

Becoming a Teacher of English Learners: A Case Study

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Abstract

This qualitative case study presents findings from research focused on the preparation of elementary teacher candidates (TCs) and the instruction of English learners (ELs) in the general education classroom. Set within the context of a literacy methods course on second language acquisition, this inquiry goes on to explore the influence of such experiences as TCs move into their roles as novice classroom teachers. Utilizing praxis as a means of supporting TCs as they move from preservice to novice teachers, this research examines the impact of course-embedded opportunities to learn about the instructional needs of ELs. Findings revealed that course-embedded opportunities supported teachers in developing capacity for the awareness and tensions in teaching ELs, reinforced understandings related to both social and academic language, and provided occasions to own the role and responsibility as a teacher of ELs. Implications for novice teachers, teacher education, and research are discussed.

Keywords: preservice teacher education, English learners, elementary teachers

As teacher education standards and state-level certification requirements increasingly include the teaching of English learners (ELs)¹ as a part of preservice teacher education, teacher educators are teaching courses that focus on instruction for ELs for all teacher candidates (TCs) in order to best prepare teachers for linguistic diversity (Deng et al., 2021). Including core teaching practices (i.e., high-leverage practices) and practice-based opportunities within preservice teacher education to support elementary students, in general, and in support of ELs more specifically, have emerged as promising pathways to support equitable teaching and to more effectively prepare TCs for their work as teachers (Horn & Little, 2010; Peercy, 2014; Peercy & Troyan, 2017; Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2017). In order to implement meaningful classroom and field experiences, these opportunities require collaboration between PreK-12

¹ I refer to English learner (EL) students in this paper as students that are receiving English language services. There is full recognition that these students are emergent bilingual or multilingual learners and bring linguistic and cultural resources.

schools and institutions of higher education to work towards equity, accept educational responsibility, and prepare culturally and linguistically responsive teachers (Lucas et al., 2018).

This study examines the role of a literacy methods course focused on second language acquisition and the embedded learning opportunities in a teaching-focused college. In addition, this inquiry examines the professional capacity of teachers as they move from TC to first-year, elementary classroom teacher. This case study is important, as we know that teacher preparedness to work with ELs is impacted by learning experiences and opportunities to work with ELs, yet there is limited research that unpacks how learning opportunities in coursework on second language acquisition support the capacity of TCs across varying teacher education contexts and once TCs start teaching. Furthermore, the role of teacher education in meeting new mandates (e.g., coursework on teaching ELs) is not fully understood across educator preparation program contexts. This inquiry focuses on the following research questions:

1. In what ways do TCs who have taken part in a literacy methods course on second language acquisition, including innovative course-embedded Studio Days, understand their role and responsibility as teachers of ELs before and after they enter their first year of teaching?
2. How does drawing on praxis support teachers' capacity development and experience of becoming a teacher of ELs?

This paper highlights findings from this research focused on praxis—integration of theory and practice— as a means of supporting teacher candidates (TCs) as they expand their knowledge and expertise in teaching ELs in the elementary classroom.

Conceptual Framework

Recent research highlights both the mismatch between university coursework in teacher education programs and the reality of TCs' field experiences, as well as the need to learn the

actualities of teaching in PreK-12 classrooms (Brown et al., 2020). Furthermore, current scholars of teacher education suggest that teacher education needs to decenter whiteness by incorporating antiracist pedagogy, hiring and supporting more faculty of color, and ensuring that teacher education research promotes equity for teaching and learning for our most vulnerable student populations, their families, and communities (Carter Andrews et al., 2021). ELs are often some of our most vulnerable student populations, and yet there continues to be consensus that as the number of ELs in United States PreK-12 schools continues to grow (Batalova & Zong, 2016), teachers are often unprepared or under-prepared to teach these students when they enter the classroom (Elfers et al., 2013; Gandara et al., 2005; LaCroix & Kuehl, 2019). Additionally, it is recognized that there is a need to move to teacher education pedagogies that focus on culturally and linguistically sustaining teaching (Paris, 2012). Moreover, there is also a necessity to move from the notion of cultural competence to a more robust and relevant focus on TCs and the development of equity literacy – an understanding of how to include equity-oriented teaching practices (Gorski, 2016).

In order to make such imperatives a part of teachers' practice, research suggests that centering professional learning opportunities within the context of teachers' classrooms, through job-embedded professional development, can support teachers as they cultivate their sense of collective responsibility and urgency in the instruction of ELs in their classrooms (Von Esch, 2021). For TCs, the opportunity for course-embedded learning opportunities has the potential to occur during occasions to engage in problems of practice related to ELs during innovative field experiences and partnerships with PreK-12 partners.

Practice-Based Approaches to Teacher Education

Teacher education scholars suggest that a promising approach to bridging this gap between university coursework and the realities of the field include practice-based opportunities embedded within teacher preparation programs (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Peercy & Troyan, 2017; Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2017). This research suggests that creating increased opportunities to move between the theoretical and practical, with guided support of teacher educators and mentor teachers, will enable TCs to translate coursework pedagogies through opportunities to observe and enact practice.

Moreover, current research on practice-based teacher education and instructional practices for ELs indicate that opportunities to engage in implementation and occasions for providing and getting feedback; as well as explaining these goals clearly to TCs is critical (Peercy, 2014). Implementing a practice-based approach in teacher education coursework aligns with calls to focus on equity for ELs in teacher education as we move toward critical practice teacher education (Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020). A critical practice focus in teacher education is rooted in the practice of teaching, while at the same time moving in the direction of social transformation. In doing so, teacher educators can move towards decentering whiteness in their coursework and pedagogies in pursuit of educational equity (Carter Andrews et al., 2021).

Using a practice-based approach within teacher education programs can further impact outcomes of TCs as they move into their roles as novice classroom teachers. Recent research suggests that opportunities for practice-based teacher preparation can positively influence outcomes for instruction in novice teachers' first year on the job (Kang & Windshitl, 2018). Thus, this approach can lead to positive outcomes after TCs leave their teacher preparation programs and begin their teaching careers.

Praxis and Equity Literacy: Meeting the Needs of English Learners

This analysis draws on the dynamic interface between research and practice, or praxis, in teacher education (Bishop, 2014; Pillay, 2015). Praxis goes beyond the application of theory and moves towards engagement in theorizing in local contexts (Pillay, 2015). By inviting TCs to engage in intentional reflection during both their teacher education program and as first-year teachers, teachers are supported in praxis, by reflecting on the interplay between what “the research says” and what are considered to be core practices for teaching, and their lived experiences in local contexts (Bishop, 2014; Pillay, 2015). Moreover, drawing on research on professional learning that facilitates the development of critical praxis highlights the themes of agency, power, and relational trust as enabling structures (Francisco et al., 2021). As TCs engage in course-embedded learning opportunities within the field they have occasions to cultivate their agency and power as teachers of ELs. TCs can draw on this agency and power as teachers of ELs as they move into their roles as novice teacher focused on enacting equitable teaching for linguistically diverse students (i.e., students identified as ELs, multilingual students exited from formal programs for ELs, or students whose native language is not English).

Finally, the construct of equity literacy (Gorski, 2014, 2016; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015), for both teacher educators and TCs, is used to guide this research. In the context of this study, equity literacy refers to, “...cultivating in teachers the knowledge and skills necessary to become a threat to the existence of inequity in their spheres of influence” (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Meeting the needs of ELs in the general education classroom is one area where teachers can use their spheres of influence to make an impact and address issues of equity for linguistically diverse students. Equity literacy for general education classroom teachers includes a recognition

and awareness of inequities in instruction for ELs, responding to this inequity, redressing this inequity, and sustaining equity efforts (Gorski, 2016).

This study adds to what we know about course-embedded learning opportunities in teacher education, as well as fills the gap between what we know about elementary teacher preparation and how these TCs come to understand their role and responsibility as teachers of ELs. Further, this study will add to what we know about praxis in teacher education and approaches to supporting capacity development for TCs as they cultivate their skills and knowledge in meeting the needs of ELs.

Research Methods

This qualitative case study research is situated within a particular context and inquires into how TCs understand their role and responsibility as teachers of ELs before and after they enter their first year of teaching, as well as how praxis can support teachers' capacity development and experience of becoming a teacher of ELs. In this section, the research methods are described, including: (1) background, (2) setting and participants, (3) methodology and data collection, and (4) data analysis.

Background

The context for this study is a teacher certification and master's degree program in childhood education located in a mid-size liberal arts college. The focus for this inquiry is located within the course, *Literacy Development and Second Language Acquisition*. At the time, the state in which the teacher education program was located did not require a course on second language acquisition for certification (this has since changed and is now a state requirement), yet the program deemed the content necessary and required that TCs working towards elementary certification in grades one through six take the course for both program completion and to be

recommended for certification. Given the TCs in the course were not seeking certification for teaching ELs and knowing the research and literature on the gaps between coursework and the field (Horn & Little, 2010; Peercy & Troyan, 2017; Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2017), as well as the professional dissonance in the professional learning trajectory of teachers in taking responsibility for meeting the instructional needs of ELs (Von Esch, 2021), steps were initiated to integrate a more innovative approach in teaching the course.

Setting and Participants

The field-based component for the methods course involved collaboration with a local PreK-12 partner to provide on-site class sessions at an elementary school. These on-site class sessions were intimately connected to course content and pedagogy. This opportunity was framed by an approach that used two Studio Days, where the class observed and participated in small group instruction in a linguistically diverse classroom with roughly 30% of the students identified as ELs. Studio Days were embedded as a part of the course, held during regular class meeting times, and were outside of the TCs' assigned field placements. Notably, the majority of TCs (n=6) did not have ELs in their assigned field placements, so this was a distinct opportunity to be in a classroom and gain hands-on experience with ELs. During Studio Days, data was collected about student learning and language use and development within the context of math lessons, and debriefed with the partner teacher - a master teacher certified in both elementary and as an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher.

Methodology and Data Collection

Using a qualitative case study methodology, this research took an interpretivist approach to data collection and analysis (Yin, 2014). To structure this case study, a bounded set of data sources for this investigation were used, including TC work samples from Studio Days;

reflective writing and formative assessment data on the practice-based opportunities from the course; and autoethnographic memos, field journal and observation notes from the researcher/teacher educator. In addition, once TCs from the teacher education program were in their first year of teaching, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two focal teachers, Cora and Jasmine (both names are pseudonyms), at the end of their first year of teaching. Cora was teaching in the same partner district and school that Studio Days were located. Her fifth-grade classroom included around a 25% EL student population with 40% of the students in the building receiving free or reduced lunch. Jasmine, on the other hand, had moved out of state and was working in an urban school and district. Her fourth-grade classroom included a roughly 30% EL student population and 100% of the students in the building received free and reduced lunch. Total data collection spanned one and a half years.

Based on analysis of the data that was collected and through ongoing refinement of research questions and the conceptual framework for the study, the focus was on TC and novice teacher learning related to teaching ELs after participation in course-embedded learning opportunities, including innovative field experiences within a partner school, taking a practice-based approach to teacher education (Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020). This interpretivist case study method drew on TC learning through Studio Days and investigated how these learning opportunities during teacher preparation led to subsequent novice teachers' understanding of their role and responsibility in teaching ELs.

Data Analysis

An iterative process was used to code all data sources: course materials, student work samples, memos, field journal, observation notes, and interviews (Charmaz, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, the constant comparative method was used to analyze the data

corpus (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using an inductive and iterative coding and data analysis process allowed for qualitative codes, categories, and themes to emerge (Glesne, 2006). Drawing on aspects of grounded theory, where the findings emerge from the collected and analyzed data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), while at the same time referencing the initial conceptual framework, provided an analytic process that enabled key themes to emerge from the data. Ongoing data reduction was used to refine hunches and findings, while making associations between my research questions, the study context, and data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, triangulation was used across data sources to identify any disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994); this included verification and discussion with study participants during the iterative data analysis process.

Findings

Several findings emerged from the data (1) preservice and novice teachers' awareness and tensions in teaching ELs, (2) development of a teaching practice inclusive of social and academic language development, and (3) course-embedded opportunities as instances to own the role and responsibility as a teacher of ELs.

Preservice and Novice Teacher Awareness and Tensions in Teaching ELs

Based on evidence from student work samples in the course, Cora and Jasmine both developed a greater sense of awareness of ELs. Through course-embedded learning opportunities within the teacher education program, the TCs were able to connect theory to practice as they deconstructed, planned, and rehearsed core practices for ELs within the course setting and then moved into the field to observe and support ELs and teachers doing this important work in support of ELs from the position of classroom teacher. As these same TCs moved into their first year of teaching, and reflecting back across the school year, both teachers articulated the tensions

they experienced as they better understood their roles, the demands they experienced as practicing teachers, and the resources available to them to support their instruction of ELs in the elementary classroom.

Growth and Awareness Through Course-Embedded Opportunities

Reflections from Cora and Jasmine during and after Studio Days reflected growth and awareness in teaching ELs and the integration of theory and practice. After each Studio Day, students were asked to respond to a series of specific prompts related to their notes about noticing and wondering about supporting language development in the elementary math classroom. Students made links to theory and practice in their responses, specifically wondering about how the classroom and instruction could support the best-practices we had been reading about for class. For example, Jasmine noted some big picture wonderings after the first Studio Day:

- *I wonder how students' home language can be incorporated more into lessons; more than learning greetings in other languages?*
- *I wonder how the classroom teacher has collaborated with parents to incorporate students' language/culture funds of knowledge into the classroom?*

Cora wondered about the logistics of the Studio Day, pondering how the lesson and instruction would have looked with fewer adults in the room. These wonderings speak to the TCs recognition of both best practices for teaching ELs and also what they were observing as missing (i.e., how classroom teachers can incorporate home language into math instruction), as well as hints at their concern about how they might implement something similar in their own teaching in the future (i.e., what does this lesson look like when less adults are available to support students?).

During the second Studio Day TC wonderings became more specific. For instance, Cora wondered "...how this activity could be expanded to be offer opportunities for students who answered quickly to challenge themselves." Jasmine also stretched her wondering and thinking making the following comments:

- *How can you contextualize and make math word problems relevant to students in the class, but prepare them for [the state] assessment?*
- *How does content confidence impact ELs confidence in orally sharing information?*

The noticing and wondering that the TCs participated in after both Studio Days helped them to make sense of what they were observing and experiencing in the field. The data suggests that the TCs were able to demonstrate growth and awareness of what it means to be a teacher of ELs in an elementary classroom. They grappled with questions that many teachers of ELs in general education classroom settings wrestle with as they meet both content and language development demands (Valdes et al., 2014).

Moving From Theory to Practice

That said, once the teachers moved into their roles as first-year teachers tensions related to how to best serve ELs in their contexts emerged. Both teachers grappled as first-year teachers with taking what they knew to be true from theory and research, as well as their own social justice frameworks of teaching, to the point of action. Both teachers believed they knew some things about teaching ELs and what it might mean to advocate and teach ELs, yet they were unsure of how to respond in their contexts. Both were in situations where they were expected to reach out to the ENL teacher assigned to the ELs in their classrooms on their own. Without a formalized plan for collaboration, both teachers were left to negotiate this professional relationship individually. Cora had more success with this as her ENL teacher pushed-in every

day. Jasmine, on the other hand, only had the support of an ENL teacher once per week and this teacher moved between buildings. As Cora pointed out in an interview at the end of her first year of teaching, “I think that the ENL teacher here a great resource, but it’s up to us to make that connection.”

As Jasmine was not able to collaborate with the ENL teacher frequently, she mainly received input from other teachers in her building. These interactions sometimes pushed upon her own beliefs about ELs and her ability to advocate. In one critical moment, Jasmine found herself unprepared to respond to her more experienced colleagues. Jasmine reflected on one particular moment from her first year of teaching:

Teachers will sometimes make inappropriate comments about Muslim students or the ELs, because they’re mostly Muslim... I had some behavioral issues with these two kids who are both ELs, both Muslims and one of the teachers was like, ‘Yeah, just keep riding it out. It’s a cultural thing. Those kids don’t respect women.’ I really wanted to respond to that, but I was just like, ‘I’m just gonna let that go and walk the other way.’ I just don’t know how to respond sometimes and how I [can or should] advocate.

Jasmine’s reflection clearly articulates this tension between what she knows and thinks from a social justice and theoretical perspective and yet struggled with how to respond within the context of her professional work with more experienced teachers countering her own beliefs. While the course-embedded learning opportunities and content embedded in her teacher education program provided her with a foundation for understanding her role as a teacher of both content and language as an elementary classroom teacher, this culture and climate in her new teaching position was not supportive of enacting best practices for ELs, advocating for culturally and linguistically diverse students, or her own social justice position.

Development of a Teaching Practice Inclusive of Social and Academic Language

Development

As TCs and as novice teachers in their first year of teaching, both Cora and Jasmine were aware of ELs' social and academic language development based on their knowledge of theory and course-embedded learning opportunities from the methods course on second language acquisition (Valdes et al., 2014; Walqui, 2006). Moving this knowledge of second language acquisition and core practices for ELs into their instructional practice was more fraught as they each tried to make sense of their teaching in response to the need to support academic language development while teaching standards-aligned content.

Making Sense of Social and Academic Language Development Through Course-Embedded Learning Opportunities

Through analysis of reflective writing and discussions during and after Studio Days, TCs demonstrated "critical noticing and wondering" that highlighted their emerging understandings of teaching ELs, as well as ELs' social and academic language development. For instance, both noted that they recognized the importance of connecting with students' prior knowledge and backgrounds. They stated that they saw the importance of providing linguistic scaffolds for ELs and all their students.

After the first Studio Day, both TCs engaged in intentional reflection that led to insights related to their understanding of social and academic language development. Cora noticed how, "...explicitly and thoughtfully language was used within the classroom." Moreover, Cora was able to unpack how ELs' linguistic resources were used within the math lesson stating on the class online discussion board: "This lesson promoted opportunities for students to use their own experiences and understanding of their survey questions to develop a strategy that worked for

them and allowed them to record their data.” Additionally, TCs were able to frame their ‘wonderings’ in ways that connected second language acquisition theory to observations from practice. Jasmine wrote the following on the class online discussion board after the first Studio Day: (1) “I wonder how the classroom teacher has collaborated with parents to incorporate students’ language/culture and funds of knowledge into the classroom?” and (2) “I wonder how classroom teachers and the ENL teacher can collaborate to support students in the classroom, even when the ELL teacher is not there?”

Coming back for the second Studio Day, the reflective comments made by both Cora and Jasmine were more nuanced. Jasmine noticed the following related to linguistic scaffolds, “The teachers were supporting students and acting as scaffolds for students that need extra support,” and, “Students used their whiteboard as a scaffold for their speaking.” Furthermore, Jasmine was able to breakdown the academic language demands expected of ELs during the lesson responding with the following on the discussion board related to the academic language demands expected of students: “Comprehend the question (listening), write a statement (writing), orally share your whiteboard (speaking).”

The reflective comments made by Cora and Jasmine after the Studio Days highlight how this course-embedded learning opportunity within the methods course focused on second language acquisition for elementary TCs provided the students with the space to connect theory on social and academic language within the context of an actual classroom with ELs.

Making Sense of Social and Academic Language Development as First-Year Teachers

As the teachers moved into their first year of teaching, the focus on supporting both social language development, as well as ELs’ academic language development continued as a

theme. The development of a teaching practice that could support both the social and academic language development created some anxiety for both teachers.

Cora discussed this tension as it related to one of her entering ELs from her first year of teaching, “I want him to develop that comfort in just speaking... having that time for social interaction...in fifth grade, it feels like there’s not enough of that...it’s very academic.” So, in this sense, it seemed that Cora was grappling with how to support both social and language development, alongside supporting academic language.

That said, Cora did note in the interview at the end of her first year of teaching that she noticed the effectiveness of using clear structures for collaboration, specific protocols, consistent routines and structures as important tools for setting expectations and supporting academic language development. So, it did seem that Cora was able to negotiate sentence stems that are posted at the top of the board that she had her students use for conversation throughout the school year. Cora noted how useful this strategy was in teaching students how to interact with one another during class conversations:

Several of the ENL students really latch onto those [sentence stems] and use them frequently, and I think it really supports them...because I noticed in the beginning of the year that a lot of students were only thinking about what they were gonna say. And how they were gonna say it...and I think those encourage them to think about what other people are saying and then build off that.

Jasmine also noted the impact of the second language acquisition methods course as a TC on her first year of teaching stating in her interview:

I think the ELL course we took really just prepared me overall because I think a lot of...my students struggle with language, so whatever I would have done with the ELL

kids is really helping all of them...all my kids are under grade level...they really struggle with reading...with writing and language...so I didn't feel unprepared at all.

Additionally, in recounting a science lesson on, "Liquids, solids, or gas?" Jasmine noted that the students did not have the language for icicles. The students called icicles "ice sticks." She noted, in general, the need to develop academic language with all of her students noting the importance of, "...trying to build that academic language, while also using a lot...of visuals and videos in order to build that background knowledge." She also discussed the importance of group work and strategic pairing of students, going on to say, "...maybe sometimes I rely on it too much but I rely on having those social interactions help the students."

Jasmine was able to think back to her experiences as a TC and experience from the methods course on second language acquisition to process and make sense of her teaching as a first-year classroom teacher of ELs. This sense making and connection to theory came through when she highlighted in her interview:

It was really interesting to see this girl that came right from Mali to our school, how quickly her non-academic [social] language grew and how quickly she was picking up English...that was just really interesting because it was exactly like what they saw, what we read about in class.

As Cora and Jasmine made sense of social and academic language as TCs and as first-year teachers, they were able to process and make sense of theory and then link the theoretical to what they were observing and experiencing in the classroom. This seemed to happen during both their course-embedded learning opportunities as TCs during Studio Days, as well as once they were in their own classrooms as first-year teachers. As Cora remarked after the second Studio Day, "This Studio Day reiterated many of the instructional strategies we have learned to support

ELs.” The data revealed that both Cora and Jasmine entered their first year of teaching with a strong sense of ownership for the role and responsibility of teaching ELs.

Course-embedded Opportunities as Instances to Own the Role and Responsibility as a Teacher of ELs

One criticism of some approaches for the instruction of ELs is that it is not enough to consider instruction for all students, but specifically requires attention to the linguistic needs of ELs (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Still, as a teacher educator in a preservice program for general education teachers, this is a common refrain from TCs, as well as experienced teachers, and seems to be an entry point for owning the role and responsibility as a teacher of ELs. As Jasmine concluded when asked what else she wanted to share about her first year of teaching, she stated “I think just overall, how EL kids learn. I think being able to apply that just in the gen ed classroom has been helpful because all my kids really do struggle with the same things an EL student may struggle with.”

Reflecting on the course-embedded learning opportunities afforded by Studio Days within the second language acquisition methods class, the data suggests that instances of observing instruction and ELs in an authentic classroom setting can trigger meaning-making for TCs that has the potential to carry over into their first years of teaching. For instance, Jasmine asked the following question after our second Studio Day: “How can you contextualize and make math word problems relevant to students in the class, but [also] prepare them for the [state] assessment?” Moreover, Jasmine wanted to know, “How does content confidence impact ELs confidence in orally sharing information?” While Jasmine was eager to share that she believes that linguistic scaffolds are supportive for all her students, and in her case as a first-year teacher she teaches many students that are academic language learners, she is also seemed to develop

expertise and key understandings about ELs and the intersection between academic language learning, second language acquisition, assessment demands, and social development.

Cora also demonstrated her understanding of the role of the elementary classroom teacher in helping to provide linguistic scaffolds for ELs remarking on the second Studio Day lesson:

[The master teacher] highlighted one students' response to labels, letting students know that using labels in math is very similar to using labels in science. I think it is important to offer opportunities for students to see connections between subject matter.

This is true, in particular, for ELs that are learning language and content simultaneously. This noticing by Cora suggests that she was able to pick-up and make sense of the role of the classroom teacher in making these linguistic connections for students related to the language demands across subjects. This responsibility for providing linguistic scaffolds for ELs carried over into Cora's first year of teaching.

While not required, Cora made a point during her first year of teaching to develop a plan with the ENL teacher to make time for consistent co-planning. Cora took on this responsibility and assumed this duty as a part of her role as a fifth-grade classroom teacher. They use Google Docs to plan and squeeze in their planning time however they are able: at lunch, after school, through email, or text. Cora remarked in her interview that as first-year teacher in terms of planning with the ENL teacher:

Some weeks are better than others and what we're working on...impacts that. But I think we're both excited to bounce ideas off of one another...she has a lot of ideas which I really appreciate because I feel like I need it.

The opportunity for ongoing conversations with the ENL teacher seemed to have impacted Cora and her understanding of her role as both supporting English language development and

supporting first language preservation. She remarked that a student from Iraq was speaking less and less Arabic, so the ENL teacher started an Arabic Club at lunch and the student was reading and practicing their Arabic and would be reading an Arabic children's book to different classes. This interaction helped Cora to reflect on the importance of supporting and preserving ELs first language, remarking: "I've...been thinking about the importance of language and of really fostering students' languages and how do I support them in, not only learning English, but also in preserving and continuing to learn in their language." Cora further went on to note ongoing conversations she has been having with the ENL teacher related to holding high expectations for ELs in terms of final products stating: "How are we holding [ELs] students to high expectations...pushing them as learners but also creating opportunities for them to be successful? What does that look like?" In reflecting on these conversations, Cora referenced having the background in second language acquisition was super important to her understanding of assessment for ELs and what might be her "look-fors" with ELs across different language proficiency levels when having them complete a specific assignment.

Drawing on the data from the Studio Days as TCs and triangulated with interview data at the end of the first year of teaching, both Jasmine and Cora seem to own the role and responsibility of teaching both ELs and academic language learners their fourth and fifth-grade classrooms, respectively. The data points to the impact of the second language acquisition class and the course-embedded learning opportunities located within the course as impactful to this sense of ownership related to their roles as teachers of ELs as first-year teachers.

Discussion and Implications

This qualitative case study research provides an example of how innovative approaches to teacher education (Peercy & Troyan, 2017; Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2017), specifically related

to preparing general education teachers to work with ELs in elementary school contexts, can support teachers of ELs before and after they enter their first year of teaching in understanding their role and responsibility. As teacher educators begin to transform their pedagogy and take up course-embedded learning opportunities and innovative approaches to teacher education, this research contributes to what we know about supporting teacher capacity for the instruction of ELs in both preservice and inservice contexts (Babinski et al., 2018; Bauler & Kang, 2020; Russell, 2017; Von Esch, 2021).

The reality is there needs to be a sense of urgency and support for the instruction of ELs across teacher preparation and once teachers move into their roles as practicing teachers. As districts move to models that include ELs in the general education classroom, it is imperative to draw on collaborative models of teaching between general education and ENL teachers (Hopkins et al., 2019; Kibler et al., 2019; Russell, 2019), as well as job-embedded professional learning opportunities that support both this transition and the ongoing work of teaching ELs in the general education context (Von Esch, 2021). Ultimately, the goal with such course-embedded learning opportunities and innovative approaches to teacher education is to support TCs as they develop skills and knowledge, while simultaneously cultivating an equity and advocacy stance for ELs (Russell & Richey, 2017).

While there are limitations to this qualitative case study including a small sample size with only two TCs turned first-year teachers under analysis, the findings are significant in that they speak to the tensions involved as TCs develop their capacity for teaching ELs. There is a vital need for elementary teachers to develop their capacity as they become teachers of ELs. Moreover, this research provides insight into how these teachers developed a teaching practice that was cognizant and inclusive of social and academic language development. Finally, the

findings suggest that the experience of a course-embedded, innovative approach within a second language acquisition methods course provided the opportunity to cultivate the role and responsibility as a teacher of ELs that carried over into the TCs first year of teaching.

Current research suggests that course-embedded learning opportunities with the field, such as Studio Days, can be mediated when teacher educators take on the role of facilitator in ways that encourage collaborative learning among all participants, allow for experimentation, and cultivate a nurturing professional learning environment that feels safe and trustworthy (Gibbons et al., 2021). Making room for this emotional space within a course-embedded, innovative learning opportunity was seen when TCs wrestled with tensions and questions through their noticing and wondering during and after Studio Days. Moreover, this critical inquiry and wondering, for both Cora and Jasmine, carried over into their work as first-year teachers as they were confronted with both practical and conceptual push-back, either logistically or from other teachers, within their teaching contexts.

This study indicates that we need to know more about how teacher educators are encouraged to transform their pedagogy and take-up critical and innovative approaches. There is a need to further examine the impact of such approaches on teacher educators, TCs, and novice teachers once they enter their own classrooms. In addition, the findings from this research suggest that we need to know more about the longer-term impact of teachers' capacity and commitment to the role and responsibility as teachers of ELs after the first year in their classrooms. Moreover, research related to the teachers' school contexts and the support, or lack thereof, of school and district leadership to sustain a commitment to the instruction of ELs in the general education classroom need to be explored.

Conclusion

Seeing oneself as a teacher of ELs, along with owning the role and responsibility as a teacher of ELs, is not a given for general education teachers. This makes course-embedded, innovative approaches to developing TCs' capacity for teaching ELs all the more impactful. This study contributes to current research concerned with innovative approaches to teacher education (Percy & Troyan, 2017; Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2017), specifically related to preparing general education teachers to work with ELs. As our elementary classrooms become more linguistically diverse, it is imperative that our teacher preparation programs are responsive to the needs of preparing teachers that have the capacity, as well as dispositions, for teaching this student population (Heineke & Giatsou, 2020). More specifically, our elementary teachers must own this role and responsibility in teaching ELs; they must, in conclusion, become teachers of ELs.

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