

Chapter 30

Ensuring Social Justice for English Language Learners: An Innovative English as a Second Language (ESL) Endorsement Program

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ABSTRACT

Bradley University's embedded English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement program was first implemented during the 2015-2016 academic year. This program consists of eighteen credit hours of course work specified by the Illinois State Board of Education in order to prepare teachers to work with students who do not speak English as their first language. Now in its second year, early outcomes of the program are quite positive. This chapter describes the program and its development in detail, and analyzes the program's strengths and weaknesses, focusing especially on teacher candidates' knowledge of pedagogy and cultural awareness as it relates to social justice in education for English language learner (ELL) students. The chapter concludes with recommendations for programming and future research.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes Bradley's embedded ESL endorsement program and its development before discussing the program's strengths and challenges with special emphasis on undergraduate teacher candidates' knowledge of pedagogy and cultural awareness as it relates to advocacy and social justice for ELL students.

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BACKGROUND

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of English language learners (ELLs) in American public schools increased from 8.8% during the 2003-2004 academic year to 9.3% during the 2013-2014 academic year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). By 2014, Alaska, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas had the highest percentages of ELL enrollment in the United States, ranging from 15.5% to 22.7% of the total students enrolled. Illinois ranked tenth highest in the country, with 191,057 ELLs representing 9% of the total student community.

The significant increase in ELL enrollment across the United States in recent years indicates that today's teachers must be prepared to teach this unique student population. Effective ELL teachers possess both content area knowledge and knowledge of pedagogy in their content area(s) (Menken & Antunez, 2001). They understand how students learn as well as how students acquire both their heritage language(s) and the target language (Krashen, Tse, & McQuillan, 1998; Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). Effective teachers of ELLs also understand that students' literacy skills in their first language provide a foundation for acquiring new languages. They are observant of and self-reflective about the characteristics, experiences, and needs of ELLs, respect their students' feelings and life experiences as important assets of teaching and learning (de Oliveira & Yough, 2015).

Social justice education allows individuals to engage in critical interpretations about how structural layers of oppression shape people's lives. Bell (2016) argued that "social justice education aims to help participants develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society" (p. 4). Due to their deep understanding of and respect for ELLs, effective ELL teachers often become advocates for ELLs and their families (Nieto, 2013) as well as advocates for social justice in education (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; Valenzuela, 2016).

Ideally, ELL teacher preparation begins at the college undergraduate level. At Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, requirements for the Illinois English as a Second Language (ESL) Endorsement are embedded within four different accredited teacher education programs. Accreditation demonstrates that all courses and clinical experiences in a program are academically rigorous and relevant to the responsibilities of practicing teachers. Currently, Bradley's ESL endorsement program is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), with accreditation by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (2016) in progress.

HISTORY AND OVERVIEW OF BRADLEY UNIVERSITY'S ESL ENDORSEMENT PROGRAM

The Department of Teacher Education at Bradley University offers both undergraduate and graduate programs of study. Undergraduate degrees are offered in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Learning Behavior Specialist (Special Education), Middle School Education, and High School Education. Middle School and High School Education are offered in a variety of content areas, such as English, mathematics, and biology.

Since most Bradley undergraduate students come from privileged households to pursue higher education in a predominantly white institution, faculty in the Department of Teacher Education have long recognized the importance of addressing issues of social justice in the university's teacher education

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