represented by the cohorts.

Each semester's culminating assignment is a writing assignment called the *critical incident reflection journal*, an assignment that was inspired by the work of Murray (1995); each teacher participant followed a prescribed writing template designed to invite different levels and kinds of observation, description, analysis, multiple perspectives, and explicit connections to course readings and activities. These critical incident reflection journals, now accumulated over four years' worth of cohorts, provided a rich source of data and insight into the meaning making, developmental growth, and personal learning of each teacher participant. The present study is the result of the analysis of the first two years of these journals produced by approximately 162

teacher participants, resulting in 324 critical incident journal writing samples amassed from 2008-2010.

Data Collection

The data collected came from multiple sources: emails from participants, conversations with participants, course-based discussions, school change project proposals and final reports, and critical incident reflection journals. The two critical incident reflection journals written by each teacher participant provided a structured processing opportunity in which teacher participants were asked to put into writing an incident which reveals their current thoughts, feelings, and actions in light of course readings, activities, discussions, and projects. These critical incident reflection journals provided a window into teacher participants' developmental progress, one that allowed us to identify key high impact components of the courses so that we understood which instructional practices were most likely to promote transformation of teacher participants.

Data Analysis

After initial review of a subset of the course documents and artifacts, including two years' worth of participant critical incident reflection journals ($n=162$), we selected text portions that connected personal change to specific course components (e.g., specific texts, activities, discussions, or interactions from the course). One hundred thirty-five journals referenced specific course components that influenced changes in teacher beliefs and professional practices. We then sorted the text portions into emergent categories using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). This coding resulted in 212 selected excerpts, which were then sorted into five large categories, one of which will be the focus of this article: School

change projects. Other emergent themes will be discussed in future articles since a comprehensive analysis of all of the emerging themes is too large for the scope of this article.

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of our data analysis, we 1) triangulated the data by using multiple types of course documents and artifacts as data sources, 2) used multiple analysts to interpret the data, and 3) interpreted the data in light of multiple theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Although we used the critical reflection journals as the primary data source, we triangulated the data by comparing our emerging themes to what we had learned from our participants during course discussions, through their emails to us, during course instructional activities, and through other course assignments. The journals were our most insightful data sources because participants explained the thinking behind their coursework and interactions. We also used multiple analysts to interpret the data. The two researchers were very familiar with the journals because they came from the courses that we taught. We read through the data independently before we discussed what we saw as the emerging themes. We then discussed the key excerpts together as we built and refined our understanding of the emergent themes. Finally, we tied the themes back to the work of multiple theorists.

Findings

Writ large, analysis of the examined texts indicated there are two overarching categories of elements of the school change projects that provided potentially transformative space for Project Alianza participants:

1. Inquiry-centered professional learning facilitated by university partnership faculty members, and
2. Teacher development of CFG-inspired professional learning communities

Inquiry-centered professional learning

Inquiry-centered professional learning emerged as a salient theme that explained how the school change projects created a transformational learning experience. Participants were conscious of the academic demands of graduate courses and took assignment criteria seriously, but along the way, they also grew in confidence in their own capacities for conducting teacher research. Many of our participants were wary of suggesting that their schools make changes. Some of them felt like they did not have enough time. Others felt like they did not know enough about what ELL students needed. Yet others were fearful of the potential reactions from administrators to suggestions for change. While teachers were often initially hesitant to engage in school change projects, the projects were a course requirement. Consequently, the ‘official’ academic nature of the project and the expectations from the course instructors gave them an external purpose for engaging in these advocacy projects. Once teachers started the projects, they typically became excited with their work. As one participant stated,

Our school change project is going to be terrific, I hope, and furthermore, I believe. I have wanted to put a program in place for our new students for a while now, but [Project Alianza] gave me the impetus and motivation to finalize the action. With all the members of our building buying in on this project and working so hard on developing the plan, I am excited to be a team member and even more excited to be able to implement our ambassadors program at [school name]...The whole school community will gain from this program because we are not only training students to be good hosts and hostesses, but we are drawing attention in a positive way to the fact that we have students from other countries

joining us and we assess this to be a positive addition [Participant 85 Critical Reflection Journal]

As this participant so clearly articulates, teachers sometimes need an external reason to step outside of their comfort zone and engage in teacher initiated school change projects.

Another participant expressed that while many teachers saw systemic inequities towards ELL students in the school, they did not take action to address these issues. This participant's school change project group decided to invite other teachers into the planning project. The participant explained that,

During our first meeting together, we introduced ourselves and told why we were interested in this project. It was amazing that every participant had experienced a situation where they saw injustices towards immigrant students and wanted to help them [Participant 122 School Change Project Proposal].

While the teachers had previously acknowledged the inequalities in the past, they did not take proactive steps to address these issues until they met as a group under the auspices of engaging in or supporting their colleagues in designing and implementing a course project. The external expectations of completing a course assignment provided participants with the impetus, context, and agency to advocate for change.

Many participants echoed this sentiment and were startled to find they were ready to challenge existing school structures and take on new roles. Here this participant explained how the coursework and discourse of the Project Alianza sessions prepared her to make a case for their school change project with a skeptical principal:

It was interesting that during our presentations with the principal we were able to utilize our new knowledge learned in the course. The principal questioned the

need for a common homeroom for the [ELL] students [in the new program,] saying they'd speak Spanish together and that would be a negative factor on helping them achieve. We countered immediately that the homeroom was necessary to build a bond and commonality with the students. We are trying to build cohesiveness with the students to give them the opportunity to form a study group of fellow students to ask questions about their subject matter and general school questions. Later the chair of our committee commented that he would not have been able to address the principal's questions as effectively as we did.

[Participant 36 School Change Project Final Report]

Another participant described this same phenomenon with her own school change project,

This class has given me more knowledge about the ELL learner, both statistically and anecdotally through the readings. I feel the discussions have brought out differing points of view that are important to address. Through the knowledge gained in this class we are able to make recommendations for our cohort project based on discussions/readings. I have gained more confidence expressing my views because of the research I have read on the subject. I know what I believe, but it is easier to share those beliefs with concrete research/statistics to back them up. [Participant 73 Critical Reflection Journal]

As these participants explained, part of developing a sense of agency for advocating for ELL students was the ability to cite theory and research to support their suggestions. Not only did the teachers recognize the fallacies in their administrator's arguments/propose changes to address systemic inequalities but they were also able to justify their project proposals from a theoretical and research basis.

Others indicated that the academic “push” of the courses resulted in taking new risks. Here a veteran teacher speaks of her experience with her school change group:

Our school change project impacted me greatly. I think I experienced the most influential night as an educator last Thursday...when I went on my very first home visits. I would never have had the guts or drive to do this if it weren't for Project Alianza. The support from our task force [school change project group] and the push was just what I needed to get me out of my comfort zone. I have read a million times all throughout undergrad and now about how important visits can be for everyone involved... [but] always thought I would do my best in the classroom with the kids...Now I realize I was mistaken. I was doing a great deal, but so much more can be achieved. I'm not just talking about academic success for students, but I'm talking about relationships and a societal shift. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we changed the world, but I am saying that I think we made a few people feel a little bit better about their children and their school than they did before and it was awesome. [Participant 5 Critical Reflection Journal]

Several of the school change project groups decided on projects that pushed them out of their comfort zone. They dreamed about what was possible for them to do in their contexts and then held each other accountable for implementing what they decided to do.

Prior to collaboratively designing building-specific school change projects, each participant conducted an individual interview with an ELL student. To our surprise, this assignment presented challenges and provoked anxiety for many teachers. Some teachers were visibly nervous about talking one-on-one with an ELL student. Others resisted conducting the

interview, and several asked for extensions on submitting the transcript. Many teachers admitted afterward that completing this interview assignment was the first time they had *ever* spoken in depth with an ELL student for any reason. Here another veteran teacher revealed the details of her initial attempt at an interview with an ELL student:

...I pulled aside the closest person I could find with dark, straight hair, and olive skin...When we first sat down to talk, I began with small conversation...It turned out he was no more Mexican than I was. In fact he was very far removed from anything having to do with Mexican culture...Instantly I felt like a stupid, racist, ignorant fool. I was embarrassed and shocked by my injudicious actions and felt like crawling under the desk. I suddenly felt like “that” teacher in the student’s eyes. That teacher who acted in a horribly racist manner. That teacher who did not care enough about this individual student to even care where he was from. That teacher who reminded him of why he doesn’t like teachers to begin with. That teacher who prejudged him...that prejudiced teacher. ...After the shock and embarrassment slightly wore off, I told the student the purpose of the interview... After assuring me it was “okay and no big deal,” he gave me the name of a student/friend of his that I could interview—a student who actually was an immigrant. [Participant 66 Critical Reflection Journal]

Talking with this student helped the teacher to become aware that she really did not know much about the backgrounds and identities of her students. While only a few teachers wrote about not knowing much about their students, many of the teachers admitted not having spoken to, interacting with, or considering the needs of their ELL students. One teacher described this

theme well when she wrote about her experiences in interviewing one of her students for the school change project:

Prior to the interview, I did not think about Osvaldo often. But, I was concerned about his grade along with a few others in the class. After seeing him socializing and distracting those around him, I felt that he may not really do much work during the semester. I was also worried that he would keep others from completing their own work as well. As I continually reassured him that the questions were for my class and he would not be identified, he slowly opened up. I was shocked that he had so much to say about his past, present, and future. I felt that he was not asking for help from me so much as he wanted me to listen. His words came out quickly.” (Participant 11 Critical Reflection Journal)

These conversations with ELL students helped many teachers to realize how little attention they were paying to their ELL students. However, the confidence they built through talking to the students, the realization that they were often ignoring the students, and the insights about their students that they gained supported them in developing a greater sense of urgency and agency for connecting with and supporting their ELL students.

Teacher development of CFG-inspired professional learning communities

The second overarching theme that emerged from our data on how the school change project impacted teachers was that the ESL and general education teachers typically made shifts in their roles from the martyr-learned helplessness relationship to more of a shared leadership model. General education teachers who often relinquished much of their responsibility for educating the ELL students to the language education specialists gained the confidence and

experience necessary to at least begin to view themselves as advocates for their ELL students.

One middle school teacher described this shift:

The most meaningful thing that has come out of Alianza has been the relationships I have built within my building. We have built a cohesive group that laughs, cries, shares ideas, challenges, and improves together. We have opened the door to very uncomfortable topics in our school and with our kids but we have also begun to change them for the better. There is strength in numbers. [The ESL teacher] is an amazing teacher but he can't do everything on his own. His class shouldn't be the only place ESL kids are challenged at the appropriate level. Our Task Force has given us the knowledge that there are other teachers, even next-door, that are struggling with this too. We have wanted to make the necessary changes but until now we haven't know where to begin. The Alianza class gives us ideas and then the Task Force helps focus our mission and spread the word to our colleagues. [Participant 91 End of Project Evaluation]

In this school, as in all of the schools with which we worked, the ESL teachers carried the primary responsibility for educating the ELL students. Through the teachers' work in their school change project task force, the general teachers developed a sense of agency for teaching ELL students and began to see that if the ELL students were going to succeed in school, all teachers needed to take on the responsibility for educating them. Furthermore, the school change project groups often developed much deeper personal and professional relationships with each other. They became a source of strength for each other as they stepped outside of their comfort zones in order to address inequities that were facing their ELL students. Even when one of our

participant was too afraid to participate in the school change project, her colleagues were supportive:

I am grateful for my time in Project Alianza and for the school change project that the [school name] team has initiative. And I dare say, I am also *proud* of our project. A portion of our change project involves making home visits to the homes of our ESL students. The purpose of the visits is to let the families know that we care about them and to let them know that they are on [school name's] radar. I did not participate in the first home visit because of my belief/feeling that the areas of the district, which we are visiting, are not safe. I shared my feelings with the other members of the team and, of course, they were supportive and respectful of my feelings. They did not criticize me or pressure me for my decision. [Participant 5 Critical Reflection Journal]

Once this participant saw that the first home visit went so well and was transformational for her colleagues, she joined them for subsequent visits and found the visits to be transformation in her understanding of and her relationships with her ELL students and their families. What was once so fearful for her because a source of personal and professional pride. The trust that developed through the discussions and activities surrounding the school change projects supported teachers in taking personal and profession risks.

The coursework created opportunities for teachers to take on leadership positions in schools that had traditional hierarchical leadership structures:

Being a member of Project Alianza has helped me see that a community of teachers can do so much more for our students. In addition, Project Alianza has opened doors for me to discuss ENL concerns in the most positive way I can with people who can actually change things. As a result of Project Alianza I've had the

opportunity to communicate more with administration, other staff, the director of curriculum, and other members of the [name of the township] administration office who make financial decisions. [Participant 33 Critical Reflection Journal]

This teacher did not previously have many opportunities to advocate for her students with decision-makers. However, since the school change project was a course requirement, she felt more comfortable in approaching her school administrators and asking for their help in designing and implementing the school change project. Her suggestions were more readily accepted than in previous attempts to share ideas for supporting students because the situation was presented as more of an opportunity to mentor a teacher than as a suggestion for improvement or a criticism that the school was doing something wrong.

Many teachers shared how their work, especially with the school change project, created a context for them to take on greater leadership roles. One ESL teacher described this transformation in role when he wrote,

This group further became the force of an incredible change at [school name]. The information and protocols have gone beyond Project Alianza and to many other staff members as our team as shared and taken on leadership roles. The fact that I was able to be an onsite facilitator of further learning and implementation was instrumental for me, for my colleagues, and to my school. I do not think we would have had near the impact on our school culture without the fact that I took on this role. For me, this role is where I developed. I feel that I grew to be not only a teacher and program developer, but I have a turned a corner to being a respected leader, community organizer, and cultural-changer. [Participant 106 Critical Reflection Journal]

Traditional professional development initiatives do not typically provide teachers the opportunities to design and implement their own school change initiatives. When our participants had the opportunity to make their own meaning out of the coursework and implement what they learned in their own contexts with the support of their peers, the theories and research that they learned about in class took on a new level of meaning because participants were able to relate these ideas directly to their daily experiences with students and parents. Our participants often developed stronger agency for advocating for their ELL students.

Conclusions

While we concur with Teemant and Reveles' (2012) claim that ESL scholarship has "not specifically developed a professional development strategy for mainstream educators" (p. 17), our findings indicate that job-embedded, inquiry- and project- based graduate coursework can facilitate change in schools and support teachers in developing a stronger sense of agency for educating culturally and linguistically diverse students. Shared leadership and responsibility for ELL achievement (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010; Davila, 2005; Hoo-Ballade, 2004; Tupa & McFadden, 2009) emerged as a direct result of the school change project assignment. A stronger sense of agency is evidenced by the robust preparation of rationales and the citing of scholarly theories as justifications for requests for resources or permissions. The school change project provided a context for teachers to have greater access to and support from their school administrators for making changes in how they support ELL students. Course assignments like the ELL interview provided a context in which the teachers had to talk with a struggling ELL about the students' perspectives on what they need from their teachers and schools in order to be more successful. As an outcome of the CFG-inspired course structures (McDonald, J., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E. C., 2007), Project Alianza participants supported each other to take

professional risks and to engage with ELL students and their families. In the case of one project, the school change project facilitated the development of a parent task force and a shared leadership model for empowering ELL parents to become advocates and agents for their ELL students.

Inquiry-based learning for practicing teachers serves as a counter-narrative to the top-down professional development models (Dufour, R., 2007) that dominate much of teacher learning today. Inquiry-based learning for teachers is an exemplary practice that aligns with adult learning theory (Gorski, 2009) and honors teachers as knowledgeable and intellectual professionals who address deep instructional issues and academic inequities when provided collegial and collaborative time, space, and freedom to address these issues together. States and school districts need to rethink professional development and school change policies that devalue and de-professionalize teachers. ELL students need content area teachers who have the capacity and accept the responsibility for teaching all students and who advocate on behalf of their needs (Rodriguez, 2010). Project Alianza's school change projects empowered participants to embrace new roles as advocates and teacher leaders for improved instruction and meaningful inclusion of ELLs.

Rather than imposing top-down school change initiatives and teacher professional development, policymakers should value and trust teachers as professionals who are key stakeholders and valuable policy informants. As Project Alianza teachers changed their beliefs and professional practices, they naturally operated as change agents and shared these pedagogical and personal shifts with their colleagues. This teacher agency has had a steady ripple effect throughout the Project Alianza partnership schools, resulting in school and classroom cultures which are more welcoming and supportive of ELLs. In an era of teacher licensure

reforms, shrinking school budgets, and increased pressure to accelerate ELL achievement, a job-embedded, inquiry- and project- based graduate coursework model of professional development can contribute to the rethinking of graduate teacher education and school-university partnerships.

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