

Rural Redesign: Delivering Online Professional Development for Rural Teachers of ESL

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This study reports the progress of a project in a teacher education program designed to deliver professional development to rural teachers through an online format addressing ESOL (English for speakers of other languages). Funded by a Professional Development Grant from the OELA (Office of English Language Acquisition) of the United States Department of Education, the project was conceived in response to a number of factors, commencing with the perceptions of teacher candidates in the program that they had not received sufficient coursework or field experience to prepare them to teach the growing numbers of ELLs (English language learners) they were encountering in their internship classrooms. While this signaled the need for curriculum revision, it also pointed out the need to improve the clinical classroom. Project LEAP (Leading Exceptional Annual Progress) was crafted to provide in-service teachers with professional development in ESOL, so that services to ELLs in the region would be improved and so that clinical placements for teacher candidates would model and support best practices for a diverse student body. Ongoing inquiry is reported, reflecting both baseline data and interim findings for the project.

Keywords: ESL (English as a second language), rural education, online professional development

A Changing Population in Rural Schools

As school populations evolve, many rural regions are discovering that programs in teacher education need significant modification in order to prepare candidates to provide comprehensible instruction to growing numbers of ELLs (English language learners) in rural classrooms. Population shifts have been reported in multiple regions. As Giambo and Szecsi (2005) pointed out, this is a growing trend that is challenging many school districts that have not faced the need in the past. Schools in these districts are often challenged to respond, because their existing faculties have not had sufficient training to target the educational needs of students for whom English is not a first language. A professional development gap is emerging which must be addressed, and this gap may represent a unique challenge to rural schools where resources are limited. As Rodriguez and Manner (2010) reported, cultural and linguistic diversity has grown by palpable proportions in North Carolina in recent years. The result is that there are discernable gaps in quality educational services for ELL students. A common protocol of providing ESL (English as a second language) pullout in public schools is no longer a viable response to the growing numbers of students requiring accommodations.

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Theoretical and Practical Perspectives

Whittenburg (2010) echoed the concerns of Rodriguez and Manner (2010), noting that the thousands of immigrant children who have moved to North Carolina in recent years are struggling in the public schools. Rural districts are not the only ones to feel the challenge associated with providing for a growing ELL population. Although many districts are attempting to provide professional development in ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), it is often not of the same magnitude as the need for services to ELL students (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005). In prior decades, teacher education programs in many rural areas have not made ESOL a priority, and teacher candidates from these programs commence their professional practice from a deficit position in which they are required to serve an ELL population, but do not feel as though they possess appropriate skills and dispositions to do so with success (Manner & Rodriguez, 2008). Some states with considerable history in ESL challenges have modified their teacher education programs to provide teacher candidates with robust training in ESOL, yet other states, where the need is quite new, are recognizing that the simple modification of an existing program may not be sufficient. Although program modifications may be thoughtfully designed and well-intended, current faculty may not be prepared to execute needed curricular changes (Lue, 2003).

The challenge has expanded in response to several factors. A related issue is the finding that although diversity is evolving rapidly in many formerly homogeneous school districts that diversity is not expanding in aligned proportion in many teaching faculties (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005). Furthermore, except for those states with historically substantial ELL populations, teacher education programs have not often made ESOL a priority and may often have overlooked the need in large measure (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005). Teacher education courses and internship experiences that might support teacher candidates in working with second language learners have often been absent, and since the challenge of serving the ELL population is somewhat new, college and university programs are not always in the best position to respond with existing resources (Lue, 2003).

Employees of district schools, of course, are often first to recognize the limitations of teacher education programs in this area, but interns in those programs will not be far behind. Manner and Rodriguez (2008) suggested that teacher interns frequently perceive shortcomings in their own training that limits their effectiveness in providing comprehensible instruction for ELLs. Matsuda and Matsuda (2006) asserted additionally that interns often perceive that they are not observing best practices in their field experience placements in schools where the content teachers and the ESL teachers frequently do not integrate efforts. In cases where teacher candidates already feel underprepared to teach second language learners, entering a clinical classroom without appropriate modeling for the development of these skills represents a kind of double jeopardy. In two important venues, the preparation program is failing them. Montgomery, Roberts, and Growe (2003) suggested that these shortcomings can result in the development of classroom teachers who are only ready to be successful with a limited section of the student population in their schools. This concern is most typically ascribed to K-12 (kindergarten through Grade 12) classrooms, but similar concerns have been voiced for learners in adult programs targeting literacy and second language acquisition (Van Duzer & Florez, 2003).

Responding to the need for teachers prepared to work with ELL students will accrue primarily to Colleges of Education, both at the undergraduate level for teacher candidates and the graduate level for practicing teachers in need of professional development. The design of experiences for both pre-service teachers and those who have already commenced professional practice should be based on assessment data that target the

perceptions of the end-user: the teachers at pre-service and in-service levels. Perceptions of skills are important, but so too are examinations of attitudes regarding the importance of ESOL preparation towards meeting career and educational goals of those students for whom English is not a first language. Investing in assessment is the rational way to establish a basis for informed decision-making, regarding possible changes to teacher preparation at all junctures of practice.

It is also critical to assess pre-service teacher attitudes regarding how important they believe ESOL preparation is for their own professional lives. Those in teacher education must assess the perceived adequacy of both theoretical and practical areas of ESOL programming currently being offered. Such an evaluation, produced with a sample of teacher candidates who are the product of the teacher education program, will inform any potential curricular revision, so that changes can be made programmatically that will support the skills and dispositions teacher candidates will be needed in their academic and internship experiences. Such assessment will also shape professional development efforts for those who are beginning or continuing classroom practice.

A search of the literature related to this subject is limited by the scarcity of scholarship on the topic, although a descriptive study reported by Smith, Herner, McCambridge, and Seiger (2004) examined the perceptions of pre-service teachers who were at various junctures in a teacher preparation program. All subjects were involved in a program that followed the California SB2042 (Senate Bill 2042) model for teacher education. Smith et al. (2004) reported that subjects at each juncture sampled felt as though they were well prepared to teach the average student and that those who had just finished a foundational course related to the teaching of ELLs believed that their level of skill and knowledge was sufficient to do the job effectively. Their perceptions of confidence waned, however, after an initial methods course in ESOL, but then rose again after taking a second methods course, although not to the elevated level that had been perceived following the introductory foundations coursework. Conclusions are difficult to support for this study, since the data are descriptive only without any inferential analysis.

Educators know that learning is most likely to be effected when the learners recognize a need for the learning and when they perceive how that learning will apply to a contextualized area of their experience. In support of this concept, the present study's goal was to elicit and analyze perceptions of teacher candidates regarding several critical issues related to educating ELL students in their own practice. The first question of interest was to clarify whether or not pre-service teachers perceive the need to develop skills in teaching ELLs in preparation for classroom practice. Next, this study sought to elicit pre-service teacher perceptions regarding the efficacy of their college programs in supporting both theoretical preparations and practical skills in teaching ELLs. Elucidating and analyzing data regarding these research inquiries may inform potential curriculum revision for institutions of higher learning when there is a need to provide enhanced preparation for candidates who can expect to teach an expanding population of ELL students in public schools.

Lastly, when professional development programming in teaching ELL students at the graduate level is undertaken, will in-service teacher perceptions of the need for those skills increase? Will those teachers find that strategies taught during the professional development were important to their practice? This study represents a comprehensive approach, starting with an analysis of perceptions in pre-service and concluding with perceptions of outcomes in actual classroom practice. Such a comprehensive approach is essential, since, at all levels, readiness to teach ELLs is a critical issue. As Montgomery et al. (2003) asserted, teachers must be ready to deliver an education for ELLs that is comparable to the education offered to the native speakers across

the hall. In the case of North Carolina where this study takes place, Whittenberg (2010) reported that the state has made only minor steps towards improving the educational experience of ELLs. These minor steps have not really addressed the magnitude of the challenge. He suggests, however, that professional development and intervention can provide the required improvement irrespective of the financial dilemmas facing most districts.

The Context of the Study

This study was established at a large state university, proud of its long and respected history in the education of teachers, primarily for the rural districts of eastern North Carolina. A major portion of this history is represented by intimate ties between the College of Education and the Multiple Rural Communities that have served for generations. The present study developed as an outcome of an informal assessment of perceptions of intern teachers who were involved in the final phase of their preparations and on the brink of commencing their professional lives as licensed teachers. The informal assessment took place as the result of reflections required during the internship, from which common threads of concern emerged related to anxieties the candidates expressed relative to their readiness to teach ELLs. In their clinical classrooms, they had experienced firsthand the need to be ready for the challenge of providing comprehensible instruction to these students. At the same time, they perceived a palpable lack of training about the issue in their preparation programs. The upshot was their perceptions of a mismatch between a programmatic lack of ESL training versus what they would actually encounter in their local school placements.

These expressed concerns represented an alarming finding in light of the fact that these teacher candidates were very close to graduation. Revisions to the program could be developed in the future to ameliorate a deficit situation, but any such effort would be too late to be helpful to these students who, in practical terms, were program completers. What might be offered to them at this time, so that their practice could benefit their students? If some forms of remediation were developed, what kind of assessment would inform the process? An additional concern related to the professional development needs of both novice and veteran teachers related to the quality of field experience for the candidates to follow. If clinical placements for pre-service teachers were deficient in modeling effective instructional strategies for ELL students, simple curricular revision relating to coursework alone would be inadequate.

In an effort to elucidate and quantify the informal observations of teacher candidates concerns expressed over several semesters, a survey was developed in an attempt to articulate intern perceptions regarding their readiness to teach second language learners. Survey data would generate a baseline required for examining the potential significance of those perceptions regarding readiness to serve the educational needs of ELLs. From an informed point of view, measures could be undertaken to expand both coursework and field experience in the future relating to the teaching of ELL students, but what about the needs of those who were graduating at this point? Any intervention would need to have a double impact, addressing the need to provide professional development for teachers already working with ELL students in the surrounding rural districts, as well as a second focus of developing better field placements for teacher candidates who would follow. The intervention would need to take place at the graduate level, and a protocol of assessment would be essential to articulate what in-service teachers found to be both helpful and effective in their practice with ELLs, resulting from the professional development intervention.

Revising the teacher education curriculum was a project undertaken by a committee that has reported it, as a case study is not included in this writing. This study describes both the plan and intermediate findings of a

project designed to provide professional development in ESOL for initial and experienced teachers in the rural environs of the university. A proposal was developed and submitted for a Professional Development Grant from the United States Department of Education, OELA (Office of English Language Acquisition). The proposal described Project LEAP (Leading Exceptional Annual Progress), a program crafted, as an intervention related to the perceived professional development needs of teachers in the five county areas in rural North Carolina. The proposal identified the CLASSIC (critically reflective, lifelong advocacy for second language learners, site specific innovations and cross-cultural competency) Model from the CIMA (Center for Intercultural and Multilingual Advocacy) at Kansas State University as its core protocol through which Project LEAP would provide a five course series of graduate courses for school-based participants seeking add-on licensure in ESL.

A rationale was advanced regarding the implementation of the CLASSIC Model in the present context. That rationale relied on the attractive sequence of the model's courses, which emphasized the essential role of an initial methods course, as opposed to the more typical initial course in foundational studies, such as linguistics. The philosophy behind this sequencing emerges from the belief that the critical need for teachers in the program was to have immediate professional development in ESL instructional strategies that could be implemented and evaluated at once. Following the first course in the series, four more would offer study and practical application in language and culture, assessment, linguistics and advocacy. All courses would be linked to student success on Praxis II and assessment of participant perceptions would take place at intervals to inform the process of meeting teacher, student and district's needs in ESL through the offerings of Project LEAP.

When Project LEAP was awarded a Professional Development Grant through OELA, the principal investigators set out to assess the progress of the intervention it represents. In an effort to establish a baseline measure regarding teacher candidate perceptions of professional shortcomings in teaching ELL students, a survey was designed to assess the magnitude of these perceptions. Following this, a cadre of in-service teachers was recruited from a rural county in the immediate surroundings of the university, and the planned first course in ESL methods commenced, accompanied by designed teamwork and professional reflection. In response to the rural context and the concomitant geography between and among participating teachers, online delivery of coursework was selected as the most appropriate option. This protocol was chosen to provide electronic communication for teachers at a distance where asynchronous work would best meet the needs of the learners. Assessment of participant perceptions was integrated with the entire course series and these perceptions were considered in conjunction with those expressed by teacher candidates served by the same institution. This study reports the findings of the first assessment in the series. Subsequent investigations are planned to gather data at intervals consistent with implementation of the additional courses in the grant-funded series.

Research Questions for Pre-service Teachers

The teacher education program at the university had not, prior to this grant-funded project, included comprehensive training for pre-service teachers regarding the provision of comprehensible instruction for ELL students. The significance of pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding their readiness to teach ELLs, as well as their perceptions of the value of the existing program in preparing them to do this work, were assessed in an effort to inform curriculum revision. Subjects for the initial research question were a group of undergraduates who were approaching the conclusion of their first semester of internship. These subjects were a mere semester away from graduating, becoming certified teachers and commencing professional practice. The rationale for including this element in the design of the study was that these students were in a unique position to evaluate

their readiness to teach ELL students based on personally comparing their prior preparation to their current encounters with students in their first internship semester. Similarly, they could express their perceptions regarding the utility of the existing program in preparing pre-service teachers to teach second language learners. Finally, these subjects were selected, because they had been asked to self-evaluate earlier in the semester with respect to each of the InTASC (Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) standards. InTASC standards identify the skills and dispositions required for beginning teacher success. The principal investigators had observed informally during multiple semesters that while interns most often expressed confidence regarding a majority of the InTASC questions, they typically expressed concern regarding their readiness to meet the requirements of Standard #4: effective teaching of diverse learners.

A survey presented three questions, developed to assess pre-service teachers' perceptions of their needs for skill in teaching ELLs, as well as their perceptions regarding the efficacy of their teacher education programs in offering both theoretical and practical knowledge for teaching second language learners. These questions were related to several essential issues including:

- (1) Do pre-service teachers acknowledge the importance of developing the skills necessary to provide comprehensible instruction for ELLs in professional practice?
- (2) Do pre-service teachers perceive that their university preparation has provided them with sufficient knowledge about successful teaching of ELLs?
- (3) Do pre-service teachers perceive that their university preparation has provided appropriate field experience for the development of requisite skills in teaching ELLs?

Methodology for Pre-service Teacher Research Inquiry

An intact group of 24 pre-service elementary education interns, all enrolled in a course during the first semester of an internship in public school, responded to four survey questions which required them to select pre-printed answers that best represented their own perceptions. The initial question asked respondents to select one statement from five that they believed most closely expressed their perception of the importance of providing comprehensible instruction for ELL students as a part of competent teaching. The second item asked subjects to make a similar choice that aligned most closely with their perceptions of their personal confidence as a teacher of ELL students, as they approached the concluding stage of internship. The third item asked respondents to select one answer that most closely represented their perceptions of the utility of their university programs in providing the skill- and knowledge- base necessary for providing effective classroom instruction for ELL students. The final item asked subjects to select one statement which most closely represented their perceptions of their university programs' efficacy in providing useful field experiences to support the development of effective teaching for ELL students.

As described, each item presented five graduated statements as potential responses, in a forced-choice protocol, with each statement bearing a value from negative to positive on a five-point scale. The central position represented the neutral position with a numerical value of zero. Chi square (X^2) analysis was employed with four degrees of freedom for within group differences for each of the items. The significance level for the study was established at $p = < 0.05$.

Findings for the Pre-service Teacher Inquiry

Values of Chi square for the first questionnaire item were at highly significant level of 0.0001, strongly

supporting the positive perception of pre-service teachers that the ability to provide comprehensible instruction to ELLs was very important. As a point of discussion on this finding, it is very telling to observe that a large majority (17 of the 24 subjects) responded to the item by selecting the most positive of possible statements regarding this issue.

Also, highly significant were the findings for the second item that required subjects to choose a statement that most closely matched their perceptions of their personal readiness to provide this effective instruction, as they approached the concluding semester of internship. Values of Chi square for this item were highly at the significant level of 0.001, but in the negative direction. In other words, subjects overwhelmingly expressed a lack of confidence in their competence to teach ELL students effectively, irrespective of the fact that they were close to commence their own professional careers.

Analysis of the third item yielded similarly significant results, as participants were asked to apply perceptions of the university programs' efficacy in providing them with an effective foundation for teaching ELL students. With a Chi Square value at the level of 0.001, subjects overwhelmingly expressed their views that the program had not been successful in preparing them for effective teaching of ELL students, in spite of the fact that had acknowledged the importance of such teaching in item one.

Values of Chi square for the last item indicated an additional highly elevated significant level of 0.001, consistent with findings on other elements of inquiry. In the final item, participants expressed their perceptions that their university program, in addition to falling short on providing a strong knowledge base regarding the teaching of ELL students as analysis of the third item disclosed, also had not been successful in providing appropriate field experiences. These findings are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Findings for Pre-service Teachers

Question	<i>df</i>	X^2	<i>P</i> =
1	4	46.48	< 0.001
2	4	34.74	< 0.001
3	4	20.58	< 0.001
4	4	20.07	< 0.001

Note. $n = 24$.

Discussion of Pre-service Teacher Results

The findings from this intact group of pre-service teachers did not startle the investigators, in as much as the need to prepare teachers of second language learners is palpable issue for the study's geographical context. The participating students were included in the study as the result of their critical positions in assessing the both their perceptions at the brink of commencing professional practice, as well as their experiences with the current state of the teacher preparation program and the public schools with which it was affiliated. In particular, the subjects had spent most of a semester in the local classrooms and had experienced conditions facing the faculty in those schools. This combination of experiences lent subjects an excellent vantage point from which to compare their own perceived skills, the offerings of their university programs at the nexus of need versus competence to teach ELLs. These subjects were nearly unanimous in acknowledging the need to teach ELL students effectively. In fact, of the four research questions, this is the one that elicited the most significant statistical response. Nonetheless, they did not perceive themselves as competent, nor did they perceive that their

preparation programs had prepared them to be competent, either in terms of foundational knowledge or practical experience. These findings are expected to be essential in informing the process of curricular revision at the university.

The limiting factor of this study is the fact that the statistical analysis employed is non-parametric, and therefore, represents results for the sample under study alone. However, since the inquiry was aimed at articulating the conditions present for pre-service teachers in this particular program and context, they are entirely appropriate and may offer a suggested examination protocol for others. Findings are significant for the program where the study was undertaken. This was the focus of the study and findings that cannot necessarily be generalized to others in a wider population. It is noteworthy, however, to observe the extremely high significance levels achieved with this admittedly intact group. Such robust, though limited, findings, however, might beg the question regarding whether or not such results might be replicated in other similar contexts where a recent influx of second language learners has impacted formerly isolated school districts and colleges of education. Since the results of this study so strongly confirm the observations the investigators had made informally over multiple semesters, this design may be recommended for consideration by other teacher preparation programs facing similar changing demographics.

Research Questions for Teachers Participating in the Project

As described, the inquiry items created for pre-service teachers in this study were intended to establish a baseline of perceptions regarding the need for professional development in ESL for those on the brink of entering the profession from a particular program. Research questions for in-service teachers participating in the intervention/project were subsequently developed in order to articulate which elements of the intervention/project were perceived as important by the teachers currently in classroom practice in the environs. At this juncture, results for this part of data collection and analysis are in the early stages, as the data collection process will continue until, and perhaps after, the project concludes. The purpose of these analyses is to explore what appear to be important practices in the education of ELLs, as perceived by practicing teachers in impacted classrooms and districts.

This analysis followed an ESL methods course, the first in a series of five courses provided by the project. The course followed a three-step protocol in which participants were asked to learn about recommended instructional strategies through reading and viewing video-based presentations, plan for a team member to implement specific strategies under study in classroom practice, and then follow the implementation with team dialogue about possible modifications and extensions that might lead to greater success, or which might help a particular strategy be more effective at particular grade levels and with specific site-based applications. Research questions were offered at the beginning of the course and again, as it concluded in order to examine possible modifications in the perceptions of the subjects with respect to the use of course strategies over the semester. Responses from both pre- and post- measures were analyzed using a paired samples *t*-test to disclose possibly significant differences. A significance level was established as $p = < 0.05$.

For the in-service teacher subjects, the study examined potential differences in perceptions relating to a pair of research questions. The first was designed to discover if the subjects would report a more favorable perception of instructional strategies targeted for ELL student success after taking the methods course, as opposed to perceptions expressed at the course's onset. The second was designed to elucidate if the in-service teachers would express more favorable perceptions of the course's instructional strategies that they felt

supported their existing teaching styles.

Methodology for the In-service Teachers

The subjects for this part of the study were an intact group of 10 practicing teachers from a rural school district in eastern North Carolina who were also graduate students at the local state university, taking part in the first of five planned cohort for Project LEAP. The subjects were women with a maximum of 10 years of experience. A small majority was assigned to Grades 7-12, however, elementary assignments made up nearly the same statistic for the balance of subjects. Most reported that they had no college preparation in teaching ESL, but that their district had provided some training in SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) as an in-service offering. Most subjects reported having one to three ELL students in their classrooms.

Two statements regarding beliefs about teaching strategies for ELLs were posed in this inquiry, and subjects responded by selecting a position on a four-point scale which most nearly represented their level of agreement with those statements. The first was, "I believe it is important to understand/know/learn 'how-to' strategies for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students". The statement was followed by another that asserted, "I believe it is important to understand/know/learn instructional strategies for teaching ELL students that support the way I teach". A four-point scale offered graduated responses between 1 (indicating strong disagreement) and 4 (indicating strong agreement), with 2 and 3 representing more moderate perceptions.

Findings and Discussion for the In-service Teachers' Inquiry

The means from pre- and post- course questions are provided in Table 2 as well as standard deviations for both of the research questions. Data were examined using a paired samples *t*-test protocol to look for any significant differences. The *t* values are provided in the column at the right of the table. An examination of the analysis discloses that subjects reported significantly greater agreement with the second statement regarding the importance of knowing and learning about instructional strategies for teaching ELL students that support the way they currently teach. No significance was found for perceptions regarding the first statement that was designed to examine whether or not a difference would be found between perceptions at the outset and end of the methods course regarding the importance of knowing those strategies.

Table 2

Responses and T-test Results for In-service Teachers

Survey questions	Pre-test mean ¹ (SD)	Post-test mean (SD)	Paired samples <i>t</i> -value
I feel it is important to understand/know/learn "how to" strategies for working with CLD (culturally and linguistically diverse) students.	3.75 (0.46)	3.88 (0.35)	1.00
I feel it is important to understand/know/learn instructional strategies that support "the way I teach".	3.25 (0.71)	3.75 (0.46)	2.65*

Notes. ¹4-point scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly agree; **p* < 0.05.

The process of drawing conclusions for this part of the study should be accompanied with caution, of course, because of several limitations that are readily evident. The number of subjects, with *n* = 10, is small, and since the inquiry was conducted with an intact group of teachers, randomization was not a part of the design. As a result, any conclusions would be limited to the group of subjects. The authors believe, however, that the findings may provide a thought-provoking result in which future, and related research efforts might be directed. Significance was reported for the second statement in which knowledge about instructional strategies

for teaching ELL students was paired with the feature of having those strategies align with the subjects' current teaching style. In this case, it may be that, while teachers are open to adding strategies for ELL students to their instructional arsenal, most are not willing to abandon the teaching styles they have already developed. It seems likely that the way in which the methods course presented these strategies, with an emphasis on implementation and then response and reflection about possible modifications and variations in site-specific contexts, contributed to the subjects' perceptual change over the course of the semester.

Failure to find significance for the first statement is perhaps not surprising, particularly when one considers some characteristics of the sample. The subjects were teachers whose classrooms and districts were already impacted by an influx of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Because of this feature, it was probably unlikely that teacher perceptions about the importance of ELL strategies would be significantly modified, since the importance of knowing such strategies was already strongly supported at the beginning of the course and semester. In fact, the importance of knowing such strategies may have been the principal motivation for most, if not all, of the subjects to participate in the project. In addition, many of these subjects had already experienced some professional development in ESL through different levels of SIOP training. The importance of appropriate strategies would certainly have been emphasized there. The earlier experiences of these subjects may mean that results for this intact group on the first research question will differ from those that might be anticipated from other subjects for whom the project's methods course would represent an initial exposure to ESL strategies.

The addition of the teaching style descriptor lent a thought-provoking aspect to the second question and resulted in different findings than those for the initial question. While the study's analysis did not disclose any significant difference between pre- and post- measures for perceptions about the importance of strategies for teaching ELL students in the first question, question two, in practical terms, represented an inquiry about improving and elaborating subjects' existing instructional repertoire to include those targeting ELL academic success. This finding might be related to the fact that none of the participants was a beginning teacher. One might expect that most subjects had achieved a certain comfort level with their teaching that many veteran teachers might exhibit. As a result, professional development those subjects saw as enhancements to their teaching, as opposed to outright shifts in focus, were well received.

Conclusions

While the results of the present study have been useful in planning for program enhancement in a particular college of education, it is essential to observe that those results are drawn from an intact group selected to inform a process of curriculum revision for a specific non-parametric situation. In addition, the restricted number of in-service teacher subjects in the second phase of inquiry presents a further limiting factor for contexts other than the one represented by the group itself. Finally, the absence of randomization, as reported earlier, limits generalization of findings to a larger population. Nonetheless, the authors believe that, the study to be replicated, similar findings might be reported for other programs that have been operating in somewhat isolated contexts. As a model, therefore, the protocol might have significant professional utility, if employed in an equivalent fashion. It might also be noted that the current report represents the first in a series of ongoing inquiries, as continual data-collection will be analyzed to inform proposed revision of the existing program.

As a research protocol, this study may represent an effective method for providing programs and districts with essential data to inform development of professional education regarding instruction of ELL students.

Whittenberg (2010) had placed his focus on the circumstances observed in the state of North Carolina by noting that program implementation there does not address the scope of the challenges encountered. However, he took a national view when pointing out that ELL students are one of the fastest-growing and lowest-performing student groups in the United States. In other words, the need for a revision of how we educate pre-service teachers as well as what kind of professional development we offer to those already in the field needs to make a comprehensive response to the changing landscape in our public schools that is currently taking place in more than a single state. The simple (but not easy) algorithm appears to be that demographic changes in schools require that we make responsive changes to how we educate both teacher candidates and in-service teachers.

A mediocre response will limit both teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Colleges of Education can consider curriculum changes that will respond to the needs of those undergraduates preparing to teach in the nation's public schools, but another layer of professional development at the graduate level is required that will address the needs of those already in public classrooms. Fortunately, those in the profession have a long tradition of improving their teaching through lifelong learning. Here is a much-needed professional development opportunity to do just that.

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