

## Sustained teacher training can help rural teachers support multilingual students

### What this research was about and why it is important

Although many rural school districts in the United States are experiencing increases in English Language Learners (referred to here as multilingual students), most teachers in these districts do not have sufficient training to meet these students' needs. At the same time, there is a lack of research on how training can shape teacher's attitudes towards and practices with multilingual students, particularly those teachers who work throughout the school, such as literacy coaches and world language teachers. In this study the researcher conducted nine months of training with several rural schoolteachers, focusing on *translanguaging strategies*. Translanguaging strategies encourage multilingual students to use languages they already know to help them learn English and other subjects. After training, the researcher spent time with three teachers—one third-grade teacher, one literacy coach, and one Spanish teacher—observing their classes and speaking with them about how they incorporated translanguaging strategies into their teaching. An analysis of these observations and discussions showed how learning translanguaging strategies helped the teachers develop more supportive attitudes about students using their multiple languages in school. Teachers also became more invested in working together to ensure multilingual student success.

### What the researcher did

- As part of a larger project, the researcher held nine monthly training sessions with eight teachers on translanguaging teaching strategies.
- The researcher and graduate student interviewed all eight teachers during the first few months of training, and also held two group discussions with the three teachers in this study at the end of the training and then one year later.
- The researcher and a graduate student spent time in the three teachers' classrooms, observing how the teachers used translanguaging strategies.

### What the researcher found

- Although two of the teachers originally thought it would be better to teach their multilingual students using only English, after being introduced to translanguaging strategies they both expressed that it was better to use student languages in addition to English.
- One of the teachers already believed strongly in using student languages in the classroom, but she was able to benefit from the training by being exposed to and sharing additional resources with other teachers in the district.
- After the training, all three teachers showed flexibility in adapting their teaching to better meet the needs of their multilingual students. They encouraged student language use in their classrooms and throughout the school and felt that this benefitted all of their students.

### Things to consider

- Both world language teachers and literacy coaches can play important roles in supporting multilingual students, particularly in rural school districts where there are fewer resources for these students.
- World language teachers, who are trained to work with and in other cultures, can be particularly helpful resources for multilingual students, but may need additional training in the importance of using student languages in addition to the "target" language (in this case, English).
- Sustained training in translanguaging can help teachers recognize and use the many resources that exist to support multilingual students, not only in the school, but also within the community and among the students themselves.

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