

English language teacher expertise: the elephant in the room

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School has become a high-stakes environment for K-12 English language learners (ELLs) who are increasingly taught in mainstream classes where they are expected to meet grade-appropriate standards developed for fluent English speakers and where they must demonstrate achievement through standardized tests in English. The mainstreaming of ELLs, along with developments in the field of English as a second language (ESL) itself, such as the integration of language and content teaching, have contributed to the diffusion and devaluation of ESL teacher expertise in the United States.

Using Florida as a focal case, we describe the implementation of recent educational policy and the consequences for many ELLs and their teachers. In this context, we overview three separate studies of Florida educators (experienced inservice teachers with ESL expertise, preservice elementary teacher candidates, and preservice secondary English teacher candidates) who are enrolled in teacher education programs designed to 'infuse' ESL teacher competencies throughout the general curriculum. We argue that despite the progressive pedagogy and inclusive rhetoric, ELLs continue to be marginalized in mainstream contexts and ESL teacher expertise has been reconstructed as a set of generic good teaching practices appropriate for a broad range of diverse learners.

Keywords: English language learners (ELL); English as a second language (ESL); ESL teacher expertise; language education policy; *No Child Left Behind*; mainstreaming/inclusion; teacher preparation

Introduction

Regardless of their level of English proficiency or academic preparation, English language learners (ELLs) worldwide are increasingly placed in mainstream classrooms for the entire school day (Davison 2006; Leung 2007; Mohan, Leung, and Davison 2001; Willis et al. 2003). In the United States, nearly 50% of all ELLs received minimal (fewer than 10 hours) or no special services in 2003, compared to 32% a decade earlier (Center on Education Policy 2005). Despite a burgeoning population of school-aged ELLs, heightened public attention to their academic success and greater awareness of the importance of qualified teachers for student achievement, the professional expertise of English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual teachers remains invisible in mainstream educational discourse, much like the proverbial 'elephant in the room'.

We argue that in the context of recent educational reforms, ESL teacher expertise is supplanted by a set of general good teaching practices appropriate for a broad range of diverse learners. This phenomenon has been observed in other English language countries, including the United Kingdom (e.g. Leung and Franson 2001), Australia (Davison 2001; Lo Bianco 1998; Moore 2007) and Canada (Handscombe 1989). In this paper, we draw

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on the context of the United States and the specific example of K-12 public schools in Florida to examine some of the consequences of the assumption that ELLs' language and learning 'problems' are best addressed through (monolingual) mainstream approaches, and when ESL specialist teachers are considered redundant and are replaced by mainstream teachers who are minimally prepared to teach ESL. Florida provides an illustrative case due to its significant and rapidly growing population of young ELLs, a history of legislation to ensure equal educational access for ELLs, and a policy of full-time placement of ELLs in mainstream classrooms that has been officially endorsed by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE 2000).

We first examine external (legislative and policy) pressures and internal (professional and curricular) developments within the field of ESL that have subsumed the teaching of ELLs with general education and contributed to the diffusion of ESL as a professional discipline (Leung and Franson 2001). Using Florida as an example, we describe how the convergence of these factors can lead to the preparation of educators with minimal expertise in ESL/bilingual education, the reduction in specialised language support for ELLs and/or the reassignment of experienced ESL and bilingual teachers in curricular areas for which they are inadequately prepared. Finally, we discuss implications for the field of English language teaching.

External pressures: the mainstream as norm

A number of educational policies and reform efforts have positioned the mainstream classroom, teacher and curriculum as the idealised norm for all students, while minimising the linguistic and cultural diversity that ELLs bring to school (Reeves 2004). In spite of the fact that ELLs vary tremendously in age, country of birth as well as in linguistic, cultural, economic and educational background, many inclusion¹ efforts have resulted in a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction. The forthcoming sections describe changes in policies regarding instructional programmes for ELLs and the impact of national reform efforts to standardise curriculum, instruction and assessment. Like the metaphorical elephant that is physically present but systematically ignored, the educational needs of ELLs are overlooked in schools, and serious equity issues are raised through current inclusion practices.

Educational programmes

The ongoing push for short-term, English-only programmes is one trend that has significantly increased the placement of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Recent legislative initiatives such as those in California (Proposition 227), Arizona (Proposition 203) and Massachusetts (Question 2) emphasise the rapid transition of ELLs into mainstream classrooms and limit the number and scope of language support programmes. Also, structured English immersion has replaced many bilingual education programmes (e.g. de Jong, Gort, and Cobb 2005; Gándara 2000; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscou 2005). These programmes are based on the assumption that ELLs, like native speakers of English, will acquire English naturally through social interaction and that they will do so within a year or two. Because public discussion has focused on the English-only nature of structured English immersion programmes, it has been a small step in many districts to place ELLs, even at lower levels of (academic) language proficiency, in mainstream (i.e. all-English) classrooms rather than in specialised English language support programmes.

Studies have clearly shown that placement in mainstream classrooms without appropriate preparation of teachers and instructional accommodations can lead to the social isolation

of ELLs, as well as to a lack of class participation, meaningful peer interactions and teacher feedback, and opportunities for language development and academic achievement (Harper and Platt 1998; Harklau 1999; Langman 2003; Platt and Troudi 1997; Sharkey and Layzer 2000; Valdés 2001; Verplaetse 2000). ELLs often simply disappear in these 'inclusive' settings. Similar observations about mainstreaming have been made in other English-speaking countries such as Australia, Britain and Canada, where ELLs are also classified and served under a larger umbrella of diversity education or literacy education designed for native English speakers who may have learning needs very different from their own (Bourne 2001; Cameron, Moon, and Bygate 1996; Clegg 1996; Davison 1994; Franson 1999; Miller 2003; Mohan, Leung, and Davison 2001).

Educational reforms

Despite their formal inclusion in federal policy, ELLs have been largely excluded from the mainstream educational discourse associated with national standards and accountability systems (Swierzbis, Liu, and Thurlow 2000). Educational reforms developed for fluent English-speaking students assume that ELLs can be adequately served within these frameworks for curriculum content, teacher preparation and student achievement.

National content standards

In terms of curriculum, the national standards for students in social studies, English language arts and mathematics claim to outline effective subject area instruction for all students (National Council for the Social Studies 1994; National Council of Teachers of English 1996; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics 2003). Yet, apart from advising teachers to show respect for and draw upon ELLs' native languages as resources whenever possible, these content standards documents give minimal consideration to how teachers will help students with varying English proficiency levels participate in and meet the language demands of grade-level classrooms. Students are expected to read and analyse complex texts, question and discuss abstract concepts and express their ideas through various genres of writing. However, these expectations are based on the erroneous assumption that all students have the oral English proficiency necessary to talk in order to learn (Dalton 1998).

In terms of teacher education in the United States, specific standards for ESL teacher preparation did not exist until the professional organisations of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) developed standards for the accreditation of ESL teacher education programmes in 2002 (TESOL 2002). The TESOL/NCATE standards were significant in the United States because they were among the first national standards to acknowledge the distinct professional knowledge, skills and dispositions of ESL educators of grade-level ELLs. For the first time, institutions wishing to attain or retain the prestigious NCATE accreditation for their teacher education units were held accountable for meeting high standards of quality for their ESL programmes along with all other areas of teacher preparation. It seemed that ESL had finally taken a legitimate place at the table along with other core curriculum areas such as English, Math and Science in which professional teaching qualifications were recognised and even required.

No Child Left Behind

A major educational reform effort in the United States was introduced with the federal legislation entitled *No Child Left Behind* (No Child Left Behind Act 2002). The reported

goal of NCLB is to eliminate the achievement gap for minority learners and ensure educational success for all students. ELLs are identified as one subgroup that has fallen behind academically, and under NCLB K-12 schools are held accountable for ELLs' academic achievement. Paradoxically, NCLB recognises and overlooks the needs of ELLs in several important ways. First, academic achievement and progress are measured through standardised tests that are heavily dependent on reading skills in English. To mediate this demand, there is an increased emphasis on reading skills and strategies in schools across the United States. Unfortunately, expectations for grade-level achievement on standardised tests in English have resulted in the placement of ELLs into remedial reading classes alongside native English speakers who have been identified as poor readers (Harper, de Jong, and Platt 2008; Callahan 2006). It is assumed that the instruction in these intensive reading classes will meet their needs; however, the texts used in these classes are often too difficult for ELLs, and the curriculum is generally inappropriate for those whose reading difficulties in English lie in vocabulary development and reading comprehension, and not in the decoding and basic skills practice provided.

Harper, de Jong, and Platt (2008) and Menken (2006) document the potential and very real negative consequences of standardised, grade-level tests in English for ELLs, including higher dropout rates and a narrowing of the curriculum as teachers focus on preparing students for the test. Further, although allowances for test 'accommodations' (such as bilingual dictionaries and additional time to take the tests) were later added as 'flexibilities' to NCLB accountability guidelines, research by Abedi (2002) and Wright (2005) indicates that such accommodations fail to adequately compensate for the language difficulty of the tests.

Finally, despite NCLB's intention to make teacher quality one of the cornerstones of educational reform, the majority of ELLs continue to be taught by unqualified teachers. According to Gándara et al. (2003), only 29% of California who had more than three ELLs in their classrooms were certified in ESL or bilingual education. And in a survey of seven U.S. states, fewer than 8% of the teachers working with ELLs reported eight or more hours of professional development specifically related to ELLs (National Center for Education Statistics 2002). Given the importance of teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond 2001) and the national shortage of specialist ESL and bilingual teachers (American Federation of Teachers 2004), the need for highly qualified teachers of ELLs is clear. However, once again NCLB ignores the needs of ELLs, touting the importance of 'highly qualified' teachers,² but failing to recognise ESL/bilingual education as a core content area for teacher preparation. Consequently, ESL teachers' expertise goes unrecognised at the national level and at the local level ESL teachers become vulnerable to reassignment as reading teachers and literacy coaches in their schools and districts. In Florida, for instance, many ESL teachers are asked to teach the increasing numbers of reading intervention classes filled with remedial readers, including ELLs. In spite of the 'lip service' of NCLB leaving no child behind, ELLs' are being left behind in classes with teachers who fail to acknowledge their linguistic and cultural differences or address their academic strengths and needs, and as their progress is measured through tests that cannot accurately assess what they are learning.

The pull from within: developments in the field of ESL

Recent trends in ESL curriculum and instruction have contributed to the notion that the general education classroom is the optimal placement for ELLs. Traditional ESL instruction using the audiolingual method focused on language forms and the development of discrete language skills, with an emphasis on oral language rather than literacy development

(Richards and Rodgers 2001). Subsequent English language pedagogy emphasised the cognitive and social nature of language learning and acknowledged the similarities between first and second language learning processes (e.g. Krashen's Monitor Model and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory). Further, the move towards communicative language teaching goals increased the importance of authentic interaction among learners (Fillmore 1991; Long and Porter 1985; Savignon 1991; Swain and Lapkin 1998).

More recently, evidence that many ELLs were unable to meet the language demands of mainstream content classrooms after being exited from ESL support programmes (Chamot and O'Malley 1994) and a growing understanding of the functional, situated nature of the language needed in school (Halliday 2004; Schleppegrell 2004) have moved the field towards content-based and task-based language teaching. Supporting students' academic language development has become an integral component of English language teaching for most K-12 ESL school programmes (Carrasquillo and Rodriguez 1996; Kaufmann and Crandall 2005; Mohan 1986; Nunan 2005; Richard-Amato and Snow 2005; Stoller 2004). The revised TESOL P-12 student proficiency standards are now organised around language demands in the content areas of math, science, social studies and English language arts rather than the previous emphasis on communicative, social language needs (TESOL 2006). The move towards content-based language and sheltered content teaching as well as increased attention to the linguistic demands of mainstream classrooms represent a significant shift in the content and context of ESL curriculum and instruction.

As long as ESL curriculum and instruction were not explicitly connected to ELLs' academic achievement in other content areas, ESL teachers' roles and the ESL curriculum could be clearly distinguished from those of mainstream teachers. However, ESL and mainstream teachers now share many of the same responsibilities for which neither teacher is adequately prepared. Working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms requires ESL/bilingual teachers to assume more collaborative and supporting roles (Creese 2005a, 2006; Davison 1992, 2006). In turn, their mainstream teacher colleagues face the challenge of integrating content and language instruction, a role they embrace with varying degrees of skill and enthusiasm (Arkoudis 2005, 2006; Reeves 2006).

Visible and invisible: ELLs in the mainstream

Within the United States, the state of Florida is of interest to educators of ELLs for several reasons. According to the United States Census Bureau (2000), one of every four ELLs between the ages of five and 17 is enrolled in a Florida school, forming the fourth largest population of K-12 ELLs in the country. The state itself is physically large, with nearly 800 miles between the two most distant of the 67 urban and rural school districts. The demographic distribution of ELLs throughout Florida varies enormously, with sparse numbers in the more rural northern half of the state and large urban populations in the southern half. On average, approximately 9% of the total school population is classified as limited English proficient, although close to 25% speaks a language other than English at home. Spanish is the most common language spoken by Florida ELLs, although Haitian Creole and Eastern European languages are significant and growing.

The Florida Consent Decree

In 1963, the first two-way bilingual programme in the United States was established at Coral Way Elementary School in Miami. Other bilingual programmes have been implemented since then, particularly in the central and south parts of the state, but Florida can be

characterised as a predominantly English-only state in terms of services for ELLs. In 2002, 67% of school districts reported that they used English-only instruction, and currently most ELLs find themselves in English-dominant instructional settings. At the same time, Florida has some of the most comprehensive ESL professional development requirements in the country. The mandate for this professional development originated in a 1990 federal court order (referred to as the Florida Consent Decree) mandating the preparation of all in-service teachers to work with ELLs. The amount of ESL professional development required by the Consent Decree was based on a teacher's instructional assignment. For example, elementary and secondary English Language Arts teachers needed 300 hours of ESL training (the equivalent to an ESL endorsement), while math, science and social studies teachers needed 60 hours and teachers of other subject areas such as music, art and physical education needed 18 hours of professional development in ESL.

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) was responsible for monitoring the compliance of each of the 67 school districts with Consent Decree requirements. In 1992–1993, using its elevated authority associated with the district monitoring role, the FDOE began actively promoting full inclusion (i.e. the full-time placement of ELLs in mainstream classrooms) as a programme alternative to ESL pull-out instruction, sheltered content classes and other programme models that separated ELLs from their English-proficient peers for intensive English language support or modified content area instruction. The rationale for inclusion as an educational policy was grounded in an interpretation of 'equal access' to the same social and academic learning environments as fluent English speakers (e.g. Cochran 2002; Handscombe 1989). The FDOE issued a Technical Assistant Paper stating, 'Inclusion . . . is an innovative approach prompted by the goal of full and more meaningful participation of all students in all instructional programs' (Florida Department of Education 1995). While consistently implementing decisions that favoured inclusion over separate, specialised language support services, the FDOE cautioned against 'a rush to inclusion' and related practices that would undermine the equal access goals of the Consent Decree.

Diffusing ESL expertise in Florida

While the Florida Consent Decree represented an important step forward in providing equal access to an education for ELLs in Florida schools, various factors have conspired over time to lead to the deprofessionalisation of ESL teachers rather than the specialisation of mainstream teachers.

The Consent Decree mandate for ESL professional development for teachers of ELLs was based on an underlying assumption that teaching ELLs required specialised knowledge and skill, and that ESL was a distinct area of teacher expertise with important linguistic, cultural, curricular, pedagogical and assessment dimensions. Some districts embraced the ESL professional development mandate as an opportunity; others adopted a compliance mentality, resulting in inconsistent quality of the professional development and variable teacher responses. Many ESL teachers found themselves teaching after-school and Saturday workshops filled with angry mainstream teacher colleagues. In order to ameliorate the situation, ESL teachers looked for ways to package and 'deliver' ESL content knowledge in easily digested doses, and ESL expertise was distilled down to a common denominator of core concepts familiar to all teachers and applicable to all students. ESL 'trainers' emphasised the similarities of first and second language acquisition, natural processes and stages of language development and the importance of valuing cultural diversity. They generated lists of good, general classroom teaching techniques (often coded in acronyms

such as KWL, TPS and LEA)³ and referred to these as ‘ESL strategies’. ESL strategies included activities such as accessing students’ background knowledge and addressing their affective needs, using visuals to make concepts comprehensible, providing opportunities for student interaction through cooperative grouping, and increasing ‘wait time’. They focused on behaviours and actions rather than ideas and attitudes, and whenever possible they simplified, generalised, codified (TPR, BICS, CALP)⁴ and mollified, reassuring their mainstream colleagues that these ESL strategies would work for all students (de Jong and Harper 2005).

Without intending to, ESL specialists and the professional development they provided essentially pulled the rug out from under the discipline, leading to comments from mainstream teachers such as, ‘Teachers don’t need specialised ESL training; common sense and good intentions work fine’ (Walker, Shafer, and Iiams 2004, 145). Simplistic approaches (such as ESL strategies and scripted literacy instruction) are proposed as a ‘magic bullet’ solution to complex linguistic, cultural and educational issues. Bartolome (1994) referred to this reductionist approach as ‘the methods fetish’. Two examples illustrate the importance of highlighting not only similarities but also differences between effective general education and ESL classroom practices. The first example relates to process writing, a common mainstream literacy practice. This teacher used the following warm-up activity to introduce a process-writing lesson in a mainstream classroom that included ELLs:

I read them . . . *Ira Sleeps Over* and it’s about a little boy’s first sleepover and I read that as a pre-writing activity, writing about a child’s own experience. And then after reading it I talked about a childhood experience of my own and then we start talking about a childhood experience of their own. Well, that worked for my mainstream class. For second language learners it was just reading a story without showing pictures—you know, it was just a lot of language without any . . . so it was pre-writing activities, but it wasn’t ideal for a second language learner in that class. (C.J. Naranjo, personal communication, November 14, 2004)

Process writing has been recommended for ELLs (e.g. Peregoy and Boyle 2005), though teachers must know how to make appropriate changes depending on ELLs’ English proficiency. In this classroom, the pre-writing activity was not helpful in activating or generating background knowledge for the ELL students because they could not access the story through the medium of oral language. Although the teacher’s oral reading of the story may have had the intended result with her English-proficient students, it was not helpful for the lower proficiency ELL students in her class. A brainstorming activity conducted with the group, supported by the use of pictures, and represented through a semantic map could have assisted with developing the key vocabulary and conceptual prerequisites needed to understand the story.

In other cases, good general teaching practices must be ‘stretched’ for ELLs, as an ESL teacher illustrates in the following description of the KWL chart, a commonly used pre-reading strategy:

Like, for example, on a K-W-L chart, the teachers will do, ‘Ok, what do you know?’ They go over what do you want to know, and go on and establish that background knowledge. But for ESL students you really have to involve them more in the four areas. So, for example, you would do something with having a think-write-pair-share so that they have a safer environment to try and orally express to a partner what they know and hear what the other partner knows before they put it out before a larger group. They will do a little bit more of copying and writing of the KWL chart. In terms of taking those ideas then and categorising them, for ESL students they may not have the vocabulary to categorise, but they may be able to associate and link the words, and then the teacher can direct the categories, knowing that they may not have that vocabulary or background knowledge. (L. Damsky, personal communication, November 17, 2004)

This example shows how ESL teachers actively seek opportunities to extend ELLs' language development. They go beyond using graphic organisers or other teaching strategies to make concepts more accessible, and they use them purposely to develop students' English language skills. Tang (1992) provides a good model for the use of graphic organisers as a scaffold for ELLs' writing development, not simply as a cognitive tool for reading comprehension. Musumeci (1996) noted the difficulties experienced by mainstream teachers in addressing both language and content objectives for ELLs, and Creese (2005b) noted similar patterns, 'they [content teachers] modified their input but rarely did they get the students to modify theirs. Teachers did not give linguistic feedback, nor were incomplete messages renegotiated' (p. 151). In their work on the distinctive nature of ESL teachers' expertise, Harper and de Jong (2004) and de Jong and Harper (2005) notes the importance of both linguistic and cultural dimensions that inform ESL teacher expertise and affect considerations as to whether certain classroom practices will facilitate language development as well as comprehension and conceptual learning.

If ESL teachers' specialised knowledge and skills are not recognised in their schools and districts, it is unlikely that they will be called upon to represent or advocate for ELLs' curricular or assessment needs, provide professional development for teacher colleagues or assume roles as equal partners in collaborative team settings (Davison 1992, 2006; Hurst and Davison 2005). As a result, ELLs will continue to find themselves in classrooms with teachers who are unprepared to meet their linguistic and cultural needs or who are not willing or motivated to alter their instruction significantly because they believe that good teaching for fluent English speakers is good teaching for all students.

Deprofessionalising ESL teachers

In 1999, the Florida legislature extended the ESL in-service professional development mandate to pre-service teachers, requiring them to complete the ESL professional development prior to graduation from any Florida teacher preparation programme (Florida Department of Education 2000). Because state universities in Florida were limited in the total number of credit hours that could be required for a degree, most teacher education programmes opted to implement what has been called 'ESL Infusion' for those teachers needing the ESL endorsement (300 hours of ESL preparation). Currently, these teacher certification programmes with an infused ESL endorsement provide teacher candidates with two (and in some cases three) ESL-specific courses and additional ESL content 'infused' into other general education courses. The extent and quality of such infusion varies greatly across programmes and requires significant institutional support (e.g. Costa et al. 2005; Verkler and Hutchinson 2002). While documentation of the effectiveness of teacher preparation through ESL infusion is sorely lacking, anecdotal evidence throughout the state suggests that ESL expertise in new teacher graduates with the infused ESL endorsement has been compromised by the truncated preparation time (300 hours or five ESL courses typically reduced to 120 hours or two courses).

The Florida Consent Decree, the subsequent FDOE push towards inclusion programmes and the decision to infuse ESL teaching credentials for all teachers in pre-service teacher education programmes were each implemented with the stated goal of ensuring equal access for ELLs. In 2002, the federal education legislation referred to as *No Child Left Behind* introduced a new layer of educational policy and practice designed to support the school success of ELLs. Unfortunately, the implementation of NCLB has accelerated the dissolution of professional ESL teacher expertise in Florida. In the following section, we provide examples from several different studies conducted with Florida teachers over

the past five years to illustrate the deskilling of ESL teachers and the challenges of retaining the salience of ELL-specific knowledge and skills in the context of general education.

In 2005–2006, Harper, de Jong, and Platt (2008) interviewed 52 experienced elementary and secondary teachers of ELLs throughout Florida to understand their perspectives on the local implementation of NCLB and its effects on their students and on their roles as teachers. Many of these teachers characterised NCLB as a dominating force that had dramatically affected curriculum, instruction and assessment for ELLs in their schools. They reported a homogenisation of curriculum and instruction driven by the need for students to demonstrate progress on standardised tests. All of the teachers had serious concerns regarding the negative consequences of evaluating ELLs' progress entirely on the basis of such tests, and they explained that because students' test scores determined the outcome of their school's overall performance evaluation, their schools had focused in on the skills and subject areas that were tested. As a result, reading had taken priority over all areas of curriculum and instruction. Students with low reading test scores (and many ELLs fell into this group) were scheduled into additional periods of intensive reading in lieu of elective classes. Even when electives were allowed, the emphasis was still on reading. One teacher explained, 'Our elective classes are almost exclusively about reading. Reading is the real focus now. There's just so much focus on reading skills . . . it just kind of overshadows everything'. Teachers also had concerns with the extremely narrow view of what counted as reading under NCLB and with the teacher-centred, scripted instruction required by the reading programmes adopted in their schools. One elementary teacher complained that the frequent reading assessments required students to 'sound out the words, nonsense words that have no meaning whatsoever. That is so un-ESL! And then, they give them [oral reading] fluency tests! My ESL students can decode, but . . . do they comprehend?'

Even within the ESL curriculum, an emphasis on reading skills had effectively squeezed out literature and other language arts content. Teachers could no longer focus on oral language development or integrated language skills. An ESL high school teacher explained, 'We don't have as much time to focus on listening and speaking and writing skills. They just want us to really pound in the reading comprehension'. In reflecting on how implementation of NCLB had affected their roles in their schools, one ESL teacher noted, 'I think it used to be more teaching language, teaching English as a second language, or more as a grammar teacher. Now it's more focused as a reading teacher'. Another experienced ESL teacher shared her frustration because her expertise in ESL and that of other ESL colleagues was not recognised in her school or district. As a result of their low test scores, her ELLs had been placed in a reading intervention class instead of their ESL class. And, although she had been assigned to teach the class, she was not consulted when textbooks for the class were chosen. She described the process as follows:

The problem as I see it is that everyone is being treated alike, and the materials that are chosen for us . . . first of all, without any input from me whatsoever. Why aren't they asking me what I do right instead of inflicting horrid books on me that don't meet my learners' needs, that are inappropriate for [ELLs]? I mean people with over 20 years of experience, and at a level of master teacher and professionalism in our field . . . There's something radically wrong . . . I mean basically you're driving me out of my classroom. And it's a shame in a way . . . to be driven out of what you do best. What I do best is not this intensive reading stuff.

Collectively, these teachers' voices represent a broad and deep base of professional expertise in ESL teaching in Florida. Unfortunately, their evaluation of NCLB reforms is not a positive one. They believe that ELLs and their unique language and learning needs are poorly understood in their schools and districts, and that their own professional expertise as credentialed ESL teachers is being overlooked in their districts' plans to improve the

academic success of ELLs through generic, remedial, skills-based approaches to their diverse language and literacy needs.

Our second perspective on ESL expertise comes from our research conducted with a cohort of 128 pre-service elementary teachers nearing completion of a five-year teacher preparation programme in Florida. Most planned to teach in general education settings, though they would also be credentialed as ESL teachers upon graduation from their infused ESL endorsement programme. In response to a written survey, these pre-service teachers were asked to describe what good teachers of ELLs need to know and be able to do. They were also asked to characterise the differences between teaching in an inclusion classroom (with both ELLs and proficient English-speaking students) versus a classroom with only proficient English-speaking students.

Analysis of students' responses to the two questions reveals the knowledge, skills and dispositions that were most salient to these teacher candidates at this stage of their preparation. Four general concepts dominated their responses: (1) understanding different English language proficiency levels, (2) knowing how to make instruction comprehensible through a range of strategies (e.g. using visuals, gestures, graphic organisers), (3) knowing students' cultural backgrounds and (4) ensuring a welcoming classroom environment. One student commented, 'They need to feel comfortable; they need to feel their culture and language is valued'. Another emphasised the need 'to try to be patient if they aren't understanding and to try a variety of teaching methods to find the best way to help the students learn'. These responses suggest that general concepts and skills (such as those related to a basic understanding of comprehensible input, cooperative learning and cultural sensitivity) are more easily adopted by mainstream teachers, at least initially, than language- and culture-specific knowledge and skills (such as setting language objectives and using students' funds of knowledge), which were mentioned much less frequently.

A third set of teacher perspectives comes from a study of secondary English language arts teacher candidates ($n = 19$). Like the elementary teacher candidates, these secondary English pre-service teachers would receive the ESOL endorsement upon graduation the following semester, and like the elementary teacher candidates, they were asked to respond to a survey asking what teachers of ELLs need to know and be able to do, and to explain the perceptions of the similarities and differences between teaching ESL and teaching mainstream English language arts to English-proficient students. In specifying the essential knowledge and skills of ESL teachers, the secondary English teacher candidates' responses resembled those of the elementary teacher candidates, but they placed greater emphasis on the ability to provide explicit language instruction. They noted that similarities between the two instructional contexts included building on students' background knowledge, and using visuals or graphic organisers to supplement instruction. Responses describing contrasts between teaching in the two instructional contexts included considering the differences in ELL and English-proficient students' background knowledge and levels of vocabulary, making instruction more comprehensible by simplifying oral language and written text, and setting language objectives to scaffold language learning for ELLs. Like the elementary pre-service teachers, they focused on increasing comprehensible input for ELLs (simplifying oral language in particular, as well as using other strategies such as visuals and graphic organisers). Curriculum adaptations and targeted language instruction (such as selecting and sequencing language functions and forms) or providing optimal student feedback, which are often considered key components of ESL teaching, were not prominent in their responses.

Conclusion

Federal and state educational policies have highlighted the achievement gap and set expectations for the success of ELLs in public schools. Policy implementation, however, has been based on the assumption that the needs of ELLs are not significantly different from those of students who are proficient in English. In many cases, this has resulted in the displacement and deskilling of ESL teachers and dependence on the instruction of minimally prepared mainstream teachers who are equipped with scripted materials and a generic toolkit of teaching strategies presumed to be effective for all students.

Leung (2007) explains how a similar phenomenon of inclusion (mainstreaming) of ELLs was justified in education policy in England following the 1985 Swann Report:

In other words, mainstreaming ESL students takes priority over the adapting and extending the mainstream curriculum for ESL students. The pedagogic option that makes immediate sense in this primarily social integration agenda is a student-oriented one that, above all, aims at helping the individual student benefit from the mainstream classroom activities, dispensing with the need to address ESL as a distinct curriculum issue. (258–259)

Although the social integration goals and the communicative motivation for mainstreaming have not lived up to expectations, the promise of the mainstream remains strong. In Florida, the primary rationale for the full inclusion of ELLs in mainstream classrooms is equal access to the curriculum. Educational reforms at the national level, most notably NCLB, have aligned achievement goals for ELLs with those of their grade-level, English-proficient peers. In order to maximise the potential of mainstream instructional contexts, ESL pre-service and in-service professional development for all teachers of ELLs will be critical. ESL professional development for mainstream teachers must go beyond activities designed to increase comprehensible input and provide a welcoming environment. It must target more informed attitudes towards teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students, deeper understandings of second language and literacy development and of the language demands of content area texts and tasks, and more sophisticated approaches to integrating language and content instruction.

Pre-service teacher preparation should include high-quality field experiences and practicum teaching opportunities that allow them to identify and build on ELLs' specific strengths as well as to address their unique needs. This is particularly critical in the areas of academic content learning, literacy development and formal assessment. Additionally, professional development for state, district and school administrators should help those educators to consider how their policies and programmes (such as the adoption of textbooks and reading programmes, and the provision of specialised support classes, after-school programming and parent/school communications) all serve to include or exclude ELLs. As Nieto (2002) argues, 'While it is true that most language minority students in United States schools are also from racial minority and poor backgrounds, language issues cannot be relegated to either racial or class distinctions alone. Language diversity in and of itself needs to be considered an important difference' (p. 84). Policies and practices must therefore acknowledge the unique cultural and linguistic experiences that ELLs bring and that demand, in many cases, exploration and reformulation of new classroom practices and school structures rather than minor adjustments to existing ways of doing and thinking (Gee 1990; March 1996).

In conclusion, we return to the metaphor of 'the elephant in the room'. The challenge of providing effective schooling for ELLs is present and visible to all, but it is ignored all the same. Awareness of this paradox is important for educators at all levels of policy and practice. Rather than expecting the elephant to settle in to the ill-fitting accommodations

of the mainstream, new learning environments must be created that effectively integrate ELLs (rather than merely physically include them) and that coordinate the knowledge and skills of both specialist ESL teachers and informed general educators. If ELLs are to be included in educational policy and practice in any meaningful sense, ESL expertise must make its way into the mainstream educational discourse on its own terms and not be diluted, dissolved and lost in transit.

Notes

1. Inclusion refers to the full-time placement of ELLs in mainstream classes without the support of separate language classes taught by specialist teachers (e.g. sheltered content, ESL pullout or bilingual instruction). Instead, mainstream teachers are expected to adapt curriculum and instruction for ELLs.
2. According to NCLB, 'highly qualified' is defined as having a bachelor's (or higher) degree and having obtained state certification and demonstrated competence in each of the subjects taught. Foreign language education, reading, art, physical education and vocational education are all listed along with math, science, social studies and English language arts as content areas that require highly qualified teachers.
3. KWL = What you know, what you want to know, what you have learned; TPS = Think-Pair-Share; LEA = Language Experience Approach.
4. TPR = Total Physical Response; BICS = Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills; CALP = Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

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