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Abstract

The number of students who speak languages other than English continues to grow in both rural and urban public schools in the United States. Teachers are challenged to accommodate the diverse needs of English language learners (ELLs). This exploratory study investigated the perceptions of eleven teachers from a rural public elementary school in North Carolina and how these perceptions affect the learning experiences of ELLs. This article discusses pedagogical implications for in-service teachers educating ELLs.

Resumen

El número de estudiantes que habla inglés como segundo idioma continua creciendo en las escuelas públicas rurales y urbanas en los Estados Unidos. El reto para los maestros es cómo ayudar a los estudiantes diversos a adaptarse al sistema educativo. Este estudio investigativo explora las percepciones de once maestros de una escuela elemental pública de zona rural en Carolina del Norte y cómo estas percepciones afectan las experiencias de aprendizaje de estos estudiantes. En el artículo se discuten implicaciones pedagógicas para los maestros que imparten este tipo de enseñanza.

Keywords

English Language Learners, methods of teaching ESL, teachers perceptions

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Rationale

The demand for certified, highly qualified teachers with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) licensure continues to intensify due to the significant rise in the number of linguistically and culturally diverse students nationally and particularly in rural settings within the United States. The purpose of this article is to elucidate teachers' perceptions regarding integrated, inclusive settings led by educators who are highly qualified to work with all students, but particularly students for whom English is their second language. There is a critical need for highly qualified ESOL teachers in the Eastern North Carolina area, where rapidly growing numbers of different languages are represented among the student population, but a majority of teachers are not well prepared to effectively provide for the educational needs of these second language learners.

The authors proposed a distance education delivery model to provide instructional services to in-service teachers who had significant numbers of English language learners (ELLs) in their rural, public school classrooms. This model was predicated on the belief that teachers can benefit from effective professional development in English as a second language (ESL) via distance education strategies that address the needs of rural teachers and their students. Project East Carolina University Leading Exceptional Annual Progress (ECU LEAP) provides a model of such professional development, which integrates the work of specialized university faculty with that of practicing professionals in rural counties. Project LEAP represents a model of grant-funded, online, ESL professional development at East Carolina University, which serves the teaching and learning needs of K-12 rural professionals and their students.

Although the model is largely provided through electronic modalities, an important feature of the professional development offered includes face-to-face opening and closing sessions as well as the opportunity to meet with other site-based participants in collegial learning communities on an as-needed basis. This blended model, composed of an effective combination of online and site-based inquiry, was considered essential, given the remoteness of school sites from the university campus as well as the smaller number of teachers to be served in most rural communities of the geographical area. Much has been written regarding the social distance attendant to online learning, but when coupled with the site-based learning communities developed in the Project LEAP model, the online component ceases to be a purveyor of social distance and becomes rather an efficient communication pathway as well as an effective communicative archive for collaborating professionals.

Theoretical Framework

Research indicates that the importance of professional development has been recognized as a valuable component to providing comprehensible instruction to second language learners (Howard, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Wong, 1993). ESL program delivery varies greatly among school systems, yet a common purpose unites program goals

and objectives, which are to ensure that ELL students learn the English language and also participate fully in learning the curriculum at their current grade level (Gitomer, Andal, & Davison, 2005). At the same time, Jimerson (2003) suggests that some special circumstances are attendant to the challenges that rural districts face, including compromised professional development that may affect the actual delivery of services to ELLs. She calls this a competitive disadvantage.

Planning instruction for second language learners can represent a complex equation. As Echevarria and Short (2006) discussed, level of academic achievement for ELLs has lagged significantly below that of their language-majority peers. The literature discusses several strategies that cultivate ELL students' linguistic development: writing and speaking tasks, graphic organizers, explicit instruction of vocabulary, having students work in pairs or small groups, simplified instruction, and learning vocabulary by listening and speaking (Herrera & Murry, 2005; Tran, 2006). According to Numrich (1990), learning strategies such as having students use statements to check comprehension, analyzing text organization, and teaching students to make predictions encourage students' processing skills of comprehension. In addition to language acquisition, content mastery is an essential element of ESOL instruction, and the intersection of these dimensions must be stressed. Finally, the specific learners and their contexts must be considered. As Brock, Moore, and Parks (2007) note, it is a misconception to assume that methods, strategies, and instructional frameworks can be taught and learned in a decontextualized fashion apart from the learners and their specific locations. Second language learners are not all alike (Echevarria & Short, 2006).

Teacher attitudes appear to represent an equally complex consideration for the delivery of services to second language learners. One issue relates to the observation that educators may view second language learners from a deficit perspective. Brock et al. (2007) underscore the challenge of ascertaining teacher beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions, as well as what to do when these constructs are identified but deemed inappropriate. They make the important point that on top of the concern regarding identification of and response to teacher attitudes, teacher educators need to be taking the lead in providing effective instruction regarding these critical issues. The potential impact of these attitudes exacerbates the deleterious effect, because failure in this regard not only affects teachers but their current and future students as well.

Teacher knowledge, as well, is a complicated construct in relation to the instruction of ELLs. Sharkey (2004) makes the point that with respect to curriculum development, such knowledge is woven together with both content knowledge and knowledge of context. Sharkey argues that knowledge of context serves as a critical mediating modality in the theory–practice dynamic of providing instruction and that teacher educators must acknowledge this complex relationship to help ESOL teachers succeed in their knowledge production. Contextualizing, in Sharkey's view, can make it possible for teachers to articulate and define needs and to negotiate appropriate curriculum and instruction.

Research Questions

Will significant differences be observed in an ELL methods course between pre- and postcourse measures regarding subject/teachers' perceptions of (a) the value of learning strategies implemented in coursework, (b) personal knowledge changes in ELL education, (c) professional attitude changes, (d) anticipated student academic achievement, and (e) course satisfaction?

Method

Participants

Eleven in-service teachers from Eastern North Carolina participated in the project (see Table 1). To provide a demographic snapshot of the East Carolina University participants who completed the presurvey ($N = 11$), most indicated they were women ($n = 10, 90.9\%$). Participants most commonly reported having between 4 and 10 years of experience as an educator ($n = 4, 36.4\%$). The majority of respondents had not taken previous courses toward an ESL endorsement or certification ($n = 11, 90.5\%$).

The most commonly reported number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in the participants' classrooms was 1 to 3 students ($n = 10, 90.1\%$). Finally, most respondents indicated they taught Grades 7 to 12 ($n = 6; 54.5\%$).

Eleven in-service teachers were enrolled in a Methods of Teaching ELLs Course, which was an East Carolina University distance education course. The teaching methodology course was a hybrid online course delivered in the spring 2008 semester. Two faculty members commenced the course in a face-to-face orientation and ended the semester with students' project presentations. Throughout the semester participants met online and face to face to discuss course sessions. The course was divided in 8 sessions that included a variety of learning strategies to implement with second language learners in their classrooms.

The 11 participants completed a survey at the beginning and end of the course. Originally the course, which is titled "Dual Language Methods and Learning Strategies," was designed by Center Inter Multicultural Advocate (Herrera & Murry, 2005). The researchers modified the course for use by students at East Carolina University. On the precourse survey, participants completed questions regarding their demographic information, attitudes toward educating ELLs, and a content-based assessment regarding their knowledge of methods of instructing ELLs.

Measure/Instrument

To identify teachers' perceptions and preparation to teach ELL, the researchers administered the survey at the beginning and end of the course. The survey includes 35 learning strategies. Participants were asked to rate only the strategies they personally implemented.

Table 1. Participants' Description

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
What is gender		
Female	10	90.1%
Male	1	9.1%
How many years of experience do you have as an educator?		
Years of experience		
0 years	0	—
1-3 years	3	27.3%
4-10 years	4	36.4%
11-15 years	0	—
16 or more years	3	27.3%
How many university credit hours of coursework have you taken toward an ESL endorsement, certificate, etc.?		
Number of credit hours		
0 hours	10	90.9%
1-3 hours	1	9.1%
4-10 hours	0	—
11 or more hours	0	—
If you are a classroom teacher, how many culturally and linguistically diverse students (identified and unidentified) do you currently have in the classroom?		
Number of culturally and linguistically diverse students		
0 students	0	—
1-3 students	2	18.2%
4-10 students	1	9.1%
11 or more students	4	36.4%
Not applicable/not in classroom	4	36.4%
If you are a classroom teacher, what is the grade level of your current and primary practice?		
Grade level		
Pre-kindergarten–kindergarten	1	9.1%
Grades 1-6	1	9.1%
Grades 7-12	6	54.5%
Not applicable	3	27.3%
What is your content area? (Respondents could select more than one response)		
Content area		
Elementary education	2	18.2%
Language arts/English	3	27.3%
Math	0	—
Science	1	9.1%
Social studies	1	9.1%
Physical education	0	—
Arts (visual, performance, etc.)	0	—
Not teaching in a classroom	3	27.3%
Other	1	9.1%

On the postcourse survey, participants again completed questions regarding their attitudes and knowledge of methods of instructing ELLs. They also provided ratings of the course as compared with other course formats they have experienced and of the teaching strategies they implemented as a course requirement.

The following results provide a summary of the demographic information, attitude changes from pre- to postcourse survey, knowledge changes from pre- to postcourse survey, and the course and strategy ratings.

Results

As part of establishing the need for such a program, a precourse and a postcourse survey were administered to in-service teachers at the beginning and end of the training for teaching ELLs. Among the survey items, one can gain insights into the personal perceptions of readiness to provide comprehensible instruction to second language learners. Student perceptions of self-efficacy in providing for the needs of second language learners were consistently low and aligned with concomitant perceptions that their preparation program had provided both an insufficient theoretical framework as well as insufficient experiences to support their readiness in this area (Manner & Rodriguez, 2008).

How Did Participants Change?

Eleven participants completed the Teaching Methodology to ELLs Postcourse Survey, which allowed for respondents to evaluate the course and the strategies they applied in their classrooms throughout the course. Because the survey was administered at the beginning and end of the course, comparisons can be made between pre- and postcourse survey responses.

Knowledge Changes

Eight participants completed both the precourse survey and the postcourse survey, each of which contained a 31-item content-based assessment relating to methods of instructing dual-language learners. On average, participants completely answered 16.50 questions correctly on the precourse assessment and 19.00 questions correctly on the postsurvey. This average increase of 2.50 complete responses from pre- to post-test approached significance, $t(7) = 2.12, p = .072$.

Attitude Changes

Participants indicated their agreement level with 15 statements completing the stem "I believe it is important to understand/know/learn . . ." along a 4-point scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*.

The mean ratings participants provided at precourse and postcourse are presented in Table 2, along with the standard deviations (*SD*) for each item. Finally, data were

Table 2. Importance Ratings

Item Following Stem "I believe it is important to understand/know/learn ..."	Pretest Mean ^a (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Paired Samples t Value
The degree of anxiety/lack of confidence a student is experiencing with academic tasks, the classroom, and/or the school.	3.63 (0.74)	3.63 (0.52)	0
"How to" strategies for working with CLD students.	3.75 (0.46)	3.88 (0.35)	1.00
How the CLD student's prior educational history (e.g., education in another language, continuous or interrupted attendance, and grade level completed) affects learning in her or his current school setting.	3.75 (0.46)	3.88 (0.35)	1.00
Techniques that are easy to use in the classroom.	3.50 (0.76)	3.88 (0.35)	2.05
The content and concepts of the curriculum to which the student has been exposed, in relation to grade-level expectations.	3.63 (0.52)	3.88 (0.35)	1.53
The value that the student's family places on education and the way in which the family views the role of the teacher.	3.75 (0.46)	3.50 (0.53)	-1.53
How the student's country of origin and/or other social-cultural influences may affect progress in school.	3.38 (1.06)	3.75 (0.46)	1.00
Teaching strategies that build upon what I am already doing in the classroom.	3.75 (0.46)	3.75 (0.46)	0
The student's motivation toward learning the critical concepts of a lesson or unit.	3.38 (0.52)	3.63 (0.52)	1.53
The <i>funds of knowledge</i> that CLD students and family members may bring to the learning community of the school or classroom.	3.63 (0.52)	3.25 (0.46)	-2.05
Whether the classroom curriculum for CLD students meets grade-level expectations or is <i>watered down</i> for their deficiencies.	3.63 (0.52)	3.63 (0.52)	0
If classroom instruction focuses on declarative ("what") knowledge or procedural ("how") knowledge.	3.38 (0.52)	3.50 (0.53)	0.55
Instructional strategies that support <i>the way I teach</i> .	3.25 (0.71)	3.75 (0.46)	2.65*
The nature of the community in which the CLD student grew up during his or her early years (i.e., urban or rural, library access, industrial or agricultural, religions/churches, classes or people).	3.50 (0.76)	3.38 (0.52)	-0.55
Techniques and strategies that can be used <i>with all students</i> .	3.88 (0.35)	3.88 (0.35)	0

Note: CLD = culturally and linguistically diverse.

^aAll ratings were provided along a 4-point scale, where 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Agree*, and 4 = *Strongly Agree*.

* $p < .05$.

Table 3. Estimated CLD Student Educational Achievement Rates

Item	Pretest Mean ^a (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Paired Samples <i>t</i> Value
What percentage of CLD students in your unit do you believe will complete high school?	53.75 (28.13)	56.88 (37.98)	0.34
What percentage of CLD students in your unit do you believe will enroll in 4-year colleges?	39.38 (26.78)	36.25 (36.03)	-0.43
What percentage of CLD students in your unit do you believe will complete degrees at 4-year colleges?	24.38 (19.90)	31.63 (33.43)	1.28

Note: CLD = culturally and linguistically diverse.

^aParticipants provided an estimate of the percentage of CLD students who accomplish each task; thus, ratings ranged from 0 to 100.

submitted to paired samples *t* tests to determine if the change from pretest to posttest was significant; the *t* value is presented for each item. Participants agreed significantly more strongly with one item at the conclusion of the course than at the beginning: "I feel it is important to know instructional strategies that support *the way I teach*."

Student Educational Achievement Estimates

At the beginning and end of the Methods course, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of CLD students they believed would complete high school, enroll in 4-year colleges, and complete 4-year college degrees. Eight respondents completed these questions on both the pre- and postcourse surveys.

The mean percentage estimates participants provided at pre- and postcourse are presented in Table 3, along with the standard deviations (*SD*) for each item. Finally, data were submitted to paired samples *t* tests to determine if the change from pre- to postcourse was significant; the *t* value is presented for each item. Although the estimates were not significantly different from pre- to postcourse (all *ps* > .05), the mean estimates were higher at the postcourse for two of the three items. This suggests that participants were more hopeful with regard to the educational success of their CLD students after completing the Methods course.

Course Perceptions

College and university students possess an array of perceptions and learning styles that influence their views regarding how instructional content should be delivered. At course completion, the 11 participants rated how much they learned in the course in

Table 4. I Have Learned More by Meeting With My Group Members in This Course Than I Did in Traditional Lecture Courses Meeting in Classrooms

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
Strongly disagree	2	20.0
Disagree	2	20.0
Neutral	1	10.0
Agree	4	40.0
Strongly agree	1	10.0

Table 5. I Have Learned More by Meeting With My Group Members in This Course Than I Did in Other Courses Emphasizing Group Discussion

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
Strongly disagree	2	20.0
Disagree	2	20.0
Neutral	3	30.0
Agree	2	20.0
Strongly agree	1	10.0

Table 6. I Have Learned More by Meeting With My Group Members in This Course Than I Did in Other Distance Course Emphasizing the Use of Online Discussion Tools (e.g., Email, Discussion Boards, Chat Rooms)

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
Strongly disagree	2	20.0
Disagree	1	10.0
Neutral	1	10.0
Agree	4	40.0
Strongly agree	1	10.0
Not applicable/no response	1	10.0

relation to other courses they have completed. In particular, they rated the course in comparison with (a) traditional lecture courses, (b) other courses featuring group discussion, and (c) other distance education courses. Half ($n = 5$, 50.0%) of the participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they learned more by meeting with their group members than they did in traditional lecture courses and in other distance education courses. Tables 4, 5, and 6 depict the number and percentage of respondents who selected each agreement response option for each of the three questions.

Table 7. Session 1: Learning Strategies

Strategy	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Vocabulary foldable (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (16.7%)	4 (66.7%)	1 (16.7%)
Elementary student biography card (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Secondary student biography card (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)

Table 8. Session 2: Learning Strategies

Strategy	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Vocabulary quilt (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	2 (40.0%)	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Linking language (<i>n</i> = 4)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (75.0%)	1 (25.0%)
TPSI (<i>n</i> = 8)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Structured academic talk (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	3 (50.0%)
Setting up student configurations (<i>n</i> = 7)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (14.3%)	3 (42.9%)	3 (42.9%)

Table 9. Session 3: Learning Strategies

Strategy	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Guided note-taking (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)	1 (20.0%)
Visual signals (<i>n</i> = 9)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	2 (22.2%)	7 (77.8%)
Guarded vocabulary (<i>n</i> = 9)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)
Consequence wheel (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)

Course Perceptions: Strategy Ratings

Participants selected from 35 learning strategies (introduced over seven sessions) to apply in their classrooms as they progressed through the course. They were asked to rate *only* the strategies they personally implemented. The number and percentage of participants who selected each satisfaction level for each strategy appear in Tables 7 to 13.

Table 10. Session 4: Learning Strategies

Strategy	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Critical concepts reflection tool (<i>n</i> = 7)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (14.3%)	3 (42.9%)	3 (42.9%)
Hearts activity (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)	1 (20.0%)
CALP checklist for English (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	5 (100.0%)	0 (—)
CALP checklist for math (<i>n</i> = 4)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (25.0%)	3 (75.0%)
Picture this (<i>n</i> = 7)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (42.9%)	4 (57.1%)
Cognates (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)

Note: CALP = Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

Table 11. Session 5: Learning Strategies

Strategy	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Vocabulary concept map (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Work wall (<i>n</i> = 7)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	5 (71.4%)
Listen/sketch/label (<i>n</i> = 8)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	4 (50.0%)	4 (50.0%)
Connected talk (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)
Octagon (<i>n</i> = 4)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	4 (100.0%)	0 (—)
Water cycle (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	2 (40.0%)

Limitations of the Study

Limitations for this study are those that are attendant to conducting any research with intact groups. Although significance was found for some measures, and although the authors believe this significance may reflect real differences that would be found in larger samples and perhaps the population, the lack of randomization and the lack of a control group here suggest that any such conclusions must be considered with caution. What can be stated with confidence is that, for these subjects, the significant results reported are important.

Additionally, the subjects in this study were teachers who had previously received some training in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol. This prior exposure to ESL instructional considerations may mean that results for this group are different

Table 12. Session 6: Learning Strategies

Strategy	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Jigsaw (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	5 (83.3%)	1 (16.7%)
A-Z chart (<i>n</i> = 8)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	1 (12.5%)	7 (87.5%)
PEPSI AHH! vocabulary (<i>n</i> = 9)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)
Selective attention (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)
SIOP lesson plan/framework guide (<i>n</i> = 8)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Structural indexing (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)

Note: SIOP = Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol.

Table 13. Session 7: Learning Strategies

Strategy	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Anticipation reaction guide (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Preview, view, review (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)
Questioning to make experiential and academic links (<i>n</i> = 7)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)
Mind maps (<i>n</i> = 6)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Consult, extend, confirm (<i>n</i> = 5)	0 (—)	0 (—)	0 (—)	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)

than those that might be expected for other subjects for whom the Project ECU LEAP methods course would be a first exposure to ESL instructional practices.

Conclusions

It is particularly interesting to note that significant to the teachers in this study was the issue of the importance of instructional strategies that support the way they teach. This is an important finding, because it suggests that these professionals were not simply interested in learning and using strategies by rote or as automations. Nor were they seeking a wholesale replacement of their teaching styles. They,

rather, recognized the central issue of conjoining new ways of presenting material that enhanced, but did not replace, their own professional practice in a highly personal way.

The fact that estimates of achievement levels for CLD students did not change significantly over the course of a semester may not be surprising and may reflect more strongly on the social challenges that many teachers perceive as confronting these students than on strictly academic issues. Improved teaching and learning strategies alone may not be sufficient to modify the ultimate academic and professional outcomes for many second language learners. As a result, it may be necessary for districts to redouble their efforts in reaching out to the families and communities of ELLs not only to make opportunities available but also to “advertise” them in ways that are inviting to those constituencies.

Though not a planned comparison, challenges experienced by in-service teachers were anecdotally documented during the semester with the lack of time to implement many of the learning strategies being predominant. Teaching and learning strategies are critical components of teacher preparation in the field of ESL. Therefore, the authors suggest there would be additional merit in developing greater clarity about the ways educators can integrate the ESL strategies modeled in the course with the subject matter the participants typically teach. This is essentially a restatement of the earlier theme relating to the inextricability of teaching and learning strategies plus content. The implications for teacher preparation in general are related to this recommendation inasmuch as an integrated approach to ESL methods converging with curricular content makes the most sense for second language learners and can represent a benefit to all learners as multimodality instruction represents a significant way to accommodate a number of cognitive styles. In the view of the authors, programs that connect such integration with strategies and content will serve elementary, intermediate, and high school students and their teachers as well as the colleges of education preparing the new generation of professionals. Essential partnerships reflecting such restructuring are imperative.

The restructured approach must include a rigorous commitment and implementation from the dedicated faculty and in-service teachers along with district superintendents and state-level administrators. Supporting a culturally diverse and competent ESL program force is the responsibility of everyone in the community. Knowing these facts, colleges and schools of education have a moral obligation to recruit and retain as well as to encourage and support the success of all ELLs.

Recommendations

To assist ELLs, this study recognizes that teacher preparation programs in universities include courses in pedagogical and assessment methods of ELLs. In the long run, this will help with academic engagement and achievement of ELLs in K-12 schools. For researchers to contribute to teaching practices concerning ELLs, further

investigation is suggested along multiple fronts to gain insights into efforts by teachers to implement diverse methodologies for ELLs. Specifically, the authors recommend that future study includes more participants teaching ELLs in rural and urban areas. In addition, comparative studies should be conducted to contrast the education of ELLs in rural settings to urban settings. Studies should replicate and extend methods used in this work. Studying teaching in distance education and face-to-face environments may lead to hybrid instructional strategies, which may be adapted for use in both rural and urban settings. Because of copyright restrictions, it is not possible to provide a syllabus, but the author may be contacted for additional information.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Bios

Dr. Diane Rodriguez research is at the intersection of special education, bilingual education, and the academic development of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Dr. Rodriguez is currently engaged in a federal funded project to increase the instructional proficiency of teachers seeking to reduce the achievement gap between English Language Learners and native English speaking students.

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