

# PREPARING ESL TEACHERS TO TEACH CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

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## **Introduction**

When most people hear the term “English learner” in the US these days, the news rhetoric surrounding immigrants tends to jump to mind, even though most English learners are not immigrants, but rather, are born in the United States. (Zong&Batalova, 2015). The pressure on schools is two-fold: the pressure to do better at meeting the needs of these culturally and linguistically diverse students, while also now having to answer questions about culturally responsive practices from those listening to the media reports. ESL teachers in these schools sit at the crossroads of the current storm. Faced with supporting the very students whom others threaten, working with parents and families that are fearful, and facing increasing caseloads with fewer resources are daunting tasks that accompany their actual work of supporting content-based language acquisition. All of these factors point to the need for these specialists to be highly trained and qualified to work with the culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families that they serve. This study was conducted as part of a process to create a graduate-level ESL teacher education program in the United States, designed to train in-service teachers in meeting the needs of English learners (ELs) in US public schools and enable those teachers to gain certification/endorsement in English as Second Language (ESL). To do this, it is important to understand who those learners are, second language acquisition, the

context and historical effects of instruction for ELs in the United States, along with what research tells us about effective practices that result in ELs having robust academic success throughout their K-12 experience. These factors will then be used to develop the course of study, curriculum and instructional strategies that will be employed throughout the graduate program.

The study was guided by the following questions:

- Who are English learners in U.S. schools?
- What are important factors in second language acquisition? How are these played out via instructional decisions in U.S. schools?
- What are important teacher qualities that promote academic achievement for ELs?

Historically, given the nature of immigration to the United States, public schools have consistently had populations of English learners. Today, while the majority of these students are native-born to the United States (Zong&Batalova, 2015), others are labeled as immigrants, with many of those considered refugees, either from poverty or violence or both. Given the nature of the areas these students come from, many have had limited or interrupted formal education experiences, and may have experienced severe trauma before, during and/or after their arrival. Some come to school fully literate in their home language, while others have not learned how to read. The wide variety of needs that these students present, along with the varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds they represent can present a challenge for U.S. educators who may not have had the training or experience to know how to best support the language development and academic learning of these students.

English learners that enroll in public schools in the United States represent a wide variety of linguistic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. These students must not only learn English, but also grade-level skills and knowledge across curriculum areas. To do so, they need more than just exposure to English, (see Lau v. Nichols, 1973) and indeed,

there are many laws and regulations related to the additional pieces necessary for ELs to become academically successful (Zacarian, 2012).

Teachers and administrators that make decisions affecting curriculum, instructional practices, and overall school and classroom systems must be specially trained to ensure the academic success of these learners. This training needs to encompass specific pedagogical training, expertise, and appropriate cultural responsiveness (de Jong & Harper, 2005; de Jong, Harper & Coady, 2013; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2002). Since English learners may come from homes in poverty, arrive as immigrants or refugees, and/or may be students of color, specific dispositions related to teaching English learners, students from homes in poverty and students of color must also be included (de Jong & Harper, 2011; Gay, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2007; Tellez & Waxman, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Some states face more of a challenge than others, with Massachusetts used as an example here, as not only has there been significant growth in the English learner population over the past 10 years, but also as noted by Slama, Haunes, Sacks, Lee, and August (2015) “the average ELL student in Massachusetts attended ‘triply segregated’ schools--- those with high proportions of minority students, ELL students and students from low income households---compared to the average non-ELL student” (p. i).

Recently, the need to understand trauma and be able to help students who have experienced it as part of their refugee or immigrant experience has also arisen and is a critical issue currently experienced by many districts (Gandara, 2018; Gandara & Fe, 2018a; Gandara & Fe, 2018b; Gandara & Sanchez, 2018; Zacarian, Alverz-Ortiz, & Haynes, 2017). Mader (2015) reports a critical need for teachers to be better prepared to work with “diverse, low-income students and the trauma that can impact students from those backgrounds” (p.1).

Unfortunately, the lack of teacher preparation to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners is well documented (Goldring, Gray,&Bitterman, 2013; U.S.Department of Education (United States Department of Education (USDOE), 2016). Add to that that the majority of teachers in our schools are white females from middle class backgrounds, and there becomes a cultural understanding gap as well, suggesting the need for extensive cultural responsiveness training (USDOE, 2016).

### **English Learners**

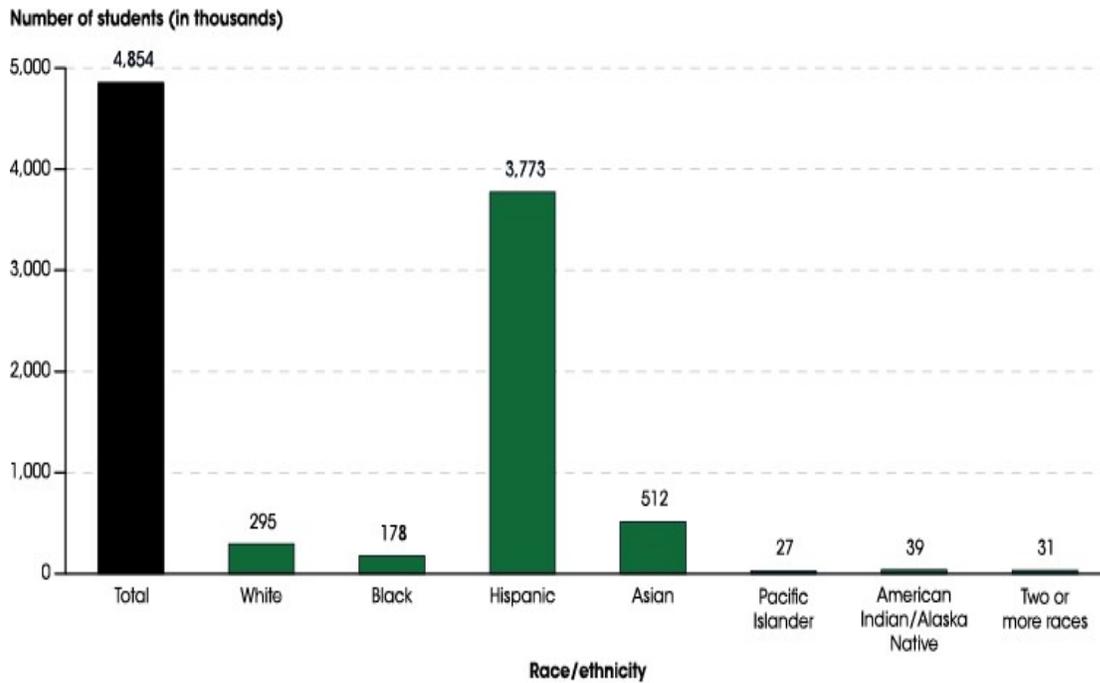
The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2019) identifies English learners as “individuals who have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language to be unable to learn successfully in classrooms or to participate fully in the larger U.S. society” (p. 1). As noted by NCES, (2019), English learners made up a total of 9.6% of the total publicschool population in 2016 (up from 8.1% in 2000), while individual states had widely different populations (West Virginia just had .9%, while California had 20.2%). The home language of students also varied, with the largest groups speaking Spanish, followed by Arabic and Chinese. It should be noted that within all of those language groups there may be some significant variation in dialects as well. The following charts identify number/percentage of ELs by home language background as well as broken down by race.

**Table 1. Number and percentage distribution of English language learner (ELL) students in public schools and number of ELL students as a percent of total public school enrollment, by the 10 most commonly reported home languages of ELL students: Fall 2016**

Home language	Number of ELL students	Percentage distribution of ELL students <sup>1</sup>	Number of ELL students as a percent of total enrollment
Spanish, Castilian	3,790,949	76.6	7.7
Arabic	129,386	2.6	0.3
Chinese	104,147	2.1	0.2
Vietnamese	78,732	1.6	0.2
English <sup>2</sup>	70,014	1.4	0.1
Somali	38,440	0.8	0.1
Russian	34,843	0.7	0.1
Hmong	33,059	0.7	0.1
Haitian, Haitian Creole	31,608	0.6	0.1
Portuguese	28,214	0.6	0.1

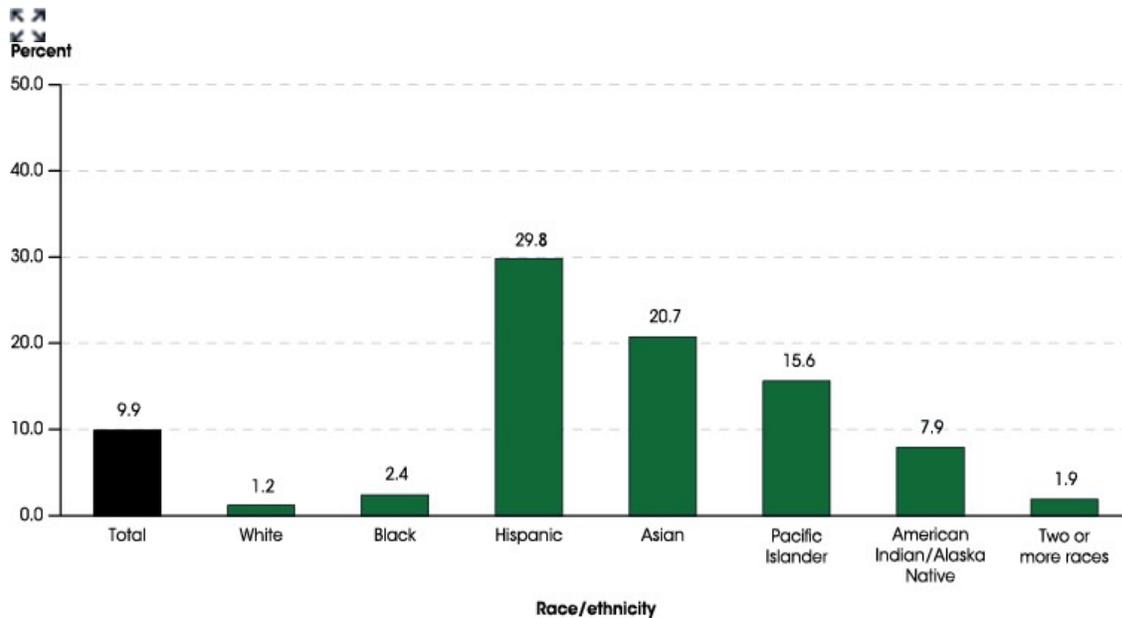
*Note:* Reprinted from “English Language Learners in Public Schools,” by NCES, 2019, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgf.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp).

**Figure 8.1. Number of English language learner (ELL) students in public schools, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2015**



Note: Reprinted from “English Language Learners in Public Schools,” by NCES, 2019, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgf.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp).

**Figure 8.2. Percentage of public school students identified as English language learner (ELL) students, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2015**



*Note:* Reprinted from “English Language Learners in Public Schools,” by NCES, 2019, retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgf.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp).

On a more local level, Massachusetts serves as an excellent statewide example for the need to increase teachers’ abilities to reach English learners. Sugarman and Geary (2018), provided a well-defined picture of English learners in Massachusetts schools. In the 2017-2018 school year, districts around MA reported 10% of students identified as English learners. Following trends noted nationwide, most of those students were located in urban areas, and the vast majority of them spoke Spanish as their native language (54 %). They go on to identify a significant gap in English learner achievement: “Students who remain in the EL subgroup are not performing at a level where their achievement on mainstream assessments is comparable to that of their English-proficient peers. Whereas this lag is expected for students in their first several years of learning English, concerns about the significant numbers of long-term ELs—those identified as ELs for six or more

years-not scoring proficient in English language arts (ELA) and math have driven policy makers to strengthen the ways they hold schools accountable for EL outcomes on academic assessments” (p. 5).

The gap grows wider in both ELA and math as ELs get older. For ELA, the gap in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade was 27 points, but in 10<sup>th</sup> grade it was 49 points. Similar differences are noted in math, with the gap in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade being 23 points and up to 53 points in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Clearly the instructional practices being used are not resulting in robust academic grade-level achievement for these students as Sugarman and Geary (2018) note,

“ . . . graduation rates in Massachusetts have increased 3 percent over the last five years for students overall but are basically unchanged for ELs, with large gaps between the two groups. For the class of 2017, the share of ELs to graduate within four years was 63 percent, compared to a four-year graduation rate of 88 percent for all students. These rates show a wider gap between ELs and all students than is seen at the national level for the most recent year available (SY 2015-2016) where rates were 67 percent for ELs and 84 percent for all students.” (p. 7).

### **Second Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement**

Language acquisition is a complex process, regardless of whether it is a first or subsequent language. The most commonly accepted theories about second language acquisition suggest that language is acquired because there is a reason to use it---and that comprehension precedes output (or speech). These sociocultural perspectives suggest that language originates as individuals attempt to make meaning and communicate about events and topics of importance. Bakhtin (1981) suggested that social use and language learning occur together as an individual attempt to use language to participate in their various communities. Further descriptions are given of these language communities that characterize individuals as being apprentices, learning how to fit in, to participate and whom have different levels of expertise over time (Lave & Wagner, 1991). Norton and

Toohy (2011), identify this process as always being in motion and claim that this development of identity via communication is a fluid and multi-layered process. Given this perspective, of language learning being situated within a social process where language is the medium for individuals to exchange ideas, opinions, express their sense of self or claim an identity, where sometimes they are beginners and sometimes the expert, language learning can be an intense and complex process.

In contrast to the above, two perspectives, behaviorist and structuralist, have historically been at the root of language education, breaking language teaching down into pieces. The behaviorist theory, first proposed by B.F. Skinner (1957) focused on cycles of stimuli and responses, to create habits. In this perspective, learning occurs through copying and memorization, including children imitating the language of those around them. Structuralists view language as independent pieces to be learned and then put together. Vocabulary, grammar, and rules dominate this instruction, and the dominant theories suggest that in order to acquire a language, an individual must be conscious of all of the rules and forms of the language (Johnson, 2009). Along these lines, Krashen (1981, 1983) suggested that learners needed comprehensible input through authentic language use in order to make sense of the language. These perspectives would suggest that language learners need to learn the rules or grammar, receive comprehensible input--or language that they can understand within the current context, be able to use the language themselves by communicating with others, and be able to use their first language skills and knowledge and apply it to their learning of the second language (Krashen 1981; Garcia, 2009; Swain, 2000). Furthermore, being able to use content-based vocabulary in specific situations and understand inflections of words and phrases (and be able to use the same) are also considered important skills. (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005; Chung, 2012; Goldenberg, 2008;).

As English is the language which dominates schools, academic preparation and academic assessments in the United States, English acquisition is critical for success. This leads then to the question of which perspective results in the most achievement for English learners. As evident from the data presented above, the traditional language “teaching” experience in schools is not resulting in robust academic achievement for our nation’s English learners. While evidence exists that providing some form of English language instruction is better than not providing it at all (Saunders, Goldenberg & Marcelletti, 2013), research on providing explicit instruction related to rules, grammar, or specific features of language has been primarily focused on studies of college-aged and adult students. Saunders et al., 2013 argue that such research be carefully extrapolated to younger populations. They caution that explicit should not be confused with “direct” instruction that is typically connected to remediation or with instruction for students with disabilities. Rather that explicit instruction compliments content-based instruction that promotes “comprehension, oral fluency, self-confidence, and communicative abilities” (p. 19), by adding to understanding of pronunciation, syntax and pragmatics. However, this explicit instruction must take place at developmentally appropriate times in the language learner’s acquisition process, especially as related to literacy instruction. Students at lower levels of English proficiency are typically treated to instructional practices designed for native language learners or students with disabilities. While such “direct” instruction has been shown to be effective for native English speakers and some students with disabilities, the opposite is true for English learners in the lower stages of acquisition. These strategies are best reserved for students who are at the higher end of proficiency (Goldenberg, 2013).

Perhaps it is not an either/or question, but rather a question of how to blend an appropriate amount of explicit instruction within a learning environment that is welcoming, accepting of cultural and linguistical differences, and promotes authentic interactions where learners are supported in using language to discuss, reflect, analyze

and think about learning. It is clear that sociocultural pedagogies are largely missing in our teacher preparation programs, suggesting that teacher education programs should incorporate these ideas and techniques throughout the coursework.

Standards-based reforms have focused heavily on the measurement of individual skills and knowledge. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that were released in 2010 have led to a focus on the academic language needed to be successful in the content areas. An example of this are the literacy standards for the content areas of science and social studies that emphasize the use and teaching of academic language. So far, meeting these standards for ELs has proven challenging for teachers and schools. The CCSS has recognized that ELs “may require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge.” (CCSS, n.d., para. 1). However, little guidance was given as to what appropriate instructional supports or aligned assessments might look like. The TESOL International Association and others have tried to step in with resources to assist educators and to promote educator understanding on the important role that language plays in the Common Core Standards. While guidelines like these show there is potential to bring together both language specialists and content-specialists within our schools to address the needs of all students in meeting these standards, many school systems’ organizational structures are not supportive of the collaboration time necessary to accomplish this, nor are most teachers effectively prepared to work collaboratively together (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010).

Unfortunately, the literature is full of references to the lack of teacher training to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. (Lucas, 2011; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Rueda & Stillman, 2012). Furthermore, the average teacher is most likely a white female who does not share the culture, language or background of her students (USDOE, 2016). With the rapid growth in ELs and a shortage of certified teachers to work with them, many districts have moved to inclusion models and have

sought to train their classroom teachers to better meet their needs. This results in classrooms where typically ELs do not have a teacher that has experience or expertise in differentiating instruction to meet their linguistic needs and who may also have extremely different educational backgrounds and experiences than the students in their classrooms.

The state of Massachusetts sought to remedy this by requiring all classroom teachers who serve ELs to partake in Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) training (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MA DESE], 2012). SEI covers some basics of language acquisition and teaches specific instructional strategies that teachers are expected to use with all students, but which are supposed to specifically support English learners. While such a step seems like a logical place to start, there has been little to no progress noted in the years since the requirement was put in place (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). Harper and de Jong (2009) noted the same result when a similar kind of training was implemented in Florida and concluded that the required training “result(ed) in the displacement and deskilling of ESL teachers and dependence on the instruction of minimally prepared mainstream teachers who are equipped with scripted materials and a generic toolkit of teaching strategies presumed to be effective for all students” (p. 147). Similar findings were reported by Evans Fanaeian (2018) after she conducted a review of pre-service teacher preparation programs. After examining practices of providing mainstream teachers with basic training to work with English learners, she found that these types of language education policies (in the studied states of California, Florida and Massachusetts) caused “recent graduates to act as *de facto* language specialists in their places of employment” (p. 219) and suggests that policies such as these devalue actual ESL specialists and contribute to the “marginalization of English learners in schools” (p 220).

While these efforts have been unsuccessful, research suggests that mainstream teachers need to understand: the difference between social/conversational and academic English (Cummins, 1981), overall language acquisition and second language acquisition (Lucas

& Grinberg, 2008; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2002), the importance of the use of L1 and code switching, and how first language use and knowledge impact second language acquisition (Cummins, 2000; Garcia, 2009), how to adapt their instructional language to provide comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981), teach content vocabulary (Chung, 2012; Marzano & Pickering, 2015) and sociocultural perspectives, including the cultural norms, family structures and practices, and the role of culture (both within the classroom and in the broader community) (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2016; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). While this is not a complete list, it characterizes the research. Unfortunately, the picture is skewed by a strong dependence on early structuralist theories (Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1981) whose importance and focus has been questioned (Bunch, 2013; Liu, 2015, Hawkins, 2004a). Regardless of the criticism, these theories remain on many “required” lists for teacher educators to cover. The lists of required understanding, knowledge and skills for ESL teachers are similar, with added intensity in language education, linguistics, and a stronger focus on cultural knowledge, along with some that suggest a critical need for social justice training, models and practice. (Bunch, 2013; Hawkins, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Zeichner, 2011).

Despite the many years of sociocultural research, many teacher-education programs and school-based practices remain centered in a combined behaviorist and structuralist approach. Lave and Wenger (1991) viewed learning as participation by individuals in communities, where the individuals engage in practices and language use, with a critical importance placed on the modeling done by experienced or mature members of that community, noting that beginners should have full access to these models in order to facilitate their growth. Hawkins (2004b, 2010, 2011) deepened this concept by suggesting that we can better understand how language development occurs by more deeply investigating how social and linguistic interactions within the classroom community influence EL’s use of and acquisition of both social and academic English. By doing so, teachers can focus specifically on creating opportunities for authentic language use and

exploration. This requires teachers to be aware of areas such as positioning and identities, the idea of apprenticeship within a community, communities of learners, status and power and looking at the classroom as a mini-ecology of sorts. Norton (2000) found that issues of power between those learning a language and those who speak the target language were not addressed in theories of second language acquisition and believes that motivations or, as she further fleshed out, “investment” in the learning process was a complicated concept. Differentiating from motivation, which is frequently used as a negative description of something language learners may be lacking, Norton & Toohey (2011) clarify the idea of investment:

“Investment, on the other hand, sees language learners as having complex identities, which change across time and space, and which are constructed on the basis of the socially given, and the individually struggled-for. Thus, while motivation can be seen as a primarily psychological construct (Dornyei 2001), investment is a “ sociological construct, and seeks to make meaningful connections between a learner’s desire and commitment to learn a language and their changing identities” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420).

These theories strongly suggest that teacher education programs need to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to see, experience, analyze and reflect upon interactions between students, students and teachers and systems that reinforce or create patterns of power, community and equity of access. Johnson (2009) also suggests that teachers need to understand and reflect upon how they influence these classroom practices, interactions between students, and foster language development via opportunities for language rather than a strict focus on instruction on language forms, structure, etc.

While there is a preponderance of theories related to effective pedagogical practices for English learners, Goldenberg (2013), notes the “surprisingly little research on common practices or recommendations for practice with the more than 5 million ELs in our nation’s schools” (p. 4). In an extensive review of the literature, he suggests that there

are three principles important in the field of teacher preparation related to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. First, the concept that good teaching is good teaching emerges extensively. This includes:

- “Clear goals and objectives
- Appropriate and challenging material;
- Well-designed instruction and instructional routines
- Clear instructions and supportive guidance as learners engage with new skills
- Effective modeling of skills, strategies and procedures
- Active student engagement and participation
- Informative feedback to learners
- Application of new learning and transfer to new situations
- Practice and periodic review
- Structured, focused interactions with other students
- Frequent assessment with reteaching as needed
- Well-established classroom routines and behavior norms” (p. 5)

However, effective practices for all must be augmented with additional support for English learners in order for them to achieve academically---so just “good teaching” isn’t enough. Identified successful practices include (but are not limited to):

- the use of L1
- helping students connect learning to their own unique backgrounds and experiences, or if necessary---to support students in gaining background knowledge via shared experiences, videos, etc.
- the use of a variety of graphic organizers with language at the students’ level
- using visuals and realia

- hands-on learning experiences
- additional practice
- sentence frames and models of language for both speaking and writing.

In his final point, Goldenberg (2013) states, “there is no controversy over the positive effects of home language instruction on home language skills,” (p. 9) and goes on to describe how such skills can be transferred to the second language. Bilingual instruction can positively impact the academic and linguistic growth of students, resulting not only in bilingual citizens, but also facilitates the academic and linguistic progress of the students. Other research focuses on programming for English learners, noting the importance of Newcomer programs, programming specific for adolescents—both those in the early stages of language acquisition and those who are identified as Long-term English learners (LTELs), and exemplary learning environments (Rivera et al., 2010). While these are important in understanding the impact of organizational choices on EL success, they are not as critical to the focus of this work, as while they are important to understand, they do not directly pertain to the education of ESL teacher candidates.

### **Cultural Responsiveness**

With the focus on skills and standards, missing from much of the current public discourse around EL achievement is a discussion of the need for teachers and schools to be culturally responsive toward the wide diversity in their learners’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This conversation is becoming more prominent as ELs continue to lag behind their English-speaking peers, even after the implementation of teacher training programs such as SEI in Massachusetts and ESOL in Florida. As noted above, the vast majority of English learners in U.S. schools are students of color, while most of their teachers are white females. The need for culturally responsive schools, classrooms and practices has never been greater, and as such, culturally responsive

practices and educator reflection must be incorporated into every teacher preparation program.

TESOL (2019), the international association for teaching English as a second or other language, suggests that teacher candidates not only demonstrate knowledge of research and theories of equity and cultural and linguistic diversity that promote learning for ELs, but also suggests that they be able to “identify and describe the impact of his/her identify, role, cultural understandings and personal biases and conscious knowledge of U.S. culture on his/her interpretation of the educational strengths and needs of individual ELLs and ELLs in general” (p. 8).

Castagno (2014), singles out this issue of racial inequity and describes how the dominance of whites in education affects the instruction and success (or lack thereof) for students of color. Whiteness is a term that is seen often in the literature. As described by Castagno,

“*Whiteness* refers to structural arrangements and ideologies of race dominance. Racial power and inequities are at the core of whiteness, but all forms of power and inequity create and perpetuate whiteness. The function of whiteness is to maintain the status quo, and although White people most often benefit from whiteness, some people of color have tapped into the ideological components of whiteness for their own financial and educational benefits. Whiteness maintains power and privilege by perpetuating and legitimating the status quo while simultaneously maintaining a veneer of neutrality, equality and compassion. Understanding the links between whiteness and diversity-related educational policy and practice is, therefore, an important and yet relatively unexplored, task for educators.” (p. 8)

Whiteness affects our practices within schools and classrooms. For instance, students of color are disproportionately represented in office referrals, referrals to special education, suspensions and expulsions, and just as disproportionately are not referred for gifted and talented programs. (Milner, et al, 2019). They claim this is vital to emphasize as

“educators are not taught to understand and build on the historical context of a community and school, understand and negotiate the sociopolitical landscape of an environment, or develop partnerships with family and community members of their students and other stakeholders. These are explicit skills that can help teacher better meet the needs of their students---and ones that are often overlooked in the face of lesson planning and text preparation” (p. 45).

With almost 94% of all English learners identified as students of color (Zong&Batalova, 2015), and with the current anti-immigrant political rhetoric, we, as educators, have a moral obligation to fight back as we advocate for the students we serve. This is especially important for our latinx students and their families who frequently suffer from misconceptions about their culture and behaviors. Morales, Abricaand Herrera (2019) found:

“It is in this context we outline a particularly harmful narrative: the *mañana* complex among White teachers. As such, they associate Mexican–American children with the term of *mañana*—meaning they are only concerned with tomorrow and not vested in education, and thus not teachable. We argue this concept is a powerful and historically rooted narrative within education that *has* and *continues* to delimit educational opportunities for Mexican–American children in the United States . . .who continue to be educated by a teaching force comprised predominantly of White women who potentially suffer from this complex” (p.505).

Since ESL teachers are often the first and main point of contact for ELs and their families, and as such, they frequently become privy to the condition the family is living in or the trauma experienced during immigration, it is especially critical for their teacher preparation coursework to include culturally responsiveness training, expectations of advocacy and training in working with students who have experienced trauma. Zeichner, (2011), notes that that it is critical that this training not just be the type where teacher candidates passively receive information about culturally responsive practices, but that they actually have models and get to practice working in diverse schools and the community for social justice. Hawkins, (2011) reinforces this view, stating:

“It is not clear to any of us what social justice education looks like in schools and classrooms, nor can it become so. Teachers, classrooms, students and families are idiosyncratic, not uniform, as are the communities and institutions within which they function, and social justice education must be responsive to local situations and conditions. The same can be said for social justice language teacher education; it cannot be prescriptive. I think that the best we can do is to roll up our sleeves and, in the most ethical ways we can devise, get immersed in the messy work of community building for social change” (p. 122).

Given the high percentage of English learners who are non-white, many of whom also come from homes in poverty and live in communities vastly different than those of the teachers that serve them, culturally responsive instruction and actual work in schools and the community, along with subsequent reflection must be embedded into teacher preparation coursework, particularly for those who will serve ELs.

## **Curriculum and Standards**

Based on the above information, an assumption can be made that any graduate ESL teacher preparation program must include not only specific linguistic and second language acquisition information, cultural responsiveness, a focus on family and community, specific instructional strategies, planning and assessment related to language acquisition, but also reinforce “good” teaching practices that the teachers may or may not be employing. There have been attempts by many official organizations and states to identify the subject matter and knowledge (SMK) needed by an ESL teacher. However, there are no nationally recognized standards. The closest we have in the field come from organizations such as TESOL and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The WIDA organization, which provides annual assessment tools for many of the states and which is used in Massachusetts, provides student standards, but does not have standards for ESL teachers.

As an example, the TESOL International Association (2019) provides guidance for teacher education programs and lists 5 standards which reflect the above discussion. These are:

- Knowledge about language: language structures, second language acquisition, English language use, and specific strategies to promote academic language and literacy in the content areas).
- ELLs in the sociocultural context: “Demonstrate and apply knowledge of the impact of dynamic academic, personal, familial, cultural social and sociopolitical context on the education and language acquisition of ELLs as supported by research and theories. . .” (p. 8)
- Planning and implementing instruction: planning to meet grade-level standards, use of evidence-based strategies, interactive, student-centered

approaches, reflection, collaboration with colleagues, differentiation and adjusting instruction

- Assessment and evaluation: able to use various classroom and standardized assessments (includes WIDA Access in MA), analyze the results and adjust practice as indicated, and be able to communicate with a wide variety of stakeholders.
- Professionalism and leadership

The fifth standard, professionalism and leadership, is really meant to be all encompassing throughout the other four. For example, ESL teachers should be able to share their knowledge about language with their peers in such a way that is it easily understandable and allows the peer to incorporate that knowledge into their planning and instruction. It includes collaboration, coaching, advocating for ELs and their families, reflection, and continuing professional development to stay current in the field.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2010) also addresses ESL teacher preparation and while they have nine different standards, they are similar to the standards listed by TESOL.

- Knowledge of students
- Knowledge of culture and diversity
- Home, school and community connections
- Knowledge of the English language
- Knowledge of English language acquisition
- Instructional practice
- Assessment
- Teacher as learner

- Professional leadership and advocacy

Finally, individual states have identified guidelines for ESL teachers as well. As an example, Massachusetts has identified the subject matter knowledge (SMK) guidelines for ESL teachers and requires the SMKs to be identified and present throughout the program of study. These SMKs include:

- Language and Linguistics.
  - Language as a system: functions and registers of language.
  - The structure and nature of language: Phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse varieties, aspects of social and academic language, rhetorical registers, and writing conventions.
  - Language variation and change.
- Language acquisition and literacy development.
  - Theory and research in first and second language acquisition.
  - Knowledge of the significant theories and practices for developing reading skills and reading comprehension in English as a first language at different educational levels.
  - Relevance of linguistic differences between the first and the second language for reading instruction in English.
  - Differences in initial reading instruction in English (including phonemic awareness and phonics) for students who may or may not be literate in their first language: effects of first language literacy on second language learning and literacy.
  - Formal and informal measures for assessing development in reading skills and their use with second language learners.
  - Development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary.

- Approaches and practices for developing writing skills and the use of writing tools.
- Writing process and formal elements of writing.
- Oral/Aural fluency in English at different proficiency levels.
- Social and academic English and academic language for the content areas.
- Development of metalinguistic skills and vocabulary appropriate to cognitive, academic, and language proficiency levels.
- Instructional approaches and best practices for teaching ESL
  - Foundations of ESL instruction.
  - Theories and sheltered strategies for developing English language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for English language learners in bilingual or multilingual classrooms from the primary grades on.
  - Research-based practices for English language development.
  - Program models and teaching strategies for developing and integrating language skills.
  - Planning and implementing standards-based ESL and content instruction.
- Socio-cultural and socio-emotional considerations in teaching ESL.
  - Regional, socioeconomic, and developmental factors influencing language variation and bilingualism or multilingualism.
  - The nature and role of culture and its intersection with teaching and learning.
  - Cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic identity.
  - Intercultural communication in the classroom.
  - Special populations and situations: long-term English language learners, English learners with disabilities, and students with limited or interrupted formal education.

- The role of the community, families, and schools in English language learner education.
- Formal and informal English language assessment procedures and instruments for English language learners: selection, administration, and interpretation; identification of bias and normal variation in performance, as well as possible differentiation from learning disabilities.
- Federal and state laws pertaining to the education of English language learners.
- Theoretical, political, and historical foundations of education for English language learners.
- Instruction, assessments, resources, research, and advances in the field of ESL.
- Strategies for school collaboration, family outreach, and community involvement for English language learners.” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE), 2018, pp. 25-26)

All three documents reflect similar foci and should guide the development of courses which include: language acquisition and sociolinguistics, ESL methods, sociocultural factors affecting ELs in schools, family and community, culturally responsive teaching, and assessment. In addition, Baecher (2012) reported that novice ESL teachers feel underprepared to teach literacy to students who may have limited literacy in their own language, gaps in their formal education, or otherwise be significantly behind grade level. This is of particular concern for middle and high school teachers. Teachers at all grade levels described feeling underprepared to work with ELs who also were identified with a disability. Since the research is clear that students of color and ELs are disproportionately identified with disabilities, this is an important area to address. Finally, the teachers in the study claimed that while they had basic instruction in assessment, they were not fully prepared to meet the legal requirements of annual testing of ELs, newcomers or the reporting of such. Since this testing usually is the responsibility of the ESL specialist, it also needs to be included in their teacher

preparation program. Understanding collaboration techniques and being able to work with their classroom peers to plan and deliver standards-based instruction was also a concern, although not reported as strongly as the three other areas described above.

Harvey and Teemant (2012) reinforce the importance of ESL teachers being able to collaborate with their mainstream peers. In a study of ESL administrators, collaboration was one of three key areas of responsibility highlighted, with student instruction and serving as a cultural liaison for students and families being the other two. The administrators surveyed felt that collaboration was one of the most challenging aspects to the role, as school organizational structures and issues of credibility, status and power frequently affect collaboration efforts and even whether collaboration can occur during the normal work hours. While the ESL teachers had strong preparation in language acquisition and pedagogy, the administrators felt that the ESL teachers needed more preparation in areas such as a disposition of persistence (in working with others), relating to ELs and their families on a personal level, supporting the literacy development of ELs, and the understanding of the cultural differences of ELs and the differences between EL populations. These findings reinforce the need for better cultural responsiveness training, sociocultural instruction and a focus on developing relationships with peers, students and families.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Program Development**

While this study used Massachusetts as a primary local example, the research clearly points to a nationwide need to improve ESL teacher education programs in the United States. It is evident that to fully prepare ESL specialists to be truly effective with English learners, a graduate level ESL teacher preparation program must do more than just ensure the teachers understand language acquisition and language features. To be fully accomplished practitioners, they also will need to model and lead in the areas of sociocultural understanding and culturally responsive teaching. In addition, they need specific skills and knowledge of ESL methods, curriculum and assessment, including

their role in the annual measurement of EL progress. Social justice themes and advocacy need to be embedded throughout the programs' coursework to prepare students to work with students of color who typically also come from homes in poverty. Finally, the added areas of literacy for ELs, content instruction combined with academic language instruction and use, instructing ELs who have disabilities (while also being able to collaborate with peers to do all of these), and working with students who have experienced trauma, should be included to enable the teachers to effectively support the diversity they will encounter in their students. Reflection, advocacy, attention to families and communities, co-planning and collaboration, and student-centered practice should be woven throughout, building on "good teaching" practices in general.

In order to accomplish these goals, a number of systematic pieces at the university level (besides the actual courses) must be put in place. As noted in Mader (2015), students need a significant amount of meaningful practice in schools and classrooms with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including socio-economic standing. The stress of making multiple decisions daily (and the resulting resiliency and confidence that can result from going through this process repeatedly), the experience of working with students who bring vastly different backgrounds and experiences, the empathy that can be fostered and developed, are all positive benefits of structured interactions and significant time spent in schools. Connections with highly competent supervising teachers need to be fostered by the university, along with a very stringent assessment system of not only content knowledge by also pedagogical knowledge to ensure that students graduate knowing how to reach and teach a diverse group of students and are not only specialists in a content area. Finally, the program must have exceptionally high standards for teacher candidates. The students they will be serving are typically underserved and deserve better. Just "good teaching" is not enough.

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