Preparing linguistically responsive teachers: Why service-learning is such a good idea

Sandra Rodriguez-Arroyo

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Sandra Rodriguez-Arroyo, D.Ed.

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CUMU 2015
Education Week identified Nebraska as one of thirteen states where the enrollment of ELLs grew over 200% from 1995 to 2005 (Editorial Projects in Education, 2009, p. 2).


July 2010
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>13,803</td>
<td>19,128</td>
<td>18,388</td>
<td>19,323</td>
<td>20,062</td>
<td>17,532</td>
<td>16,895</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14_tables/dt14_204.20.asp
Nebraska schools reported 18,500 Limited English speaking students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 and 103 languages other than English.

**LANGUAGES**

- Spanish 13,693
- Karen 1,053
- Arabic 613
- Vietnamese 516
- Somali 381
- Nilo-Saharan (Other) 399
- Other 1,964

**By Grade Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>2,729</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gr 1</td>
<td>5,226</td>
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<td>Gr 2</td>
<td>2,055</td>
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<td>Gr 3</td>
<td>2,111</td>
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<td>Gr 4</td>
<td>1,713</td>
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<td>Gr 5</td>
<td>1,445</td>
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<td>Gr 6</td>
<td>905</td>
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<td>Gr 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gr 11</td>
<td>519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr 12</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

84\% of current UNO students are from Nebraska

Source: The UNO Fact Book 2015-2016
COE STRATEGIC GOAL:

Increase candidates’ knowledge and understanding of teaching students who are different from themselves (culturally responsive teaching).
SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCES (SLE) FOR ELLS

• Lucas and Villegas (2013) insist that teacher educators must be strategic in how to prepare TCs to teach ELLs when there are no required courses in a program. One strategy to prepare teachers to teach ELLs is through the use of SLE.

• Clayton (2010) defines SLE as a “collaborative teaching and learning strategy designed to promote academic enhancement, personal growth, and civic learning. Students render meaningful service in community settings that present them with experiences related to academic material” (p. 2).

• Tinkler and Tinkler (2013) argue that SLE provide the “possibility to target experiences with particular populations of students, specifically English language learners” (p. 108).
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

• The teacher orientations emphasized in the linguistically responsive teaching framework include sociolinguistic consciousness, a value for linguistic diversity and an inclination to advocate for linguistically diverse students (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

• Lucas and Villegas (2013) state that even though culture plays an important role in the teaching and learning process, it cannot be separated from language, therefore “our goal is to spotlight the language-related issues that are too often lost in the larger conversation about culturally responsive teacher preparation” (p. 100).
DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

• Pre/post Learning to Teach for Social Justice-Beliefs Scale (Ludlow, Enterline, Cochran-Smith, 2008).
• Researcher’s fieldnotes
• Course requirements (syllabus, reading responses, service learning reflections, final paper).
Course description: TCs in Nebraska are required to enroll in Literacy and Learning, an education course on incorporating literacy strategies (oral, listening, reading, written, and digital) into content areas such as social studies, science, math, physical education, art, and music. During the first weeks of the semester, TCs usually meet as a class to study literacy strategies such as graphic organizers, vocabulary cards, RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic), read alouds, and more (Fisher & Frey, 2012). The SLE required the TCs to practice the literacy strategies with ELLs from a local middle school.

SLE meetings take place at the middle school, the university campus, and at the community partner’s site (Gracier Creek Preserve) located northwest of Omaha. These past semesters (Spring 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015), the prairie project focused on developing consciousness about prairie conservation through pictures and incorporating high-level academic vocabulary with words that described the prairie. Additionally, before beginning the SLE and per their request, the TCs received more specific instruction on teaching ELLs. Three class sessions focused on the diversity of ELLs, the SIOP Model, and a guest speaker that talked to the TCs about Service-Learning for Cultural Engagement.
Quantitative: Pre/post Learning to Teach for Social Justice-Beliefs Scale (Ludlow, Enterline, Cochran-Smith, 2008), Pre/post SLE Survey Significant Results:

• At the end of the service learning experience TCs answers showed that they strongly believed teachers should not have lower expectations for students who don’t speak English.

• Significant change on answer for “I know how to work with others to solve a problem in my community” item- 75% pre-project survey/92% post-project survey

• However in the item: “It is my responsibility to be actively involved in community issues,” the results went down- 100% pre-project survey/83% post-project survey.
• Qualitative-SL reflections, dialogue journals with ELLs, final presentations, participant observation, researcher’s journals, and e-mail communications.

• Data analysis from the students’ final presentations show that TCs tend to incorporate several literacy during their sessions:
  
  • Writing strategies: RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic)
  • Background knowledge, vocabulary development with visual aids, graphic organizers, and technology (iPads, SMART Boards, Laptops)
  • Research skills: Big 6, brainstorming, online resources, library materials
  • Reading skills (Before, During, and After Reading activities).
OTHER EXAMPLES:
http://prezi.com/s5ik1ewuf5an/literacy-strategies/
http://prezi.com/io6bqv buzldi/human-influences-on-the-prairie/
Content analysis of the student reflections. Themes from the students’ reflections based on Harwood, Fliss, and Gualding’s (2006):

1. Understanding of students:

- My students are Aung and Aye, who each have their own specific personalities that I love. Aung is very quiet and shy, but once he starts to open up, he is very spunky and funny! Aye is outgoing and extremely smart. She is very determined and passionate about chasing her college dreams! I really enjoy each and every time we get to work with our ESL student’s and get to know their lives outside of this service-learning project. Aung is playing soccer for the school, and Aye and her friends like to go and watch his games.
2. Understanding of service-learning pedagogy (each reflection for the Prairie Project requires TCs to connect their experiences with service-learning readings)

- While reading the article “Service Learning Promotes Positive Youth Development in High School,” I came across a very powerful statement: “nurturing young people’s civic actions, motivations, and skills can have lasting benefits for both youth and society.” Although I feel that this is talking to the students taking place in the service-learning project, an impact can also be made on the students the project is working with. For example, I loved the experience of working with my two ESL students. I have learned so much, because I have never had the opportunity to work with students trying to learn English. It has greatly opened my eyes to the ESL community.
3. General pedagogical understanding

- Before diving into the organizers I used the literacy strategy of questioning to help them with their photographs. Once they picked their picture they had to explain to me why they picked it. It is one thing to say that you picked a picture because you liked it but it is another thing to go into detail about the exact reasons. This not only helped with their descriptions of the photos but it also helped to brainstorm ideas for possible words. In our book it states, “Classrooms should include ample experiences in responding to questions that require students to analyze information, identify problems, develop original solutions, and formulate opinions” (Fisher & Grey, p. 84). When they explain why they chose their photos they are analyzing the photo next to other options, identifying positives and negatives, and formulating higher-level opinions of not only what is good and bad but what is better and best.
4. Understanding the community

- I really enjoy each and every time we get to work with our ESL student's and get to know their lives outside of this service learning project. Mohamed is playing soccer for his school, and Rose and her friends like to go and watch his games.
5. Knowledge About Self

- Some people might be concerned about the language barrier, but I am comfortable with people whose first language isn’t English because it is something I am around constantly. If I had to pick something I am slightly more hesitant about it is that they are older than the students I am around most frequently. Being elementary education, I am typically around the younger kids more, but I don’t think it will be a problem. (However, this TC was not expecting that one of her students refused to talk to her or to anyone for that matter.)
- I was slightly overwhelmed during the hour because one of my students had major technical issues with her computer and the other was not responding to anything I suggested. I am starting to get concerned about how I am going to help him finish his project because he has refused to talk to myself, other teachers, and other students. I have tried several different tactics to get him to speak and he refuses to. Even by asking him yes or no questions he will not give me an answer. Luckily, he got done what needed to be done for the first class period but I am more concerned about the next class. The next session will require a lot of work and communicating between us both.
Ultimately, I think this service learning has been a wonderful experience, which provided me with opportunities to work with ELL students, apply literacy strategies, and learn about the Nebraska prairie. Daw was an amazing student, and I hope he learned as much as I did from this experience. There were challenges along the way, but in the end, it all worked out. The students had fun and expanded their vocabulary. I am so glad that they had a chance to present their hard work, as all those students truly deserve recognition for their accomplishments this semester.
Additional Findings:

- In the Spring of 2014 the TCs also used dialogues journals to develop a relationship with the ELLs while they were not able to meet in person. My favorite quote from these dialogue journals comes from an ELL that wrote to her TC: “[sic] You look like you scared when you talk, don’t be scare I feel comfortable with you. I talk a lots if you know me really well. I am gland I get to work with you.” (Original misspelling, grammar, etc.)

- TCs used iPads, computers, cell phones to search for images and definitions for concepts that they had difficulty explaining to the ELLs. The use of technology decreased, as TCs and ELLs “understood each other.”
Additional Findings:

- Some students still believe in the notion that they had the ability to “help” the ELLs. This view reinforces the “missionary” approach of working with culturally diverse learners that Hess, Lanig, and Vaughan (2007) express concern about when implementing SLE. There was one student in particular, who repeated the word help more than once throughout his reflections. For example:

  - *I was very happy with what was accomplished and with my ability to help. I am comfortable working with Naw and I believe she is comfortable working with me. She shows an eagerness to learn, which makes my job of helping her that much easier.* (Prairie Project, emphasis added)

- After reading this reflection, the researcher decided to read aloud to all the TCs Rachel Naomi Remen’s “In the Service of Life” (1996). Many TCs commented on the fact that they had not realized there was a difference between helping and serving others.
• TCs acknowledge misconceptions they harbor about the students and families through direct experiences with ELLs and families. The SLEs give TCs the opportunity to figure out how to overcome the language barrier, practice instructional strategies with diverse learners, recognize the assets of ELLs/ families, and acknowledge that caring for ELLs and their families goes a long way.

• The SLEs give TCs an opportunity to practice pedagogical skills through meaningful literacy projects and activities. Beyond cultural competency, the SLE make TCs aware of their need to learn more effective strategies for working with ELLs language development.

• Moreover, the university students that participate in all three SLE are becoming more culturally and linguistically responsive teachers as they have learned that Latino families do want to be engaged in their children’s education, that as teachers they need to adapt their teaching to the language and cultural needs of ELLs, and that even at a young age Latino tweens could be guides to adults as they enter their communities for their first time.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Choose a community/school with ELLs.
2) Develop partnerships with ESL teachers and other experts in the field.
3) Plan an initial visit to the community and/or school for the TCs before the start of the project to get them acclimated to the setting and to address initial fears and
4) Provide TCs with basic theory and strategies for working with ELLs before the SLE begins.
5) Reiterate the purpose of service-learning, the strengths of ELLs, and that TCs are there to serve rather than “help” so as to combat deficit thinking (Remen, 1996).


