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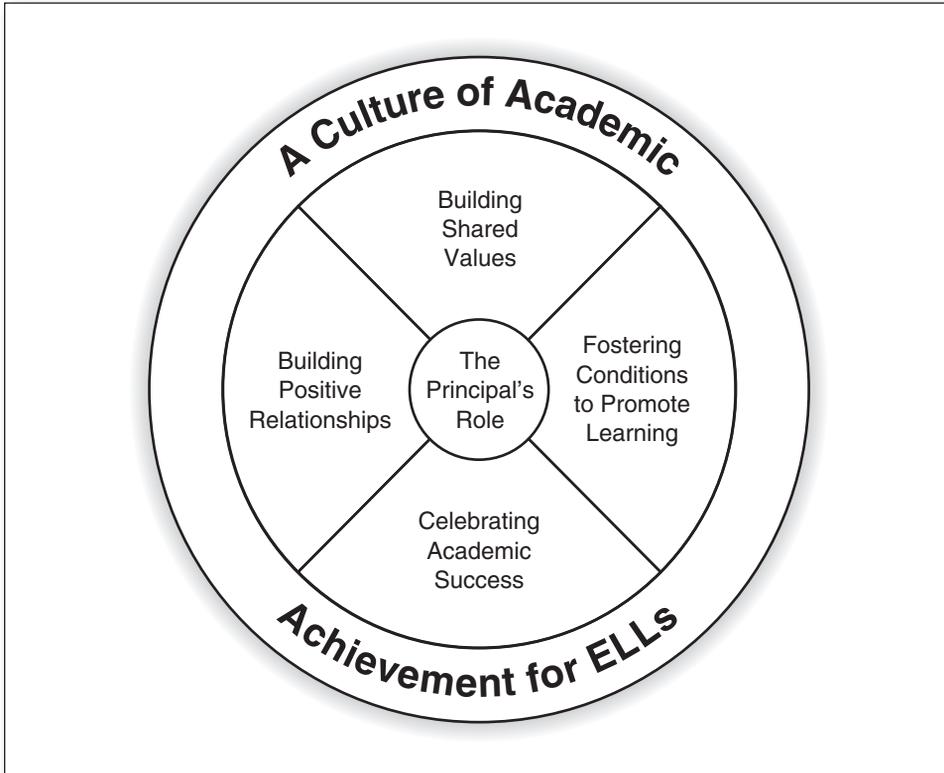
Preparing for Success

Strengthening a Culture of Academic Achievement for English Language Learners

Culture has been described as “the way we do things around here” (Bennis, 1989; Deal & Peterson, 2009). A positive school culture that promotes academic achievement for English language learners (ELLs) can be seen in tangible ways, such as words of welcome written in the first language of the students, banners celebrating academic success, and interactive learning boards reflective of cultural diversity. What we value as faculty and administrators is demonstrated by what we do. If educators value diversity of all cultures, you will see actions and artifacts to support this belief. In answering the question, Why should we focus on culture? Patricia McDonough (2008), a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, stated, “It is the essence of a school—the values, beliefs, meanings, expectations, and assumptions that characterize the school.” School cultures can be either toxic or productive, and the principal influences this culture to a great degree in serving as a key spokesperson for the school, as an evaluator of practices, and as a model of commitment to student success.

In this chapter, you are provided ideas for reflective practice as you consider factors that influence a school culture of academic achievement for ELLs. The chapter illuminates the principal’s role in strengthening this culture by discussing four key areas: (1) building shared values, (2) building positive relationships, (3) fostering conditions to promote learning, and (4) celebrating academic success (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 A Culture of Academic Achievement for English Language Learners (ELLs)



BUILDING SHARED VALUES

The principal is the school's primary communicator of the vision of high expectations for student success. By the nature of the position, the principal has multiple opportunities to serve as the school's spokesperson. Through various means, such as program introductions, articles in newsletters, morning announcements, conversations in the hallways, parent meetings, and faculty meetings, the principal has a venue for communication that can influence a culture of high expectations. As Richard Flanary (2007), senior director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, expressed, "Establishing a school culture for student success is about moral courage. It is about using every opportunity to espouse your view and share it with parents, students, teachers, and the community" (2007).

Because a key role of the principal is to communicate the values and beliefs of the school, consider the harm of one principal's statement to a student teacher: "The ELLs are manipulative. They understand more than they

let on.” This extremely negative statement conveys a lack of knowledge of language acquisition as well as the principal’s biased beliefs about the ELLs in his school. Contrast this message with the following statement from another principal: “When you find a barrier, go around it. Everyone deserves a quality education. My job is to find out where students are and to take them further.” Or consider the actions of an elementary principal who noticed blank space at the top of hall corridors and had a banner painted along the top of the hallways displaying the names of various universities as a way to plant seeds for the students’ futures. Although the latter two principals were working in schools with high numbers of ELLs and a student body in which over 70 percent qualified for free and reduced lunch, these principals never stereotyped, labeled, or assumed lowered expectations for the students. Instead, these principals seized every opportunity to communicate the message of high expectations for all. They recognized the important role of teachers in reinforcing this consistent message of high expectations. As one principal emphasized, “The teacher’s mindset influences student performance. The best teachers engage students and get results.”

Their communication of high expectations was enhanced by positive actions, such as providing resources for college visits and materials for engaging lessons. As a principal expressed, “I give the teachers no excuses. If they need resources, we get them. We want to arm them with everything they need.” Sometimes encouragement requires no additional funds, such as designating a college day with teachers wearing shirts representative of the universities they attended and encouraging positive conversations about college preparation between students and faculty. The secondary principals provided multiple opportunities for parent meetings to discuss the steps for college preparation and the importance of advanced-level secondary course selection to college preparation. They reinforced the importance of holding meetings when parents could attend. When a teacher asked why they couldn’t hold the parent meetings about course selection earlier in the day, the principal quickly replied, “We can, if you don’t mind parents not coming.”

The principal who fosters a culture of academic achievement takes a stand for equity and excellence both in words and in actions. For example, we visited a school that had derived a vision statement of “Respect for Everyone.” This theme was printed on pencils we received. Also, each grade had created a flag depicting a symbol of respect. We learned that the principal had facilitated the discussions that led to the shared vision and served as one of the key communicators of this core value of the school. The shared values were evident in the way meetings were held, decisions were made, and instruction was carried out.

CONSIDER THIS

How often and in what manner do you communicate directly with ELLs in your school and with parents of ELLs? What are challenges to direct communication? How can these challenges be overcome?

BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A large part of establishing a positive culture in the school is building positive relationships with students, faculty, parents, and the community. This process involves seizing moments that can make a true difference in a student's life.

I asked a student who rode two metro buses to attend our charter school, "Why didn't you like your former school?" The student replied, "They were mean to us." "Why?" the principal inquired again. "Because we look funny." "You don't look funny," the principal swiftly replied. In a school with students from twenty-two countries representing sixteen native languages, students are not made to feel different. Difference is the norm, and each person's heritage is celebrated.

ACTION POINT

Capitalize on existing community networks. Chambers of commerce exist for many cultural groups within communities. Churches offer language classes and ministries for immigrant groups. These community leaders can help get you established, offer you an introduction in a meeting, or allow you to place school information where employees or patrons clock in or enter an establishment. Being visible and establishing your presence is the first step to being rooted in the community.

A word of encouragement or a word of discouragement can be a turning point in a student's life. In the school cited above, where sixteen languages are spoken, the principal commented, "I try to learn phrases in the languages. I use a 'hooked on phonics' approach and make flash cards to say phrases such as 'Good job,' 'Good morning,' and 'Do you need help?' The students love it, and if a parent comes in who doesn't speak English, and I can say a word of welcome, the parent internalizes that we value his or her being here." The principal further shared that she is "rooted" in the community. She attends community events, and parents visit with her in the grocery store. From her five years as principal, she has developed positive relationships based on trust in an urban environment of high needs.

As principals build positive relationships with students, it is important for principals to recognize that all too often, educators assume that ELL students are at or below average instead of talented. Particularly if a student is from a low socioeconomic status family, counselors and teachers may encourage a schedule of basic courses instead of one with advanced-level courses. Consider a former ELL student who described her experience of mistakenly enrolling in an advanced physics class. Once in the class, she excelled. She pondered, "Would anyone have recognized that I was smart if this error hadn't occurred?" Or consider the comment

of a college engineering student who knew no English when he enrolled in a U.S. middle school: "I had friends in high school band who were in advanced placement classes, and I said, 'I want to be in those classes.'" No one had ever encouraged him to take advanced placement classes although he was a strong student. Once in the classes, he too excelled. Contrast this lack of encouragement with the actions of school principals who meet with all students and parents to encourage participation in advanced-level courses. In short, principals can build relationships that foster student success.

FOSTERING CONDITIONS TO PROMOTE LEARNING

A vital role of the principal in strengthening a culture of academic achievement is to foster conditions that support ongoing learning (G. T. Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, & Muth, 2007). Conditions that support learning include hiring good teachers, providing professional development and participating as a colearner, and providing the time, space, and resources for professional development. The principal of the school where students speak sixteen languages and are learning English commented, "We look for teachers who don't mind working late." Another principal added, "You have to have the heart. The education of immigrant students has been my passion. I have a genuine interest in them and care for them. I have seen many students with many backgrounds and amazing stories. They are fighters and so courageous." In addition to heart, teachers must have knowledge and skills in content and language acquisition processes to teach ELLs effectively.

In the United States currently, four states require all preservice teachers to take specific English as a second language (ESL) coursework or to earn ESL certification (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2008). For many states, knowledge and skills in working with the ELL student are attained as an endorsement or specialization rather than as a requirement for all teacher education candidates. Less than one-sixth of colleges include training in working with ELLs as part of their preservice education (Menken & Antunez, 2001). Teachers enter many classrooms without the prerequisite knowledge and skills to foster achievement and educational opportunity for ELLs (Robles-Goodwin, 2006). Therefore, many practicing teachers and preservice teachers need professional development to recognize the meaning of content and language objectives and ways to meet the needs of ELLs. Professional development with coaching and follow-up is needed to assist teachers in gaining specific knowledge and skills to more effectively instruct ELLs (de Jong & Harper, 2008). In Chapter 4, we examine this process more fully.

Teaching is a profession, not making widgets. The best teachers are those who get results. We must stay true to our mission, and personnel are keys in achieving this. We've started lesson studies. We've participated in thirty intensive professional development institutes. I am here to help the teachers as a coach.

Research supports that the teacher is instrumental in influencing student learning (Darling-Hammond, La Pointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007). One principal shared that she communicates this research while providing no excuses. Passionate about promoting a culture of academic achievement, the principal stated, "I seek to ignite the passion to make a difference for students."

In discussing those moments in teaching that demonstrate true passion in teaching, Lorraine Monroe (2000), former principal of Frederick Douglass Academy in New York, described teachable moments as moments "when true dialogue begins to transpire in class and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up acknowledging that something special is happening." Fostering true learning is the essence of education. As teachers engage students in learning, the classroom is seldom quiet; it is alive with the sounds of learning. Principals who encourage the growth of ELLs recognize the benefits of the engagement, encourage it, and celebrate it. Student engagement is not quiet work, and it is not easy work. It is, however, imperative for ELLs to put forth twice the effort as they learn academic content and language simultaneously. Without student engagement, ELLs can become passive receptacles who develop neither content nor language.

Fostering Academic Support for ELLs in a Nonremedial Manner

As mentioned previously, principals can strengthen the conditions for learning in school (G. T. Bellamy et al., 2007). They are in a unique position to influence both the times for instruction and where instruction will be provided. Principals can influence positive conditions for learning if they seize moments to do so, and when they do, they play a role in ensuring that true learning can take place. When learning is truly taking place, moments are occurring that students can recall and say, "Yes, I was there." When establishing the learning conditions for ELLs, the principal plays a key role in providing resources for quality instruction to meet students' needs. We recognize the importance of this role in considering both positive and negative experiences. Recently, a graduate student told of her principal's experiences in providing Rosetta Stone as a resource for students. When the principal asked the curriculum director about purchasing the software, he was told, "Just ask around. It's on some campus." The principal did ask and found that, indeed, the software had been purchased

but only one level had been installed. When asked, the technology aid explained that the curriculum director had requested that just level 1 be installed at this time. It would be four months before the next level was installed. Immediately, the principal took the appropriate steps to have all the levels installed. He recognized his role in strengthening conditions that foster learning and immediately corrected the situation caused by the erroneous assumption that all ELLs were at the same level of instruction and would progress at the same rate. Wise principals realize that all of the many actions they take to support learning serve to strengthen a culture of academic achievement for students.

Language Development and Support Embedded in Rigorous Content

Students' native languages can be used to introduce key vocabulary. In one classroom, a teacher pretaught key vocabulary in the lesson by providing native-language translation for all seven languages represented in her classroom that period. A student noted that she had misspelled a word in his native language of Hindi. The teacher welcomed the student to the board, and he corrected it with the help of another student. Such a simple act honors and validates students' first languages and builds appreciation for all languages represented.

Principals can foster academic support by providing the resources teachers need to provide quality instruction to ELLs. At one campus for newcomers, each classroom was arranged with learning stations including a computer station, a writing station, an oral language station, and a station for direct instruction. Recognizing that not all ELLs were at the same level of instruction and would not progress at the same rate, the principal provided the scheduling, classrooms, and financial resources for teachers to differentiate for students' language proficiency levels. This wise principal realized that all of the many actions she took to support learning served to strengthen a culture of academic achievement for ELLs.

Language development and support can be embedded in rigorous content using language objectives. Many states require both a content and a language objective for all teachers—not just language or ESL teachers. Whereas a content objective often uses a verb correlating to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956), a language objective uses a verb that describes how a student will use language to portray how he or she understands the material learned in the content. Specifically, a language objective will use a verb that correlates with the four literacy skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The content objective in a biology course may address higher-order thinking skills and ask students to evaluate a current ecological event using criteria studied in the course. The language objective in the course would then be more specific, addressing the language necessary for the student to access the content. Whereas the content objective addresses the cognitive demand, evaluation, it does not address the linguistic manner.

ACTION POINT

In a middle school English language arts classroom with heterogeneous proficiency levels and first languages, the teacher assigned all students identical writing assignments but designed four rubrics aligned with English proficiency levels. Expectations varied for length, grammar, and so forth but not for content or ideas (which were aligned with topics being studied). As students progressed in proficiency, language expectations changed, but content expectations remained constant. How does this meet student needs but also keep management of assessment to a minimum?

A more specific language objective would address the manner in which the student would evaluate through an essay, a paragraph, or an oral sentence. The language objective might also specify the academic vocabulary the student would use. The language objective would not be the same for all students. It would vary for students depending on their language proficiency level. A student with a beginning language proficiency level would retain the same content objective, but the teacher would craft an oral or visual language objective. A student with an intermediate or advanced proficiency level would retain the same content objective, but the teacher would craft an appropriate language objective—perhaps a paragraph or an essay.

Continued Support for Teachers to Achieve Scaffolded Instruction

ACTION POINT

Tools 1.1 and 1.2 (see Chapter 6) contain tips for crafting language objectives to complement rigorous content objectives.

The principal plays a key role in ensuring that all teachers obtain training in ESL methodology. As a principal explained, “Every teacher has training in ESL strategies with follow-up minitraining once a month and coaching.” Another principal commented that in class walk-throughs, he gives suggestions about ways to introduce the vocabulary. The principal expressed, “I was

a teacher at a school that had students from seventy-two countries who spoke forty-two different languages, and 90 percent were LEP [limited English proficiency]. I honestly believe it just takes one person to help a student meet higher goals.”

Achieving scaffolded instruction, plainly put, means that while all students are working within the same content objectives, teachers provide students from different language proficiency levels different resources or parameters with which to achieve objectives. These resources and parameters change as students develop their language abilities. When we work with teachers in professional development sessions, this is sometimes a difficult concept to imagine. We show principals and teachers an image of a skyscraper being constructed. Large scaffolds are constructed alongside the skyscraper. One can see the insides of the skyscraper, the metal foundation, the wiring, the pipes, and the floors. As the skyscraper becomes solid

and strong, the scaffolds are taken down. The same holds true for knowledge construction. As students' content knowledge and academic language are developed, the teacher can take away the cognitive and linguistic scaffolds provided to each student.

Not only should principals set this expectation for instruction and assessment; they should also provide support for teachers to understand and implement this level of differentiation. This approach requires an understanding of student language proficiency levels and differentiation of proficiency levels (topics discussed in Chapter 3). It also requires the principal to commit to high expectations for ELLs (a topic discussed in Chapter 2) and to provide continued support and resources for professional development and authentic scaffolded instruction. The principal who encourages a culture of academic achievement hires teachers who will engage students in learning, encourage conversation, and foster higher-level thinking skills. Supporting responsive teachers to achieve scaffolded instruction means that principals also have knowledge of second language instruction and can accurately assess appropriate linguistic modifications and accommodations within a rigorous academic context.

Increased Comprehensible Input Within Rigorous Content

From observational data in high-performing schools with large percentages of ELLs, we noted the intentional use of bulletin boards, including word walls, visuals to denote word meanings; charts of cognates; charts of explicit vocabulary words specific to the content area; and hallway displays of instructional materials as well as student work. By building connections with background knowledge for the students to aid their comprehension, the teachers promoted academic learning. The principals reinforced the importance of keeping the content high while also increasing comprehensible input. As one principal stated, "Five years ago when I first came to this school, there was a lot of coloring. Also, teachers would tell students to look up words in the dictionary whenever they didn't understand. This wasted a great deal of instructional time. I told them, 'Unless you are teaching dictionary skills, don't send the student to the dictionary for every unknown word.'" Teachers made content comprehensible by providing visuals, capitalizing on ELLs' background knowledge, preteaching academic vocabulary, strategically using native languages, and scaffolding instruction. Because principals and teachers were able to provide comprehensible input to the students without watering down the curriculum, they provided equitable access to rigorous content.

Facilitating Collaborative Relationships During the School Day

The principal can encourage time for professional development and resources to enhance learning and can foster collaboration for joint

planning to meet students' needs. One principal stressed, "It's important that everyone feels ownership and believes that 'these are our students.' We want teachers to truly believe that 'this is our school.'" With shared ownership through team planning, professional development, and follow-up coaching, teachers can strengthen skills in meeting the needs of ELLs. Another principal described how she works with teachers: "I work with grade-level chairs. We discuss the bilingual needs and the English needs. I ask the physical education teacher to share how [she is] supporting the content teachers. It is our belief that if perpendicular lines are taught in math, they should also be taught in art. We try to integrate our content areas. We are trying to be more vertically aligned. I constantly stress that times have changed. We must model, tell, and demonstrate. In a school with 25 percent LEP [limited English proficiency] students, we're constantly providing help for the content teachers in all classes."

The principals did not merely manage the time to collaborate and develop professionally; instead, the principals worked alongside the teachers, modeling the vision for success and expectations for students and collaborating with the professional community.

Providing Support

Principals can seek resources for their students and opportunities for support. Consider the principal who visited with his school's valedictorian, who was waiting tables as his part-time job in college. The principal quickly offered the young man a job as a tutor at his school, stating, "I can give you a much better job than this while you are in college. Come see me tomorrow." He hired the young man as a tutor for students and worked around the young man's college schedule. In this community of immigrants, the principal recognized the strong value of building positive relationships, encouraging high achievement, and providing support for success. Another urban principal commented, "We employ college tutors in all of our Algebra I and geometry classes and most biology and integrated and physical science classes." This principal's actions mirror his stated belief that each student "deserves a quality education. My job is to find out where students are and take them further."

CELEBRATING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

In their book *Shaping School Culture*, Deal and Peterson (2009) emphasize the importance of celebrations as a reinforcement of what the school values. In achieving a culture of academic achievement, academic success is celebrated. Celebrations of academic success can be noted through tangible artifacts, programs, or announcements, but the celebration of student learning can also occur simply through an encouraging word. One

principal shared, “What does it cost to smile and say ‘good morning’?” Principals can celebrate academic success in multiple ways. The stories of success that are shared and the role models that are provided are additional ways that principals can celebrate academic success and encourage a culture of academic achievement for all. As the U.S. assistant secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Thelma Melendez (2010b) stated in her conference presentation at the College Board Prepárate, “Students need to hear, ‘I believe in you, and you can achieve great things.’”

I don't know of anyone who celebrates more than we do. Every six weeks, we have an assembly, and we give medals for multiple areas, such as improvement, school behavior, and academic excellence. The medals are displayed outside the team area, and the team that receives the greatest number of medals also keeps the four-foot trophy or display. After we received the rating of Exemplary through our state's accountability system, each student, cafeteria worker, administrator, custodian, parent volunteer, and teacher was provided a T-shirt celebrating our success. We had a steak dinner for teachers, and teachers were provided a half day as a personal day while community volunteers staffed our classrooms. We also had a celebration for our students.

Today's school leaders are facing an intricate world with new challenges and complex barriers that must be overcome if they are to create learning environments in which all students can succeed (Schlechty, 2008). Leadership is needed to transform schools to meet these challenges (Reyes & Wagstaff, 2005) and to turn schools into arenas of learning for all (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). This chapter contributes to the understanding of practices and processes of principal leadership that strengthen academic achievement and educational opportunity for ELLs and move campuses toward systemic, whole-campus reform to meet the needs of ELLs. This illumination of key practices and processes in principal leadership can be used to guide reform efforts in schools as principals create these conditions, reform current contexts of inequity, and turn their direct attention to the needs of ELLs—needs that are of the utmost importance in today's world.

CASE STUDY

In a school-university partnership, principals were the catalysts in making the vision of high expectations possible through practical implementation. The principals who provided structures for collaboration experienced higher levels of implementation on their campuses. The following case

examines the actions taken by secondary principals to ensure the implementation of high expectations for ELLs, best practices for comprehensible input, and a coaching model.

A Structure of Collaboration

Structures for collaboration between teachers, between teachers and coaches, and between coaches and university faculty were necessary for the change effort to be effected at the classroom level. Access to resources and networking was required before significant changes were accomplished at the classroom instructional level. This structure was largely due to the level of instructional leader support on each campus.

Instructional Leader Support

Principals on the secondary campuses garnered support from teachers by attending university trainings alongside coaches and teachers, being present in on-campus trainings, and following up with teachers and coaches on lessons learned during professional development. Principals incorporated language objectives, scaffolding, and strategies for increasing comprehensible input into observational expectations. In addition, principals arranged for coaches' classes to be covered when they were observing other teachers or working collaboratively during planning periods. Above all, principals' high expectations for teachers to deliver quality content to ELLs were critical to the success of the change effort. As one participant noted, teachers are "a little leery at first when it's all thrown at them." Principals not only had high expectations for teachers but also provided support in concert with the professional development project to realize the expectations. The critical link for effective implementation of rigor and support at the classroom level was the campus instructional leader's level of support for facilitating structures of collaboration.

On Campuses

The culture of collaboration fostered positive attitudes toward moving educators to high expectations for all students and equitable access to rigorous curriculum for ELLs. Rather than laying blame on teachers, engaging in critical dialogue fostered further discussions designed to address the critical issues. Facilitating dialogue to achieve transformation rather than stagnant complaining required structuring professional development around a process of dialogic engagement. This process began with a coaches' training using Lindsey, Martinez, and Lindsey's (2007) approach to reflective conversations and problem-solving conversations. Coaches had previously indicated concerns about engaging teachers in critical conversations or attempting to move campus cultures to include rigor and high expectations for all learners. Training in the process of coaching

through conversation and seizing the “opportunity to shift thinking” (Lindsey et al., 2007, p. 152) in a nonconfrontational, collaborative, and supportive manner was a critical step in moving coaches to facilitating collaboration effectively on their campuses at the classroom level.

I meet with my teachers on the second and fourth week of every month. We have a curriculum meeting, and different topics are initiated. I've also surveyed the teachers to find out which professional development topics they are wanting. By their conversations, I also learn of needs. For example, I write a newsletter. Last week's topic was "These Kids Don't Speak English? What Do I Do?" I pulled some different web articles and sites the teachers could go to in order to help them to understand second language learners. At the beginning of the year, we also talked about the development of language acquisition and the myth of "This child is just really, really shy. He or she never says a word." Understanding that this silent period is actually a stage of language acquisition is important. This is a natural progression. Yet during the first weeks of school, teachers were screaming, "Really, they don't speak? They don't talk? They don't understand me?" In response, we've continued talking about how we can best support students. We opened one of our professional development sessions with a discussion question: "What do high expectations look like?" Some of the teachers gave excuses, such as "This child is a second language learner, so I can't have the same high expectations." I asked the challenging question, "Wouldn't you have the same expectations that the child should be able to compete with his or her same-aged peers?" I think discussions—those hard ones about race, about culture, and about differences—are important. That is capacity building in the knowledge base and making it part of who we are. As we continue to dialogue about curriculum, about instruction, and about strategies, I've started to hear the buzz in the teachers' lounge. That's how I know we're making changes. The conversation is "Did you try this strategy?" or "I did this and it worked," or "We've had this article about working with ELLs. Did you get a chance to read it?" I put articles in their boxes, not as forced reading, and they are reading them. Instead of having faculty meetings this year, we have had vertical team meetings, and the teams are talking about strategies that are effective with the ELLs.

Curricular Collaboration

Teachers began working to contextualize knowledge for ELLs so that moving from one subject to the next was a natural transition. In addition, research supports organizing curriculum for ELLs around big questions or themes (Freeman & Freeman, 2007) to increase comprehensible input and make content more contextual. The collaboration between the curricular objectives requires collaboration between teachers for implementation. Participants indicated that a structure within the curriculum has helped increase collaboration between teachers. Teachers have also worked to

provide curricular collaboration as they have integrated language and literacy objectives into each content area. This collaboration provided common language for teachers to plan, instruct, and assess literacy skills, and it strengthened consistency for students as they worked in content areas to develop literacy skills. Through this process, a culture of academic achievement for ELLs has been strengthened.

I think that the ELL teaching strategies are very good teaching strategies. I let the teachers know that this isn't an add-on or something that's effective just for ELLs. Attending these professional development opportunities will really make your teaching better, and the strategies that you will learn will benefit all your students. I think we must provide teachers the opportunity to grow professionally and to be able to use as many strategies as they can. We talk about "What are we going to do to enhance learning for the ELLs? Are we challenging the students?" We look at our achievement data and talk about ways we can more fully meet students' needs. I'm not going to prescribe something for the teachers. They're the ones with the special expertise.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In which ways did the principals build shared values and structures for collaboration?
2. How did their practices and processes strengthen the culture of high expectations?
3. What are the critical roles of the principal in strengthening a culture of high expectations?