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Three Ways to Help ESL Content Linger Beyond the “ESL-focused course” in Teacher Preparation Programs

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“This course will introduce students to contemporary theory and approaches in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). It will also prepare students with knowledge and skills to help English learners (ELs) at varying stages of proficiency to acquire both English language skills and content. The ways that first and second languages are learned will be explored and students will become familiar with an interactive approach to language pedagogy. Topics include: second language acquisition, linguistic awareness, sheltered English immersion, and contemporary methods and approaches to teaching language.”

The above text comes from the syllabus of an undergraduate course titled *Foundations of Teaching English as a Second Language*, or as it is more commonly known around the Commonwealth of Massachusetts: “the SEI (Sheltered English Immersion)” or, even more informally and problematically, “the EL-course.” This ESL-focused course, its syllabus, and its objectives are regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which has responded to the growing population of ELs in Massachusetts schools by requiring all teacher candidates to earn an SEI endorsement via this one course. Like many other states, our teacher preparation program arrived at this compartmentalized, “single-experience” ESL-focused course model as a result of local, state, and federal policies in the United States that have increasingly placed ELs into mainstream classrooms rather than into language and literacy development courses (de Jong, 2014).

As a teacher educator and faculty member whose specialization is in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), I have routinely taught this single-experience ESL-focused course, served as its course mentor, and have formally and informally provided professional development to my colleagues and to local school districts in support of the course’s content. TESOL faculty in a teacher preparation program like mine that possesses this single-experience, one-semester model might recognize a variation of the above course description within their own program and have taught it, too. In addition, TESOL faculty might have questioned: how can *everything* related to effective ESL teaching be covered in *one semester*? What happens after teacher candidates leave this ESL-focused course? Do they apply what they have learned to future courses and coursework? What is the TESOL faculty member’s role in spiraling this content beyond this single-experience course? The fact of the matter is that the onus on this work largely rests upon teacher candidates’ shoulders after they depart the ESL-

focused course. Faculty colleagues in subsequent content-area courses may reference how particular practices might shift for ELs, but it is up to teacher candidates to draw from the foundation they built within the ESL-focused course to actually recall and implement the ESL practices they've learned. Therefore, what can TESOL faculty do to help ESL content linger with teacher candidates and spiral into their future coursework?

Three Practices for “Helping It Linger”

What follows are three practices that largely have arisen from my experiences teaching the ESL-focused course with pre-service teacher candidates from a variety of content-areas in a university teacher preparation program.

Practice 1: Prompt explicit connections between the ESL-focused course and all courses in teacher candidates' programs of study

Activating and building background knowledge is foundational for readying ELs to tackle new content, language, and skills, and this same principle applies to TESOL faculty's own lesson delivery as well. Intentional dips into the wells of teacher candidates' prior learning from other courses can help them to see how the objectives of the ESL-focused course fit within the larger roadmap of their programs. However, it does take some homework on the TESOL faculty member's part to get to know the curricula of the content-area programs that feed into the ESL-focused course. As preparations for a new semester commence, TESOL faculty might take a few minutes to consult the plans of study from content-area programs to see what courses teacher candidates may have taken before the ESL-focused course and what courses likely will follow. Then, TESOL faculty can plan for how teacher candidates can be involved and engaged in sharing what they already know about teaching in the ESL-focused course. In addition, TESOL faculty can use the objectives from prior or future coursework to plan activities within their ESL-focused course, where candidates can explicitly layer on best practices in ESL teaching to what they have learned or form a foundation for what they will later learn.

Helping teacher candidates to see these holistic connections also means helping them to acquire the discourse of the profession in order to facilitate this transfer. As language educators, TESOL faculty know how language is central to gaining membership into a new discourse community, and there are key linguistic features that characterize the language of the education field (see Swales, 1990, for the features of a discourse community). Examples of this educational lexicon include the parts of a lesson plan sequence, the shades of meaning between common instructional verbs like: *differentiate*, *scaffold*, *accommodate*, *modify*, or *adapt*. TESOL faculty's strengths and backgrounds as language educators uniquely positions them to help teacher candidates acquire this education-specific language. TESOL faculty can provide explicit vocabulary instruction

that names the various instructional moves and have teacher candidates practice identifying and deploying this terminology during class activities. When asking teacher candidates to turn and talk or think-pair-share, TESOL faculty can support this process with word banks or sentence frames or starters. Faculty can also highlight the terminology by emphasizing or glossing key terms in class presentation slides and make these slides available to the candidates for later review. Faculty might also dedicate a space on the whiteboard to the vocabulary that arises during the class session and review these terms in the last few minutes of class. Possessing a robust educational lexicon allows candidates to be able to recognize and speak to the content of the ESL-focused course in later courses.

Finally, TESOL faculty can use the last day of class to have teacher candidates explicitly make implementation plans for how they will use the theories and practices discussed in the ESL-focused course within their future coursework and in their teaching practica. Providing candidates with a formula for when they see practices that do or do not align with what they have explored throughout the ESL-focused course helps facilitate later implementation. An example of such a formula could follow a “hear, see, do” model: “when I *hear* ___, I will think of ___;” when I *see* ___, I will do ___;” and “when I [*do*] ___, I will remember, ___.” Or, TESOL faculty can have candidates perform curriculum mapping activities that connect the objectives of the ESL-focused course to the objectives of later coursework and their practicum. Technology also offers many possibilities for candidates to share and access each other’s coursework, curriculum maps, or other implementation plans long after the course ends (e.g., Padlet, Google Sites, etc.). It might even be possible to share these sites with non-TESOL faculty colleagues so that they might draw upon their teacher candidates’ ESL background knowledge in their subsequent content-area courses.

Practice 2: Encourage students to expand their definition of the “language” of the classroom and plan for multiple languages from the ground-up

Advances in the field of translanguaging offer avenues for teacher candidates to question the assumption that academic content is best communicated in one particular language or language variety. Long-held linguistic biases within the U.S. educational system have codified “academic” English as this variety. This view has largely led to a deficit model of bilingualism where the education system reinforces a problematic view that ELs’ use of social English, interlanguage, or their heritage languages presents a key barrier to their academic success (Flores & Rosa, 2019). However, studies in sociolinguistics and educational linguistics provide evidence that presenting and expressing a concept or skill in multiple languages and/or language varieties deepens ELs’ understanding and increases their educational outcomes (García, Ibarra Johnson, &

Seltzer, 2017). When teachers of ELs integrate, code-switch, and present classroom content in multiple languages and language varieties, ELs form connections and understanding across languages, thereby enriching their linguistic repertoire and resources (García et al., 2017).

However, if teachers of ELs are to effectively adopt these translanguaging practices into the mainstream classroom, they must be planned for from the ground up and not regulated to post hoc accommodations for ELs. To help shift to this a more ground up approach, TESOL faculty might consider folding practices from Universal Design for Learning (UDL; Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014) into lesson planning objectives within the ESL-focused course. Instead of asking, “how might this lesson be adapted this for ELs’ language(s), ask “how might this new concept be represented in multiple languages or varieties so that ELs can access the content?” Practicing how to build multilingual text sets is one way to encourage teacher candidates in the ESL-focused course to naturally plan for multiple languages and varieties from the get-go. Next, instead of asking “how should this assignment be differentiated for ELs?”, TESOL faculty might ask: “how might ELs express their understanding in ways that allow them to evidence what they know and not be limited by one language or language variety?” One powerful method for allowing for multiple means of expression is to offer students choices in how to express their understanding, whether it is in a different language, language variety, or even a different format or genre. TESOL faculty can even model this for teacher candidates within their course assignments. Lastly, instead of asking, “how might ELs’ background knowledge be activated or built?”, ask, “How might ELs’ interests in this topic be engaged in a way that recognizes their cultures, languages, and lived experiences?” Rather than planning for academic English first and *then* adjusting the plan to the linguistic resources of ELs, the UDL framework creates space for teacher candidates to think about drawing on the richness of a multilingual classroom *as* lessons are being planned.

Practice 3: Provide intentional attention to reflective practices and noticing

Noticing in educational settings is the practice of “paying attention to” the instructional happenings in a classroom and “interpreting, prioritizing, and responding to” these events in order to improve teaching and learning (González, Pomerantz, & Condie, 2019, p. 20). For teacher candidates, the concept of noticing bolsters their ability to reflect on what they are learning in class and make intentional adjustments to their practices. Because of the compartmentalized nature of teacher preparation curricula, noticing tends to default to the practices and content of whatever course the teacher candidates are enrolled in at the present time.

In order for noticing to become a habit that is inclusive of ESL-focused course content and extends beyond the course right in front of candidates, it is a skill that needs modeling, intentional practice, and coaching. One way TESOL faculty can meaningfully integrate habits of noticing into the content of ESL-focused course is to model the instructional moves and practices teacher candidates are to adopt during their own lesson delivery and explicitly make the thinking behind these practices known. For example, if teacher candidates perform a “think-pair-share” to explore a concept during class, TESOL faculty can take a few minutes to name the discussion-based strategy verbally and on a presentation tool. Then, debrief its pros, cons, scaffolding, and the decision-making behind how and when to use it together as a whole-class to help candidates notice the instructional value of the activity. If the modeling and explicit debriefing of an ESL-focused course practice becomes an expected routine within the EL-class, this key habit of noticing will become second-nature for teacher candidates

Other ways TESOL faculty might have teacher candidates exercise more effective noticing skills is to include discussion protocols that practice describing and analyzing ESL instructional practices (see School Reform Initiative, n.d., for a comprehensive list of protocols). Using case studies of ELs, videos of classroom teaching, or field observations are essential to facilitating discussion protocols that lead to richer noticing (see Nutta, Strebel, Mokhtari, Mihai, & Crevecoeur-Bryant, 2014, for EL cases and instructional protocols). Team-based learning techniques, where teacher candidates are grouped into smaller learning communities according to their content-areas, can also help them to support each other in reflecting on how they might adjust or enact instructional changes based on what they notice. Lastly, TESOL faculty can hold teacher candidates accountable for their noticing habits by building noticing and reflective practices into course assignments and rubrics. Through the intentional attention to habits of noticing, TESOL faculty can assist teacher candidates in fostering a growth mindset that includes ELs in how they adjust their instructional practices.

In Conclusion

Recognizing that the next time teacher candidates might engage more deeply with ESL content could be with ELs in their own future classrooms, it can be overwhelming to think about how TESOL faculty can make what their candidates have learned in the ESL-focused course linger. The three practices offered here are not meant to add more content to this already packed course, but to offer suggestions for how TESOL faculty can make the most of the teaching they already do. As a result, the ESL-focused course can be a solid foundation onto which teacher candidates can continue to build, from the ground up, an instructional framework that meets the needs of ELs and all learners in their future classrooms.

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