

2011

Infusing EL Content into a Sociocultural Studies in Education Course

Lauren B. Isaac

Richard A. Quantz



Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Educational Methods Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/tapestry>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in TAPESTRY by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Isaac, Lauren B. and Quantz, Richard A. (2011) "Infusing EL Content into a Sociocultural Studies in Education Course," *TAPESTRY*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/tapestry/vol3/iss2/3>

Infusing EL Content into a Sociocultural Studies in Education Course

Lauren B. Isaac and Richard A. Quantz, Miami University

Introduction

While EDL 204: Sociocultural Studies in Education is required of all undergraduate teacher licensure students, it is not a professional education course, but satisfies a general education requirement. While not being the norm, many social foundations of education courses are considered liberal education courses, but unlike even those liberal education courses, EDL 204 satisfies a university humanities requirement making it a very unique course in education. Rather than designed to teach future teachers how schools actually work or even how they should work, EDL 204 is designed for students across the university to understand the different sides of the basic arguments about public education in the United States at the present moment. It is, therefore, a course that examines educational texts and a writing course that teaches students how to enter into the debate about public education in our democracy.

Like most social foundations of education courses, EDL 204 introduces students to philosophy of education, history of education, and sociocultural studies of education, but it also addresses directly economic-political ideologies that help clarify the national political debates. Since nearly every major area of conflict around education involves issues of culture, EDL 204 is also a diversity course designed to help students understand the basic concepts that are drawn upon by advocates of different issues surrounding questions of social class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Each semester we offer more than 20 sections of about 22 students per section on three campuses utilizing around 18 different instructors. In order to ensure that all sections are relatively the same, each instructor is presented with a master syllabus and a common set of assignments, which they may adjust to their own particular interests and expertise but which must remain true to the basic concepts and broad goals of the course. Furthermore, all instructors have spent a year apprenticing under the direction of the coordinator of the course, who has a doctoral degree in the field of social foundations, which helps ensure a consistency across sections. The apprenticeship program is particularly important because many of the instructors are doctoral students or graduates of programs in educational administration or curriculum studies rather than specifically in the field of social foundations of education.

Professional Learning

This essay is authored by the present coordinator of the program, Richard Quantz, and a former Teaching Associate, Lauren Isaac. Quantz has been teaching at the university level in social foundations for 34 years and his area of scholarship is sociocultural theory. Isaac is a

<http://tapestry.usf.edu/journal>

former elementary school Spanish teacher and high school EL teacher with a Masters degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and at present a doctoral student in curriculum and cultural studies. Well-grounded in general theory of culture and semiotics, Quantz has a strong theoretical basis upon which to consider issues related to students whose first language is not English, but he had only a cursory knowledge of the specific debates within the ESOL field and within the nation before agreeing to infuse EL content into the EDL 204 course. To prepare for doing this, he collaborated with a colleague who was working with the EL infusion project, and read widely in the professional literature, perhaps 20-30 scholarly articles, and the popular press coverage of issues related to EL education including national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Los Angeles Times*; national news magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*; as well as dozens of websites from advocacy groups such as the Heritage Foundation, Brookings Institute, Hoover Institute, Project of Focus on the Family, Center for American Progress, and Truthout.org; as well as dozens of local papers from around the nation located through document searches.

Isaac's professional experience working with high school English learners (ELs) informed her teaching of the course because she was attuned to the academic and social struggles that English Learners experience. Her experience supporting content teachers with ELs in their classes was especially fitting since most students in the course, like most content teachers, are unfamiliar with the issues affecting English learners. In addition, the aspects of her TESOL masters program that focused on sociolinguistic and political nature of English learner education were relevant for the course and, along with the cultural studies aspect of her doctoral study, made her particular approach to the infusion of EL content into the course particularly valuable and insightful.

The Process of Embedding the Course (Richard A. Quantz)

As a service course we are used to trying to respond to the unique requests from different professional areas and do the best we can to incorporate their needs into EDL 204. Understandably, however, any incorporation of specific requests by a particular major requires that it be conducted in a manner that also makes sense for students enrolled in EDL 204 but not enrolled in that major. For example, when the science education faculty ask us to help them meet a particular state or national standard, we will try to accommodate that request but only to the extent that our action is a valuable contribution to the education of the finance major from the business school who is also enrolled in the course. As you might expect, in serving so many programs, we find ourselves trying to incorporate a large number of differing topics into this single-semester course. Furthermore, when you consider that the basic content of the field pushes us to address the wide and complex fields of philosophy, history, sociology, and anthropology, you can imagine that the course has become quite full and complex.

One of the things that was attractive about the request to infuse EL content into the course is that it did not ask us to add in another new topic in addition to the topics already present—that action would, of course, have required us to cut something out. Instead, it asked us to consider what we were already teaching and find a way to infuse into those given topics issues

related to EL education. As a result, we began the process of identifying articles and concepts that can be explored while the students are studying philosophy, economic-political ideology, history, and other social topics. For example, when studying history we included a 1928 article about the Americanization of Mexican-Americans and when presenting a technique for “reading social text” (i.e., ritual), we focused among other things on language as a performance. We also incorporated EL topics into the basic assignments. Students are given choices of articles to analyze, interpret, and critique, and we now make sure that one of those articles addresses topics involving English learners. We also created an EL topic as one of the options for the major end-of-the-semester project.

We continue to search for ways of incorporating EL content into the whole course, helping our students recognize that all of the concepts learned in the course can be used to address issues related to the education of EL students. All EL-focused readings and assignments are incorporated into the master syllabus and, therefore, are infused into every section each semester. On the other hand, individual instructors do have the opportunity to add and to further develop different themes in their own section. What follows is an exploration of one of those sections as developed and taught by Lauren Isaac to help show the way in which the required elements are infused and added to by the individual instructor.

Process of Embedding the Course (Lauren B. Isaac)

Upon first examination of the EDL 204 Master syllabus, I immediately recognized several theoretical commonalities between the course content and my own background as a Spanish and ESL teacher, especially in terms of educational philosophies and political-economic ideologies. First, I found that the five different educational philosophies (progressivism, essentialism, perennialism, critical pedagogy, and relational pedagogy) intersect at times with different theories of second language acquisition and different language teaching methodologies. For example, one of the tenets of a Deweyan progressive educational philosophy is the important role of students’ previous experiences and knowledge as a foundation upon which new learning occurs. Applying this philosophy to teaching English learners would result in the need to incorporate students’ first language and culture into content classes. Another theoretical commonality existed between the political-economic ideologies content of the EDL 204 course and some of socio-political-linguistic content that informs the discipline of TESOL. We cover five dominant political-economic ideological positions: social democrat, progressive liberal, neo-classical liberal, social conservative, and neoconservative. Embedded within each of these ideologies are specific stances on what constitutes an appropriate education for English learners. For instance, a neoconservative ideology advocates for a curriculum that encourages a specific type of American patriotism, one that connects loyalty to the United States with the preservation and promotion of the English language. On the other side of the political spectrum, a social democrat ideology positions cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset to the educational process and may advocate for a multilingual and multicultural approach to education. In addition, these ideological lenses allow students to interpret the political battles over Bilingual Education as well as the ways that the politics and rhetoric of “illegal” immigration get played out within educational policy and practice.

Teaching Embedded Courses

As a new doctoral student and Teaching Associate, I taught my first EDL 204 course in the fall of 2009. During that semester, I embedded EL content in a manner consistent with the Master syllabus from the course coordinator. One of the main ways the course is embedded is through the course's final Democracy and Dialogue Project. One group in each class is required to work on the English learner topic. The 6-week long collaborative project requires students to explore what kind of program is best suited for English learners to develop their democratic voices within schools. When I first worked with the Democracy and Dialogue EL group, I noticed their struggles in connecting the notion of democracy to the public debate over what programs are most suitable for EL students. However, over the course of the 6-week project, the students gradually became critical of the "sink or swim" models of English immersion because of their potential to hinder the democratic voices of the ELs. Simultaneously, the students begin to think about the political and practical complexity of implementing bilingual education, resulting in a more nuanced, rather than "either-or" understanding of the educational debate.

Seeing how well the group dealt with the complexity of educating English learners gave me the confidence to further integrate EL content in subsequent semesters. I continued to follow the Master syllabus that required including an EL-related article for two papers, a unit of the ritual performance of identity, and the Democracy and Dialogue Project. In addition, I also found my personal ways to infuse my own EL education and Spanish-language background into the course. One addition consisted of teaching the educational philosophy of critical pedagogy through a viewing of the 2006 HBO film *Walkout*, which depicts the story of the 1968 Chicano student Walkouts in East Los Angeles. One scene, in particular, depicts Sal Castro, the Chicano students' teacher, clearly employing a critical pedagogy-inspired lesson in which he guides the students to investigate how Mexican-Americans are absent from their U.S. history books. Another scene depicts one of the Chicano students getting paddled for speaking Spanish in class. Students were prompted to interpret the film through some of the main terms connected to critical pedagogy, such as *hidden curriculum*, *hegemony*, and student resistance.

Through watching, interpreting, and discussing the film, EDL 204 students not only came to understand critical pedagogy but they also engaged in a discussion of the political and historical context of educating multilingual students, who only recently have been given the monolithic label of "English Learner." Students were required to post reflections on the film, and many students expressed utter shock at how unjust the Chicano students were treated in the schools. Their responses prompted further discussion of the historical legacy of assimilation practices in U.S. schools, and helped to contextualize current educational debates on educating English learners. Throughout the course of the semester, students frequently alluded to the film when discussing concepts such as *hegemonic curriculum* and *student resistance*, indicating that the film served as a frame of reference throughout the course.

Overall, I have observed that some EDL 204 students are receptive and enthusiastic about EL-related content while some are more hesitant and resistant. On the one hand, the EL topic is always most frequently chosen for the final Democracy and Dialogue Project. On the other hand, some students conceive of their future careers, whether in education or not, as not requiring knowledge or understanding of students (or people) whose first language is not English. Having

a sociocultural focus in a course, however, allows for discussion of the systems of power and privilege that allow for such attitudes to exist in the first place.

Conclusion

Colleagues who teach either humanities-focused education courses, social foundations of education, or diversity in education courses can embed English learner content if they keep in mind the following general principles. For one, we recommend simply including readings in the syllabus that directly address course concepts through a reading on some aspect of English learner education, whether it be historical, philosophical, or something from popular culture. For instance, in EDL 204, the purpose is to learn the concepts of philosophy and ideology and history, but, in doing so, they also gain insight into the experiences of English learners leading to their better understanding of what is really at stake when policy decisions are made that address English learner education such as when voters are asked to decide on whether a particular teaching method should be permitted or not (i.e., bilingual education).

Our second recommendation is to broaden the course's notion of diversity to include linguistic diversity, not in the sense that students must learn "another" form of diversity, but rather, students are encouraged to include language as a crucial aspect of identity and as part and parcel of other aspects of identity, such as race gender, and sexuality. Allowing students to see how language intersects with, for example, gender, can reveal how the experience of a female English learner from the Dominican Republic may be drastically different from a male English learner from Taiwan. In other words, we would encourage our colleagues to use language as a way to complicate notions of identity and diversity.

Finally, we would recommend our colleagues to pull from the experiences of students enrolled in the course, especially students whose first language is not English. For example, Lauren Isaac turned the class over to her Chinese international student, who taught a math lesson in Mandarin for twenty minutes. This short experience prompted over an hour of discussion from students, and they expressed feelings of humiliation, utter confusion, and anxiety. Students analyzed what kinds of behaviors resulted from being linguistically lost. This activity developed empathy for beginner English learners and required nothing more than handing the class over to a student already enrolled in the course.

By infusing English learner education into the course rather than by adding it on as a separate topic, it is more likely to be integrated by the students into a larger worldview and philosophy. Through infusion future teachers come to understand that teaching students whose home language is not English has its own unique aspects but is not a wholly separate issue from other issues of diversity. The infusion of English learner education into provides future classroom teachers and future members of the general voting public a greater understanding of the basic situation that English learner students and their teachers are trying to address.

About the Authors

Lauren B. Isaac is a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Cultural Studies in the Department of

Educational Leadership at Miami University. She is formerly a K-6 grade Spanish teacher and High school/Adult School ESOL specialist. Her dissertation research focuses on the politics of language and race in multilingual educational settings.

Richard A. Quantz, PhD, is a professor of social foundations of education in the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University, Oxford, OH. His area of teaching and scholarly interest is sociocultural theory and education. He recently published *Rituals and Student Identity in Education: Ritual Critique for a New Pedagogy* (Palgrave Press, 2011).