Preservice to Practice: Preparing all (Florida) Teachers for English Language Learners in Elementary Classrooms

Candace Harper,
University of Florida

Co-Authors Maria Coady & Ester de Jong,
University of Florida

ACTA International TESOL Conference
Gold Coast, Queensland AU

July 9, 2010
Overview

• Project DELTA: Study sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition

• The research seeks to
  – (a) Understand the relationship between teacher preparation and ELL student achievement
  – (b) Inform teacher preparation programs & ESL professional development for mainstream teachers
U.S. Demographics

• **Nationally** – 87% of teachers with ELL students reported having 8 hours or less of ESL professional development (Gándara et al., 2003)

• 100% increase in 7 states w/out large immigrant populations; fastest growth continues in the elementary grades

• Schools with high numbers of ELLs have more new and uncertified teachers than schools with few or no ELLs (Chu, Cosentino, & Murray, 2007)
ESL Professional Development

• **Nationally** 87% of teachers with ELLs received more than 8 hours of PD (professional development) in ESL (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007)

• **Florida** is 1 of only 4 states (with AZ, CA, NY) to require ESL PD for **all teachers** (Quality Counts, 2009)
Florida Demographics

• Florida has the 4th largest population of ELLs in the U.S. (24% of all school-aged children)

• Great differences in linguistic & cultural backgrounds and in numbers of students in north vs south Florida

• Approximately 175,000 ELLs are Spanish speakers; 25,000 Haitian Creole (+ 300 other home languages)

• 63% of ELLs do not graduate from high school
Florida Education Context

- Consent Decree (1990) required PD for all teachers of ELLs (18-300 hrs, or 1-5 post-secondary courses, based on teacher’s instructional assignment)

- Legislative Rule (2000) required teacher education programs to provide ESL preparation for all preservice teachers

- “Infused” ESL Endorsement Programs: 2 ESL courses (other competencies addressed in general education courses)
ELL Teacher Preparation

• There is little consensus across states on requirements for preparing teachers to work with ELLs (Menken & Atuñez, 2001)

• **Quality teacher preparation** has been organized in 3 areas:
  - **Teacher Background** experiences, training, personality (e.g., Brower & Korthagen, 2005)
  - **Knowledge of ELLs** L1, literacy level, prior knowledge (Harper & de Jong, 2007; Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2008)
  - **Knowledge of ELLs’ Teaching & Learning** specific strategies and methods, sheltered instruction (de Jong & Harper, 2007; Lucas & Grinberg, 2001; Minaya-Rowe, 2001)
Prior Research at UF on ESL Specialist Teacher Characteristics & Roles

Interviews with

UF elementary teacher graduates (infused ESL endorsement) & Florida K-12 ESL teachers (ESL certification/specialization)

Findings re ESL teacher knowledge, skill, & disposition

ESL specialist teachers
• recognize the specific linguistics and cultural demands in classrooms and understand the importance of language and culture in school learning
• are able (and willing) to mediate the learning needs of ELLs at different levels of English proficiency
Project Delta Rationale

Florida is one of only four states to require preservice preparation of all teachers of ELLs, but trend is growing (Quality Counts, 2009)

Nationally, there has been little research on the infusion model used to prepare mainstream teachers to work effectively with ELLs
Project Delta Research Design

- **Education Warehouse Database**
- **Survey** of Elementary Education (ProTeach) program graduates teaching ELLs in Florida
- **Follow-up Interviews** with survey respondents
- **Teacher Cases** (n=6) teacher graduates in 5 school districts in north/central Florida
  - Teacher interviews
  - Classroom observations
  - Stimulated recall interviews
Methods: Data Collection

• Survey
  – Developed & piloted in Fall 2007 / Spring 2008
  – Hard copies mailed to all graduates (n=1200; only 70% still teaching in Florida)
  – 10% return rate with viable responses
Survey Design: 3 Sections

1) Teacher Background (graduation year, specialization area, current grade level teaching, # ELLs, Title 1 school status, prior cross-cultural experience, LOTE)

2) Teacher Ratings of Preservice Program Preparation & Effectiveness with ELLs

3) Teacher Ratings of Preservice Program Components (course work plus clinical & field experiences)
Survey Design: Section 2

- 6-12 items, each with ratings for Preparedness & Efficacy in 5 broad conceptual domains:
  - Social and Cultural Dimensions of teaching ELLs
  - Language and Literacy Development for ELLs
  - Content Area Teaching for ELLs
  - Curriculum and Classroom Organization
  - Assessment Issues in Teaching ELLs
Survey Research Questions

1. In what instructional areas do teacher education program graduates feel most and least prepared to teach ELLs?

2. In what instructional areas do teacher education program graduates feel most and least effective in teaching ELLs?

3. Is there a significant difference in teacher education program graduates’ ratings of their effectiveness and preparedness?

4. What clinical/field experiences in their teacher preparation program do graduates consider most effective in helping them work with ELLs?

5. Are there significant differences in responses based on teacher background characteristics?
RQ 1a: In what instructional areas do program graduates feel most prepared?

- **Sociocultural skills**: use grouping strategies for student interaction
- **Content area instruction**: provide sufficient wait time, use graphic organizers
- **Language and literacy development**: differentiate reading instruction; teach reading comprehension strategies
- **Curriculum**: organize a ready-to-learn classroom environment
- **Assessment**: provide accommodations
RQ1b: In what instructional areas do program graduates feel **least prepared**?

- **Sociocultural skills**: particularly related to teachers’ use of ELLs’ home language

- **Language & literacy**: particularly in their preparation to support ELLs’ oral English language development
RQ2a: In what instructional areas do program graduates feel **most effective**?

- **Sociocultural**: making my students feel valued in my classroom; using grouping to make them feel comfortable; help them interact with other students

- **Content area instruction**: providing wait time; pairing or grouping students from the same L1; supporting comprehension by writing key words on the board

- **Language and literacy**: modeling the use of English; differentiating reading instruction; teaching decoding skills and vocabulary strategies
RQ2a: In what areas do program graduates feel most effective? (cont.)

- **Curriculum**: organize curriculum so students feel ready to learn; locate materials at different reading levels; teach to grade level standards; modify instruction through demonstrations and visuals

- **Assessment**: provide accommodations; adjust instruction based on assessment results
Survey of Teacher Graduates
Findings

Study of elementary teacher graduates’ sense of efficacy & preparedness in teaching ELLs in mainstream classes

• Teachers’ personal experiences with linguistic & cultural diversity were linked to their feelings of preparedness to teach ELLs

• Direct experiences with ELLs were most helpful:
  Teachers felt most effective in using ESL strategies; teachers were least effective in using L1 & in teaching oral English
RQ2b: In what instructional areas do program graduates feel least effective?

• **Sociocultural**: using L1 as a resource in teaching; learning about students’ L1; helping students with circumstances affecting their lives outside the classroom

• **Content area instruction**: addressing grammar; setting & teaching to language objectives; addressing vocabulary demands

• **Language and literacy**: teaching pronunciation, explaining aspects of English grammar, addressing pragmatics
RQ4: What *program experiences* did graduates consider *most effective*?

The top 3 experiences were related to *direct experiences with ELLs*:

- ESL classroom observations,
- Direct teaching ELLs (whole class, small group)
- Tutoring ELLs
Findings & Implications

• Teacher (LOTE, ESE certification) and school (Title I) characteristics seem linked to teachers’ effectiveness and preparedness to teach ELLs
  • Need to expand emphasis on bilingualism/language awareness among teacher candidates

• Graduates feel *most* effective / *prepared* to use instructional strategies (esp. re teaching content and reading comprehension)
  • Need to increase emphasis on *why* certain strategies are useful for ELLs

• Graduates feel *least* effective / *least* prepared in areas related to language (students’ native language, English grammar, and pronunciation)
  • Need to increase focus on language awareness, role of language in learning

• Graduates perceived preservice field experiences that provided direct contact with ELLs as most important in preparing them to work with ELLs
  • Need to enhance field experiences and working relationships with diverse schools
Future Focus on Classroom Observation Research

• Research Questions
  – How do teachers of ELLs plan and adapt their instruction to help ELLs develop language and content learning in mainstream classrooms?
  – What variables influence teachers’ sense of preparedness/effectiveness (e.g., role of LOTE, other teacher characteristics; # ELLs, English proficiency level & educational background of ELLs; Title 1 school; other contextual factors)