Chapter 7
Learning While Teaching:
Teacher Candidates Working With University ESL Students

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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 candidate exposure to English learners (ELs) with "third space" as a theoretical framework. In third spaces, the 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 three teacher candidates regularly volunteered in the university ESL classes and taught mini-lessons to the ELs while taking a class on EL 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 teacher candidates with opportunities to immediately implement what they learned in a traditional class with the ELs. In this boundary blurriness, the teacher candidates became the owner of their own practitioner knowledge, rather than the borrower of the existing academic knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

English learners (ELs) represent the fastest growing segment of the school age population in the United States (García, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009). Projections indicate that ELs will comprise 40 percent of public-school students by 2030 (U.S. Department of Education & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2003). In 2014, P-12 public schools in the U.S. enrolled 4.6 million English learners (Kena et al., 2016). Although ELs could master conversational English fairly easily, within 2-3 years (Cummins, 2000), the majority of them struggle to succeed in school, particularly on content area

achievement measures (Short & Boyson, 2012). On top of mastering the English language and learning content areas in English, poverty, political oppression, and interrupted schooling (Cadiero-Kaplan & Rodríguez, 2008) they experienced in the past and experience in the present negatively affect ELs' performance at school. On the National Assessment for Educational Progress Grade 8 exams for reading and mathematics, ELs performed poorly: 74% and 72% performed below basic in reading and math respectively, compared with only 22% and 25% of non-Els, respectively (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

Because ELs 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. Therefore, mainstream teachers are responsible for teaching academic content and raising student achievement while simultaneously developing ELs' facility in and command of the English language (McGraner & Saenz, 2009). This is why EL education becomes relevant not only to ESL specialists but also to mainstream teachers. The population of teachers, however, has historically received no preparation for teaching ELs (García, Arias, Murri, & Serna, 2010). In addition, it 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 ELs, these monolingual teachers need to develop "sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and range of skills" (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 4). However, Lucas, Villegas and Feedson-Gonzalez (2008) conclude that "far too many new teachers find themselves unprepared to meet the special challenges of teaching academic content" (p. 371) to ELs.

To produce teacher candidates who possess knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will lead to ELs' 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 ELs, basic second language acquisition theories, and scaffolding techniques to help ELs develop their academic language proficiency. However, many teacher candidates have had minimum experiences of working with ELs before the class. For example, in one EDBL 401 class the first author taught, 19 out of 21 students declared that they had never interacted with ELs before the class, let alone teaching them. Since extended contact with people who speak languages other than English has a positive impact on teachers' attitudes towards ELs (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008) and consequently, the lack of exposure undermines their understanding of ELs' needs, our teacher candidates' lack of experiences with ELs may hinder them from acquiring knowledge, skills, and dispositions appropriate for EL 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 ELs. The chapter delineates how the interactions affected teacher candidates' understanding of EL teaching and their development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions for this population. In this chapter, two terms, English learners (ELs) and English language learners (ELLs), are used interchangeably.

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