



The Status of ESOL Teacher Education in the State of Georgia

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During the Literacy Summit, a small group of teacher educators from across the state focused on literacy and literacy teacher education for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Presentations of achievement test scores of English Language Learners (ELLs) at the state level mirrored those of ELLs at the national level. Both sets of test scores show evidence of achievement gaps between ELLs and other subgroups of students.

In Georgia, the state achievement test results for the 2005 Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) indicated that ELLs scored lower on tests of reading than all other subgroups of students. In fourth grade, it was reported that 60% of ELLs met or exceeded expectations on the CRCT reading test. Students with Disabilities (SWD) scored higher with 68% meeting or exceeding expectations. When looking at all students who took the 4th grade reading CRCT, 87% met or exceeded expectations. In eighth grade, 39% of ELL students met or exceeded expectations on the CRCT reading assessment, while 50% of SWD met or exceeded

expectations. For all eighth grade students who took the CRCT reading assessment, 83% met or exceeded expectations (GaDOE, 2005). Clearly, the literacy needs of ELL students in Georgia have not been met.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows similar disparities in reading test scores. Data from the NAEP report (2005) indicate huge achievement gaps between ELL students and other subgroups of students. In fourth grade reading, 20% of ELL students scored at or above basic levels. The next lowest performing group of students were those identified as Students with Disabilities (SWD). During the same year, 37% of SWD scored at or above the basic level in Reading. In the eighth grade, none of the ELL students scored at or above basic levels on NAEP reading assessments; 32% of SWD scored at or above basic levels. Based on the test scores of ELLs at the state and national level, the need to examine literacy teacher education in ESOL became imperative.

Following the plenary session of invited speakers at the Literacy Summit, Evelyn Barker, ESOL Program Director at the Georgia Department of Education, facilitated an animated dialogue about key issues in the preparation of pre-service and in-service teachers for ESOL. Group members identified challenges and recommendations for improving literacy teacher education in ESOL.

Five issues emerged as needing further discussion. A first issue was the lack of preparation of teachers to teach ESOL at a time when there are unprecedented increases in the number of ELLs in Georgia's schools. A second issue, was the importance of raising consciousness about teachers beliefs and practices with regards to non-native English speaking students and their families, a third issue, was a need for all teachers, especially those in the content areas, to have some professional development to acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions for meeting the needs of Georgia's increasing ELL population. A fourth issue for meeting the needs of ELL students was strong collaboration among educators that would integrate ELL students into the mainstream of Georgia's classrooms and school communities. Finally, as teacher professional development programs examine how they are preparing teachers to address the education of ELL students, there will be a strong need for a rigorous, longitudinal research agenda and appropriate assessments to determine the most promising practices for closing the achievement gap between ELLs and other subgroups of students. This paper will now examine each of these central issues in turn. We will end with recommendations by the group for improving not only literacy education, but education in general, for ELLs in Georgia.

Need for ESOL Teacher Preparation in Literacy
Many teachers in Georgia have already experienced an increase in the number of ELLs in their classrooms. There was a 378% increase in the number of K-12 ELLs in Georgia public schools from the 1993-94 school year to the 2003-2004 school year (NCELA, 2004). Increasing numbers of ELLs coupled with their

dismal achievement test scores create many challenges for educators. The first issue of teacher preparedness is of pressing concern. Teacher knowledge has positive effects on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Considering the rising numbers of ELL students in Georgia classrooms and the lack of literacy achievement as measured by the NAEP and CRCT test results, the question of teacher preparedness must be examined. Are teachers prepared to teach ELLs? What does teacher preparation in ESOL look like in institutions of higher education?

In a search for ESOL programs in public institutions of higher education on Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GPSC) website, it was noted that one institution offers certification (a Master's of Arts in Teaching (MAT)) in ESOL. Six other public colleges/universities in Georgia offer ESOL as an endorsement that requires 9 - 12 hours of graduate coursework. Typically, ESOL endorsement programs include courses such as cultural issues, socio- or applied linguistics, methods for teaching ESOL, and/or a course in second language acquisition. Teachers rarely participate in a practicum or field-based experience as a requirement for the ESOL endorsement. Teachers who work in areas where there is a high population of ELLs are not necessarily required to obtain an ESOL endorsement. Therefore, many teachers in Georgia may have had little or no professional development designed to prepare them to work successfully with ELLs.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to mine the data for individual literacy courses in undergraduate programs to determine how extensively ESOL standards for classroom teachers are integrated into the existing pre-service programs. However, further research by the University System of Georgia's Reading Consortium is underway to examine these courses more closely. There is research that

¹ It is estimated that by 2030, approximately 40% of the school age population in the United States will be ELLs (Dept. of Education, 2002-2004).

suggests that undergraduate teachers in some teacher preparation programs do not feel well-prepared to address the literacy and learning needs of ELLs (Cartiera, 2005).

Critical Examination of Beliefs and Practices

With the increasing numbers of ELLs in the state of Georgia (378% increase from 1993/4 – 2003/4, NCELA, 2004) and with the projected increases for the entire country by the year 2030¹ all education professionals across the state need to be engaged in dialogue to welcome these students into our communities and classrooms. While there is a need to prepare more teachers to work with ELLs, our group also concurred on the need for consciousness raising and training for in-service teachers across the state on ESOL issues and pedagogy. Teachers' beliefs, values, ideologies, and frames of reference impact their teaching (Boyd, Ariail, Williams, Jocson, Tinker Sachs, McNeal, Fecho, Fisher, Healy, Meyer, & Morrell, 2006). Teachers' attitudes and perceptions about foreign immigrant families and ELLs in the schools is an important part of professional development for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Multicultural education is needed to raise awareness of the many issues and concerns that must be considered when teaching students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Traditionally, when waves of immigrants move into communities, the members of the old community have several options: ignore, resent, or embrace them. There is no denying the changing demographics and the numbers of foreign language speaking African, Asian, Spanish, European, and other immigrants who are moving into Georgia. With an estimated 85-90% of the teaching force being monolingual Caucasian women and men (Synder & Hoffman, 2002), a mismatch between the cultural diversity of school students and the teaching force may exacerbate a history of racial tensions in the United States and Georgia, in particular. Therefore, a concerted effort needs to be made on the part of all stakeholders, particularly educators, for collaborative discussions about what it means to educate increasing numbers of

foreign language speaking immigrants of different ethnic and cultural groups.

As much as possible, culturally and linguistically diverse students should be physically and socially integrated into the mainstream of school and classroom life rather than regulated to the periphery in trailers away from the main classroom buildings, for example. When ELLs are included into the school and classroom culture all students benefit from the diverse strengths and resources they bring.

While many of the educators in our group lamented the negative attitudes that exist in some school and community environments towards immigrants, our group members unanimously endorsed a pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1970; 1998) by emphasizing the strengths of having diverse groups of learners from all over the world in our communities and in our schools (Nieto, 2002). In general, in-service professional teacher development seminars and all teacher education courses need to address the attitudes and perceptions of educators towards minority groups of immigrants who come from different social class, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

All Educators are Teachers of ELLs

Literacy learning is not the only issue that was raised in our small group. There is also the issue of teaching academic content areas and English language skills simultaneously. For this, all teachers need further professional development. Just as educators and researchers in the 1970s and 1980s called for all teachers to see themselves as teachers of reading, it is crucial that teachers from all levels and of all subjects see themselves as responsible for the education of ELLs. When all educators recognize themselves as teachers of ELLs, the school as a community becomes more dedicated to supporting ELLs in the best ways possible.

Content area teachers need to be concerned about understanding their roles in helping the immigrant learners acquire strong linguistic competencies in English. The job cannot be left solely to those who teach or have been trained

to teach ESOL. According to Cummins (1984), academic language (CALP or cognitive academic language proficiency) is difficult to acquire and takes a long time to develop (5-7 years). While immigrant students might appear to be using English proficiently for social purposes (BICs or basic interpersonal communication skills), their academic language proficiency sets them apart on all school tests and reading materials. The ability to use English in a social way does not imply that ELLs can use English to learn and to demonstrate what they have learned. It is important for content area teachers to be sensitive to the dual load of learning English and subject matter content at the same time. Professional development for teachers must address the strategies and skills that content area teachers should employ when teaching ELLs. The ESOL endorsement programs should provide in-depth training in addressing language in the content areas for teacher education candidates. In-school workshops and professional development seminars should likewise enhance teachers' understandings, strategies and skills in providing an education that affirms and extends the existing language skills that ELLs already possess.

Collaboration Among Educators

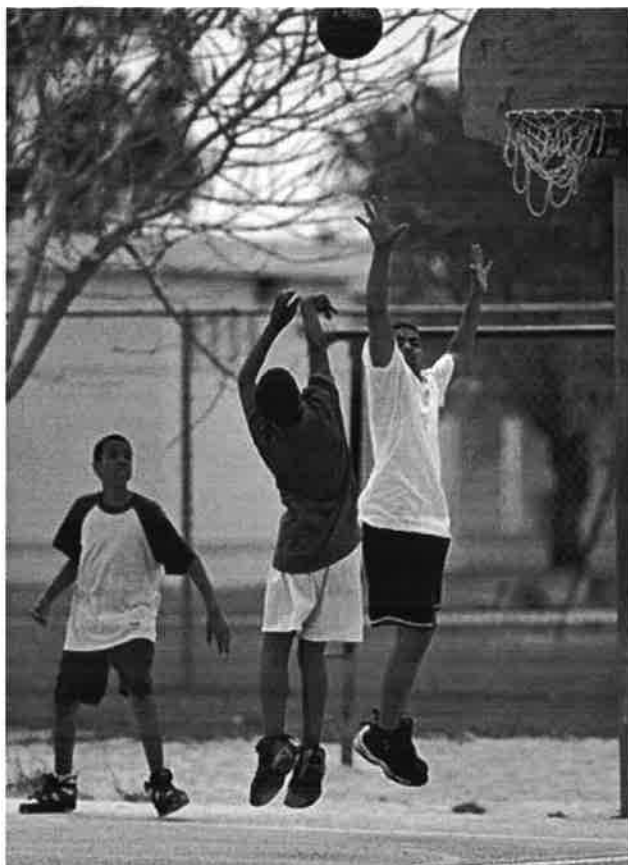
The expansive educational needs of a linguistically and culturally diverse student population can not be met by teachers in isolated classrooms using a narrowly defined curriculum and a deficit view of learning and language differences (Pinkos, 2007). The traditional structure of isolationism in schools is not conducive to successful learning for ELLs. Participants in the ESOL group of educators agreed with the recommendations of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) that meeting the needs of ELLs will demand strengthening collaboration and coordination among federal, state and local programs. In addition, collaborative teaming among administrators, teachers, and parents is critical. ELLs can benefit from a welcoming community of support in which all teachers work collaboratively to plan, teach, and assess content standards and English language competencies of ELLs



(Pinkos, 2007). Snell & Janney (2005) and others have written extensively on the benefits of collaborative teaching and learning for teachers and students. Information on collaboration is abundant in the research and literature in education. What is not pervasive in actual school settings is the structure and support for truly collaborative teaming among highly qualified teachers to plan for, teach, and assess individual student learning. Knowing how to collaborate is a far cry from knowing what to do in schools to create conditions where effective collaborations occur as a matter of course and where students benefit from the combined knowledge of many informed professional perspectives. Collaboration is especially important among ESOL professionals and content area professionals who need to develop differentiation strategies as they make accommodations for developing ELLs' academic language and skills.

The Need for More Research and Valid Assessment

A final area of concern that our group discussed



at length was the need for more research and the dearth of culturally appropriate ways of assessing ELLs. With the increase in ELLs across the state, many educators often feel woefully inadequate as they strive to understand what to do and how best to meet the needs of these learners. Our practices need to be investigated by teachers and educational researchers to ensure that we are adopting the best models possible for the development of pupils' multimodal literacies. At present, schools employ many different models in working with ELLs. These models may range from *push-in*, where groups of ELLs work in the regular content area classrooms and are supported by an ESOL professional to *pull-out* where the ELLs are withdrawn from a regular class for small group instruction with an ELL professional. We also discussed the sheltered model which many schools practice. In this model, the ESOL professional may teach both language and content area in a modified push-in or pull-out version or as more commonly done, the classroom teacher makes accommodations to

the content and delivery of the instruction by collaborating with the ESOL and special education teacher. Accommodations may take the form of modified content and/or the use of differentiated instructional strategies. In these different contexts, how do we know what is working from what is not working? How do we begin to identify best practices within these educational models? How do we describe these practices to our teachers-in-training and help to accommodate them in adopting these models as they strive for excellence in teaching? Only rigorous research in these areas can help us begin to answer these questions.

As a follow-up to the Literacy Summit in the summer of 2006, another one-day retreat was held on "Integrating language and content for ESOL/Title 111" at the Marietta Conference Center on November 3 of the same year. This gathering was convened and facilitated by Dr. Evelyne Barker of the Georgia DOE. In attendance were educational professionals from different school, universities, and education sectors from across the state. At this meeting, the participants examined a draft document on several models for facilitating the instruction of ELLs. These modes of learning included the push-in and pull-out types mentioned previously and a range of immersion models such as: total immersion in an English medium class; dual immersion where students are instructed in both their home language and the target language, English; and partial immersion where ELLs study in English classes for a certain number of instructional hours and then spend the remainder of the day working in their home language. While the success of these models depends very much on the skills and training of the teachers who are involved, they also need to be investigated in depth before sound recommendations can be made as to which models are more appropriate for the different school contexts in the state of Georgia.

When considering the proliferation of testing in schools with the enactment of legislation for No Child Left Behind, educators at all levels must be very concerned about how tests affect not only

the performance of linguistically different students but also the emotional and psychological scars that result from testing in a language in which they are not necessarily proficient. Students in Georgia are at present subjected to several tests including the home language survey to determine whether they are qualified for ELL instruction or not, the CRCT for academic achievement, and the ACCESS to determine their language proficiency and whether they are eligible or not to exit their ELL program. Many schools in Georgia have been designated as low performing schools that have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) because of the presence of large numbers of ELLs and their weak performance on the CRCT. While some politicians and community members might deride the school administrators and teachers for failing these children, the validity and reliability of certain tests needs to be questioned by concerned educators. Again, only further detailed investigations by teachers and educational researchers can help us ascertain which tests are the most valid and reliable for assessing linguistically and culturally diverse student populations.

Recommendations

Recommendations for teacher education in general and literacy teacher education in particular seem to impact all five issues that were addressed in this paper. To improve ESOL pre-service and in-service teacher education in literacy, examination of teacher beliefs and practices, teacher preparation in general for ELLs across grade levels and disciplines, collaboration among stakeholders, and an agenda of rigorous research to identify effective practices for increasing success of ELLs in our schools, the group members made the following recommendations:

There needs to be a concerted and collaborative effort among stakeholders at the state, regional, district, and local educational agencies to examine existing pre-service and in-service professional development programs and courses in literacy to identify when and how literacy teachers are learning ESOL standards for teacher quality as identified by TESOL (2003)

and as presented in the TESOL position statement on teacher quality (Board of Directors, 2003). TESOL standards include the following:

- High level of written and oral proficiency in English
- Knowledgeable about research and best practices in
- Applied and socio-linguistics
- Second language acquisition
- Language pedagogy
- Literacy development
- Curriculum and materials development
- Assessment
- Cross cultural-communication

There is a need to increase the number and availability of high quality ESOL degree programs and endorsement programs for all teachers across the state to create a cadre of professional educators who can work together to improve the literacy learning, English language, and academic learning of ELLs in all of Georgia's classrooms and school communities. Collaboration among highly qualified professional educators must become a reality so that students can benefit from the concerted effort of several teachers working together to plan, teach, and assess their individual needs and offer developmentally appropriate practices (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005).

Along with our group members' recommendations, we endorse many of Whitney's (2005) ideas for teachers working with culturally different and immigrant populations as well as the recommendations made by the Conference on English Education (CEE) Leadership and Policy Summit held in Atlanta in May, 2005 (see Boyd et al, 2006).

1. Teacher, Educate thyself – as with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers, teachers in general, and teacher education programs in particular, need to attend more than a single multicultural course or professional development seminar to understand the needs of immigrant groups of learners and how best to help them. As Whitney (2005, p. 65) states, "one of the biggest obstacles that teachers of

linguistically diverse students face is ignorance.” Teachers therefore need to develop instructional skills, strategies, and models of teaching and learning which accommodate the linguistic and socio-emotional needs of learners. Teacher education programs need to make these strategies and skills integral to all their courses, not just a select few.

2. Incorporate multiculturalism into the classroom - this means more than paying lip service to the ideals of social justice, educational equity, and diversity. Incorporating multiculturalism means infusing the literature, histories, and cultural resources from diverse cultures into our teaching and affirming the cultures of the students and groups within our communities in our classrooms. Again, this first starts in the teacher education programs which our teachers attend.

3. Affirm the linguistic resources of our students – this means allowing the home languages of immigrant students a place in our classes as they develop multimodal literacies in English. Many of the students come with skills in speaking and writing and thinking in their home languages and valuing these skills as resources will help to build their second language literacies.

4. Become advocates for underserved students in general and immigrant students in particular - as advocates for and models of social justice and equity, educators must work actively to address the inequities and injustices that they see taking place in our schools and society and which prevent all students from having access to the best education that is possible (Boyd et al, 2006).

5. Acknowledge that teaching is politicized by our ideologies and frames of reference - we need to question our practices and our beliefs. Are they in the best interest of our learners? Are our ways of thinking based on dominant cultural practices and beliefs that exclude multicultural and multilingual communities (Boyd et al, 2006)?

Conclusion

As August and Hakuta (1997) suggest, recommendations begin with increased political interest, legislation, and adequate resources and support for investigating the five issues identified in this paper as well as emerging issues as challenges increase. The coming together of teacher educators to address ESOL concerns was a very important undertaking for establishing a common ground on the status of our state in issues affecting our ELL learners. From here we can formulate a plan for improving the quality of our teacher education programs as well as ways in which we can meet the needs of practicing teachers. We find promise in the discussions that were held and we look forward to collaborating with all the ESOL stakeholders as we strive to develop promising practices that serve to promote the development of a large segment of our population. Just as there is promise in some of the new ventures being undertaken by the DOE such as the replacement of the Quality Core Curriculum for ELLs with performance standards and assessment based on the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment framework (WIDA, 2007) and the family support programs that are needed in many of our schools, teacher educators need to continue to find ways to investigate and share their best practices and improve the general delivery of teacher education programs across the state.

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