Chapter 3

Teaching and Learning Simultaneously: Collaboration between Teacher Education and a University ESL Program

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a collaboration process between a teacher education program and a university ESL program that attempts to increase teacher candidates’ exposure to ELLs with “third space” as a theoretical framework. In third spaces, boundaries of teacher and student get blurred, and new ways of thinking about teaching and learning emerge. In the collaboration project that this chapter describes, the two teacher candidates regularly volunteered in the university ESL classes and taught mini-lessons to the ELLs while taking a class about ELL teaching. The qualitative analysis of the participants indicates that in the collaboration project, a university-based class and a field-based class were in sync by providing the participants with opportunities to immediately implement what they learned in a traditional class with the ELLs. In this boundary blurriness, the ELLs became from abstract to concrete in the participants’ mind, and the participants became reflective practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

English language learners (ELLs) represent the fastest growing segment of the school age population in the United States (García, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009). Projections indicate that ELLs will comprise 40 percent of public school students by 2030 (U.S. Department of Education & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2003). Although ELLs could master conversational English fairly easily, within 2-3 years (Cummins, 1980), the majority of them struggle to succeed in school, particu-
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larly on content area achievement measures (Short & Boyson, 2012). On the National Assessment for Educational Progress Grade 8 exams for reading and mathematics, ELLs performed poorly: 74% and 72% performed below basic in reading and math respectively, compared with only 22% and 25% of non-ELLs respectively (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

Because ELLs are held to the same accountability standards as native English speakers (Short & Boyson, 2004), providing them with effective content instructions and opportunities to acquire academic language along with opportunities to develop the English language proficiency becomes crucial for their school success. That is why ELL education becomes relevant not only to ELL specialists but also to mainstream teachers. The population of teachers, however, will likely remain predominantly white native speakers of English. In 2011, white native speakers consisted of 84 percent of full-time teachers (Feistritzer, 2011). To be responsive to the academic needs of ELLs, these monolingual teachers need to develop “sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and range of skills” (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 4) to be able to meet the unique needs this population effectively.

To produce teacher candidates who possess knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will lead to ELLs’ academic success, all teacher candidates in our university’s teacher education program are required to take a class, EDBL 401: Principles and Practices for Educating English Language Learners. This class covers the history of education for ELLs, basic second language acquisition theories, and scaffolding techniques to help ELLs develop their academic language proficiency. However, many teacher candidates have had minimum experiences of working with ELLs before the class. Since extended contact with people who speak languages other than English has a positive impact on teachers’ attitudes towards ELLs (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008) and the lack of exposure undermines their understanding of ELLs’ needs, our teacher candidates’ lack of experiences with ELLs may hinder them from acquiring knowledge, skills, and dispositions appropriate for ELL teaching.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a collaboration process between a teacher education program and a university ESL program in which teacher candidates were required to interact with university ELLs. The chapter delineates how the interactions affected teacher candidates’ understanding of ELL teaching and their development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions for the ELL population.

LITERATURE REVIEW: PREPARING TEACHER CANDIDATES FOR THE ELL POPULATION

Considering the increased population of ELLs at public school, all teacher candidates should be prepared to effectively work with ELLs by acquiring appropriate knowledge, skills, and dispositions for the ELL population during teacher preparation. However, they have little access to preservice education focused on what to teach and how to teach this underserved population (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). According to National Center for Education Statistics (2002), 41% of teachers have ELLs in their classes, but only 12.5% of those teachers had had 8 or more hours of training in the previous 3 years on how to assist them. As of 2008, only four states (Arizona, New York, California, and Florida) required specific coursework or certification requirements with regard to ELLs for all teachers (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). These realities support the claims that most teachers are not prepared to work with ELLs (Janzen, 2008) and unlikely to help them successfully learn academic content and skills through English while developing proficiency in English (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008).