



## Curriculum Integration and Adaptation: Individualizing Pedagogy for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students

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### **Abstract**

In the United States, populations identified as linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD) are increasing at the fastest rate in public schools (Samway & McKeon, 2007). LCD students have not performed as well as their monolingual and/or affluent peers on state mandated assessments. No Child Left Behind Act (2001) stressed this disparity as “the achievement gap,” resulting in highly structured curricular demands from districts forcing teachers to grapple between those demands and meeting the academic and cultural needs of LCD students. Using case-study methodology, this research explored how teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning influence curriculum decision-making for LCD students. Through the triangulation of interviews, observations, and document analysis, three teachers and their students in a low-income, urban, k-4 school in a predominantly Spanish-speaking community was investigated. Participants integrated and adapted curriculum based on personal beliefs about teaching and learning, the needs of their LCD students, and the mandated curriculum.

*Keywords:* Linguistically and culturally diverse, curriculum planning, curriculum integration, curriculum adaptation

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**Current Issues in Education**

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## Curriculum Integration and Adaptation: Individualizing Pedagogy for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students

The changing climate of classrooms in the United States increasingly includes populations who are linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD) (Samway & McKeon, 2007). To better understand what linguistically and culturally diverse students are defined as “minority populations” (Darder, 1991). Based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s definitions of race and for the focus, when discussing individuals from LCD backgrounds refers to any person who is (1) of non-White ancestry and/or (2) utilizes English as a second language. Nieto (2005) states given the inexactness of language, just one term cannot fully encompass all that composes a person.

Research has indicated that students from racial and ethnic-minority backgrounds do not perform as well academically as their mainstream peers (Darder & Torres, 2004). Sleeter (2001) suggested “education in many communities of color, as well as many poor White communities, is in a state of crisis” (p. 94). She continued by saying, “Students are learning far too little, becoming disengaged, and dropping out at high rates” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 94). In a climate of standards/objectives based reform, educators have to seek ways to address diversity in classrooms and employ practices that concentrate on the needs of LCD student populations.

As a result, many public schools adopt curricula aligned to state standards under the auspice of making planning easier for teachers or preparing students for standardized assessments. Often times, classroom teachers may not be included or have limited input in the process of adopting curriculum. When teachers are not included in the curriculum adoption process or curriculum decision-making, they are forced to plan and deliver curriculum that may neither be appropriate for meeting the needs of their diverse students nor permit opportunities for

individualized instruction. Tomlinson (2000) summarized the notion of stripping from teachers the ability to create effective curricula when he wrote:

For many teachers, curriculum has become a prescribed set of academic standards, instructional pacing has become a race against a clock to cover the standards, and the sole goal of teaching has been reduced to raising student test scores on a single test (p. 7).

A disconnect occurs between the needs of children from diverse cultures and the system of instructional delivery, including curriculum, planning, and materials, in public education in the United States (Darder & Torres, 2004). The curriculum materials should be chosen based on evidence that they contribute to the production of meaningful learning experiences. Educators, on the front lines, are attempting to close the achievement gap as judged against proficiency delineated by standards in academic areas, without being equipped with the proper tools to both meet both state standards and students learning needs. In an era of educational reform, appropriate curricula and materials are essential for embracing the background knowledge of diverse learners.

Teachers' voices and involvement are essential for developing and adapting curricula and adjusting learning experiences and formative assessments to create educational success (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Appropriate curricula allow teachers to create lessons that empower students to be successful learners. When teachers are not given the autonomy to create appropriate curricula, the planned curricula, especially when scripted, is informally modified through instructional delivery (Tomlinson, 2000). Objectives-driven curricula provide the exact content, written in measurable terms, to which district administrators expect teachers to adhere (Darder & Torres, 2004). Instead of teachers using objectives based "melting-pot" mentality and the "one-size-fits-all" approach, they should be encouraged to incorporate differentiation of learning, inclusive of

language, culture, community, and socioeconomic status that best serves students (Darder, 1991). Currently, teachers are confined to the curricular demands of the school or district while grappling with the academic and cultural needs of LCD students.

### **Curriculum Adoption and Teacher Voice**

Nieto (2002) stated, “teachers sometimes view curriculum development as little more than a technical activity rather than as a dynamic and potentially empowering decision-making process” (p. 190). Curriculum should challenge students to think creatively and critically. According to Nieto (2002), teachers have tremendous power when deciding how to execute a curriculum. Effective learning occurs when teachers “learn to view curriculum as a decision making process in which their own creativity and talents can be used” (Nieto, 2002, p. 191). The following explores curriculum in these contexts: curriculum adoption and teacher voice, NCLB requirements, effects of standards/objectives-based reform, scripted curriculum, and addressing student academic needs through individualizing instruction.

Teachers’ voices in curriculum decision making is paramount to student outcomes and the ability for teachers to meet individual student needs. Shavelson (1983) believed that a unique feature of teacher decision-making is that most decisions are made in front of the class during the instruction process. He called this “real time” decision-making (Shavelson, 1983, p.325). Because many teacher choices are done spontaneously in front of the classroom, teachers must rely on their own knowledge and experience to determine the appropriate path to take.

Owings and Kaplan (2001) found that teachers who have an active voice in curriculum development or leeway to adapt and adjust curriculum are able to design creative and unique learning experiences and formative assessments so learners experience success. As Ladson-Billings (2006) explained, teachers demonstrate the ability to make professional decisions about

curriculum in the process of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing curriculum. This process is never to “tear down” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 32), but to expose weaknesses, discover ways to address weaknesses, and then, through critical analysis, make decisions about the best ways to fill the weakness.

### **Effects of Standards-Based Reform**

In an era of standards/objectives based reform, curricular focus is on alignment to state standards/objectives with state testing as the anchor. Standards and objectives suggest a “one-size-fits-all” approach (Samway and McKeon, 2007). Decisions of curricula creation and “pedagogical imperatives of the classroom” are founded on state standards and objectives (Darder & Torres, 2004, p. 80). The curriculum, as a result, has become a prescribed set of skills leading instruction (Tomlinson, 2000). The intent of standards/objectives based curriculum is for all students to become competent applying skills demonstrating mastery of content matter. Standards/objectives based reform in American public schools are a response to criticisms that schools were not preparing students with the knowledge and skills necessary for college or full-time employment (Owings & Kaplan, 2001).

Standards based instruction, often times assessed through high-stakes testing, is believed by some to be the most effective way to raise student achievement (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). A standardized approach to school curriculum has resulted in teachers being given exact content and expected to adhere to the form of delivery prescribed by the curriculum designer (Darder & Torres, 2004). Some policy makers have argued that is what is needed to decrease the achievement gap between students. In contrast, Kaplan and Owings (2001) argue that standards and objectives deprive students and teachers of a broad range of creative learning experiences.

### **Scripted Curriculum**

Some school districts, under the pressure of accountability due to the residual effects of *NCLB* and currently *Race to the Top*, are choosing scripted curriculum designed to complement state standards, thought to lead to increased achievement. Scripted curriculum not only takes away the decision-making ability of teachers, but also articulates the exact words teachers are to say during instruction (Ladson- Billings, 2006). Thinking that meaning is enhanced or depleted by emphasizing the specificity of exact words epitomizes Hall's concept of the United States as a low-context society (Bennett, 2003). Giving educators the exact words to be spoken viewed by some as a strategy to "teacher proof" learning by prescribing a particular sequence and format, that is often skill driven (Darder & Torres, 2004). The system of high-stakes testing and standards/objectives based instruction legislated by federal government and state governments, and endorsed by many school districts has led to a very trade like culture to teaching. The concept of "right or wrong" approaches to instruction has led to what Darder and Torres (2004) have called a "deprofessionalized" vocation driven by "mistake" free scripted curriculum.

"Deprofessionalizing" or what Shannon (2007) calls "deskilling," is where planned or mandated curriculum reduces teaching to a technical skill. With teachers being accountable for student learning as demonstrated solely on high-stakes tests, there is pressure for instruction to center around skills found in district and state tests. Hence, teaching becomes a procedure of teaching skills in a similar fashion to a technical job where success is based on a job being done to code, and entails a sense of correctness or incorrectness. The emphasis on skills supports traditional "melting-pot" and the one-size-fits-all approaches to instructional delivery.

Differentiation, from a standards/objectives based model, is not grounded in the appreciation of

language, culture, community, and social economic status as Darder (1991) suggests. Instead, it is anchored in approaches meant to teach and reteach skills until “mastered” by students.

Darder (1997) states how scripted curriculum, “fails to acknowledge the creative potential of educators to grapple effectively with a multiplicity of contexts found in classrooms and to shape environments according to the lived experiences and actual educational needs of their students” (p. 332). This approach to curriculum design employs banking methods to teach basic skills; with the assumption students will score higher on standardized tests (Darder & Torres, 2004). Therefore scripted curriculum reinforces instruction with what Freire (1970) described as “banking” (p.72). Freire’s (1970) notion of “banking” describes a process where teachers, the depositors, make deposits of knowledge and information into the minds, depositories, of passive students. The adoption of scripted curriculum insinuates teachers need to be directed in what and how to teach while students are expected to attain specific skills deemed necessary for future success in society by politicians, businessmen, and administrative level educators of the dominant culture.

A major effect of scripted and planned curriculum, according to Kayes and Maranto (2006), is that recently graduated pre-service teachers are leaving certification programs with the expectation they don’t need to be able to develop curriculum because, “the curriculum people will tell you what to teach” (p. 41). When teachers are required to use scripted curriculum, both “students and teachers, as subjects of classroom discourse who bring their personal stories and life experiences to bear on their teaching and learning, are systematically silenced by the need for the class to ‘cover’ a generic curriculum at a prescribed pace established by the state” (Darder & Torres, 2004, p. 87). Nieto (1999) summed up the backlash of planned and scripted curricula as

learning environments in which students are subjected to “stale teaching and irrelevant curriculum” (p. 78).

### **Addressing Student Needs through Individualized Instruction**

Brisk and Harrington (2007) elucidated upon lived constructs related to teaching and learning saying, “Students are individuals very different from each other” (p. 16). Individualizing instruction is not a means to “water down” curriculum. Nieto (2002) claims, “good teachers know that learning begins where the students are at” (p.192). Effective individualized instruction necessitates identifying and recognizing students’ abilities as strengths and not weaknesses. Pang and Kamil (2004) suggested that instruction should build on students’ knowledge and experiences as well as present opportunities for students to make connections between school and community-based knowledge sources. Perez and Torres-Guzman (1996) discussed setting up learning environments where instruction does not consist of drills, but projects, dramatic presentations, storytelling, and encouraging teachers to seize teachable moments when students have real purpose for learning.

Another way to individualize instruction is through an understanding of students. Brisk and Harrington (2007) discussed teachers’ knowledge of students’ personal life, home and situational factors, in establishing individualized instructional techniques helping to teach, motivate, and evaluate students. An active voice in curriculum development increases teachers’ ability to adapt curriculum and adjust learning experiences, including formative assessments so each learner experiences success (Owings & Kaplan, 2001).

Standards-based reforms have led many schools to make objectives-based curriculum aligning to state standards as evidenced by Samway and McKeon (2007). Current education reforms and policies such as *NCLB* and Race to the Top have endorsed curricular materials

debatably described as being based on sound evidence, sometimes through research funded by for profit educational companies who profit from the perceived evidence. States and districts in hopes they ensure students' proficiency in academic content areas adopt these marketed curricular materials. Increasingly the result of this movement is away from teacher-based decision making to state and school districts mandating teachers use scripted curriculum as a means to raise test scores.

### **Methods**

This qualitative study focused on how teachers in a small, urban elementary school in the Northeast negotiated their beliefs, teaching materials, and instructional delivery in Linguistically Culturally Diverse (LCD) classrooms. The central focus of the study was based on the “overarching” research question (Creswell, 1998, p. 99): How do teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning influence curriculum decision making for LCD students? This question, as it applies to everyday classrooms, seeks to understand what it means when teachers use rhetoric such as “every student can learn.”

### **Investigation Site**

The elementary school featured in this case study was chosen because it serves a LCD community in an urban area. The school site serves a low-income, inner-city, K–4 school in a predominantly Spanish-speaking community. The building is over one hundred years old and was built to serve 125 students, but served 334 students at the time of the research. The largest demographic group represented in the school was Latino at 93.4%, while the remaining population was 3.3% African American and 2.7% Caucasian. Although the student population was largely Spanish-speaking, all classes were taught in English with an emphasis on English as a Second Language (ESL) strategy.

**Participants**

The participants invited to take part in this research were state certified third- and fourth-grade teachers. These teachers held teaching certificates in their content areas and each had over ten years of teaching experience. Each had worked in this school for a minimum of four years. All three of the teachers identified as Caucasian, and one spoke Spanish. All other demographic data regarding teachers and students was collected through interviews to understand the background characteristics of the teachers and the classrooms where they were teaching.

**Observations and Interviews**

This research focused on teachers' beliefs about LCD student populations influence their curriculum decision-making, one form of data collected was observations designed to understand the instructional intersections between the written curriculum, curriculum planning, and instructional delivery through the actions and interactions of the participants. Observations were conducted on a daily basis for eight weeks during literacy instruction. The researcher made daily visits to the elementary school and visited the three participants for 60 minutes of the 90-minute literacy block. The observations were of direct instruction, mini-lessons, small groups, one on one conferences, and assessments. The research employed a field log to organize and document data. Systematic field observations and maintained detailed written records of the observations established a contextual basis for understanding and interpreting the interviews.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data used to understand participants' perceptions about teaching and learning with LCD students. Teachers were interviewed to collect information about past and present experiences as a means to assist the researcher in making sense of the participating teachers' beliefs and philosophies about teaching and learning. In addition, teachers reflected on their instructional practices and defined their

beliefs about teaching and learning for LCD students. The interviews were scheduled, securing a time and location, to occur after the first week of the school year. The interviews took place at the school site during the school day or at the end of the school day.

The follow-up interviews were intended to draw explanations about teachers' instructional delivery based on observations and data from the initial interview. The explanations created an understanding of how teachers negotiate between their beliefs and the needs of their classrooms in planning and delivering instruction. Each follow-up interview lasted about thirty minutes. Follow-up interviews were designed to obtain clarification of teachers' beliefs about practices, addressing the needs of LCD students, observed and statements made during previous interviews.

### **Analyzing Interviews, Observations, and Documents**

Three sources of data were analyzed both as single sources of data and for the relationships between them (Stake, 1995). Using Yin's (2003) analytic strategies for observations and interviews, a descriptive framework for organizing this case study was developed. First, interviews and field notes were transcribed. The researcher searched for patterns of behavior and outcomes that generated a list of categories. After categories were identified, the data were manually coded to visually denote the patterns and the contradictions.

Besides analysis of documents the researcher collected from observations and interviews, documents relevant to prescribed content involved in curriculum planning, such as district time lines, also called pacing schedules, were analyzed. The purpose of engaging in document analysis was to explore the triangulation of the researcher's observations, the teachers' responses from the interviews, and the documents guiding and influencing teacher pedagogy. As Merriam (2002) pointed out, "the strength of documents as a data source lies with the fact that they

already exist in the situation; they do not intrude upon or alter the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator might” (p.13). This is of importance because all of the documents are used for either planning, instruction, or for both. They are available on the district’s website and are expected to be used by teachers in daily classroom instruction. Triangulation of data sources allows the interpretation of data to make sense of the case, and establish trustworthiness of relationships between the three data sources (Stake, 1995).

### **Results**

Data collected by the researcher consisted of an initial and concluding interview, observations of each teacher’s literacy instructional period along with a follow up interview after each week of observations. As the data was coded the following themes emerged: (a) curriculum adaptation and (b) curriculum integration. Curriculum integration and adaptation were strategies teachers employed to create equilibrium between teaching the content and skills of the mandated curriculum required for the six-week assessment and the learning needs of the LCD students. The following sections analyze and synthesize the data, incorporating relevant literature as it pertains to the findings focused specifically on curriculum adaptation and integration through the use of non-district mandated supplemental resources and technology.

The participants described the curriculum used in their classroom as a “mandated curriculum based on the state standards,” that the district calls the “core curriculum.” Tomlinson (2000) explained that, “for many teachers, curriculum has become a prescribed set of academic standards, instructional pacing has become a race against a clock to cover the standards, and the sole goal of teaching has been reduced to raising student test scores on a single test” (p. 7). As participants thought about how they planned for instruction in their classrooms many of them referred back to the district’s pacing guide or pacing schedule as a document that “may not

always fit every student or every classroom because student needs are not taken into account” (participant response). In reflection on the needs of their individual students and their classrooms, participants discussed the tension between what the mandated curriculum prescribed for them to teach and their ability to do so. The following vignette attempts to capture the tension expressed by participants:

... if I realize that students don't get it, I am re-teaching it in, it's the sixth week. If I realize I'm never touching it again according to the curriculum; [but] not according to me. What I do, according to me, is I would further the skill. I would further predicting [for three weeks], because I know it's a very important strategy that they need to have. They need to go deeper into it. Not just tell me a basic prediction. They have been doing that since kindergarten, so I feel that even if it says we are done predicting, and never talking about again, it can always be touched on. These are important strategies, just like all the other comprehension strategies. They are all very important.

In resolving the tension between teachers' beliefs about teaching, learning, and the mandated or planned curriculum, the participants individualized and adapted instructional pedagogy. Curriculum integration and curriculum adaptation are conceptually individualized pedagogical approaches to address teachers' perceptions of inadequate curriculum choices. The implemented curriculum is how teachers interpret curriculum and “maximize the value of their lessons in light of the dynamics of their classroom” (Marsh & Willis, 2007, p. 185). Supporting Clandinin's (1986) work, participants sought ways to either integrate other strategies, viewed as “best practices,” or incorporate alternative resources into the mandated curriculum. They used resources and programs that fit their beliefs about teaching and learning along with the intention of addressing the needs of diverse learners in their classrooms.

## **Curriculum Adaptation**

The mandated curriculum was organized by one-size-fits-all objectives and standards intended for designated grade level instruction. Incongruence occurs when designers of mandated curriculum presume students have the prerequisite skills necessary to introduce new skills. Not only are prerequisite skills disregarded, but also a delinquency within the mandated curriculum to revisit skills taught previously in lieu of maintaining a pace so “coverage” occurs. Teachers navigate the incongruence using one or more strategies. For example, a third grade teacher states: “...if I realize that students don’t get it, I am re-teaching it. What I do, according to me, is I would further the skill. I would further predicting for three weeks, because I know it's a very important strategy that they need to have.” The participants “do more clarification” or find ways to “slow things down” for students instead of focusing on “coverage.”

During an observation one fourth grade teacher was teaching students how to make predictions. She knew students had learned making predictions. She modeled making predictions through a read aloud and prediction chart. Every student had a white board and she would read then stop and have students make predictions. Students during their independent reading time were making predictions about what would happen next or how their story would end. As she conferenced with individual students she would have students orally make predictions for her. Participants referred to this approach as “going deeper” rather than “reteaching” which is what teachers did.

The mandated curriculum perpetuates maximum coverage of material, breadth over depth, with greater amounts of surface knowledge leading to a mastery of subject knowledge (Tomlinson, 2002). The participants validated the quality of the parts of the Planning and Scheduling Timeline that fit their personally constructed beliefs about teaching, learning, and

instructional practices. Dissonance came when they disagreed with the mandated skills within the Planning and Scheduling Timeline.

When the participants perceived deficiencies in the curriculum for the abilities of their students, they found concordance of the various influences on classroom pedagogy through adaptations and supplements to the curriculum. Some strategies for modifying the curriculum included clarifications/connections of concepts or adjusting the pacing schedule, completely or in part, for students. The idea of “going deeper” was echoed by all participants, especially when students needed more time to learn the skills outlined to be learned during a specified period of time. “Going deeper” would challenge students to engage in higher order thinking such as synthesizing and evaluating information. Observations indicate this pedagogical practice as “reteaching” or “differentiating” instruction based on students needs. Participants reteach concepts and skills students do not master or as a means to make the curriculum recursive.

Curriculum adaptation portrays the way that participants “tweak the curriculum.” “Tweaking the curriculum defined by participants are ways curriculum is perceived to be adapted to create a “good program” with “what works in the classroom and what doesn’t.” Participants believed they could reconcile the limitations of the mandated curriculum by “tweak [ing] it to fit the children and learners in the class.” A participant stated, “I take what I know will work, I take what they [students] need. I model it into a lesson I know that my children will get something from.” Participants explained that the curriculum did not leave room for creativity or for prerequisite concepts to be taught. While the document informs teachers as to what concepts and skills to teach, it also “fails to acknowledge the creative potential of educators to grapple effectively with the multiplicity of contexts they find in their classrooms and to shape environments according to the lived experiences and actual educational needs of their students”

(Darder et al., 1997, p. 332). The pacing timetable dictates when specific concepts and skills have to be taught while making assumptions as to how certain concepts will be taught in order to prepare for the district and state assessments.

Teachers used curriculum adaptation and integration to make curriculum decisions based on their beliefs about creativity and best practices learned throughout their experience as described by Nieto (2002).

Participants adapted curricula when it conflicted with what they believed was good teaching. As a result, teachers who recognized the importance of cultural relevance appeared to have greater dissonance between personal beliefs about teaching and learning, the mandated curriculum, and addressing their LCD students' needs. For example, a third grade teacher stated, "At times there may be a need for mini-lessons." In this case it was a phonics lesson in the middle of the literacy lesson that the researcher observed; later the teacher described, "if the students need a phonics review I am not going to neglect that need and keep going. I am going to teach the phonics lesson that is needed because that is going to impact learning later on."

Teachers incorporated mini-lessons to adjust for students' lack of prior knowledge with a skill or concept presented in the district's pacing schedule. The mini-lesson also provided an opportunity for the teacher to model thinking about text, make connections across content areas, and introduce or re-teach literacy strategies. Mini-lessons, aligned to the objectives but not necessarily in congruent with the pacing schedule allowed for instruction as a means to either extend learning or fill in gaps beyond the set objectives. For instance, if the third-grade curriculum indicated predictions were to be taught for a week, then making predictions was a mini-lesson taught and reinforced throughout the week.

The participants believed they continued to use “good teaching and learning” by using supplemental resources to focus on skills and re-teaching. Many opportunities were created for students to learn skills taught through additional teaching. Small groups and independent instruction were two strategies discussed and observed to address students’ needs.

### **Curriculum Integration**

Unlike curriculum adaptation, which takes the curriculum and makes modifications using the same materials and resources identified by the district, curriculum integration combines outside resources with the existing curriculum to “fill the gaps” or “meet student needs,” where the core curriculum seems to fail to do so. During observations the researchers saw teachers using outside resources or approaches to deliver the planned curriculum. For example, a third grade and a fourth grade teacher used aspects of other curricular approaches such as: Readers and Writers Workshop and Message Time Plus, to meet the needs of their students in the area of literacy. Technology played an integral role in delivering instruction; however, its use is not defined in the curriculum.

In numerous observations the researcher watched one participant rely on the Smart Board in the classroom for instruction. A Smart Board has been provided by the district to assist in instructional delivery, however was only present in this participant's classroom. In addition, the curricular materials did not identify technology integration, technology support or the use thereof as a means to meet the standards. The data indicates that the core curriculum, which informs instructional practice, is not designed to incorporate this type of technology as supported by the following vignette.

While teaching is going on, you constantly have to scan the room to differentiate what kind of delivery you are giving them, to differentiate the kind of activities you are going

to give them. There have been times I've had an activity ready, and I'm like I'm not going to give them this today because they are no way ready for it; or, it's too boring for them because they've already got it. So you modify right there, and that's where the Smart Board is a really great tool, because you can come up with another activity (snaps fingers) on the spot.

Finally, teachers found ways to integrate students language into instruction as a means to “clarify” or “make connections” with what students know. Curriculum integration “help[s] build the prerequisite skills so that they [students] can get the target skills that are identified by the pacing schedule.” From an observation, one of the fourth grade teachers used an old set of English textbooks with her students. When asked about this on a follow up interview she stated, “I am outsourcing. It is the content that I am working on. I try to use as many sources as I can to implement the core curriculum.” In addition, another participant discussed how many students have a limited number of experiences and as a result it makes it hard for them to connect with the texts in the basal reader, the reading program purchased by the district, and other parts of the curriculum. The use of newspapers in the classroom, helps when it is integrated into the curriculum.

Unlike curriculum adaptation, curriculum integration combines supplemental resources with the existing curriculum to “fill the gaps” or “meet student needs” where the core curriculum was perceived to fail to do so. Curriculum integration, as observed and explained by participants, “help[s] build the prerequisite skills so that they [students] can get the target skills that are identified by the pacing schedule,” as stated by a participant during an interview. All of the participants make use of supplemental resources, like a Smart Board, to assist in

instructional delivery. The participants drew on their past experiences, likes and dislikes to make not only teaching choices, but curriculum choices as well (Shavelson, 1983).

### **Discussion**

This study set out to explore how teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning impact curriculum planning to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. The findings from this qualitative case study offer us a glimpse into the pedagogical approaches and instructional strategies that drive what teachers do in the classroom to meet the needs of LCD students. As in any case study, generalizability is left to the reader and the findings may not be generalizable to all contexts.

When teachers are able to reflect, identify, and name their own socialization process and experiences, they will be better able to recognize and identify those qualities in their students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ultimately "you as a teacher, a professional, know what's best for you students, your class and what works," said a fourth grade teacher. Teachers know what students "need in their heart." This was a sentiment shared by participants. Despite the strengths and weaknesses of the core curriculum, one participant statement encompasses the importance of being a reflective practitioner, "you don't want to have them [students] leave your room and not feel you've done the best possible job you could just because the curriculum says do this. You need to give them what they need to be lifelong learners."

The teachers clearly had beliefs about teaching and learning, but believed they should use the mandated or planned curriculum. Although the participants recognized the deficiencies in the Planning and Scheduling Timeline, they also validated it by using it as the foundation of their instructional practice. Dissonance occurred in all three teachers when faced with a mandated curriculum that did not fit the needs of their students nor their beliefs about teaching and

learning. They chose one or more strategies to balance came when they disagreed with the mandated skills within the Planning and Scheduling Timeline. The two major ways teachers met the needs of LCD students as identified through this research was curriculum adaptation and curriculum integration.

A conclusion drawn from the data was that behind closed doors teachers made curriculum decisions based on their beliefs of what was best for their students rather than strict obedience to the district created pacing schedule. Quality instruction for LCD students, where instruction is continually adjusted to address the needs of the students is supported by Nieto and Bode's (2007) call for a standards-conscious curriculum. A standards-conscious curriculum is where standards are a tool for promoting a rigorous, demanding, and inspiring curriculum that can be creatively designed around the needs for diverse student populations. Teachers must present opportunities for students to construct knowledge and reinvent their world through a curriculum providing activities, texts, and a variety of learning experiences. Educators must be willing to transform curriculum and instructional pedagogy to engage students and connect learning to the real world. Freire & Macedo (1987) states: "What we do in the classroom is not an isolated moment separate from the 'real world.' It is entirely connected to the real world" (p. 25). Connections to the real world provide authentic learning experiences that validate individual people, who they are, what they bring to the classroom, culturally and linguistically, which can be used to stimulate student engagement and academic success.

Teachers found ways to adapt and supplement the curriculum to balance the perceived deficiencies of curriculum. Some strategies for modifying the curriculum included clarifications/connections of concepts or adjusting the pacing schedule, completely or in part, for students. The contentious part of the planning and pacing timeline is that teachers are

expected to teach in a way leading to high achievement on the state test. As one participant elaborated, “everything has to be linked to the test.” Data such as this reinforces Silvermail’s (1996) evidence that standardized testing promotes a narrowed curriculum. Teachers used curriculum adaptation and integration to make curriculum decisions based on their beliefs about creativity and best practices learned throughout their experience as described by Nieto (2002).

Although participants adapted curricula, they supported the mandated curriculum as a legitimate foundation for teaching and learning, as evidenced by lessons connectivity to the goals and objectives of the mandated curriculum. The more teachers recognized the importance of cultural relevance and context, the greater the dissonance between beliefs about teaching and learning, the mandated curriculum, and addressing their LCD students’ needs. The participants believed they continued to use “good teaching and learning” by using supplemental programs or curricula to focus on skills and re-teaching. Many opportunities were created for students to learn skills taught through additional teaching. Small groups and independent instruction were two strategies discussed and observed to address students’ needs.

### **Implications**

This study unveiled the how teachers used their professional judgment or “real time” decision making in the classroom to benefit their students. The use of professional judgment was explicated, as “you know what the kids need to know to survive.” Explicitly structured curriculum, like the Planning Timeline, is teaching and learning operating at a technical level, in which content and skills are the predictors of the outcomes and goals of students as measured by benchmarks and the state assessment. As a result not all teachers are struggling, as professionals, to implement practice meant to address the unique needs of diverse students through an understanding of their students (language, culture, and lives). Some have found ways to do what

is best for their students once the classroom door is closed, although the incongruence in what is being taught and a solid way to assess learning gets lost. Although students' needs may be met, they still are left behind their peers who have many more advantages when it comes to testing.

Another implication from this study could be the use of formal or informal dialogue may guide school-based curriculum planning meetings in which teachers reflect on their beliefs and goals for their students. School stakeholders must have dialogues where the needs of students represented in the school community as are identified and defined in an effort for greater application of academic and social learning. Dialogues must include planning for teaching and learning experiences developed in intentional and innovative ways to meet students' needs, while allowing them to develop a love for learning. Dialogue in this sense is not simply having a conversation, but rather engaging in an on-going forum between and among colleagues, mentors, administrators, and others. The lack of dialogue or collaborations between constituents was evident as a fourth grade teacher indicated when discussing the mandated curriculum, "It does not always have what we need" and "needs more open ended writing in the curriculum." The curriculum has "no flow with it." It is, "missing great strategies; inferring, questioning, and visualization." Through reflective practices veteran and pre-service teachers begin to see themselves as learners and understand that they are also engaging in the learning process and are able to find ownership in the curriculum to be taught.

### **Conclusion**

In creating classrooms where the needs of LCD students are met, teachers need to become more aware of their own beliefs about teaching and learning, presumptions about mandated curriculum, and a true understanding of the instructional strategies that meet the needs of LCD students. Mandated curriculum is implemented more fully when it is in line with

teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. When the curriculum is identified not coordinating with teachers' beliefs, it will be adapted or integrated in some form to meet the perceived needs of the students. As mandated curriculum necessitates specific prior knowledge for success on current learning, those students with that prior knowledge seemingly will always be in the vantage. Students whose background leaves them deficient will in all likelihood not be able to catch up with their peers. Furthermore, they may fall further behind in real understanding because of the overemphasis on functional literacy.

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