

# **A Literacy Root Begins with a Seed: Planting an Elementary Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages Teacher Preparation Program**

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All elementary and secondary school students currently in the U.S. will be living in and contributing to an increasingly diverse society and an increasingly interdependent community of nations in the twenty-first century. To realize their personal, social, and long-term career goals, individuals will need to be able to communicate with others skillfully, appropriately, and effectively. The challenge of contemporary education is to prepare *all* students for life in this new world, including those learners who enter schools with a language other than English. (TESOL, 1997b, p. 5)

Goodlad (1991) advocated the radical restructuring of teacher preparation programs in order to meet the needs of diverse student populations. As enrollment and identification of limited English proficient (LEP) students increase (Olsen, 1997), there is an increased need for teachers who can effectively teach both students from varied ethnic backgrounds and the increasing number of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students. The need is especially critical because there are few trained ESOL teachers; the majority of ESOL students receive most of their education from regular classroom teachers who often have not had specialized training (Lara, 1994).

## **The Seed is Planted**

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is the language arts component in the education of LEP students across the nation. The State of Florida has the fourth largest LEP population in the United States (Olsen, 1997; Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994) and must provide specific services for limited English proficient students. Training requirements for instructional and administrative personnel are specified in the LULAC et al. v. SBE (1990). Although the consent decree did not impose any direct requirements on institutions of higher education, the Department of Teacher Education at Florida Atlantic University chose to plant the ESOL seed by developing the first Elementary Education/ESOL Teacher Preparation Program in Florida and possibly the country (TESOL, 1997a).

## **The Seed Takes Root**

Florida Atlantic University Teacher Education faculty began by developing an ESOL endorsement program for inservice teachers seeking to meet training requirements set forth by the consent decree. The Teacher Education faculty at Florida Atlantic University also felt that undergraduate students (pre-service teachers) should be “ready” to teach ESOL students upon graduation without needing additional coursework or inservice training to meet state requirements. LeMon and Clayton-Kandor (1992) suggested that institutions of higher education provide a teaching degree at the undergraduate level that would include all Florida ESOL

requirements. Inspired by LeMon and Clayton-Kandor's idea, Florida Atlantic University began fulfilling its vision for an Elementary Education degree with a built-in ESOL endorsement.

The four goals of the Elementary/ESOL program were to: (1) integrate core courses of the Elementary Education degree with ESOL competencies, (2) provide pre-service teachers with a program of studies that would lead to ESOL endorsement, (3) provide workshops to facilitate curricular integration, and (4) serve as a resource to other institutions of higher education.

The Department of Teacher Education designated a faculty member to serve as TESOL Coordinator responsible for coordinating, maintaining, and monitoring program quality. The TESOL Coordinator oversees the ESOL integration efforts in the designated courses, develops and instructs ESOL related faculty workshops, assists with field experience placements, serves as liaison to state agencies and school systems in the University's service area, prepares a portfolio and all necessary documentation for Program Review, and coordinates with other departments and areas within the University regarding ESOL integration efforts.

Faculty participate in workshops which include TESOL methods, curriculum development and adaptation for ESOL students, alternative assessments for ESOL students, cross cultural communication and a general overview of second-language acquisition research. Faculty also may experience professional enhancement through conference attendance and presentations, memberships in professional organizations, and research and publication related to ESOL.

The Elementary Education/ESOL integrated program includes appropriate sequencing of required courses as well as two specially developed TESOL courses. The national ESL (English as a Second Language) standards and specific state ESOL competencies were infused into the language arts, reading, art, and content area courses through correlation of objectives, student activities, readings, and assessments directly related to ESOL competencies. The field experience component provides the pre-service teacher with multiple opportunities to interact with ESOL students in a variety of environments. "Master syllabi" were developed for each course to identify core information and resources for faculty to integrate into individually developed course syllabi.

### **The Seed Sprouts**

With a core syllabic base and TESOL workshop training in place for Teacher Education faculty, it was time for the seed to change form and grow. Although training was emphasized for all faculty instructors in reading, language arts, math, science, social studies, and general education methodology courses, this article focuses on how the seed began sprouting in reading and language arts instruction. The initial "sprouting base" was that ESOL related instruction in the language arts and reading courses reflects both the three goals of the internationally recognized ESL Standards for Pre-K through Grade 12 Students (TESOL, 1997b) and the relatively new Florida State Department of Education ESOL competencies (the latter are required for the Florida ESOL endorsement of language arts teachers).

The ESL standards focus on three goals (TESOL, 1997b, pp. 23-25): (a) To use English to communicate in social settings by interacting in, through, and with spoken and written English

for personal expression and enjoyment; (b) To use English to achieve academically in all content areas by obtaining, processing, constructing, and providing subject matter information in spoken and written form; and (c) To use English in socially and culturally compatible ways demonstrating the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting. In meeting these goals, faculty needed to incorporate and adapt ways to teach skills and concepts such as how to (a) use the telephone effectively, (b) encourage students to generate questions and to respond to both oral and written stimuli, (c) describe literary elements such as characters and settings, (d) sequence plot events, (e) use chunks of meaningful language rather than single words to communicate, (f) use realia or graphic representations to learn vocabulary and make the relationship between ideas or objects, and (g) teach strategies to self-monitor and refine one's communication skills. Students in reading and language arts courses are introduced to *ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* (TESOL, 1997b) which offers teaching vignettes, descriptors of objectives for meeting each goal, and sample progress indicators. This helpful resource provides additional instructional possibilities beyond those strategies and activities which may be demonstrated and practiced during a preservice course.

In addition to reflecting the ESL Standards and Goals, the Florida State ESOL Competencies must be met. For example, in an introductory reading methodology course, objectives must be taught and documented. Teacher education students are expected to (a) demonstrate an understanding of the significance of a child's prior knowledge and background experience contributing to individual differences in all areas; (b) use knowledge of the cultural characteristics of Florida's LEP population to enhance instruction; (c) analyze student language and determine appropriate instructional strategies, using knowledge of morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse; or (d) select, adapt, develop, and/or sequence instructional materials for a given set of instructional objectives and student learning needs must be taught and documented.

Strategies include Matanzo's (1997) adaptation of KWL (Ogle, 1986; Ogle, 1989): KWLSH (What do you know? What do you want to know? What did you learn? What do you still want to know? How will you find the additional information?) Another strategy is the Language Experience Approach (LEA) as a way to elicit oral language and to study and read the same language in print. Still other strategies include comparing syntax structure between English and Spanish and developing transitional activities between the two languages for students; using sentence strips and pocket charts to develop stories incrementally; and building a repertoire of both narrative and expository children's literature reflective of the cultural diversity in Florida are among the instructional procedures used by the faculty. In a more advanced diagnostic reading course, preservice students must administer an Informal Reading Inventory with a given ESOL student. During the subsequent meetings with that student, an original instructional plan is developed and implemented over the span of several weeks to enhance the ESOL student's oral language and reading progress.

Basically, preservice students are exposed to a variety of effective instructional strategies which will work with non-ESOL students as well but which may require more repetition or a greater use of visuals when being used with students who are still acquiring English. Despite the emphasis on instruction of the ESOL student, this should not take precedence over instructing other students in the given classroom. Instead, it should be incorporated with other instruction

whenever possible. To ensure that teacher education students understand how to meet the needs of both student groups, faculty demonstrate ways the same strategy might be used with non-ESOL students and then adapted appropriately to the specific needs and language proficiency of ESOL students in the same classroom setting. Cooperative learning groups are strongly recommended as one instructional means for meeting the needs of ESOL students and modeled frequently in the methodology courses.

### **The Plant Grows**

As students increase their knowledge of effective strategies, faculty are aware of the importance of a healthy environment in which that knowledge can be nurtured. Therefore, courses establish a strong philosophical foundation based on the following premises:

1. Each student is special and needs reinforcement in some way.
2. Effective instruction must be used with flexible grouping.
3. Instruction and assessment must be linked together to ensure optimal learning growth for each student.
4. Each student can. Can'ts, like weeds, must be plucked.
5. A sensitivity and appreciation of the differences and similarities among students and teachers must be fostered.
6. Materials and activities used should reflect cultural diversity even if such diversity is not represented among a group of students in given a classroom.

In addition, general guidelines are offered and practiced with preservice students for their consideration when planning instruction. These guidelines include:

1. Alternate response modes to avoid an over emphasis on paper and pencil activities; the Every Pupil Response Strategy (EPR), role playing, artistic expression, and the use of manipulatives are examples of response alternatives.
2. Do frequent think-alouds to explain reading passages or concepts being taught; encourage students to do think-alouds.
3. Use reciprocal questioning (ReQuest Strategy) (Manzo, 1969) to encourage students to ask the teacher questions about a passage and then to answer variety of questions the teacher models;
4. Accompany instruction with pictures, videos, concrete objects, or other realia to enhance concept development and understanding;
5. Engage in informal conversations frequently using key words and concepts being taught.

6. Provide self-checking opportunities so students can receive immediate feedback and learn to monitor their own adjustments in using language.
7. Select texts which include explanatory illustrations and graphics; emphasize the use of visuals and assign primarily parts of the texts that convey the most important information in learning a given concept.
8. Develop various means to repeat given concepts and vocabulary including paraphrasing students' responses and encouraging students to rehearse ideas using the Think, Pair, Share Strategy (Lyman, 1988) before needing to respond orally before a larger group.
9. Read, read, read a variety of genre orally on a regularly scheduled basis and provide ways for ESOL students to hear those same readings repeatedly and to read or talk along through access to a listening center or by reading with a buddy or volunteer.

Just as a plant needs water and fertilizer, students need the strategies described above to provide the atmosphere in which language growth and learning comfort of ESOL students can be enhanced.

### **The Plant Blooms and Multiplies**

As preservice students internalize the various strategies and practice them with actual ESOL students in guided situations, their confidence in knowing what to do with language diverse students in their various teaching settings increases. In the sequence of courses, the preservice students gradually become more independent in their planning and work with ESOL students over an extended period of time. Since we are still in the early phases of integrating ESOL endorsement with the elementary education program, longitudinal data are not yet available. However, the university supervisors of student interns during their full time teaching experience have shared numerous accounts of appropriate strategies being used by former methodology students in their assigned classrooms. Initial observations on the transfer of preservice knowledge gained during methodology courses on how to instruct ESOL students effectively are encouraging. More formal data needs to be collected and evaluated; but, just as in a newly planted flower bed, each bloom is exciting and contributes to the quality and appropriateness of the environment.

### **Maintaining the Garden**

The planting of the ESOL seed in this elementary teacher education curriculum was a beginning. We now have progressed to the flowering stage and are seeing bouquets of ESOL instructional effectiveness in classrooms. However, in order to make a garden flourish, ongoing attention is imperative. Likewise, we are finding that certain elements are essential for the ESOL-Elementary Education integrated program to stabilize and refine its offerings. Recommendations for this continued growth include the following:

1. Provide faculty with training updates through additional workshops and/or strategy newsletters.

2. Increase TESOL print and non-print resources and their availability to faculty and university students.
3. Encourage faculty from the various methodology areas to dialogue and note any duplications of assignments, readings, or ways the various curricular areas and field-based requirements might be co-supportive.
4. Develop a means to disseminate information about the ESOL instruction preservice students are receiving to local school personnel where they are assigned for participatory and intern experiences.

This article has provided an overview of how reading and language arts instruction can meet a state ESOL endorsement requirement by integrating the needed knowledge and competencies into an existing program. Cooperation among faculty was essential and evident. Students who have completed the integrated methodology courses and their internships appear to be considering ESOL needs and incorporating strategies as a natural part of their planning and instructional processes. It should be noted that the strategies cited earlier are a small sampling of the scope of ESOL strategies and knowledge gained by students in this integrative curriculum.

Thus, the ESOL seed was planted, took root, sprouted, and flowered! The inclusion of various maintenance checkpoints in the teacher education program should assure continuing bloom and the opportunity for students to pick from an abundant garden of practical strategies which will help them deliver appropriate instruction to the ESOL students they teach.

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