

Integrating English Learner Needs in an Elementary Teacher Education Program: Moving Forward

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Preparing mainstream classroom teachers to teach increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, such as English learners (ELs), continues to challenge teacher educators. Although there is a consensus that such preparation is necessary, there has been much debate about how best to do it (deJong & Harper, 2005; Echevarria, Short & Vogt, 2008; Faltis & Valdés, 2011; Gibbons, 2002; Schleppeggrell, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In response, many teacher education programs in the United States have integrated EL preparation in such programs. This integration is challenging, however, due to a lack of qualified instructors, limited course time, and little faculty collaboration.

In this article, we describe how EL preparation was conceptualized, developed, and integrated within an elementary teacher education program (ELTEP) at University of Washington, an R1 institution. Our development of the program was based on the existing research in this area as well as the needs and the capacity of the institution and TCs. We also share lessons learned in the hope that others can develop critical and practical insights into building, implementing and refining/revising similar programs.

Context

When we implemented the EL-focused strand into the ELTEP at the University of Washington, a major program overhaul was underway¹. Various internal studies, along with the reality of rapidly increasing number of ELs in P-12 schools, made clear the need for such a

¹ Primarily supported by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation

strand. Scheduling and workload issues also factored into decisions about how to provide EL-focused preparation. Although Washington guidelines for EL instruction encourage native language instruction, schools and districts can serve ELs in other ways when such instruction is not practical. In addition, there has been a recent push towards inclusion programs and collaborative teaching models that serve students in mainstream classrooms. Thus, the majority of classrooms in Washington provide all instruction in English. This is the context in which UW TCs begin their careers.²

Moving Forward: EL-focused Teacher Preparation in ELTEP

Starting in 2008, ELTEP offered a four-credit EL course within its Differentiated Instruction (DI) strand. The first author was central to facilitating this aspect of the renewal process, and collaborated with the other two authors on the conceptualization and instruction of the course content over the years. Table 1 below reflects the salient aspects of this course with changes incorporated after the first year.

We based the readings and activities for this strand on the research cited earlier (deJong & Harper, 2005; Echevarria, Short & Vogt, 2008; Faltis & Valdés, 2011; Gibbons, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Our focus in the first quarter was to build the capacity of the TCs to get to know immigrant, refugee, and EL students within the broader sociopolitical context of the contemporary U.S. The major assignment was to shadow such a student at the practicum sites, and respond to focal questions that we gave out, the goal of which was to find out information that was not initially available about the student. Then, the TCs wrote a letter to the child's hypothetical teacher describing what was learned about the child and making suggestions for working with the child in the classroom.

During the second quarter, TCs learned about second language acquisition and how proficiency levels correlate with the state's English Language Development standards. We taught instructional skills based on parts of the SIOP framework (Echevarría et al, 2008) and the language enrichment framework (Gibbons, 2002). We believe SIOP provides a useful and feasible framework but focuses too much on comprehensible input and also is too large a framework with a number of strategies for TCs to learn while Gibbons' framework is more

² Once certified, teachers also have the option of adding an EL endorsement that involves more coursework and student teaching, in addition to passing an exam called the WestE.

Table 1

Conceptualization and Description of EL-focused Teacher Preparation in ELTEP

| <u>Topics</u> | <u>Readings</u> | <u>Activities</u> | <u>Major Assignments</u> |
|---|---|---|--|
| Quarter 1 | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For whom and why? • Demographics • Ethical reasons (weak legal mandates so we need to be advocates) • Legal reasons (federal and state levels) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valdés (1998) <i>The world inside and outside schools</i> • Parts of Ovando, Combs & Collier (2006). Policy and programs (chs. 1,2 in <i>Bilingual & ESL Classrooms</i>) • Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., Gonzalez, N. (1992). <i>Funds of Knowledge for Teaching</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frames of Reference • Chalk Talk with readings • Reading discussions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student shadow and letter to classroom teacher |
| Quarter 2 | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For whom and how? • CLD children and families (variability within this group) • Stages of language development (and variability within this group) • Modifying instruction for EL students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesee et al. (2004) Second language acquisition in children (ch. 6 in <i>Dual language development & disorders</i>) • Cummins (1981) • Echevarria et al. (2008) <i>Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP model</i> • Washington State ELD standards • Gibbons (1993) Planning for a language for learning (ch. 2 in <i>Learning to learn in a second language</i>) • Gibbons (2002). <i>Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to language proficiency levels • Practicing writing language and content objectives • Watching videos and modeling strategies/lessons • Sharing lessons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two modified/scaffolded lesson plans |

conceptual and gives equal attention to scaffolding input and output, while providing a number of examples for TCs about how to scaffold their instruction. The major assignment for that quarter was to use these frameworks to modify/scaffold two content lessons and provide a rationale for these modifications based on knowledge of student characteristics (i.e. immigrant history, social and cultural knowledge, language proficiency levels). In this way, we connected the two quarters and integrated the EL knowledge and skills with what the TCs were developing in their content-area coursework. Our overarching goal was to provide a solid foundation of

theory and practice to enable TCs to begin to address the content and language learning needs of their EL students.

Lessons Learned: Successes and Limitations

We are currently in the fourth year of the EL integration in ELTEP. We have experienced some success in linking our DI assignments with TCs' other courses in that TCs have articulated their appreciation for this. For the first few years, we met with the rest of the faculty to update each other about coursework, and several ELTEP faculty members integrated EL-specific or compatible knowledge and skills into their courses. On student evaluations, teacher candidates have cited the usefulness of these connections. In particular, they emphasized that modifying content lessons helped them put into practice what they learned about EL theory and instruction.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Both the DI instructors and TCs have experienced frustration about the dearth of EL-focused classes/material/field experiences as well as the fact that the DI class itself still stands somewhat isolated from the rest of the program. An overall challenge is to counter our TC's tendency to view EL instruction as "just good teaching" (deJong & Harper, 2008, p.102), mirroring a larger trend in the field. This has been especially difficult to address because of the limited EL-specific practicum time in the regular program. We continue to address these challenges as the EL strand continues to evolve within the UW ELTEP, much like in other teacher education programs across the country.

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