
Training Teachers of English Language Learners through Instructional Conversations: A Metalogue

Abie L. Quiñones-Benitez
University of Connecticut

Abstract

Although the Instructional Conversation (IC) has been successfully utilized to teach English language learners (ELLs) and at-risk students, the literature fails to locate studies of the IC as a professional development tool for middle school mainstream and bilingual teachers. The study examined the IC as a socioculturally based professional development tool and how it encouraged knowledge construction as it was assisted through dynamic participation among mainstream and bilingual teachers of ELLs across grade level. The study found that the IC could be instrumental in training teachers to comprehend theoretical constructs, use new pedagogical and instructional strategies, and to promote reflection on practice for teachers. The data also revealed that the IC could be an effective pedagogical tool in the middle school and that bilingual and mainstream teachers of ELLs have similar training, professional development, and policy needs.

Professional development today
also means providing occasions for teachers
to reflect critically on their practice
and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs
about content, pedagogy, and learners

(Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597).

Introduction

The tremendous growth of ELLs in the nation's schools has increased the need for teacher development in understanding linguistic processes (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997; Waggoner, 1999). A comparison of school enrollment in the nation shows that from 1989 to 2000 general school enrollment grew by 13.6%. In contrast, when growth in school enrollment is analyzed only for ELLs the rate of growth is 104.3 % (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, 2000). More than ever before ELLs sit in the nation's regular classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1999). This increase creates a wider gap between teacher training and the skills needed to teach across the nation (Riley, 2000). This constant increase of ELLs and culturally diverse students ought to change how educators view the school environment. And most of all,

their own professional development, they must acquire new skills and change their pedagogical approach now and in the years to come (Tharp, 1999).

ELLs' possibilities to succeed academically depend upon teachers' knowledge of effective pedagogy. This includes how ELLs learn academics and develop proficiency in English as a second language, and how they engender positive changes in their learning and self-efficacy (Cummins & Wong Fillmore, 2000; Krashen, 2000; Echevarria, Short & Vogt, 1999). Current research states that in most classrooms lecture and teacher-centered instruction are still the norm (Gottlieb, 1999; Valdes, 1999). For ELLs this method does not provide many opportunities for second language development, which requires a great deal of teacher-student and student-student interaction (Faltis, 1999; Merino, 1999). Although, research-based instructional practices can improve student learning, this can only happen if teachers acquire, produce, test, and implement new knowledge (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Lampert & Ball, 1999; Shulman, 1999). Hence, mainstream and bilingual program teachers must be afforded the opportunities for knowledge construction assisted through dynamic participation across grade level (Echevarria & McDonough, 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991).

Consequently, the challenges facing professional development in education go beyond time and space constraints. New requirements on educators, a more diverse and demanding student body, and a commitment to educate all children, must be met with authentic activities that enhance learning (Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, & Fideler, 1999; Kennedy, 1999). In addition, professional development efforts need to take into account that teachers are adult learners who are self-directing, bring prior learning, display distinctive learning styles, and pass through different developmental stages (Corcoran, 1995; Lockwood & Secada, 1999).

Current studies suggest a need to focus training for teachers of ELLs on how second language learning takes place, where it can take place, and hence a change in the ways learning, and teaching are perceived (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 1998). To transfer research into practice, teachers need to be exposed to professional development opportunities that promote reflection. Furthermore, they should foster collaboration with a focus on problem setting and problem solving (Joyce & Showers, 1995). Collaboration incorporates formative feedback which is used to modify and improve on ideas and practices in transition (Romero, 1990). As such, it gives the teacher opportunity to converse with colleagues in order to clarify rather than judge. Sharing and providing feedback empowers the receiver and fosters introspective and creative problem solving (Milk, Mercado, & Sapiens, 1992).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to use qualitative methods such as observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to examine how teachers perceive the IC as a tool for professional development. In addition, the intent was to investigate the perception of teachers of the IC as a pedagogical strategy in the classroom. This study takes into consideration the specific professional development needs of middle school mainstream and bilingual teachers in regards to effective teaching practices with ELLs. Finally, conclusions were reached on the IC as an effective practice in implementing professional development programs for teachers.

Statement of the Problem

The ELL student population is increasing and the need to provide them with quality and appropriate schooling becomes an imperative (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). Despite efforts to improve the quality of the teaching force to meet ELLs' academic and linguistic needs, the problem of professional development persists (Riley, 2000). Although a number of professional development programs have been suggested as a means to train teachers to teach ELLs more effectively, many teachers continue to rely heavily on a transmission model of knowledge in their classroom (Tharp, 1994). Furthermore, most classroom teachers receive no special advanced training in the areas of second language teaching methodology, cross-cultural issues, and approaches to teach academic content to ELLs (Ballenger, 1999).

Teaching ELLs requires sophisticated instructional strategies for drawing connections between students' experiences and ambitious curriculum ideas (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999). According to Tharp (1999), the most important aspect of professional development for teachers of ELLs is learning how to use the second language in instructional settings so that students learn content while developing receptive and production functions in that language. The IC is a social interactive tool that promotes both planned teaching and interactive responsive conversation. A gap in the literature exists with respect to IC as a tool for the professional development of teachers of ELLs (Rueda, 1998). Therefore, the IC was examined in this study as a tool in the professional development of both mainstream and bilingual middle school teachers.

Background

Professional Development

Contemporary professional development practices in the teaching of ELLs are described as shallow, fragmented, and lacking continuity. Joyce and Showers (1995) emphasized the importance of reflection and discussion in professional development practices. Moving away from the one-shot training session and the presenter-centered format. Indeed training that focuses on the process by which teachers acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to be effective in the ELL classroom (Villegas, 1991). Any effort designed to promote growth for teachers should be interactive, job-embedded and context-sensitive in order to be most effective (Ferguson, 2000).

Professional development is a challenging dilemma, needing resolution if school reform efforts are to succeed (Scribner, 1999). August and Pease-Alvarez (1996) suggest that for school improvement to succeed stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators) need to play a key role in the improvement of instructional practice. In addition, teachers are more productive when they are close to students and their work (Temple Adger & Clair, 1999).

Learning

Research has demonstrated that students learn best when new ideas are connected to previous knowledge and experience and when they are actively engaged in applying and testing their knowledge on real world problems (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Researchers on learning processes in social contexts, like schooling or professional development, explain how interaction impacts cognition. According to Shotter (1997), the learning process involves self and others in an exchange of ideas to deepen individual understanding. Vygotsky (1986) contends that learning is a sociocultural practice and that language gives and receives meaning from social activity. In other words, thought develops from undergoing changes produced by interactions. Hence, thoughts exist through words, their understanding, and meaning. Dialogue allows for individuals to negotiate and share meaning and make connections in a dynamic interaction that promotes growth.

Didactic Interaction

Vygotsky's theory assumes that cognitive development arises as a result of social interactions between individuals (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Furthermore, he considers learning a dynamic social process in which dialogue between novices and experts leads to the development of higher cognitive levels (Goldenberg, 1991). These interactions promote the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving in collaboration with more capable peers (Brisk, 1998). The ZPD is the level of performance at which a learner is capable when there is support from interaction with a more advanced individual. Teaching at the ZPD requires activities that include the use of speech and visual representations such as modeling, contingency management, and feedback.

Intersubjectivity

Tharp and Gallimore (1991) used Vygotsky's theoretical framework to pose that dialogue and dialogic thinking are critical forms of assisted learning. Accordingly, they propose the IC as a medium for weaving ideas continually and rousing the mind to life (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Moreover, the IC has been proposed as one of five standards for effective pedagogy in multicultural settings (Tharp, 1998). The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) has synthesized the work of many researchers working to improve education for students placed at risk of failure due to poverty, limited English proficiency, and race, among other factors (Tharp, 1999). According to Rueda (1998), the five standards can also be applied to professional development. He contends, however, that "adults and children learn differently. Adults may be more aware of their learning so that they monitor and self-regulate their own learning better" (p.1). Nevertheless, he asserts that "the principles that describe effective teaching and learning for students in classrooms should not differ from those for adults in general and teachers in particular" (ibid.).

The conversational aspects of the IC provide the hook that facilitates the connection of formal schooled knowledge to practice knowledge, providing opportunities for responsive assistance in the ongoing interaction among participants (Rueda, 1998).

Thus, the IC engages participants in a balanced interaction with an instructional intent (Dalton, 1998; Dalton & Sison, 1995; Echevarria & McDonough, 1993).

The contention of this study is that professional development efforts that utilize the IC can effectively facilitate the learning of instructional strategies to teach ELLs (Tharp, Estrada, Stoll Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). Thus, this study examined the IC as a tool for professional development with both mainstream and bilingual middle school teachers.

The Model

Socioconstructivism contends that learning occurs when meaning is created from the interactions present in the reality of the learner. When building a metalogue for teaching the phenomenon of context is deeply related to the phenomenon of meaning. This study proposed to utilize the IC as the context of the interaction. In addition, IC was the topic that generated the interaction. Thus, the IC was the phenomenon of context and meaning. Articulating a particular method disappeared, so that the method became the phenomenon under study, as it is in metalogues, and therefore it became part of the abstractions needed to construct meaning.

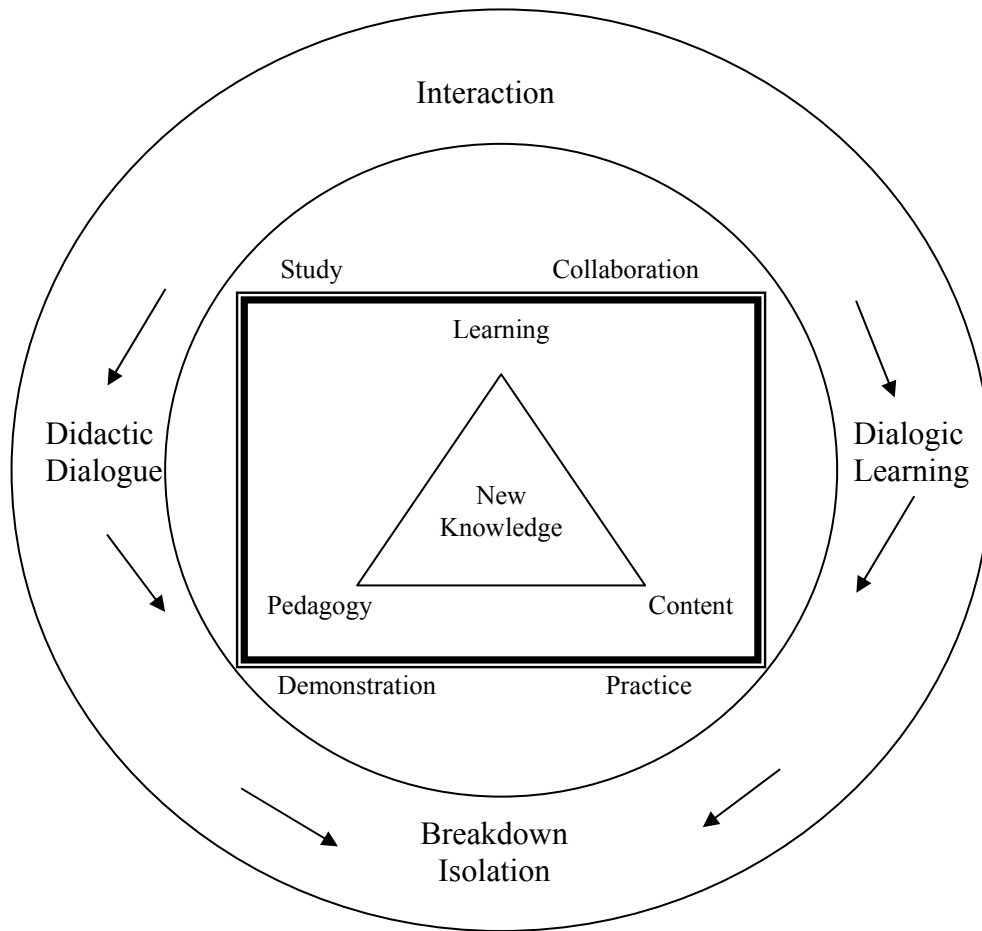
This study's pedagogical metalogue is based on the Constructivist premise that social experiences are part of constructing meaning for learning. Moreover, the professional development approach utilized in this study supports the Socioconstructivistic premise that learning must be structured around "big ideas" and not around fragmented smaller parts. Using the IC for professional development that promoted the utilization of the IC in the classroom generated a series of lenses. Firstly, one level of analysis one looked at the interactions among individuals; and secondly, another level of analysis looked at the interactions of new concepts with prior concepts. The findings evidenced that intersubjectivity, or thought processes generated by the interactions among the participants, promoted individual active learning.

Thus, the IC metalogue examined in this study includes acquiring new knowledge on learning, pedagogy, and content through study, collaboration, demonstration, and practice. This ambitious goal can be achieved because ICs promote interaction, didactic dialogue, and dialogic learning which breakdown isolation among educational practitioners enhancing participants' professional development. In accordance with what Rogoff suggests, this model for professional development allows for learners to take part in learning on multiple planes but all are intertwined and necessary for learning to happen. Rogoff (1990) proposed that interaction and conversation could serve as apprenticeship for cognitive development. In addition, Rogoff (1995) suggested that sociocultural activity could be analyzed on three planes: participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship that are part of a whole; sort of as the organs of the body that have individual functions yet one can't function without the other in the context of the whole organism.

The following model illustrates how ICs could impact professional development. This is a visual representation of the model that resulted from the interactions among the participants in this study. The circles represent motion in multiple directions, which

allows for an exchange of ideas and promotes learning. The triangle represents the effectiveness that acquiring new knowledge could bring about for educational practitioners.

Figure 1
Visual Representation of the Model: Professional development using ICs for teachers of ELLs



Note. The components inside the square contribute to new knowledge and are necessary for effective instructional practice. Teachers need to constantly build their knowledge about learning, pedagogy, and content. As per the new professional development paradigm in education, the components inside the inner circle have been identified as critical components to integrate new concepts or strategies into practice. The components of the outer circle are the elements of IC and its impact on new practice for teachers of ELLs.

Method

The purpose of this study was to examine the IC as a highly interactive professional development and instructional tool. This study was conducted using ethnographic techniques such as: document analysis, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and ranking and pile sorting. The rationale for selection of techniques was based on the need to capture the insider's or “emic” point of view (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The basic premise of this approach is that it is possible to identify and describe a specific stock of knowledge in the participant's mind that is shared with other participants and that guide their behaviors in the specific context under consideration (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Participants’ performance in this study was defined as their ability to identify the elements of the IC and to implement them in their classroom. The training topic and the medium for training were the IC. The researcher and the participants engaged in a series of professional development activities using the IC. Finally, to ensure trustworthiness a team of two peer-reviewers lead the rating of the videotape of each training and classroom IC session.

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of the IC as a professional development tool for middle school teachers of ELLs?
 - a) How do teachers perceive the IC as a tool for their own professional development?
 - b) How do they perceive the IC scale as a tool for self-evaluation?
 - c) What IC training objectives can teachers define for themselves?
2. What are the characteristics of the Instructional Conversation as a pedagogical and instructional tool for middle school students?
 - a) How do teachers use the IC in the classroom?
3. What guidelines for professional development and instruction can be profiled using the IC?
4. What theoretical model emerges that represents the findings of the study?

Instrument

The IC rating scale developed by Rueda, Goldenberg, and Gallimore (1992) was used in this study to determine the elements of the IC present in the planning and delivery of each training session and classroom lesson. This rating scale has been designed for teachers, researchers, and other educators to estimate the extent to which a given lesson approximates an IC. It is based on the neo-Vygotskian teaching approach, which poses that it is necessary to provide an interface between emergent scholarly concepts and every-day concepts (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The reliability of the total score is .98. The scale appears to reflect changes in lessons as they become more like IC.

Participants

The participants of this study were nine teachers purposively selected from a pool of 80 teachers servicing 890 students enrolled at Clearview Middle School in southern

New England. The teachers were both bilingual and mainstream, and both administratively assigned and self-selected. All mainstream and bilingual classes include ELLs. The levels of professional development of the teachers in terms of years of service and credentials ranged from bachelors degree newly certified to sixth year degree experienced personnel. However all teachers were identified by the district and the state as in need of skills to teach ELLs.

Procedures

Participant anonymity and confidentiality was ensured through the assignment of pseudonyms by which each teacher was identified and referred to throughout the study. Before beginning the study the researcher: (1) sent a letter to the city's Board of Education asking for permission to conduct the research. After the Board's authorization, the researcher: (1) sent the principal of the school an explanatory letter about the study, (2) sent participants/teachers an explanatory letter about the study together with a consent form of participation and a self addressed stamped envelope, (3) sent an authorization letter to the parents of the students participating. The consent form allowed for the signatures of each participant and the school principal. The authorization letter allowed for the signature of the parents of the students participating. The researcher met with the principal and the participants with the purpose of: (1) clarifying any concerns, (2) answer any questions about the study, (3) checking on the status of the consent form, and (4) scheduling an interview. Teacher and student participation started once this process was completed.

Nine teachers were trained in the IC strategy for teaching. The training topic and the medium for training will be IC. The researcher and the participants engaged in ICs developed by the researcher to present theoretical background on the IC as an instructional tool. The role of the researcher was that of participant observer. In order to maintain considerable distance, the researcher acted in such manner that participants engaged in their tasks as usual, and the researcher remained detached from the learning culture (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). To accomplish this role, the researcher acted as a staff developer for effective teaching practices in the school. The participants in the study received training to introduce them to the IC and to train them to use it in their classroom based on the professional development sequence proposed by Joyce and Showers (1988). They proposed four conditions that must be part of any staff development effort: study theoretical basis, demonstrations, practice, and observe implementation with another educator. The first six sessions of training were conducted with the following topics: (1) activity settings (socio-cultural learning in the classroom), (2) assisted learning and scaffolding (theoretical background for IC), (3) discourse and learning (the instructional conversations), (4) the elements of the Instructional Conversation (the IC rating scale), (5) and (6) two sessions for practice of the IC with feedback from training peers and the researcher. The training sessions were held during school twice a week for four weeks. Each training session lasted approximately two hours. As part of the training session there were 15 minutes of reflection. In the final two sessions, each participant implemented a fifteen-minute IC on the topic of their choice using their peers in the training cadre as learners. After completing these six sessions, all participants developed and implemented the IC in their classroom, the researcher provided support in the planing and delivery of the classroom IC and

videotaped each classroom lesson, and a team of peer reviewers rated each lesson. The rating session consisted of viewing the videotape and rating the elements of IC present in the lesson. Upon the completion of the training and classrooms IC, all participants were engaged in a focus group.

Data Collection

The process of collecting data included videotaping and transcription of IC training sessions. In addition, interviews were utilized to account for the participants' voice about the training process (Spradley, 1979). After each training session four participants were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews. All interviews were audio taped, and later transcribed. The researcher introduced a specific request for information by means of free listing to elicit the participants' construction of the domain under study. The participants were asked to list the helpful and unhelpful training experiences with the IC, they were also asked to rank each experience from the most helpful to the least helpful. In order to assess similarities a pile sorting activity based on the categories or groupings was the outcome of this process (Weller & Kimball Romney, 1988). A team of two peer-reviewers was asked to lead the rating of the videotape of each training session after all sessions are completed. After all rating sessions were completed a focus group was conducted to account for the participants point of view of the training and its impact on the implementation of the IC in the classroom. The focus group was audio taped and later transcribed. The researcher introduced an open-ended question to promote inter-subjectivity among the participants and the researcher.

Data Analysis

A conceptual framework for this study was developed in three strands: research provided by Tharp and Gallimore (1988) on ICs as didactic conversations; a conceptual framework for professional development using the consensus building model explained by Hawley and Valli (1999); and, the dialogic learning from the work of Bakhtin (Moraes, 1996) and Vygotsky (1962). All three strands of the conceptual framework were utilized in the analysis of the data. The researcher videotaped the training on IC and the subsequent teacher demonstration sessions. A team of two other researchers rated the teacher training sessions on IC that used ICs as a learning strategy. They also analyzed the demonstration sessions. Both types of sessions were transcribed and analyzed on the bases of the elements of IC present.

The data of this study were analyzed and discussed in terms of the elements of the IC as training and teaching tool. The literature identifies ten elements of the IC: a challenging but non-threatening atmosphere, responsiveness to student contributions, promotion of discussion, connected discourse, general participation, including self-selected turns, thematic focus, activation and use of background knowledge and relevant schemata, direct teaching, promotion of more complex language and expression, promotion of bases for statements or positions (Echevarria & McDonough, 1993). In order to facilitate data analysis, an observational tool constructed to indicate elements of IC present in didactic conversations was utilized (Rueda, Goldenberg, & Gallimore,

1992). The resulting IC training session data were used to determine the characteristics of the IC in the planning and delivery of professional development efforts. The IC rating scale data provided an estimate of the extent to which the session approximated an IC. The data of this study was analyzed using the IC scale by focusing on the elements present and the participants' report of their perceptions of these elements. The data resulting from the interviews and focus group interview provided insights about how participants engaged in IC and their perceptions of this interactive approach. The constructs that were found in this study could help make a contribution to the broader knowledge base on professional development and IC.

Research question 1 and 2 were answered by analyzing the data collected in the interviews, students' essays and the IC rating scale. The researcher conducted the IC analysis by identifying and describing each of the IC elements present in the training sessions and in the classroom. The IC rating scale provided results indicating how evident was the presence of the characteristics of IC in the training sessions and in the classroom and the extent to which each session approximated an IC. The data in this study were analyzed both, using the IC rating scale and the participants' report of their perceptions of these elements. The interviews provided an indication of the participants' (teachers') perspective on IC as a professional development tool and as a pedagogical tool.

Research question 3 was answered by observing the videotapes to identify the components of IC training for teachers of ELLs. The resulting IC training session data were used to determine the characteristics of the IC in the planning and delivery of professional development efforts. The emerging characteristics of the IC resulting from the participants and trainer (researcher) interactions during the IC training session were transcribed with the purpose of identifying the IC curriculum and structure of the sessions. The videotapes provided the researcher with a data bank that helped to answer the research question.

Research question 4 was answered by analyzing the data obtained in the interviews and focus group. The data resulting from the interviews and focus group interview provided insights about how participants engage in IC and their perceptions of this interactive approach. The data gathered was coded, standardized, and tabulated. The transcribed and coded data provided the foundation for analyzing emerging patterns of the interactions between participants and the trainer (researcher).

A constant comparative method was used to reduce and group the data into categories to answer all research questions. The data of this study were analyzed by identifying and comparing emerging categories from all data sources and by organizing the data in shared emerging themes (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). This allowed the researcher to describe the categories of thought characteristic of this setting (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Results

Three training sessions were offered to the teachers. Due to the participants' conflicting schedules before and after school, the sessions were offered during the school day. Coverage was provided by the administration while teachers were pulled out of the classroom. Each session lasted about two and half-hours including both, the training and the focus group discussion on how the session was perceived by the participants. The researcher provided the training and the topic for training was the IC. The researcher used IC as a training methodology. Two ICs with theoretical thematic focus were part of the first session of training (activity settings and the zone of proximal development). In session two, after viewing the videotape of the first training session, two ICs with a thematic focus on the ten features of the ICs previously mentioned, were explored. Finally, several ICs enacted by the participants with their peers were part of the third session. Furthermore, the researcher observed enacted ICs by the teachers in their respective classrooms and randomly assigned participants for interviewing, and pile sorting. An interview protocol was developed and utilized by the researcher for each individual interview. In the pile sort task the participants classify items in categories according to their own criteria (Weller & Kimball Romney, 1988). For the pile sorting activity, words were selected from a free listing of words that describe professional development.

This training session thematic focus was on activity settings and it took place in a large community room in the public library adjacent to the school. This was the first session, the room was very big, and the participants could not hear each other very well. In the beginning, teachers seemed overwhelmed with the activity. The new concepts required shifts in their understanding of prior learned vocabulary now used in a different context. In addition, their role as active learners required a shift of their expectations for professional development and their role as participants.

The following excerpt depicts the interaction of the researcher (R) and Valdi (V), one of the participants. This particular portion of the first training IC illustrates how participants were hesitant to engage in discussion and the need for the participant to raise issues of constraints when exposed to new pedagogy.

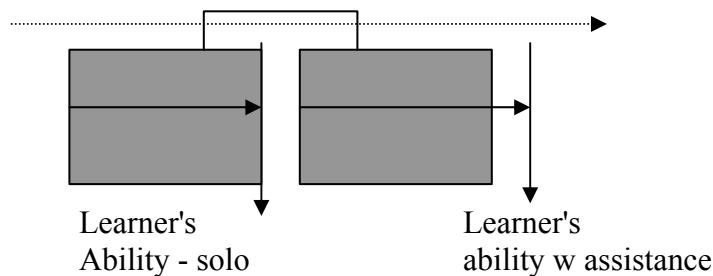
- | | |
|----|---|
| V: | An activity setting is ... if I walk in the gym, there should be physical education going on ... in general. |
| R: | In general, right. |
| V: | But then, I see throwing hoops, bouncing the ball. Then that's basketball. If I walk into a room with microscopes, I assume that the set activity taking place is science. |
| R: | In general. |
| V: | But I'm not sure as to what I'm reading. I read this twice as we were talking. As a journalistic device? ... I mean a setting for me is a place, I have to turn this around. A setting for an activity. (<i>Others are agreeing but do not contribute to the discussion; the trainer reiterates and clarifies the importance of the journalistic device {who, what, where, and why} in enacting activity settings</i>). |
| V: | Then I want to add how and how many children you are teaching. I don't know about others but I have 28 kids and it's hard to teach that many children. |

Participants seemed reluctant to participate at first. But as the researcher elicited background knowledge by making allusions to their home experiences with their own children, they started to engage in conversation. Yet, the interaction was mostly with the researcher asking all of the questions. These teachers were familiar and seem comfortable with teacher-centered instructional approaches. Therefore, they were attuned to professional development that used that approach. Perhaps it was too soon in their work with the researcher for them to break out of the old paradigm and into the new “consensus building” model.

The second training session focuses on the importance of finding teachable moments with each individual student and how theory and the practice convey these differences. The Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) was explored and discussed by the group. In addition, the group discussion allowed for clarification of the implications of the ZPD in instruction.

Each participant was given time to read a summary of how Vygotsky explained the zone of proximal development. In addition, a visual graphic was shared with the group prior to the discussion. Figure 2 is a representation of the graphic.

Figure 2. The ZPD (a visual scaffold).

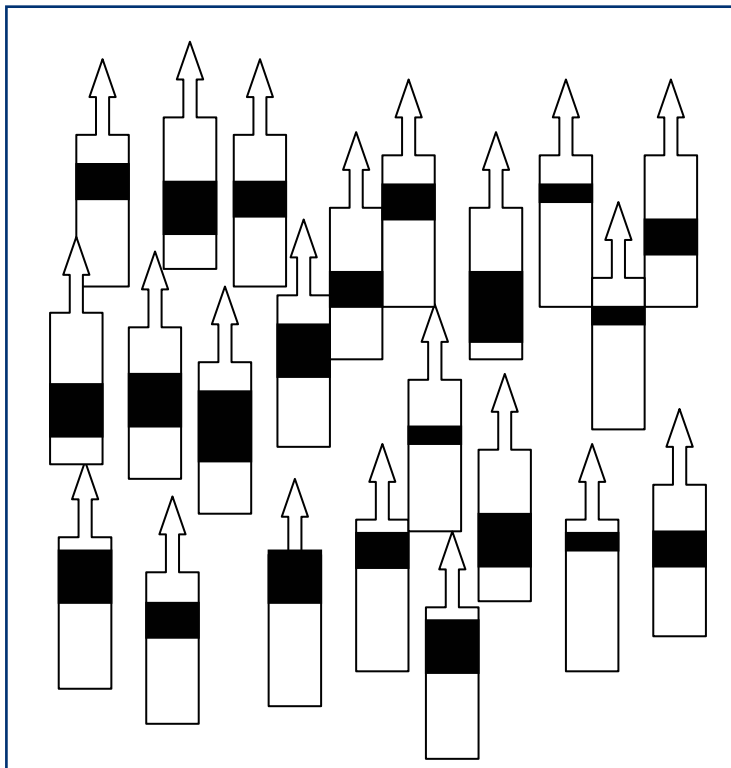


Note. As the learner continues to develop the ZPD moves forward, it is in constant movement. Therefore, the teacher needs to plan always ahead of the levels present.

This subsequent portion is a representation of the conversation between the researcher and Guppy (G) during the second IC. Following the excerpt, in figure 3, an illustration of G's conceptual understanding of the ZPD is depicted. This portion was selected to demonstrate how the IC could help promote learners' hypotheses about new knowledge and practice.

R: So, how do you see that in the classroom? Can you explain?
 G: (Referring to the visual on Figure 1). This is what we can do independently. Right?...They can reach up to here and then with the assistance of someone else, or with the leading, or by Socratic methods,...They can achieve this more. This is how I see it in the classroom. (Figure 2 has a representation of Guppy's visual).
 R: This is good. It kind of make sense (*body language was reassuring*)
 G: So individually a child can achieve up to ... a certain point, ... because of the developmental stage that the child is in, or ... because of the limited previous knowledge that they have ... So they can only achieve to this point. Now, by using Socratic methods ... or strategies to work in groups that benefit that child, whatever, he can achieve that extra. It's like a power boost; you know what I mean? They get that extra more that they usually could not achieve on their own.
 R: Exactly.
 G: It says here that we have to teach for both of them. You cannot see what he/she can do by him/her self (referring to the learner). But they are not always going to have someone to help them. But at the same time you can stretch their limits. The higher the standard that you set, hopefully, the higher they reach up.

Figure 3. A graphic representation of Guppy's classroom ZPD sketch: in the item depicted the up arrow callout represents the students and the black square portion represents their ZPD.



Note. According to G's conceptual hypothesis of the ZPD. Each child has a different level and the teacher must be aware, so that one teacher may have to respond to 27 different levels and developmental potentials.

In this segment the researcher introduced a text and a visual to prompt discussion, creating a ZPD that enabled participants to converse about a highly complex concept that was new to them. The dialogue generated a challenging but not threatening environment

that promoted the participants' reflection on the new concept and gave them bases to formulate hypotheses. Moreover, the discussion elicited one of the participants to create a visual representation of the ZPDs in the classroom.

In addition, direct teaching was limited to the needs of the participants and the researcher relied on the background knowledge of the participants to grasp this concept. Although this was a highly complex psychological construct, the researcher relied on the participants' knowledge of developmental psychology, learning processes, and pedagogical techniques. It was helpful that the researcher had a background in psychology so that prompts and questions could be inserted to keep the explication of the background knowledge on track.

The purpose of this training session was to facilitate the participants understanding of the IC. First, the participants were provided with a detailed description of the ten features of ICs. A sample of the information presented to the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Detailed Description of the Features of the IC (Rueda, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 1992).

Conversational Elements

1. A challenging but non-threatening atmosphere (ZPD). The teacher creates a challenging atmosphere that is balanced by a positive affective climate where students feel comfortable. The teacher is more a collaborator than evaluator challenging students and allowing them to negotiate and construct the meaning of the text.
2. Responsivity to student contributions. While maintaining an initial plan, focus, and coherence of the discussion, the teacher is also responsive to students' statements and the opportunities they provide. Students' contributions are acknowledged and utilized as opportunities to add to the weave of co-construction of text.
3. Promotion of discussion. The majority of the discussion should focus on questions and answers that are not conclusive, and therefore promote deeper thinking. The IC requires a teacher to pose some factual question to establish a basic understanding of a text.
4. Connected discourse. The discussion is characterized by multiple, interactive, connected turns; building upon succeeding and extended previous utterances. Important to an Instructional Conversation is the web of interactive conversation that is developed by the contributions of both the teacher and students.
5. General participation, including self-selected turns. The teacher does not determine who and when individuals should speak, thus the conversation takes a much more natural character. Each student is encouraged to participate in the IC through the use of various teacher driven methods, but at the same time the students are allowed to speak at will.

Instructional Elements

6. Thematic focus. The teacher selects a theme or idea which serves as a starting point for the discussion. The teacher has a plan on how the theme will unfold, including how to "chunk" the text to enhance exploration of the text.
7. Activation and use of background knowledge and relevant schemata. The teacher "hooks into" or provides students with pertinent background knowledge important in understanding a text. Background knowledge is then woven into the discussion that follows.

8. Direct teaching. Direct teaching is employed to clarify a specific skill or concept essential for the flow of discussion to continue. The teacher must know when to move a discussion forward by directly teaching a concept that may be necessary for students to continue the discussion.
9. Promotion of more complex language and expression. The teacher elicits more extended student contributions by using a variety of techniques, such as restatements, pausing, or questioning to elicit student participation.
10. Promotion of bases for statements, hypothesis, and conclusions. The teacher promotes the students' use of text, pictures, and reasoning to support an opinion or argument. Teacher probes for the bases of students' statements without overwhelming students.

Following the discussion of the reading material, the participants viewed a video of ICs of the previous training sessions in order to identify the features of the IC present in those sessions. Utilizing the description of each of the ten features of the IC the participants identified those present in the previously enacted ICs.

The process of the session was explained and the purpose of using the video of the ICs generated by their interactions was discussed. In addition, the participants received a glossary that explained some of the terminology utilized in the study, a diagram of the features of the IC.

There were indications that although the atmosphere continued to be challenging, the scaffolding (written and visual materials) created a non-threatening atmosphere. General participation continued to be a concern, yet, all but one of the participants, in one way or another made contributions to the discussion. The following excerpt was chosen to demonstrate the increase involvement of the participants. The letters preceding the statements identify the participants in the sessions were the researcher (R), Kristen (K), Lauren (La), Lucy (Lu), and Queen M. (QM).

- | | |
|-----|---|
| R: | What does responsibility to student talk mean to you? |
| QM: | Whatever contribution they give ... Whatever they say. Their background. |
| R: | You are making those connections with the people who are engaged in the conversation. |
| Lu: | You take what they know and you work it in to what you are trying to do that day and enhance which they may have said (<i>referring to student' background knowledge</i>). |
| R: | It's kind of related to connected discourse. |
| La: | It's valuing their responses. |
| R: | Yes, it's important that the responses are taken into consideration. |
| K: | So what you do ... I mean the trick here is when somebody is responding way off, you don't want to tell them that they are wrong. Because...because...You don't want them not to speak again. One thing you could do. You record what they say. Like when they are predicting about a story ... And then after reading...Then go back and ... That way nobody is alienated. So we analyze, so you have to be careful there too ... What students say ... Some are sensitive. |
| R: | You may shut them down. I read an article on Socratic teaching that said: "that if you don't choose your words carefully you may, shut them down." |
| K: | But this is almost like eliminating ... To eliminate total control, which is the fear of teachers. You really have to have excellent control ... Because you have to be able to get that class to where you want it to go. When you're discussing, everybody should feel comfortable and not have fear to contribute to the discussion. And you can't criticize. (<i>Silence, as if looking for more.</i>) You can disagree, but not use words like ... stupid, things like that. So everyone feels that what they have to say is worthwhile. |

The thematic focus of the final researcher facilitated IC was on how to evaluate an IC. In this training session the participants were willing to take risks and they were more familiar with the IC format of the training sessions. In addition, at this point in the training, the participants' background knowledge had been enhanced by the previous sessions on theoretical background. Both peer reviewers agreed that all of the features of IC were present. Accordingly, the researcher was able to reduce the interventions while the participants were exchanging ideas among each other and with the researcher. The conversation features were clearly present. Questions posed by the researcher as well as the responsiveness to participants talk promoted discussion. The participants' contributions were frequent.

This session was designed to prepare the participants for the practice session. The researcher and the participants reviewed the IC rating scale and how it would be utilized in evaluating the enactment of ICs in the classroom. In the beginning the participants were reluctant to consider the concept of practicing the strategy with their peers before they practice with their students. As the discussion progressed the cadre supported each other in the process of preparing for practice by giving each other ideas and selecting partners who would help them in the planning.

Evaluation may be a risky subject to discuss in urban education. Many evaluations tend to demean the efforts of teachers and offer little or no support. The fact that they had evaluated the researcher and that the scale served as a rubric for preparation ameliorated any concern the participants had about being evaluated. The next portion of the fourth training IC was selected to demonstrate how the participants in this session, Lauren (La), Lucy (Lu), Queen M. (QM), were able to interact among each other without the researcher (R) as the target for response.

R:	It may take you twenty minutes but if what you want is ten ... Then shoot for that.
QM:	Well ... then if that is what you want do it in ten minutes.
Lu:	You could do your story.
La:	That's what I'm going to do. But I'm not going to do the whole story just the beginning part of the story: building background knowledge, vocabulary...
QM:	Lauren, remember when we went to that workshop. The before, during, and after reading. I could do one of those three.
La:	Yes!

Clearly the rapport developed to the point that this cadre was now sharing opinions and consulting with each other about the essentials of classroom enactment. In this cadre both bilingual and mainstream teachers shared a common goal: to teach ELLs academic content necessary for them to succeed. No longer were the barriers of grade level, different programs, years of service obstacles to collaborating for effective enactment.

The Practice

After the completion of the training ICs facilitated by the researcher, the participants planned and enacted their own ICs. The practice ICs were devised by each participant and the rest of the cadre and the researcher posed as students. With the help of

two peer reviewers and for the purpose of this study, the researcher selected two of the practice ICs for analysis. Lauren, a veteran teacher and in the mainstream fifth grade; and Dancing T, a teacher with less than ten years experience and in the bilingual program sixth grade. Both, participants were able to engage the group. Yet, Lauren the more experienced teacher was able to maneuver expertly as to approximate the activity more to an IC enactment.

The Interviews

The interviews revealed that teachers' perceptions of the IC as a tool for training and for instruction are twofold. Their perceptions include positive and negative themes. Next, Table 1 shows the emerging themes found by the researcher while analyzing the data collected in the interviews. The themes were organized in two columns: positive and negative statements according to the context explored in this study and in relation to the participants perceptions of the pedagogical strategy under study.

Table 2
Emerging themes of teachers perceptions of the IC

Positive	Negative
Small groups	It's not for everyone
It's a two way (give and take)	It took longer
It clarified for the new comers	Hard
Not leave them behind	Learn to work together
Kids more open	It's going to take a lot of experimenting with it
More engaged	Not sure it will help
I learn more from my peers	Not enough

It appears that participants had mix feelings about this new strategy. On one hand, they saw the benefits of small grouping and interactions in that context, but on the other hand, they wonder if it would be effective with all students. It is not unusual for teachers to voice this type of concerns due to the constant influx of new ideas and strategies in education (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). Guskey and Huberman (1995) stressed the need for teachers to understand general pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge in order to integrate new strategies into their own practice. This strategy required that the participants expanded their knowledge about pedagogical practice and learning theory. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that teachers agreed in that the IC due to its dialogic and didactic elements could address learning. Thus, the participants' professional development was impacted at the same time that they were involved in staff development through a deepen understanding of their practice.

The Focus Group

The focus group sessions revealed, just as the interviews did, that teachers' perception of training is twofold. First, teachers verbalized their frustration for their lack of control over the atmosphere in their classroom, lack of participation in curriculum

development, and lack of participation in decision making about assessment and instruction. Second, teachers had serious concerns about the demands placed on them by the district's goals and their students' levels of performance. Yet, other themes were relevant and may impact how ICs can contribute in teacher development. Participants reported that staff development efforts currently available were not always related to professional development, were not always relevant to their needs as staff members, did not take into consideration the demographics of inner city New England, and were not relevant to students needs. Finally, they all agreed that professional development efforts were more readily available today than in the past and were more effective, yet, they considered the efforts still insufficient.

In terms of the IC as a training tool they all agreed that they understood better due to their own input. In addition, they reported that the interactions with their peers helped them understand the concepts and the possibilities for implementation in the classroom.

Classroom Observations

All of the teachers observed demonstrated an understanding of the strategy, some greater than others. One of the teachers requested further demonstration with their students in the classroom. The researcher conducted an IC lesson with the students in the classroom and the teacher observed and participated. The next day the teacher conducted the ICs demonstrating clear understanding of the strategy. For the purpose of this study, the researcher, with the help of two peer reviewers, selected two of the classroom ICs to analyze. Both teachers were veteran fifth grade teachers who taught ELLs, one in the mainstream and one in the bilingual program.

Finally, both the teachers chosen for discussion were able to demonstrate pedagogical maneuvering. In other words, they knew how to take advantage of opportunities for teaching existent in the dialogues with the students. In addition, these participants were able to assert their understanding of the IC as an effective pedagogical strategy.

Emerging themes: Pile Sorting and Interviews

A pile sorting activity was designed to answer this question. The Clear View Middle School teachers in this study were given a free listing activity. About twenty teachers contributed words that created a list of vocabulary related to professional development. Three teachers were given piles of words and were instructed to make piles of related words, assigning a category to each pile. In addition, an analysis of emerging themes present in the teachers interviewed is included in this section.

The emerging themes presented in pile sorting and the interviews revealed that teachers want to be viewed as professionals who are valued by others. In addition, it is important for teachers to keep up to date and be creative. In general, teachers would like to emerge from within and be empowered as capable professionals to create and be able to help students.

Classroom management was an important issue for teachers including being creative and innovative. It is evident that teachers value good planning, organization,

management, time, and technology. Furthermore, implementation and collegiality are seen as important components for classroom management as well as behavior.

Staff development was described as important, necessary, and useful. On the other hand, efforts for staff development could be unproductive. Yet, good staff development could be enlightening and applicable. It could enhance professional growth. In addition, it could promote gathering of new ideas, new practices, techniques, and clarification.

Teachers verbalized negative aspects in education especially those related to policies and politics. An emerging theme that was critical for ELLs was the lack of training for ESL support and the evident omission of the students' first language. Mandated staff development, instruction, and assessment was seen as worthless, impractical, insulting, and inconvenient. It was reported that one-shot staff development was still the practice and not the exception. In general, test-driven initiatives were viewed as insufficient.

Main Findings and Conclusions

Given that the IC was used for the first time as a staff development tool, the following findings and conclusions are tentative until replicative studies indicate otherwise. The IC (1) seems to provide a methodology for professional development that connects theory with practice, (2) can be used by a trainer in professional development settings may serve to demonstrate how effective the strategy (IC) itself is for learning new information or techniques, (3) can be a medium for reflection about current practices and its improvement, and (4) could be the context for apprenticeship in that it promotes new concepts to become part of the repertoire of classroom strategies used by practitioners.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study are consistent with aspects of dialogic learning, social constructivism, social cognitive theory, and inquiry-based professional development. As a tool for professional development, ICs:

1. can provide the type of interaction that can help break barriers that promote isolation among teachers and among different programs;
2. indicate that inquiry-based professional development that encourages more teacher contribution enhances teacher implementation of a new strategy;
3. when used as a metalogue, seem to provide metacognitive opportunities that allow participants to achieve a deeper understanding of a new approach;
4. to be effective professional development, should consider providing opportunities for teachers to utilize their prior knowledge in learning new concepts;
5. indicate the need to introduce relevant literature as a scaffold that supports the discussion in learning concepts for enhancing practice; and

6. can be effective in promoting teacher development in inner city schools by providing a tremendous opportunity for interaction and collegiality.

Significance of the Study and Further Research

The findings of this research provided additional insight into the relative importance of ICs in teacher development efforts. The study examined the emic point of view of professional development for teachers utilizing ICs as a medium for training on IC. The data gathered from this study would help to provide a knowledge base from which professional development programs for teachers of ELLs in general can be reconceptualized (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997). More practically, it will be potentially useful as a foundation for the design and development of instructional methodologies and programs aimed at improving the communicative and academic competence of ELL students (Ovando & Collier, 1998). Moreover, the constructs found in this study would help make a contribution to the broader knowledge base on professional development and teaching via the IC. Therefore, the results of this study would: (a) add to the existing knowledge base about professional development and teaching ELLs, (b) improve professional development practices with middle school teachers; and (c) provide useful information for planning and organizing professional development programs.

In order to examine the effects of ICs in teacher development for new practice and new knowledge, it would be beneficial to compare approaches to professional development with and without IC. It is suggested to consider training provided to two groups of teachers; one with ICs and one with a presenter-centered approach. Interviews and focus group data can provide information on the perception of the two groups. In addition, observation can provide information about how each group implements the strategy and if there is any difference. It would also be beneficial to conduct such a study using both qualitative and quantitative data. Replication of the study may include using a pre-and-post design in order to counteract the observational design.

In addition, further research is required of the effects of teacher training with IC in the academic and linguistic development of ELLs in the middle school classroom. One aspect to consider is the effect of ICs on ELLs' affective domain. Can this strategy promote motivation, improve attitudes, lower anxiety? Another aspect that may be explored is the role of IC in the school such as teachers practicing ICs in school reform. Finally, it may be beneficial to examine the ICs as a pedagogical tool and its impact on learning.

In sum, the results of this study seem to support the use of ICs as a means for professional development for teachers of ELLs in the middle school. To further the confidence in the model for staff development suggested by the results, more research is suggested.

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