After Infusion: What Graduates Say about their Preparation for Working with ELLs

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Context

Nationally, most teachers are inadequately prepared to teach ELLs (Gándara et al., 2005)

- Karabenick & Noda (2004) report that teachers lack basic foundational knowledge about ELL issues, despite the fact that 88% teach ELLs

- Florida’s requirements to prepare mainstream teachers of ELLs (through in-service since 1990, and pre-service since 2001) are unique
ELLs in Florida

- FDOE reported 231,801 ELLs in 2009-2010 (8.8% of total enrollment)
- Additionally, FDOE reported 204,287 former ELLs in 2009-2010 (7.7% of total enrollment)
- Most ELLs (66%) are enrolled in the elementary grades, including 40% enrolled in grades K-2

Achievement of Florida ELLs

- Little change has occurred in the past 5 years in terms of achievement on the FCAT
  - In 2010, 43% of 3rd grade ELLs scored at level 3 or higher; in 2005 40% scored at these levels
    Compare: 78% for general ed. in 2010; 75% in 2005
  - In 2010, 4% of 10th grade ELLs scored at level 3 or higher; in 2005 3% scored at these levels
    Compare: 43% for general ed. in 2010; 36% in 2005

- The gap between ELL and general education student achievement persists; any ELL gains are matched by (greater) for general ed. students.
Percentage of Students scoring 3 or higher on FCAT Reading in 2005 and 2010

- Gr. 3: 2005 - 40%, 2010 - 45%
- Gr. 5: 2005 - 50%, 2010 - 55%
- Gr. 8: 2005 - 60%, 2010 - 65%
- Gr. 10: 2005 - 70%, 2010 - 75%

- Standard
- ELL
Does ESOL Preparation for Mainstream Teachers Make a Difference?

We know very little about:

- The characteristics of ESOL-infused programs at different institutions (same for ESOL inservice professional development)
- The impact of ESOL infusion on graduates who teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms
Project DELTA

- Federally funded, post-training grant to examine the impact of an ESOL-infused elementary education program on teacher practices and ELL achievement through:
  - Analysis of Education Data Warehouse (EDW) data linking teacher and student files
  - Survey of graduates’ sense of preparedness and efficacy in teaching ELLs
  - Interviews with teacher graduates
  - Observations in Math and Reading classes
  - Follow-up interviews with case study teachers

SE TESOL 2010 Sept 23-25, Miami FL
Preservice Teacher Preparation at UF

- Teacher education programs at UF have prepared candidates with an “infused” ESOL endorsement program since 2001

- Components of the ESOL-Infused Program:
  - 2 stand-alone ESOL courses
  - ESOL performance standards addressed in general education courses
  - ESOL field experiences in stand-alone ESOL courses
  - ESOL PD requirement (45 hours) for faculty teaching the ESOL-infused courses
Our Focus Today

- Interviews with case study teachers and other UF elementary program graduates

**Question:** What do graduates say about how the ESOL-infused program has prepared them to work with ELLs now that they have been teaching for more than 1 year and have taught ELLs in the context of a mainstream classroom?
Primary Research Questions

- 1. What components of their preservice program do graduates consider most helpful in preparing them to work effectively with ELLs?

- 2. What do graduates recommend in terms of program improvement?
Secondary Research Question

What role does a teacher’s proficiency in languages other than English (LOTE) play in their teaching of ELLs?

Note: This research question arose from a finding in our prior analysis of survey data; i.e. teachers with LOTE felt more prepared to teach ELLs than teachers without LOTE. The difference in preparedness was largest in teachers’ responses to survey items representing sociocultural competence (Domain A).

A difference in efficacy for LOTE teachers was also found, though only in teachers’ responses to those items on the survey representing sociocultural competence (Domain A).
Data Collection

- Individual interviews with 19 teachers
- Recorded interviews lasted 20 - 60 minutes
- Interview questions addressed teachers’
  - Experiences working with ELLs
  - Preparation: How the program prepared them to teach ELLs
    - comprehensible input
    - culture/background knowledge building
    - assessment
  - Experiences learning another language
  - Recommendations for improving the program
Data Analysis

- Interviews were transcribed
- Transcripts were reviewed to identify teacher statements that
  - reflected comments about the teacher preparation program
  - made explicit recommendations for program improvement
  - related to their proficiency in or use of LOTE

- Note: Statements related to teacher practices were not selected for coding (future analysis)
Data Analysis

- Conceptual codes were generated by the researchers for the selected statements.

- Each segment of data was coded by at least two members of the research team, who later conferred to discuss coding decisions and reach consensus.

- Prominent themes were identified.
Study Participants

- 19 Teacher graduates
  - Interview data (n=19)
  - Survey data (n=18)

- Criteria for participation:
  - Graduate of UF elementary education program with infused ESOL endorsement (two stand-alone ESOL courses completed)
  - Two or more years of teaching experience
  - Experience teaching elementary ELLs
Background Characteristics

- All participants were female
- Participants had completed 2-7 years of teaching at the time of the interview
- Grade level assignments:
  - Kindergarten (n=1)
  - Grade 2 (n=1)
  - Grade 3 (n=2)
  - Grade 4 (n=7)
  - Grade 5 (n=1)
  - Multigrade (n=6)
  - Other (n=1)
Background Characteristics

- Half (10) of the 19 participants indicated on the initial survey (sent to all graduates) that they had some LOTE proficiency:
  - Spanish: 6 Beginner, 3 Intermediate, 1 Advanced
  - Chinese: 1 Beginner

- 3 of these 10 LOTE participants had grown up in bilingual families; 1 had Spanish-speaking family members.

- 4 of the 19 participants had visited or lived in countries outside the United States.
Findings

1. ESOL Preparation
2. Program Recommendations
3. Languages Other Than English (LOTE)
ESOL preparation

• The importance of field experiences
• A mismatch of field placements
ESOL Field Experiences

- Core ESOL field experiences include:
  - Conversation partnerships with students in a post-secondary intensive English program
  - Observations, tutoring in K-12 ESOL-pull-out classes
  - Observations, tutoring in Adult ESOL classes
The Value of Field Experiences

- Unanimously identified as the most important aspect of preparation for building confidence and skills (i.e. using strategies) to teach ELLs
  - Observing in classrooms helped teacher candidates see examples of classroom effective teacher practices
  - Tutoring ELLs helped teacher candidates understand ESOL students’ needs
4-140: “we had to go and volunteer there [the English Language Institute] and even though it was adults...you got to know them...you learned how to approach strangers with the different culture and it made you a little apprehensive, but once you did it and once people realize you are there to help .... It helped you build a relationship with those people so that once I was in the classroom, I had already tried to build relationships with adults and I think children are easier anyways so once I had already tried it with adults, getting the kids to trust you was good...”
5-396: “Oh, I really loved those [field experiences]. Those really helped me a lot. Those are really helpful, because you can see them [the students] in action…. Even though I was sitting there and watching. You can see all of the things that she [the teacher] was doing.”

5-155: “you hear people telling you how to teach, you know you can feel one level of confidence there but it’s entirely different when you actually get in, you know, and get your hands dirty and put the things that you’ve been learning to practice.”
A Mismatch of Field Placements

- Adult vs. elementary
  Adult ESOL field experiences were valued by graduates as enjoyable and useful, but their relevance for the future teaching of elementary ELLs was questioned

- ESOL specialist vs. general education (mainstream/inclusion) classrooms
4-140: “when we did ESOL we went to a high school. I don’t know if they go to all three now but we only went to a high school so when I got to elementary classrooms . . . it was like in high school it’s completely different from elementary school.”
Recommendations to Improve the Program

- More extensive, and more grade-appropriate field experiences with ELLs
  - Better connection between theory (course work) and practice (practicum)
  - Better match with ‘realities’ in school
S9-79: “I do truly think that I got a lot out of the program. I honestly think it’s the big picture of teaching and all the millions of things that you have to do and what’s actually feasible. I know we had to work with ELI [English Language Institute] students and we got to observe classrooms that had ELLs in them, and that was great, but I would have loved more opportunities to apply or observe how things are used, not just in class with college students, you know, at that level, that sort-of thing. … I do believe I learned a lot, but in the real world applying it all and making the accommodations for each of the students and differentiating.”
Recommendations to Improve the Program

- Other recommendations:
  - Access to good internet resources for lesson planning and materials development
Proficiency in LOTE: What role does it play in working with ELLs?

• Impact of LOTE:
  • Empathy
  • Instruction
  • Communication with parents

• Other ways teachers use LOTE
IMPACT OF LOTE: Empathy

- Those speaking a LOTE or with experience living in a non-English environment spoke of the related benefits for working with ELLs, such as understanding what it means to be an outsider, to be unable to understand the language.
S9-12: “I guess I have the empathy. I kind-of understand that feeling of the alone-ness and the not understanding the other language.”

5-155: “Well, I think it helps me appreciate the frustration that comes from learning a second language, especially when … the grammatical structure is so different”
Teachers with intermediate to advanced LOTE proficiency used it to enhance their instruction, especially with beginning level ELLs

- Explanations in L1 (content areas)
- Acceptance of students’ responses in L1
- Assessment of learning in L1
AT1: “I speak a LOT of Spanish. . . . Probably 90...no probably 85 percent of the day now. She [a beginner ELL] [is] getting more English than she is than she used BUT the majority is still in Spanish cause she's still looks at me like I'm crazy.”

Interviewer: When do you decide to transition into the English use than the Spanish use?

AT1: “I try a lot more in math. Things that she's comfortable with. If she's already comfortable with it then I feel like going for it...uhm...but there are a lot of things that you can tell she's just not real comfortable with like science-related things I mean those totally go over her head.”
IMPACT OF LOTE: Communication with Parents

- LOTE was also used to communicate with parents:
  - directly (if teacher had LOTE proficiency)
  - Indirectly with the help of translators
AT2: “I would even say to my Spanish speaking parents that they should speak both, and they should feel free to speak both, you know if they say something to me in Spanish, and I don't know what that is, I'll do my best to write it down, and figure it out later…. I definitely mentioned that to their parents like don't feel like, because you come in here you have to speak English. And you know, I guess politically people some people are adopt, if you are in America, you have to speak English. I don't really think that way. I think if you, you know, if the kid knows more or less in Spanish but not in English…you go whatever way he can do it.”
Other ways teachers use LOTE

- Teachers with and without LOTE proficiency reported using resources in the school to support students’ L1:
  - bilingual personnel
  - bilingual books
  - online translators
A42: “I even went to the library and she [the librarian] was so good and she got me books in their native language, like Spanish speaking books.”

“. . . .Just like the day I still remember when I got those library books and all the other kids were reading their English-speaking books. …They were just thrilled to have a Spanish book in front of them, they felt comfortable and that was the whole goal of it, to help them feel comfortable and accepted and loved…and that we wanted them there.”
Summary of Findings

- Overall positive evaluation of the program (all but 1 graduate felt positive about their preparation, especially compared with some of their colleagues)

- Emphasis on central role of field experiences in building confidence and developing competence in teaching ELLs

- Recommendations to expand field experiences, ensure elementary field placements, connect theory and practice, and provide access to teaching resources

- Importance of LOTE proficiency and/or experiences to connect with ELLs and make classrooms more comfortable and accessible
Discussion & Implications

- Findings highlight the **centrality of practice** through an emphasis on field experiences and perceived disconnects between course work and classroom realities.

- The absence of references to the distinctive **knowledge base** related to ELLs raises a critical question about the relationship between theory and practice in ESOL-Infused programs:
  - Three issues related to the cycle of theory-to-practice (and back again)
Theory to Practice and Back Again?

1. Is this finding reflective of the ‘methods fetish’ (Bartólome, 1994), so often seen in preservice candidates’ request “just tell me what to do”?

Problematic because this attitude

- reinforces the idea that ESOL is nothing more than pedagogy (ESOL = list of strategies)
- ignores the importance of understanding the impact of sociopolitical contexts of education for ELLs and their access to schooling
Theory to Practice and Back Again?

2. *Does it reflect teachers’ general reluctance to discuss their practice in theoretical terms?*

Problematic because teachers of ELLs need to be able to articulate their rationale for practices that are *different* from those of fluent English speakers. This, in turn, raises a question about their effectiveness as ELL *advocates.*
Theory to Practice and Back Again?

3. Do results indicate a lack of integration of theory and practice on an on-going basis in each course in the program?

Raises questions about ESOL-Infusion:

- Current: ESOL foundation → application sequence
- What kinds of projects do student engage in during field experiences?
- ESOL course work and field experiences stand on their own: infusion ≠ integration
The Role of LOTE

Another finding is the importance of experiences with and/or proficiency in LOTE and how it can facilitate instruction, even in non-bilingual program settings (Cummins, 2005).

(How) do ESOL-Infused programs promote positive attitudes toward and knowledge of bi/multilingualism?
Implications: Reflecting on ESOL-Infusion

- How are we asking our candidates to relate their pedagogical thinking to theories of language teaching and learning (in order for them to become (more) effective advocates for ELLs), while providing meaningful opportunities for application?
  - How do we connect course work and field experiences?
  - Are field placements aligned with preparation level (e.g., elementary/secondary’ mainstream/specialist)?
    - What alternatives exist for geographically isolated programs with fewer ELLs in the school system?
- How do we structure the ‘infusion’ side of the program in such a way that it is integrated with the “ESOL” stand-alone side? [theory & practice]
- How do we develop candidates’ ability to use and incorporate L1 resources?
THANK YOU!

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