Abstract

The purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of two instructional activities on teacher credential candidates as they learned how to adapt standards-based content lessons and increase vocabulary acquisition for English learners. Responses regarding lesson adaptations for English learners from a lesson plan assignment were used to measure the effectiveness of the activities. The use of the two activities positively contributed to the passage rate on the assignment and the California Teacher Performance Assessments. These results will be used to prepare future teachers in the teacher education program at California State University, Stanislaus to successfully work with English learners.
Teaching Credential Candidates How to Adapt Lessons and Increase Vocabulary for English Learners

Introduction

Studies have found that a teacher’s ability to instruct English learners (ELs) appropriately and successfully was directly related to the skills and training they received in their credential program (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Unfortunately, a majority of teachers in states such as California, where ELs represent one-quarter of the student body, have teachers who lack sufficient training in making appropriate learning adaptations for EL students (Bunch, Aguirre, & Tellez, 2009). According to Allington (2002) investing in exemplary teaching through professional development will encourage teachers to “assume greater responsibility for the success of their students” (p. 746).

In the Teacher Education Department at California State University, Stanislaus (CSUS), faculty members have been working diligently to prepare credential candidates for the demands of the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs) and adequately teach appropriate lesson adaptations for students with diverse learning needs. Given the unique demographics in the region, where the majority of the classrooms are comprised of students with low socio-economic backgrounds and who speak Spanish as their primary language, the teacher education faculty has decided to focus on ways to improve the credential candidate’s ability to create standards-based lessons that provide appropriate lesson adaptations for ELs. The faculty has determined that it is important to research effective teaching activities that will improve the academic performance of our credential candidates on their TPAs and assist the teacher candidates with acquiring skills to help their own EL students at their school-site classrooms be successful. We want to teach them practices that will foster growth in content areas and language development. It is important for
credential candidates to understand that “content-area teachers are also teachers of academic language and that it is not solely the responsibility of the mainstream English or English language development (ELD) teachers to support the language development of students” (Aminy & Karathanos, 2011, p.107). It is equally important for “faculty in teacher education programs to not only emphasize this theme in their content-area courses but also to model the approaches that they promote with their own EL candidates” (Aminy & Karathanos, 2011, p.107).

The researchers selected the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model as a resource to find activities that would specifically address the issue of vocabulary acquisition for ELs. The SIOP model promotes the use of content and language objectives in a manner that increases student interaction and creates numerous opportunities for students to use English as they read, write, listen, and speak during a lesson (Vogt & Echevarria, 2006). The two SIOP activities that were adapted and embedded in the elementary and secondary methods courses were: 4-Corner Activity to increase vocabulary acquisition and Bloom’s Question Activity to increase student talk in the classroom and improve English language acquisition. The original version of Bloom’s Taxonomy is used in the SIOP model to help teachers increase levels of cognition for their students as they progress with a topic using knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis skills (Vogt & Echevarria, 2006).

**Rationale for the Study**

Since July 2008, the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing has required all teacher credential candidates to pass the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs) in order to receive their teaching credential. The California TPAs are aligned with the state-adopted academic content standards for students, as well as with the state content frameworks, the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, and the Teaching Performance Expectations.
TEACHING CREDENTIAL CANDIDATES HOW TO ADAPT LESSONS AND INCREASE VOCABULARY FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS (TPEs) (CCTC, 2009). The TPAs include four performance tasks that allow candidates to demonstrate their ability to create comprehensive and reflective lessons that provide appropriate adaptations for English learners (ELs) and special needs students. Along with the demands of TPAs, teacher credential candidates in California are faced with completing their field practicum in one of the most diverse student populations in the world, where more than 60 different languages are spoken with 82% of the ELs speaking Spanish (California Department of Education, 2011). Even with this challenge, the No Child Left Behind Act requires that all students, including ELs, be proficient in all academic areas. This has made it necessary for all teachers to learn how to make appropriate adaptations to instruction in order to help English learners perform at the same level as their English-speaking peers.

Credential candidates need to learn how to demonstrate their knowledge and application of lesson planning, assessment, reflection, and instruction on the TPAs, in addition to acquiring skills to appropriately apply clear adaptations for an EL and a special need student on each TPA task. After reviewing data from three years of TPA test administration, the researchers have noted that candidates in the teacher preparation programs at CSUS struggle to meet the academic needs of EL students. A common adaptation for an EL student cited in a TPA was to sit them next to a bilingual student who could help them translate the material. This limited knowledge base made it difficult for candidates to write about multiple adaptations for ELs that are teacher driven and led to a failing score on the TPAs, ultimately leaving them unprepared to assist ELs in their classrooms. The knowledge and skills needed to help these candidates be successful needed to be taught and role modeled by their instructors and then practiced for application to occur.
Methodology

This research project was designed to implement two research-based effective teaching activities for teaching English learners with the assistance of the teacher education faculty in the elementary and secondary education programs at CSUS. This study specifically addressed the objectives of TPE seven, Teaching English Learners: Candidates for a Teaching Credential know and can apply pedagogical theories, principles, and instructional practices for comprehensive instruction of English learners (CCTC, 2009). Forty-seven participants from the elementary education program reading methods class and the secondary education program yearlong methods class participated in a study to analyze the effectiveness of using two research-based activities. The first activity was used to improve the acquisition of vocabulary and concepts used in these respective courses related to the participants content areas, and the second to have the opportunity to use Bloom’s Taxonomy as a questioning guide to provide a variety of ways for them to ask questions to check for student understanding. The researchers agreed to role model and facilitate these two teaching activities in each of their courses. The credential candidates had the opportunity to practice these activities with their peers using a peer-coaching model to simulate the actual implementation of these activities during their field practicum. Credential candidates then designed lessons that included these adaptations for their ELs at their school-site classrooms. Their school-site classrooms contained at least 15% EL students. Finally, the candidates had the opportunity to apply them to their TPA practice lesson plans.

The credential candidates in these classes completed two TPA practice lesson plan assignments. A four-point rubric was used with a passing score of 3 or 4. The first lesson plan assignment was given to the credential candidates after receiving general information regarding appropriate adaptations for ELs. The faculty observed a lack of teacher directed learning
activities on this assignment for ELs in the classroom and agreed to investigate ways to use the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model in their credential classes. The faculty decided to use the text *99 Ideas and Activities for Teaching English Learners with the SIOP Model* (Vogt & Echevaria, 2008) as a book study and endorsed the SIOP model as “an empirically validated model instruction for English learners” (p. 3). The researchers adapted two effective learning activities from the text to focus on in their courses. The 47 credential candidates then participated in a simulation activity regarding these learning activities with the intention they would be able to transfer these activities to their own lesson designs. The Research Question guiding the study was: Will the direct teaching and modeling of two research-based effective activities for ELs enable credential candidates to design lessons that incorporate more than one effective adaptation for their ELs that meet the content-standards lesson objectives? The researchers hypothesized that the responses to questions on the lesson plan assignment regarding the adaptations for their EL focus student would contain more relevant teacher directed activities to help them improve upon their scores from the first assignment. It was conjectured that this model would lead to more effective instruction for English learners and increase the passage rate and performance scores on the TPAs for all credential candidates. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), assessment results from tests like the TPAs are the only time that candidates and their instructors “can see whether they indeed understand and can apply what they are supposed to be learning” (p. 18-19).

**Activities**

*Activity 1 – 4-Corner Activity*

“Vocabulary learning should play a major role in successful programs for English learners” (Gersten & Baker, 2001, p. 8). Research suggests that ELs will benefit from rich,
intensive vocabulary instruction that emphasizes “student-friendly” definitions and develops an understanding of word meanings to the point where they are used in conversations and future learning opportunities (Gersten, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, Collins, & Scracella, 2007). Therefore, teaching academic vocabulary was one of the focus activities. During teacher education faculty meetings, faculty worked in lesson study groups that centered on planning effective vocabulary instruction in order to assist students in building background knowledge and comprehensible input. Developing lesson plans for intensive vocabulary instruction that included using visual aids to enhance instruction and using a student’s native language to link the known to the new were discussed as effective activities. For the focus activity, researchers agreed that using the 4-Corners activity from the workbook 99 Ideas and Activities for Teaching English Learners with the SIOP Model would be a clear way to help our colleagues teach candidates to assist students in the acquisition of content-driven vocabulary by transforming textbook definitions into “student-friendly” definitions. The 4-Corner activity involves folding a piece of paper into four equal boxes and labeling each box separately; vocabulary word, student friendly definition, a sentence containing the word, and a picture of the vocabulary word (Vogt & Echevarria, 2008, p. 40) (Appendix A). Credential candidates were instructed on the different tiers of vocabulary (tier 1–basic words, tier 2 – high utility words, tier 3 – low frequency, domain specific words) and how to choose words with the most utility and that would be best for their students to learn. A number of examples were shared with candidates to ensure they understood how to use these activities and be able to give similar instructions to their own students. Using their own content area, credential candidates were instructed to find a vocabulary word and complete the 4-Corner activity themselves. They explained their 4-corner vocabulary word to similar content area or grade level group members. Finally, credential candidates had the
opportunity to include this activity in a lesson as an adaptation for an EL student at their fieldwork site.

**Activity 2 - Bloom’s Questioning Activity**

The teacher education faculty examined a variety of activities that would increase student talk to improve English language acquisition, while decreasing teacher talk in the classroom. Some activities included think-pair-share activities, using sentence frames, understanding English language development, and designing prompts to increase language levels. The decision was to use the original and revised versions of Bloom’s Taxonomy to vary questions for language demands and provide a variety of ways to check for understanding. The adapted version of “Canned Questions” activity in the workbook *99 Ideas and Activities for Teaching English Learners with the SIOP Model* (p. 77) was the activity the faculty focused on. Rather than using the actual activity that provided sentence starters for each of the levels of understanding, the faculty decided to go through a process where credential candidates would be able to develop their own questions and discuss how teacher questioning was able to increase student talk in the classroom. Credential candidates were divided into six groups. Each group was given a picture (six pictures in all were used for this activity). The idea was to create a question using the original Bloom’s Taxonomy higher level thinking categories in the workbook or the revised version of Bloom’s Taxonomy called *Bloom’s Critical Thinking Cue Questions* (Center for Resource Management, 2007) that one could answer from the picture. The original Bloom’s Taxonomy, which classifies levels of intellectual behavior, included the following question topics for each picture at each level: Knowledge (the main part of the picture); Comprehension (an explanation of the picture); Application (an example of the main part); Analysis (a comparison the main part); Synthesis (something created from the picture); and,
Evaluation (something concluded from the picture) (Vogt & Echevaria, 2008). The revised Bloom’s Taxonomy included the following topics with a choice of selected question starters: Remembering (What is…Where is…); Understanding (How would you summarize…What would you say about…); Applying (How would you use… What would happen if…); Analyzing (Why do you think…How would you classify…); Evaluating (Why do you agree with…What is your opinion of…); and Creating (What would happen if…How would you improve…) (Center for Resource Management, 2007).

The credential candidates wrote their questions on the picture and passed it to the next group. Each group created a new question using a different level question from the previous group. Papers were traded until all six of Bloom’s levels of questions were represented. The group members were then asked to analyze the six questions that were created for each picture as they related to Bloom’s Taxonomy. The candidates were also asked to compare the questions that were created using the two different versions of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Appendix B). The discussion centered on getting students to think and talk on different levels based on their language abilities and comprehension. Appropriately asked questions assisted in helping teachers scaffold student’s language development and provided more opportunities for them to talk. Once this was done in class, candidates had the opportunity to practice this activity in the field in their own classrooms.

**Data Collection**

The Data collected for this study included the two practice lessons for TPA Task One and Task Two. Overall TPAs were analyzed using the four-point rubric with a score of a three or four as passing, and one and two as not passing was the same used in the actual TPA administration and scoring, as well as the specific types of EL adaptations the candidates were using in their
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lessons. The results of their Task Two lessons were compared with their Task One lessons that were completed before the activities were introduced to see if the activities taught had any effect on their usage of appropriate adaptations for the EL students and ultimately increase the rubric score or passage rate.

**Results**

The credential candidates who participated in this study showed overall improvement on their second TPA practice lesson plan assignment compared to their first TPA lesson plan assignment especially on their responses to the EL adaptation questions for an EL focus student. Subsequently, the 47 credential candidates who participated in this study had a 100% passage rate on their second TPA assessment compared to the 90% passage rate on the first TPA assessment. Although not all of the elementary and secondary credential candidates in the programs were compared, there was an increase in the passage rate on all TPA tasks between Task One and Task Two.

On the first lesson plan assignment, the majority of the credential candidates responded to the EL adaptation question with seating the student next to a Spanish-speaking student who was proficient in English. Also mentioned on some tasks, but not consistently were: Providing the EL student a handout with terms translated into Spanish or a picture of the material; using visuals aids to help with vocabulary comprehension; graphic organizers; one-on-one time; modifying the number of problems for homework; and, using a white board to check for understanding.

On the second lesson plan assignment, the majority of the credential candidates still included seating the student next to a Spanish-speaking student who was proficient in English as an adaptation. The responses, however, included more diverse and consistent use of adaptations and many were specifically centered on the various levels of questioning related to Bloom’s
Taxonomy. The answers included the following adaptations: simplifying the reading for vocabulary comprehension; creating specific graphic organizers; providing specific instructions for pair-share activities; providing visual aids for vocabulary words; utilizing different levels of questioning to check for understanding; extra time on assignments; use of note cards on assessments; using the 4-Corner activity; and, incorporating the six questioning cues on the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy.

**Conclusion**

The responses indicated that focusing on two effective research-based activities in the credential classes improved the credential candidates’ ability to make adaptations for ELs in their lesson plans. Activities were used in order to assist students with the acquisition of content-based vocabulary and concepts and increase student talk to check for understanding in a variety of ways. The research indicated that the faculty in the Teacher Education Department at CSUS should continue to discuss and role model effective instructional activities in all of the program classes. “Teacher education programs can use TPA data to flag program needs, guide improvements, and track progress” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p.23). Moreover, the increased use of appropriate adaptation on lesson plans and TPAs informed the faculty that they were moving in the right direction of meeting the instructional needs of ELs and effectively teaching learning activities that will ultimately assist our credential candidates with the transition to the Common Core Standards.
References


Appendix A

4-Corner Activity

Elementary Credential Program Example:

Secondary Credential Program Example:
Bloom’s Questioning Activity

Below is an example from one picture from the Bloom’s questioning activity.

Picture #1 - Pot of gold at the end of a rainbow

Elementary Credential Candidates Responses using the original version of Bloom’s Taxonomy:

1. Knowledge- How many colors are in the rainbow?
2. Comprehension- Describe what is in the picture?
3. Application- How is a rainbow formed?
4. Analysis- How is this picture of a rainbow like a real rainbow?
5. Synthesis- Compose a song about this rainbow and pot of gold
6. Evaluation- Can there really be a pot of gold at the end of rainbow?

Secondary Credential Candidates Responses using the revised version of Bloom’s Taxonomy:

1. Remembering – Who or what is the main subject of this picture?
2. Understanding – What can you say about the picture?
3. Applying – How would you use the gold that you found in the pot?
4. Analyzing – What do you think causes the rainbow to form?
5. Evaluating – What is your opinion on the myth that there is a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow?
6. Creating – If the puppy and the flower could have a conversation, then what would they talk about?