Making Connections to Enhance Teacher Quality and Student Learning for All English Language Learners

Alicia Mendoza
Florida International University, Miami, Florida

This article summarizes and discusses the Florida Consent Decree and how Florida International University has chosen to incorporate preparation for teaching English language learners in classrooms at all levels of education from early childhood to secondary. The elements of the consent decree are enumerated as are the twenty-five ESOL competencies. The two freestanding ESOL courses required of students in programs leading to certification and ESOL endorsement are described, as are the other program courses that infuse ESOL standards. The article emphasizes the connections made among program courses and program faculty, those who specialize in ESOL and those with diverse areas of expertise, in order to render programs that both enhance teacher quality and student learning for all English language learners.

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The population of students in today’s schools is already extremely diverse and continuing to increase in diversity. Strategies for teaching success with diverse learners differ greatly from those methods that work well with a homogeneous population.

The research of Gardner has made educators aware of previously unidentified “intelligences”. We have moved well beyond encouraging teachers to consider the visual, auditory, and tactile-kinesthetic learner. The influx of many students from other, non-English speaking countries has made knowledge of cultural and linguistic diversity imperative.

While we in teacher education have become more knowledgeable of the extent of diversity in our nation’s schools, our teacher education programs must ensure that future teachers are prepared to cope with the extent of diversity of all kinds that they will
encounter upon entering the profession. The mandate to place a “highly qualified teacher” in every classroom necessitates that all teachers be highly qualified to teach all students, not just those who speak English and are from the mainstream of society.

In the summer of 1989, a group known as the Multicultural Education Training and Advocacy (META) Project informed the state education agency that it planned to sue on behalf of Florida’s students with limited English proficiency, because they were not being served appropriately by the schools. In order to derail the threatened suit, the state negotiated an agreement known as the consent decree in order to remedy the prior shortcomings. The consent decree consisted of four parts: 1) identifying, assessing, and monitoring the progress of language minority students; 2) providing limited English proficient students with access to teachers trained to meet their needs; 3) requiring teachers to obtain appropriate training and certification; and 4) evaluating program effectiveness. This consent decree is how the state of Florida is deemed to be in compliance with the following federal and state laws relevant to the education of English language learner students:

- Title VI and VII Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Office of Civil Rights Memorandum (Standards for Title VI Compliance) of May 25, 1970
- Requirements based on the Supreme Court decision in Lau v. Nichols, 1974
- Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974
- Requirements of the Vocational Education Guidelines, 1979
- Requirements based on the Fifth Circuit court decision in Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981
Requirements based on the Supreme Court decision in Plyler v. Doe, 1982

Americans with Disabilities Act (PL 94-142)

Florida Education Equity Act, 1984

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

When translated into teacher education terms, this consent decree mandates that all teachers working with any limited English proficient student, participate in courses in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages and, in some cases, to earn formal bilingual or ESOL credentials.

It is generally agreed that the most critical and difficult area of the curriculum in which to cope with student diversity is in the area of language arts, and specifically in instruction in reading. It is acknowledged that reading is the key subject that is critical to success in school. Elementary teachers struggle to teach their students to learn to read, and teachers of middle and secondary students struggle to teach their students to read to learn. When you add diversity to the mix, you find that teachers at both levels are often ill equipped to modify their strategies to accommodate the needs of these students.

Effective strategies for teaching English language learners to read are effective for all grades and all subjects. Wallace (2004) stated that, “The thirty components of the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) lesson-planning checklist can be used with any curriculum or program, for students at any age or level of English proficiency” (p.1). With this in mind, future teachers must be taught these strategies regardless of what grade level or subject they are preparing to teach.

We must also dispel the myths that surround teaching these students English as a second language. According to Flores (1993), “It is often said that the best way to
develop students’ English language skills is to totally immerse them in an all-English environment in which they hear, repeat, read and write English only. Of the many recent studies regarding second language learners, none supports this common misconception. On the contrary, research shows that the most effective way for non-English language proficiency is through their first language” (p. 1).

This total immersion theory is but one that we must eliminate from our teacher education programs. It, and others like it, must be replaced with research-based strategies that actually do work. It is also important to keep in mind that these strategies, while tailored to the special needs of linguistically diverse students, are at least equally effective with native speakers of English, lest anyone think that instructional time is being taken from non-English language students in order to channel it to English language learners.

At Florida International University, the undergraduate teacher preparation programs in early childhood education, elementary education, English education 6-12, and exceptional student education, all include courses that will lead to state certification in their respective areas along with ESOL endorsement. The students in these programs are required to demonstrate each of the twenty-five ESOL competencies or standards that the state has enumerated. These include the following:

1. Conduct ESOL programs within the parameters, goals, and stipulations of the Florida consent Decree.

2. Recognize the major differences and similarities among the different cultural groups in the U.S.
3. Identify, expose, and reexamine cultural stereotypes relating to LEP and non-LEP students.

4. Use knowledge of the cultural characteristics of Florida’s LEP population to enhance instruction.

5. Determine and use appropriate instructional methods and strategies for individuals and groups, using knowledge of the first and second language.

6. Apply current and effective ESOL teaching methodologies in planning and delivering instruction to LEP students.

7. Locate and acquire relevant resources in ESOL methodologies.

8. Select and develop appropriate ESOL content according to student levels of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, taking into account (1) basic interpersonal communicating skills (BICS), and (2) cognitive academic language proficiency skills (CALPS) as they apply to the ESOL curriculum.

9. Develop experiential literacy activities for LEP students, using current information on linguistic and cognitive processes.

10. Analyze student language and determine appropriate strategies, using knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse.

11. Apply essential strategies for developing and integrating the five language skills of listening, composition, oral communication, reading, and writing.

12. Apply content-based ESOL approaches to instruction.

13. Evaluate, design, and employ instructional methods and techniques appropriate to learners’ socialization and communication needs, based on knowledge of language as social phenomenon.

15. Evaluate, select and employ appropriate instructional materials, media, and technology for ESOL at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

16. Design and implement effective unit plans and daily lesson plans which meet the needs of ESOL students within the context of the regular classroom.

17. Evaluate, adapt, and employ appropriate instructional materials, media, and technology for ESOL in the content areas of elementary, middle, and high school levels.

18. Create a positive classroom environment to accommodate the various learning styles and cultural backgrounds of students.

19. Consider current trends and issues related to the testing of linguistic and culturally diverse students when using testing instruments and techniques.

20. Administer tests and interpret test results, applying basic measurement concepts.

21. Use formal and alternative methods of assessment/evaluation of LEP students, including measurement of language, literacy, and academic content metacognition.

22. Develop and implement strategies for using school, neighborhood, and home resources in the ESOL curriculum.

23. Identify major attitudes of local target groups toward school, teachers, discipline, and education in general personnel: reduce cross-cultural barriers among students, parents, and the school setting.
24. Develop, implement, and evaluate instructional programs in ESOL, based on current trends in research and practice.

25. Recognize indicators of learning disabilities, especially hearing and language impairment, and limited English proficiency.

Two specific courses offered by TESOL faculty, are required of all programs that include an ESOL endorsement. These courses, TSL 3370, ESOL: Principles and Practices I and TSL 4141, ESOL: Principles and Practices II are freestanding courses that focus on many of the ESOL competencies listed above. For example, TSL 3370 is designed to introduce the issues, principles, and practices of teaching English to speakers of other languages. The goal of this course is to provide the foundation of knowledge needed to prepare pre-service teachers to understand the concepts upon which second language acquisition and teaching are based. Included in the course objectives are: understanding the background and concepts of the Florida Consent Decree; understanding approaches to curriculum design of instructional programs and models in ESOL; understanding second language acquisition theory and the principles of language learning; understanding linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom and the implications for instruction in the multicultural classroom; and understanding the concepts underlying ESOL instructional and content approaches to promote classroom success for second language learners. The second course in this sequence, TSL 4141 is designed to serve as the capstone experience in the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable pre-service teachers to select and apply the most effective language, communication, and teaching strategies to all aspects of classroom instruction. It deepens the knowledge gained in TSL 3370, and focuses on the needs of
linguistically and culturally diverse students, and on the classroom methods, materials, strategies, techniques, and activities most appropriate for assessing and meeting the needs of these students. The goal of this course is for students to become reflective practitioners and problem-solvers who understand the issues related to working with diverse populations so they are able to facilitate learning for these students. The objectives for this second course are the following: apply appropriate ESOL strategies and activities to language and content area instruction; evaluate the appropriateness of instructional materials, media, and technology for use with English language learners in the classroom; evaluate the appropriateness of standardized test results in assessing linguistically and culturally diverse students; use appropriate formal and alternative assessment techniques and instruments to evaluate English language learners in the classroom; apply knowledge of issues and principles related to English language learners in selecting, planning, delivering, and assessing instructional approaches, lessons, activities, techniques, materials, and assessment to promote success in the classroom, use relevant resources to maintain, extend, and update knowledge in the field of ESOL teaching.

In addition to the inclusion of the above referenced TSL courses, the ESOL competencies not specifically met by the successful completion of these courses are infused into the remaining program courses where they are related to the specific content or focus of the additional courses. In addition, from the time that students in the programs which carry an ESOL endorsement begin taking program courses, they are required to be cognizant of the special needs of ESOL students and to plan to accommodate those needs.
For example, all students in education programs are required to complete EDG 3221. This course, General Instructional Decision-Making, includes a co-requisite lab during which the students teach mini-lessons, each of which focuses specifically on certain aspects of instruction. The first of these lessons emphasizes set, explanation of content, and closure. In addition to the specific emphases, ESOL adaptation is also included as part of the lesson plan developed for teaching this mini-lesson. The second mini-lesson focuses on the instructional objective, the components of the lesson plan, stimulus variation including non-verbal cues for English language learners as well as visuals, and cooperative learning. The third mini-lesson stresses the instructional objective, the components of the lesson plan, attending behaviors, and questions on the levels of the Bloom’s Taxonomy. The fourth and final mini-lesson in this course gives equal emphasis to all aspects, as it is designed to test the student’s ability to combine all of the features of a successful lesson. Since this set of lessons teaches students in a cumulative approach, adding what was mastered in the first to the second, the second to the third, and so on, adaptations for English language learners are always included.

In addition to the mini-lessons described above, the class portion of this required course mandates that students develop a unit plan. This plan, appropriate to an elementary grade or to the particular subject they are preparing to teach, must include a minimum of five lessons. Each lesson must include a minimum of six activities, and each set of activities must have at least one which is specifically designed for English language learners.

All four of the reading courses in the elementary education program specifically require that all lesson plans contain adaptations for English language learners. The Issues
in Elementary Education course requires students to complete a case study on a child who is ESOL or ESE or a combination of both. The remaining courses in the program have similar requirements which focus attention on meeting the special needs of the English language learner.

Therefore, it can be seen that cooperation among faculty who are specialists in TESOL and those with other areas of expertise, has combined to create an enriched program that realistically prepares program graduates to succeed with the diverse population they will encounter in their classrooms. What starts as sensitivity to special needs, ends with a well prepared teacher who is knowledgeable of a variety of special strategies designed specifically for this population. Thus, connections have been made to enhance both teacher quality and student learning for all English language learners.
References


Author Note

Alicia Mendoza, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Florida International University, Miami.

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