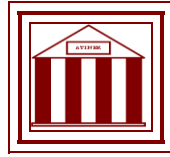


Athens Institute for Education and Research
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ATINER's Conference Paper Series
EDU2012-0053

**Preparing Teachers of English Learners in the 21st
Century: What Matters?**

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN **2241-2891**

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

Coady, Maria R., Jong, Ester J. de and Harper, Candace A. (2012) "Preparing Teachers of English Learners in the 21st Century: What Matters?" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: EDU2012-0053.

Preparing Teachers of English Learners in the 21st Century: What Matters?

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Abstract

Few can deny the role of language in education, and the growth and demand for the English language in particular (Crystal, 2003). As a result of the demand for English, there has been a simultaneous demand for English language teaching. Consequently, the preparation of teachers to work with students from distinct language backgrounds has received substantial attention in the US and abroad (see Cummins & Davison, 2007). One rising concern is how we should prepare teachers to teach English as a second language while simultaneously using it as a medium for teaching content. Specifically, what matters in the preparation of teachers to work with second language learners and, once prepared, how do teachers utilize this knowledge and skills in classroom settings?

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Introduction and Background

Few can deny the increase in need to prepare teachers to adequately and effectively teach English learners (ELs) in native English speaking countries. The need to prepare quality teachers for this tremendous task derives from several ongoing social and political issues. First, immigration patterns to English-speaking countries have sustained the demand for teachers who are prepared to work with ELs (Crystal, 2003). In addition, legal requirements under educational policies, such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 in the United States (US), mandate that all teachers become highly qualified and certified in order to meet educational funding requirements (US DOE, 2012). Finally the trend across English-speaking countries (e.g., the US, UK, and New Zealand) increasingly requires that teachers are evaluated under formulas that include the standardized test scores of the students that they teach, including ELs. Hence, because these children are in the process of learning English, they must take these tests in a language in which they have limited command.

The Florida Context

In the southeast US, the state of Florida parallels these national tendencies and trends. ELs are required to take the state standardized test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and student tests scores account for up to 50% of a teacher's annual evaluation (FL DOE, 2012a). However, Florida is unique in that it has the 4th largest population of ELs in the US. In the 2010-11 academic year, the Florida Department of Education reported an enrollment of over 243,000 ELs, with an additional 288,000 identified as *former* ELs. This latter status requires that ELs who were exited from specialized English learning programs be monitored for a period of two years, under the state statutes (FL DOE 2012b).

Overall, the number of ELs in Florida represents about 9% of the overall US EL population in grades K-12. By comparison, there are approximately 5.3 million ELs in grades K-12 throughout the United States. Florida ELs come from more than 250 different countries and speak 230 different languages, but 72% of are native Spanish speakers, and 12% are speakers of Haitian Creole. Finally, there is a recent trend in Florida in that there is an increase in the number of ELs in the primary grades (71% in Florida), and more than 47% of those students are in grades two or below (FL DOE, 2012b).

Teacher Education in Florida

Florida is also unique in another way: since 1990, the state has required training in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) for *all* teachers of ELs (FL DOE, 2012c). The mandated training includes 300 in-service hours for elementary teachers (or the equivalent of five academic, university-level courses). For colleges of education, Florida preservice programs have prepared teachers through an "infused" ESOL endorsement model since the year 2000. In this program, there are two or three ESOL stand-alone courses, and the remainder of the ESOL content is "infused." For example, the 'Science Methods' course in the program includes how teachers should modify science instruction for ELs. Field experiences are an important component of the infused teacher preparation program. However, there is a lack of research on ESOL infusion in Florida and on teacher professional development nationally (e.g., Costa et al., 2005; de Oliveira & Athanases, 2007; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008).

This study was conducted to understand how well the preservice teacher preparation program was working with respect to the achievement outcomes of the ELs that the program's graduates subsequently teach. It asked the following research questions:

- How well does the infused, preservice teacher education model work?
- What do teachers need to know in the 21st century to teach ELs?

Methodology

This study was part of a five-year, post-training assessment study funded by the US Department of Education to investigate the relationship between infused teacher preparation and EL student achievement. We utilized a mixed methods design from multiple data sources. The sources included the following:

1. Education Data Warehouse (EDW) quantitative, achievement data matched to teacher-graduates from the infused ESOL program;
2. Case studies of six, elementary teachers in Florida who were teaching in inclusive classrooms
 - Interviews, video-recorded observations, artifacts (archival data) from the case study teachers
 - Detailed observations of math and language arts / reading classes (video-recorded and transcribed, 150 pp., plus 38 pp. field notes)
 - Pre-observation, follow-up, post interviews (audio-recorded and transcribed, 101 pp.)
3. Survey of graduates' beliefs of efficacy and preparedness to work with ELLs (98 items, 85 viable responses)
4. Telephone, audio-recorded interviews with teacher graduates (n=19)

We collected data from the case study teachers over a two-year period and present data from two of those teachers here. We audio-recorded pre- and post-observation interviews with the case study teachers, and we video-recorded their teaching (in mathematics and reading/language arts classes) twice each semester. We transcribed all data and used *a priori* codes, which were derived from an extensive literature review of effective teaching practices with ELLs, to identify the instructional strategies that teachers used with ELs. The codes were initially meant to elucidate the practices that teachers used in classrooms with ELs. Once data were coded, however, we realized that *a priori* codes did not fully capture the teaching practices and classroom interactions with ELs. As a result, we modified the codes to reflect not only effective instruction with ELs but also the actual work that teachers did with ELs in their elementary, inclusive classrooms.

Both case study teachers presented here had specific background characteristics. Both taught in multi-age classrooms (grades k-2 and 4-5) and both were Spanish-speakers. They were also trained to work with ELs in inclusive classrooms through the same university's teacher preparation program and had few (one or two) ELs in their classrooms at the time of the study. Both were novice teachers (with less than four years of experience). Table 1 below shows teacher characteristics, the characteristics of the classroom, and the school information. Note that Title I schools are considered schools where the majority of students are eligible for and receive free and reduced priced lunch (high poverty).

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2, below, provides details of the backgrounds of the ELs in teach of the two teacher’s (Kate and Suzy) classrooms.

Insert Table 2 about here

After analyzing the survey, interview, and observation data from these two teachers individually, we conducted a cross-case analysis using data from the surveys, interview, artifacts, and classroom observations. As noted previously, codes were revised throughout the coding period to capture actual classroom instruction and trends within and across teachers.

Findings

Findings from the analysis revealed three main themes regarding the association between the teacher-education program in Florida and the work (instruction) that teachers did with ELs in inclusive elementary classrooms:

1. Both teachers felt adequately prepared to modify instruction (survey findings) but little evidence of doing so for their ELs in inclusion classrooms—e.g., grouping (observation findings);
2. Teachers had difficulty using appropriate terminology of ELs and using data to inform their instruction (interview findings); and
3. Teachers who were “bilingual”(used a Language Other Than English--LOTE) used those bilingual skills with beginning level ELs (survey and observation findings).

Both Suzy and Kate’s individual survey responses indicated they believed they had been adequately prepared to group ELLs for interaction through the teacher education program. However, their instruction for ELs did not demonstrate the range of instructional strategies that they were prepared to use with ELs in order to facilitate language and literacy development. For example, the classroom observations of both teachers revealed that teachers’ grouping of ELs was largely unplanned. Grouping decisions responded to content learning and/or classroom management considerations rather than English language learning needs. For example, Kate noted, “I don’t know that I have placed her [EL] to any particular, especially on the floor. I don’t tell [the students] where to sit unless I see there is an issue going on with two students.” She continued, “Adriana always says, ‘Come and sit next to me! Come and sit next to me!’ [But] I don’t do it on purpose per se.” (2-10, p. 11).

Similarly, Suzy noted, “they’re [ELs] based according to grade level when I pull them out for small group instruction, but for the regular squads, since we’re a K-1-2 [classroom], I always make sure there is at least one second [grader] in each group so that they can kind of be the leaders for the activity that they’re doing.” (2-10, p. 5). Both teachers acknowledged that their grouping of students was generally based on students’ ability level (in the content area – mathematics or reading) rather than English language or first language ability needs.

A second finding was that teachers did not express their ELs' ability levels using the kind of terminology related to English language proficiency level that suggested they had a deep knowledge of their students' ability in English. For example, Suzy had only one ELL, Jorge, in her classroom at the start of the study whom she approximated to be at a speech emergent level. A second beginner ELL, female student named María from Honduras, entered Suzy's classroom in the middle of the academic year. In contrast, Kate had only one ELL in her classroom, Adriana. Adriana's ability level was described by Kate as "actually pretty good" in writing (9-09, p.9), but lower in reading. Kate commented that Adriana's conversation seemed "very much high functioning" but her academic language was at the "early proficiency" level (9-09, p.9). Neither teacher referenced their ELLs' language ability performance on language proficiency tests nor knew the ELLs' different scores across all four language modalities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) when asked.

A third finding from this study was that the two teachers used a Language Other Than English (LOTE), Spanish, with their Spanish-speaking students, but the use of Spanish varied. Ironically, Kate, who grew up speaking Spanish in the home, was less inclined to use Spanish as a means of communication or for instructional purposes than Suzy. Specifically, Kate, the Latina teacher, used Spanish with parents but felt it hindered her students' English learning. She noted:

I wanna say it was 3 years ago, when he first came, no English level at all. I mean he just didn't know anything. He cried the first week to the school because he was so frustrated. And that was me speaking to him in Spanish. But he was just so embarrassed, I guess, and frustrated. He didn't understand what everyone was saying. He didn't understand what I was saying when I spoke in English. So again, if you ask did I get the resources from the school Unfortunately, no. It was me... Our school, our class structure, the rest of the students were also wonderful to him... and now he is in 7th grade and doing phenomenal in middle school. (2-09, p. 6)

Suzy used Spanish instructionally (primarily through the use of code-switching between English and Spanish) with her ELs and allowed students to respond in Spanish; however, this was typically for beginning-level ELs. Suzy described her use of Spanish with Maria, a student who had arrived in the middle of the school year with very limited English:

I'm using a lot of Spanish with her. I mean we're doing addition strategies, so you know I'll say '*cuatro más cuatro*.' She has the blocks and stuff and then whatever I say in Spanish I ask her to try to repeat it to me in English. You know, so I'll say '*cuatro más cuatro*' and she'll say '*ocho*', and I'll say '*en inglés*' and she'll say 'eight.' (2-10, p. 3)

While the teacher education program emphasized the need for teachers of ELs to use ELs' first language as an instructional resource, these teachers actually used Spanish under fairly restrictive conditions.

Discussion and Conclusion

As noted above, preliminary findings from this study demonstrate that despite being prepared to work with ELs in mainstream, inclusive classrooms in Florida, the two

case study teachers used limited strategies for ELs that responded to their individual second language learning needs. Essentially, while ELs were fully integrated in these “inclusive” mainstream classes and included in all class activities, the two case study teachers made few instructional modifications to accommodate *differences* in ELs’ English *language ability levels*. Teachers did not connect student data (knowledge of student’s ability level in English) to their instructional practices.

One possible explanation for this was that teachers’ training for ELs in their preservice preparation program did not provide them with training (or field experiences) with how to work with ELs at different grade levels of instruction (K-2 and 3-5). Further, the teacher education program did not educate teachers in how to navigate local (school/ district level) educational policies, nor did it provide instruction on how to deal with limitations in funding and resources. These are all issues that the teachers had to navigate on their own, once they entered the classroom.

Nevertheless, we believe that instruction that is truly inclusive must respond to the different, individual languages, cultures, and diverse learning characteristics of ELs. Teacher education programs that prepare teachers for ELs for 21st century classrooms must address these areas. The stakes have never been higher, given the emphasis on student testing and teacher evaluation. Moreover, inclusive teacher education programs must prepare teachers to “include” EL students by planning for instruction (including curriculum and assessment) that addresses the students’ distinctive characteristics (home language, home literacy, English ability).

Future frameworks for conceptualizing teacher education programs for ELs should consider an “Enhanced” training model for teachers of ELs (see Figure 1). Such a model suggests that teachers need (a) a contextual understanding of bilingual learners’ (i.e., ELs’) linguistic and cultural experiences; (b) the knowledge and skills regarding how language and culture inform instruction that is appropriate for bilingual learners; and (c) knowledge of how to navigate educational policies and practices to ensure that ELs are truly included and differentiated in the classroom. This may include identifying materials and resources for ELs and advocating on behalf of those students to ensure equitable access to the curriculum.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Given the growth in number of ELs in the US and worldwide, coupled with the emphasis on testing and achievement outcomes for all students, it is imperative that teacher education programs adequately prepare teachers to work with ELs in inclusive, mainstream classrooms. How we define “inclusive,” however, requires unraveling. Truly inclusive classrooms not only ensure that students are involved; it requires that ELs language and content learning needs are differentiated through teacher planning and modifications to instruction, curriculum, and assessment. This study demonstrated that preparation for teachers of ELs needs to be modified to address the learner-specific language and literacy needs of students. Moreover, preservice teacher education programs would benefit from providing multiple experiences in training at different (grades K-2 and 3-5) educational levels to provide preservice teachers with the experiences needed in the 21st century

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Table 1: Teacher, classroom, and school characteristics

Teachers	Suzy	Kate
1. Grades teaching	K-2 multiage classroom	4/5 loop (Alpha Program)
2. Years of teaching experience	3	4
3. First language	English	English
4. Self-assessed second language and proficiency level	Intermediate Spanish	Advanced Spanish
5. Specialization within the elementary <i>JustTeach</i> program	Educational technology	ESOL
Classrooms		
1. Number of ELs in classroom	1 (second arrived mid-year)	1
2. Aide or paraprofessional	No (but 1/2 year with special education aide for ESE student)	Yes
Schools	County A (sub-urban)	County B (rural)
1. Grade levels within school	K-5	3-5
2. Title I funding	Yes	Yes
3. Adequate yearly progress	No	No
4. Free/reduced lunch rate	48%	62%

Table 2: ELs' background

ELs' backgrounds	Jorge (male)	María (female)	Adriana (female)
1. Teacher	Suzy	Suzy	Kate
2. Origin of country/L1	Venezuelan/ Spanish	Honduras/Spanish	Puerto Rico/Spanish
3. Grade level of ELL	1 st	K	5 th
4. English proficiency level (as described by the teacher)	Teacher does not receive test scores; beginning level Oral: he has a "problem." Writing: very low; too much Spanish in his writing. Reading: at grade level	Teacher does not receive test scores; very beginning level (non-verbal English)	Teacher does not receive test scores; intermediate to advanced Oral: fluent in social conversations; however, academic oral proficiency is not as high as conversation language. Writing: good; ELL received a 4 (on 6.0 scale) on her FCAT writing. Reading: high level one student

Figure 1: Enhanced Teacher Education for ELs

