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Not long ago, I had a conversation with a young woman who had recently completed her preservice teacher education program. She had had a good student teaching experience and felt she learned a lot from her cooperating teacher and other mentors. Excited about having her own classroom in the coming year, she told me about her plans for organizing her class and using varied instructional approaches to engage students in inquiry and collaborative learning. She felt she had a solid understanding of child development and learning theories, and was confident of her ability to apply those theories in her teaching. Her enthusiasm and smile disappeared, however, when I asked how she would approach teaching children who were learning English as a second language. Knowing she would likely have English language learners (ELLs) in her class, she felt anxious about teaching them. In a few university courses she had learned about strategies
for adapting instruction for ELLs, but had never actually seen any of these strategies in practice. As this novice teacher explained, the one ELL in her student teaching classroom was pulled out of the class for a large portion of every day, and when in the class he sat by himself and seemed lost most of the time. To avoid embarrassing this student, the cooperating teacher adopted a strategy of not calling on him. But she also did very little to engage him in learning activities because, as she confessed to the student teacher, she was not sure how to teach him.

I am certain the above account would, with minor variations, describe the experiences and feelings of many, if not most, novice and experienced teachers in U.S. schools. Yet a preponderance of evidence suggests that increasing numbers of teachers will have ELL students in their classes (Valdés & Castellón, 2011). Between 1979 and 2004, the number of young people who spoke a language other than English at home rose by 162%, compared to just an 18% increase in the total number of school-age children and youth. The changes in this student population are having a major impact on schools and teachers across the country, even in areas that historically have been monolingual and monocultural (Education Week, 2009; Fix & Capps, 2005).

Along with the growing number of ELLs in schools, the turn toward inclusion and away from bilingual education and other special programs for ELLs has also increased the likelihood that general education teachers will have ELLs in their classes (Villegas & Lucas 2011). Policies written into the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which are still in place in 2013, limit the time ELLs can remain in ESL or bilingual programs, require them to take standardized tests in English after three years, emphasize content knowledge, and give no attention to teacher expertise in language and culture. These policies have contributed to the inclusion “megatrend” (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003, p. 112) that maximizes the time ELLs spend in general education classes. As a result, classroom teachers have a new responsibility for educating ELL students, whom they would not have been teaching in decades past (Evans & Hornberger, 2004; Freeman & Riley, 2005).

The third factor beginning to be felt by general education teachers is the introduction of the Common Core Standards. These standards are intended to raise the bar for the academic achievement of students and, of necessity, to place new expectations on teachers. Because the new standards accentuate the importance of language and literacy skills, they are especially challenging for ELLs (Bunch, 2013). Teachers need to be able to engage ELLs in deep and sustained learning of academic content that will result in their mastery of the rigorous language and literacy requirements of the Common Core Standards.

Unfortunately, most teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs now (Reeves, 2006; Walker, Shafer, & Iams, 2004), much less to ensure that they meet more rigorous standards. Even many teachers who value linguistic
diversity and bilingualism in general are reluctant to have ELLs in their classes because they feel ill prepared to engage them in learning (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Penfield, 1987; Walker et al., 2004). These teachers are not wrong about their lack of preparedness. Being a good teacher in general does not guarantee that someone will be a good teacher of ELLs (de Jong & Harper, 2005). In fact, teaching ELLs well requires special knowledge, skills, and orientations that few teachers have had the opportunity to develop. Several scholars have offered conceptions of this linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical expertise (Bunch, 2013; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2005), but there is as yet no consensus about its nature and substance.

This book helps to move the field forward, making a valuable contribution to the small body of work that has sought to conceptualize this knowledge base and expertise. De Oliveira and Yough have assembled a collection of thoughtful and thought-provoking chapters that report on empirical studies and offer analyses of policies and practices that can inform and inspire teachers and teacher educators regarding the preparation of teachers of ELLs.

The book’s two sections highlight work focused on teacher perceptions and beliefs and content-area issues for teaching ELLs. Under the section “Teacher Perceptions and Beliefs,” the chapters explore perceptions and beliefs teachers hold regarding teaching ELLs. In their chapter, de Oliveira and Burke draw on practitioner knowledge to suggest a knowledge base for teaching ELLs in elementary schools. The remaining three chapters take three different perspectives on teachers’ beliefs. They explore the beliefs of teachers who are immigrants about their roles as teachers (Abramova), and the potential to influence teachers’ beliefs and perceptions of ELLs through service learning (Yough, Gilmetidnova, & Perera) and through learning about home literacy practices (Cortes Santiago & Arvelo Alicea). The first two chapters in the section “Content-Area Issues for Teaching ELLs” examine the pedagogical and linguistic analysis skills for teaching the language arts common core standards (Maune & Klassen) and the mathematics common core standards to ELLs (Arvin & Iddings). The next chapters examine the teaching of writing to ELLs at the K-12 level (Palaez-Morales & Angus) and the knowledge for teaching science, specifically how teachers can draw on students’ life experiences to teach science concepts and the genre of school science (Lan). The last chapter (Olesova & Garcia) describes useful technology tools for teaching ELLs and what teachers need to know to use them in teaching ELLs.

The book has several notable features. The first of these is its attention to rarefied content. Given the immense need to prepare all teachers to teach ELLs, it is disturbing that there is so little literature on the issue. This
deficit in our knowledge must be rectified if we are to effectively address this expanding need. Thus, *Preparing Teachers to Work with English Language Learners in Mainstream Classrooms* is a welcome addition to the few other books that tackle this project (Brisk, 2008; Lucas, 2011; Tellez & Waxman, 2006). Another important feature is the inclusion of chapters that target particular school subjects, science, mathematics, language arts, and writing, and the Common Core Standards for language arts and mathematics. With the current emphasis on teaching, learning, and assessment of academic content and the implementation of the Common Core Standards, these chapters offer essential and current insights for teachers and teacher educators. A third important aspect of this book is the attention it gives to linguistic features of key school genres (the discourse of science class and of the Common Core Standards in Language Arts and Mathematics). ELLs benefit greatly from explicit attention to features of content-specific academic discourse, but few teachers have the tools for engaging students in such analyses (Schleppegrell, 2004). Also worthy of comment is that the chapters (other than those by de Oliveira and Yough) are reports of research projects conducted by graduate students at Purdue. These young researchers are making a contribution to the emerging literature on the preparation of classroom teachers for teaching ELLs. It is through work on the ground with novice researchers like these as well as preservice and inservice teachers that we can ultimately build a critical mass of educators who will greet ELLs in their classrooms, not with anxiety and uncertainty, but with enthusiasm, confidence, and competence.

REFERENCES


