

2011

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Recommended Citation

Govoni, Jane (2011) "The Evolution, Experiences, and Lessons Learned with ESOL Infusion in Florida," *TAPESTRY*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/tapestry/vol3/iss2/2>

The Evolution, Experiences, and Lessons Learned with ESOL Infusion in Florida

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In preparing preservice teachers to effectively work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds and at varying English proficiency levels, Florida leads the way. This professional and collaborative initiative took almost six years to accomplish, but the results are clearly evidenced today as preservice teachers experience ESOL-integrated course work and field placements throughout their respective programs of study. The efforts began over 20 years ago through a mandate for K-12 teachers to comply with federal and state laws regarding the education of English learners (ELs). This agreement reached between the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al. and the State Board of Education (SBE) Consent Decree is commonly referred to as the Consent Decree and addresses the civil rights of students with the primary right of equal access to comprehensible instruction. In a nutshell, the Consent Decree is the result of a class action complaint filed by Multicultural Education, Training, and Advocacy, Inc. (META) on behalf of a coalition of minority rights advocacy groups in Florida, including the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and a number of students (Florida Department of Education, 2011b).

Looking back, in 1990 the LULAC et al. Consent Decree established specific requirements to provide educational services to English learners in Florida K-12 public schools. Teacher training in ESOL across districts was mandated; however, teacher education programs were not included until a doctoral dissertation, by Gloria Pelaez at Florida Atlantic University, changed the landscape of teacher education in Florida. It was apparent that teacher education programs would eventually have to respond to the demands of the Consent Decree, so Pelaez took the lead and designed an ESOL Integration Curricular Model (EICM) to prepare preservice teachers in undergraduate elementary education programs to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the diverse K-12 student population. In effect, Pelaez opened the door for teacher education programs to meet the training mandates of the Consent Decree that were already in place for K-12 public school teachers. At this same time, the State Board of Education (SBE) rule was amended to include ESOL competencies and skills for teacher certification (4th edition). These competencies were used in the development of the EICM and were later truncated to 25 ESOL Performance Standards. Both the original ESOL Competencies and the 25 ESOL Performance Standards were divided among the five main content areas of ESOL as outlined in the Consent Decree. These areas are methods of teaching ESOL; ESOL curriculum and materials development; cross-cultural communication and understanding; applied linguistics; and testing and evaluation of ESOL.

By 1995, the Florida State Board of Education discussed the adoption of a rule to require teacher preparation programs to provide all preservice teachers with ESOL training. By 1997, the

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Florida Education Standards Commission approved ESOL requirements for teacher preparation programs, and at the same time the national TESOL organization published best practices for PreK-12 English as Second Language (ESL) standards for teacher preparation programs. It was imperative for all educators to bear in mind that the curricular goal of the EICM was designed to prepare preservice teachers to work effectively with students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and that it was not designed to transform every teacher into an ESL specialist. This point was essential in managing the trepidation among ESOL specialists/professionals regarding the ESOL training requirements. At first, the curricular integration model was believed to have a negative impact on the field of ESOL; however, the release of the 1997 ESL Standards (TESOL) supported the initiative and provided a clearer direction for teacher education programs across the State. Yet, even today, the intent of the proposal should be considered in that training through an ESOL integrated model does not clearly define teachers as ESOL specialists.

On April 23, 1998, Florida Atlantic University was granted full approval for an elementary education/ESOL endorsement degree program. The development, design, and implementation of Pelaez's dissertation proposal had a tremendous impact in the field of ESOL and teacher education at both public and private institutions in Florida. Several other colleges and universities were right behind Florida Atlantic University in beginning to design teacher education programs to meet the needs of ESOL preparation and training for their preservice teachers.

During the 2000-2001 academic year, college freshman majoring in teacher education programs were required to meet the mandate for ESOL preparation for preservice teachers upon graduation. According to the *Technical Assistance for Teacher Preparation: Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners* (2011), the following requirements are in place in Florida:

1. Elementary Education, Exceptional Student Education, Prekindergarten/ Primary Education, Middle Grades English (5-9), English 6-12) --15 semester hours, or the equivalent, which cover the five (5) ESOL areas specified in the Consent Decree and State Board Rule 6A-4.0244, F.A.C., Specialization Requirements for the Endorsement in English for Speakers of Other Languages – Academic Class.
2. All other programs – 3-semester college/university hour overview/survey course which addresses at an awareness level the five ESOL areas specified in the Consent Decree and Certification State Board Rule 6A-4.0244. Completion of the ESOL survey course does not constitute an ESOL Endorsement (Florida Department of Education, 2011b).

As a way to maintain a reasonable credit hour requirement for teacher education programs, the ESOL infusion model aligned with the five stand-alone ESOL courses. Candidates enrolled in one of the four majors listed under the first point above were offered an ESOL infused program with a minimum of two ESOL stand-alone courses. The ESOL infusion model provided more flexibility and lessened the burden of extra courses to meet the mandates in ESOL. Today, this model enables preservice teachers to be eligible for their ESOL endorsement upon graduation. There is no need for any other district training in ESOL or a need to take the ESOL subject area certification exam. However, the ESOL infused model requires extensive curricular changes to teacher education programs and highly qualified faculty teaching both the stand-alone and ESOL infused courses.

By 2003, the Stipulation Modifying the Consent Decree mandated sixty points/hours of training in ESOL for school administrators, school psychologists, and guidance counselors. Prior to the Stipulation these educators were required to have 18 points/credits in ESOL training. In addition, the Stipulation added requirements for teachers seeking ESOL certification. Those who pass the ESOL certification exam must also earn 120 hours/points in ESOL prior to becoming certified in ESOL. Currently, each district oversees this process and training requirement and collaborates with the Florida Department of Education to assure the appropriate ESOL training is completed.

By 2004, all preservice teachers graduating from Florida's approved early childhood, elementary education, special education, or English education programs were required to complete ESOL training. In October, 2006, the ESOL Competencies (11th ed.) were aligned with the 25 ESOL Performance Standards to provide a crosswalk of the ESOL Standards and Competencies. According to the Bureau of Student Achievement through Language Acquisition (SALA), which monitors compliance for state and federal rules, the 25 ESOL Performance Standards were voted into Rule by the State Board of Education (SBE) in March of 2009. Section 1004.04, Florida Statutes, which governs state-approval of teacher preparation programs, requires courses and school-based experiences to include instruction, observation, practice, and competency-based demonstration in teaching strategies for the instruction of English learners to meet the requirements set forth in the Consent Decree (Florida Department of Education, 2011a).

For almost two years, a team of national and state experts in the ESOL profession, worked to develop a new set of standards for ESOL for both district and teacher preparation programs. In September 2010, the Florida Teacher Standards for ESOL Endorsement were presented to the legislature and approved. These standards were based on the national Standards for the Recognition of Initial Teacher Preparation in P-12 ESL Teacher Education (TESOL, 2008). The TESOL standards are organized around five domains: language, culture, instruction, assessment, and professionalism. The Florida ESOL Endorsement Standards align with the Consent Decree as follows: Domain 1: Culture (Cross-cultural Communication and Understanding); Domain 2: Language and Literacy (Applied Linguistics); Domain 3: Methods of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language; Domain 4: ESOL Curriculum and Materials Development; Domain 5: Assessment (Testing and Evaluation of ESOL) (Source: Bureau of Student Achievement through Language Acquisition, SALA).

The current Florida Teacher Standards for ESOL Endorsement (2010) must be infused in all state-approved teacher education programs by August 2013. At this time, many institutions are working on infusing standards and will be required to identify and submit an overview of their ESOL infused programs to the Florida Department of Education by September 2012. In completing this task, teacher preparation programs must assess each of the 12 ESOL standards at least twice within the program and address the 59 indicators at least once. This should be completed in an integrated manner in the ESOL infused courses and the ESOL stand-alone courses. According to the Florida Technical Assistance document, "The Florida Teacher Standards for ESOL Endorsement require that candidates demonstrate knowledge of applied linguistics, SLA, and effective teaching strategies and assessment of ELLs" (Florida Department of Education, 2011b). Overall respective programs of study should demonstrate a solid foundation in ESOL with field placements in ESOL occurring at different points throughout the

program to support preservice teachers in understanding and demonstrating mastery of the standards. A direct field experience teaching ELs in a public or private school setting is required. However, in the ESOL overview/survey course a field experience may or may not occur as an ESOL endorsement is not granted to these candidates and therefore, mastery of the standards is not required (Requirement 4, Florida Technical Assistance, Florida Department of Education, 2011b).

In looking at the workload for institutions, the ESOL coordinator plays a pivotal role in collaborating with faculty teaching the infused courses, in re-designing the current ESOL stand-alone courses, as well as in collaborating with local districts. First, the 2010 ESOL Standards for Teacher Endorsement should not be aligned to the 25 ESOL Performance Standards but rather a new ESOL infusion model should be developed for each respective program. This should be a positive aspect, as universities/colleges begin to develop their programs based on experiences and lessons learned from their former infusion models; however, it may also prove to be a burden as the work and commitment to re-align is hefty to say the least. Overall, each program should identify the ESOL Standards that truly meet the objectives of courses regardless of the number of standards or assessments that were used in the previous infusion model. In addition, courses should succinctly allow candidates an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the ESOL Standards. Therefore, it is essential for the ESOL coordinator to work collaboratively with local districts to design a consistent and balanced ESOL training so that assignments and assessments from institutions are meaningful and realistic in practicum and/or student teaching experiences. This collaboration was lacking previously and now the opportunity to foster better communication with districts across the State is open-ended. In addition, course assignments that were weak should be tossed out and the ESOL coordinator should work with faculty to build stronger connections between course objectives, ESOL Standards, and district needs. The ESOL infusion process has been frustrating for many institutions; for example, districts with few ELs are responsible for the same training in ESOL as districts in southern Florida where there is a high population of ELs. This causes major anxiety for preservice teachers who are responsible for completing class projects with ELs in their classroom when in fact, there are little to no ELs available. The Standards for ESOL Endorsement should prove to be practical and useful across Florida. The State has taken great steps to train faculty at institutions and teachers at local districts on the role of the ESOL Standards. There is better communication, more training of trainers, and a clearer and more concise process in place for all institutions to be informed on how to best infuse ESOL. It is no longer a puzzle in which institutions attempt to reach some sort of alignment in ESOL, but rather there is a clear and direct process to infuse ESOL in higher education based on the needs of local districts.

Needless to say, the ESOL infusion process is robust; yet, questions still remain as far as what have we learned and what do we do next? The impact of Pelaez' dissertation is prevalent across the State and is meaningful and positive in so many ways. Districts are not alone in training teachers based on the Consent Decree mandates and collaborative efforts between districts and teacher preparation programs are part of the norm. Florida is one of six states with specific ESOL training requirements in teacher preparation programs (Alaska, Arizona, California, Pennsylvania, and New York). The diversity of the student population in Florida remains consistent, and ESOL training of teachers appears to be a permanent component of teacher education. Districts continue training teachers and both entities, districts and institutions,

are preparing educators to work with all students; however, the question not answered sufficiently is that of how effective are ESOL infused teacher training programs? Limited data are available (deJong et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2011) and more are needed to truly understand the impact of an ESOL integrated model for teacher education programs.

On the other hand, we have learned to work more collaboratively, such as Colleges of Arts and Sciences with Colleges of Education, and we have increased communication between districts and institutions especially when placing preservice teachers in appropriate ESOL field placements. The profession has increased the awareness level of educators, including staff, administrators, and counselors, on the diverse student population and their needs. Teachers seem to be more comfortable seeking support and asking questions related to students from diverse backgrounds and at varying English proficiency levels. Teachers appear to be more at ease in being able to work effectively with all students, and overall school systems seem to be handling the demands and challenges of a diverse population in the K-12 public school system. With new, value-added district teacher evaluation systems currently being designed and implemented throughout districts in Florida, it is surely an appropriate time to determine the overall effects of teacher training in ESOL. Wheeler (2011) identifies positive attributes on teacher training in a private institution and her conclusions should certainly be considered as we consider adaptations and modifications to the ESOL infusion model and teacher training programs. Pelaez' dissertation proposal changed the landscape of Florida education. More research should prove to benefit this proposal and have a great impact in the field. The key factor is for teacher preparation programs to continue collaborating with districts in order to effectively train teachers to meet the needs of every student in every school. Together we can make a difference!

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Jane Govoni is an associate professor in the Department of Education at Saint Leo University in Saint Leo, Florida. She holds a PhD in Second Language Acquisition from the University of South Florida. She has served as ESOL Coordinator in higher education and currently teaches ESOL to preservice teachers and consults in infusing ESOL in Teacher Education Programs across the State. She also serves as an ESOL reviewer for NCATE.