



## **Rural Endorsement Development Opportunities Program: Culturally Responsive Professional Development**

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### **Abstract**

*This study and presentation will focus on the strengths and positive outcomes of the Rural Endorsement Development Opportunities (REDO) program. REDO is an online professional development program at Boise State University that is making a positive impact for educators and addresses the continued demand to increase the statewide pool of highly qualified, culturally responsive teachers in Idaho, USA, and the need to increase the achievement of English learners (ELs) by promoting literacy at home and at school. The objective of this program is to provide beneficial professional development specific to the local needs of English learners in a rural population that permits expedient access to upgrade the state English as a Second Language or Bilingual endorsement. Examples will be shared from this online program that have been carefully designed to expand learning.*

**Keywords:** *Rural education, Professional development, English learners.*

### **1. Introduction**

The REDO Project aims to afford quality and equity education for English language learners and their families in rural areas by providing high quality education for teachers. The REDO project is a federally funded program through the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) National Professional Development Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The REDO project provides 30 scholarships every year for five years (2017-2022) to teachers working with English learners (ELs) or emergent multilinguals (EMs) in Idaho rural areas to become certified in English as a new language (ENL) or Bilingual (B). The scholarship pays for all application fees, tuition, and the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) licensure exam required for the ENL and Bilingual endorsements. The endorsement programs meet the Idaho State Department of Education requirements for an add-on endorsement to a teaching certification. The endorsement in Bilingual Education or English as a Second Language is an integral asset to the Idaho Teaching Certification and the State of Idaho has faced a shortage of English language development teachers for over 20 years. This publication provides valuable information on the ways that teachers participate in professional learning communities to improve instruction and make informed decisions to help ELs improve their skills. We will demonstrate the ways 125 K-12 teachers participate in a TESOL certification program. This manuscript outlines the ways that teachers will receive formal training to strengthen their knowledge of evidence-based instructional practices for advancing language and literacy development for ELs; specifically training to strengthen their understanding of and ability to structure literacy practices and scientific inquiry. Sharing the exemplary components of this program will provide a framework to expand collaborative educational endeavors within professional educational communities.

### **2. Review of the Literature**

The continued demand to increase the statewide pool of highly qualified, culturally responsive teachers and the need to increase the achievement of ELs by promoting literacy at home and at school is clearly evident. Idaho is a state larger than New England, covering 83,570 square miles with 168 school districts and 746 schools with a total of 310,522 students [1]. The innovative curriculum REDO Project fulfills 80 percent of the number of bilingual ESL endorsed teachers needed in Idaho for the next five years [2]. There are 21,237 ELs in Idaho who speak over 150 different native languages and dialects. Most ELs speak Spanish as their first language while Swahili, Arabic, Russian, and Kinyarwanda are four of the top native languages represented in Idaho's classrooms. Four in ten



public schools in Idaho are located in rural communities and almost one in four students attend a school located in a rural district. Statewide, 72.9 percent of the districts are considered rural [3]. Rural schools continue to experience a variety of educational challenges that directly affect student academic progress. Teachers in rural communities often operate in isolation, salaries are low, and they often lack educational opportunities due to geographical isolation [4]. Indeed, the need to improve their teaching skills has been clearly documented [5]. According to the *Why Rural Matters* 2018-2019 report, the school population in Idaho's rural districts is "a mixed bag" in terms of diversity. Rural communities in Idaho tend to be poor, and a considerable number of their families are experiencing homelessness, but "relatively few students qualify for specialized educational instruction." [6]. The national average per rural pupil is \$6,367 [7]. Idaho rural expenditure per pupil is \$4,118 [8]. Title III schools allocate an additional \$101 per EL, and State funds allocate an additional \$205.82 per EL. The REDO program has been in place for five years. There is an opportunity to receive an additional five years of funding and build on the success of the current program [9]. Idaho is in a critical situation in terms of educational outcomes, ranking among the lowest ten states on student and family diversity, educational policy context, and educational outcomes [10]. Moreover, nearly one in six students in these rural districts does not graduate, even though a large number of them earn college credits before graduating from high school [11].

### **3. Strengths and Positive Outcomes**

The strengths and accomplishments of the REDO program are significant, and the information provided above supports the need to build on a program that has been successful in Idaho. The challenge to provide contemporary professional development to acquire the needed instructional practices to better educate ELs is known [12]. Participating in the REDO program changed the instructional practices of educators and strengthened their awareness and role as advocates for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The REDO program has received 410 applications to date with an acceptance rate of 36 percent demonstrating the high competitiveness of program selection and participation. The REDO program did not work exclusively with specific school districts, rather encouraged teachers throughout the state to apply. One of the goals of REDO was to change the perception of professional development among teachers. Educators have been bombarded with one-shot professional development schemes that haven't provided the support required to sustain educational change and reform [13]. Unfortunately, this approach has heightened teachers' negative attitudes toward PD initiatives, regardless of the subject matter [14]. REDO wanted to change this perception by 1) building trust and confidence between educators and experts in the field, and 2) having active teacher participation in highly contextualized professional learning, where collaboration, reflection, models and modeling are incorporated. Statewide, most Idaho districts (72.9%) are considered rural, and out of the 14 districts with one or more REDO participants, 57.1% are rural [15].

### **4. Increasing Achievement of English Learners**

With the current challenges of our modern-day world, increasing the achievement of English learners is essential and preparing educators to provide a quality education for these students is tantamount to their success. The REDO program focuses on a cohort model for educators that allows them to complete their endorsement to Idaho teaching certification in one year. At this point, many educators continue in the graduate program to complete the additional courses required to earn a Master's degree. The courses in the REDO program are fully online and include the following courses:

- Applied Theoretical Foundations of Bilingual Education/ENL and Multiculturalism
- Applied Linguistics: From Theory to Practice
- Culturally Diverse Learners
- Advanced Assessment of Learners in the Bilingual/ENL Classroom
- Methods of Teaching English as a New Language
- Field Experience in the ENL/Bilingual Classroom
- Modern Language Bilingual or ENL

This innovative curriculum provides the opportunity for educators to study a range of valuable topics and reflect on best practices for implementing these strategies in their unique subject area and classroom.

The four pillars of the program are:



**Rural**-Provide much needed professional opportunities to educators working with ELs in the underserved rural communities of Idaho. REDO addresses the unique needs of rural districts as well as serving educators throughout the state.

**Endorsement**-Provide a beneficial PD program that permits expedient access to the Idaho state English as a Second Language or Bilingual endorsement. REDO provides certification in TESOL and Bilingual education within 11 months.

**Opportunities**-Provide professional development that is locally useful, necessary and affordable because the program pays all tuition and fees. REDO focuses on improving relationships and engagement of families in the academic opportunities of their children by conducting home visits and offering workshops promoting literacy.

**Online Delivery**-This project leads to highly qualified educators with high technological skills through the online delivery of courses. The REDO online format makes high-quality PD accessible to rural educators who otherwise would not have access to such learning opportunities.

## 5. How Program Participation Changes Professional Practices

Educators in the REDO program have reported significant benefits to being part of a professional learning community and engaging with colleagues as they pursued their endorsements in a cohort model of instruction. The Education Northwest organization was intensely involved in the evaluation component of this grant and the REDO program. They conducted surveys of teachers and school administrators to determine the impact of the program [16]. Their findings were that teachers reported extensive implementation of instructional practices and strategies they learned in REDO. The program sustained their confidence as effective teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teachers also reported using a wide variety of teaching materials and strategies to support students in accessing content instruction and most teachers frequently used culturally and linguistically appropriate resources. Furthermore, most teachers continued to share what they learned in the program with their colleagues, and many provided examples of advocacy for English learners in their schools. These teachers remained confident in their ability to engage culturally and linguistically diverse families in their children's education, which was particularly helpful and necessary during comprehensive distance learning [17]. Recent program participants and their school leaders consistently agreed that the REDO program substantially increased educators' knowledge and implementation of instructional practices and increased or sustained their use of numerous practices in the year following program completion, with the strongest growth in integrating language and content learning and using translanguaging pedagogy to guide their teaching [18]. They also made large gains from baseline to post-program in providing appropriate accommodations for language learners. They gained confidence in their ability to incorporate research into their teaching, to advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse students to be assessed for talented and gifted programs, and to create caring and supportive learning environments engaging with students and their families [19].

## 6. Conclusions and Future Recommendations

Recent worldwide events can be seen as an opportunity for expanding professional development approaches, changing the culture of multilingual education in Idaho, and making a positive impact for educators through a wider range of nontraditional platforms. By increasing the achievement of English learners (ELs) as well as the statewide pool of highly qualified, culturally responsive teachers in Idaho, beneficial gains will be accomplished for both EL and Bilingual students and teachers. As a result, we are confident that gains will be made in teacher recruitment, quality and retention. Future recommendations include ongoing support to sustain this valuable program placing an emphasis on rural school settings. By providing innovative professional development specific to the local needs of English learners in a rural population that permits expedient access to upgrade the state English as a Second Language or Bilingual endorsement, our students, their families and educators will be encouraged and student performance will be strengthened.

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