

ABSTRACT

The Impact of Professional Development on Middle School Teachers

Educating English Language Learners

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This project examines the impact of professional development on middle school teachers educating English Language Learners. The program was implemented over a one-year period in an urban district near Boston. Ten teachers participated in thirty-one hours of high quality professional development which sought to change their beliefs and teaching practices when educating English Language Learners.

Teachers were exposed to important issues related to the education of English Language Learners in the professional development program. Ten hours focused on understanding the language acquisition process of English Language Learners. Fifteen hours were devoted to a review of literature about racial identity, classroom activities, lesson design and teaching strategies and modifications. Lastly, a six-hour professional development day was offered to review the above topics.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the professional development impact on teachers' beliefs and practices when educating English Language Learners, a triangulation of analysis was employed. This methodology offered the opportunity to analyze the data collected from surveys, interviews and observations. Data

was obtained before and after the implementation of the professional development program. The researcher analyzed how teachers understand issues related to English Language Learners and how their beliefs and perceptions of students contributed or hindered their teaching practices.

Findings indicated that teachers gained a greater understanding of the complex issues surrounding English Language Learners. They learned about their embedded belief systems along with the development of language acquisition. Teachers came to understand how the length of time and the quality of meaningful exposure to the English Language directly influences the acquisition of language. Teachers gained a greater understanding of the new bilingual law and how it is detrimental to language development and contrary to the research in the field.

Teachers assumed a greater responsibility to educate English Language Learners and became better prepared to educate such students in the future. Knowledge of English Language Learners' language and cultures along with the exposure to effective teaching strategies helped teachers make instructional modifications and increased the quality of education.