Blogging for Academic Purposes with English Language Learners: An Online Fieldwork Initiative

[Laura Baecher](#), [Melissa Schieble](#), and [Christine Rosalia](#)
Hunter College, City University of New York

[Sarah Rorimer](#)
New York City Department of Education

Abstract

This research investigated the use of blogs to promote collaboration between teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) teacher candidates and Adolescent English teacher candidates and to sensitize them to the writing demands placed on secondary English language learners (ELLs). Blogs offered an authentic experience for teacher candidates to interact with each other and with ELLs. Qualitative analysis showed Adolescent English teacher candidates' desired more such fieldwork that would put them into direct contact with ELLs. TESOL candidates reported learning about the demands of high school academic writing through the tasks and the blog responses posted by their Adolescent English counterparts. Affordances and limitations of blogs as a tool in teacher education for ELLs, as well as the need for TESOL and content area teacher candidates to participate in collaborative fieldwork to strengthen instruction for ELLs, are discussed.

A current challenge for teacher education is to ensure that candidates across all disciplines are prepared to provide instruction for English language learners (ELLs). One possibility, where available, is to capitalize on the opportunity for content-specialist teacher candidates to learn about ELLs through placement in clinical experiences alongside teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) teacher candidates, an arrangement that may better prepare all candidates. However, institutional structures such as departmentalization present significant barriers to the sharing of expertise between content-area and TESOL teacher preparation programs (Cramer, Liston, Nevin, & Thousand, 2010).

In order to address this challenge, we describe how preservice English and TESOL candidates in one teacher education program were partnered to scaffold high school ELLs' academic writing through a weekly blogging project in an online field experience. Because teacher preparation is often constructed in a manner that precludes candidates from distinct programs attending the same courses or even conducting fieldwork in the same classrooms, digital web-based tools such as blogs provided a medium for candidates to experience such interaction (Hixon & So, 2009).

Blogs offered an authentic experience for teacher candidates in our English and TESOL programs to collaborate with each other and with ELLs. This study demonstrates how interactive digital tools can be leveraged to deepen content area and TESOL candidates' understanding of ELLs' academic writing needs, thus addressing a crucial need in teacher education.

Preparing Candidates to Teach English Language Learners

The number of ELLs in primary and secondary schools in the United States has increased over 200% in 16 states in the last decade. Although ELLs spend almost 90% of their classroom time with content area teachers (Polat, 2010), teacher education programs significantly underprepare content area teacher candidates for differentiating curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the needs of specific ELL populations (Mohr & Mohr, 2009). Despite the large and growing population of K-12 ELLs in US schools, only one sixth of institutions of higher education require preparation specific to the needs of ELLs among their non-TESOL teacher candidates (Menken & Antunez, 2001). This lack of preparation is especially problematic given the tendency for non-TESOL teachers to hold negative attitudes about ELLs (Cutri & Johnson, 2010; Harper & deJong, 2004; Reeves, 2006; Smith, 2004; Walker, Shafer, & Iams, 2004).

Adding to the lack of cohesive teacher preparation for ELLs is the often disconnected nature of clinical (supervised field) experiences. Without well-integrated clinical experiences, teacher candidates may not be given the time to practice and develop needed teaching skills, resulting in mastery of course content but ineffectiveness in the classroom (Zeichner, 2010). Although rich clinical experiences are seen as essential opportunities for learning in teacher preparation programs, they should target ELL populations (Webster & Valeo, 2011).

Teacher candidates [in non-TESOL/Bilingual] programs often have no access to substantive content involving language acquisition, and issues surrounding ELLs are submerged in a host o f competing 'diversity' themes. Too few teacher candidates are provided with direct experience of working with ELLs and sometimes when they do encounter ELLs in their pre-service field experiences they do not have the skills to differentiate instruction for them. (Sakash & Rodríguez-Brown, 2011, p. 143)

The literature related to effective ELL pedagogy generally advocates that collaboration between content-area and TESOL teachers is needed in order to enhance the academic achievement of ELLs (Creese, 2005; Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2006; English, 2009; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). Despite this call, neither content area nor TESOL teachers likely receive any practice in collaboration as a part of their teacher preparation, either in the *how*— approaches and methods—or in the *what*—curricular ends and means (Davison, 2006; Stang & Lyons, 2008).

As a result, teachers engage in extremely low levels of collaboration for ELL instruction in US schools (Bell & Baecher, 2012), particularly at the secondary level, where

departmentalization and the marginalization of ELL students too often curtail such interaction. Yet, "for students to flourish in ESL [English as a Second Language] programmes, classroom teachers need support in improving their instructional practices and developing shared responsibility with the ESL department" (English, 2009, p. 504). In particular, high school English and TESOL teachers both grapple with how to best support ELLs' academic writing.

To address these concerns, we designed a blogging project that brought TESOL and English teacher candidates within one teacher education program together to support ELLs' needs in the area of academic writing.

Understanding the Academic Writing Challenges of Secondary ELLs

Although secondary ELLs in US schools generally acquire conversational levels of English language for use in informal contexts, they struggle with academic forms of literacy necessary for navigating disciplinary demands at grade level (Fisher, Rothenberg, & Frey, 2007). Their teachers, therefore, require specialized knowledge to help them develop English for academic purposes (Faltis & Coulter, 2008). Graham and Perin (2007) found that writing is the most difficult of the four domains of language communication to develop (writing, reading, listening, and speaking). Academic writing in the English classroom, for example, compounds oral fluency and comprehension with the demands of knowing genre-specific rules for creating multiple forms of text (i.e., writing a persuasive essay).

Standardized testing and college entrance examinations heavily weigh the ability to write for academic purposes for admission to and success in higher education. Thus, teacher education programs must prepare teacher candidates with ways to support ELLs' academic writing in order to increase vital access to economic, social, and political mobility. Content teachers may assume the TESOL teaching specialist will provide English language development support to ELLs, yet "professional preparation for high school ESL teachers rarely includes specific instruction in teaching composition generally or L2 writing in particular" (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008, p. 23; see also Harklau, 2011; Harklau & Pinnow, 2009, and Ortmeier-Hooper & Enright, 2011) In addition, few teachers are dually certified as TESOL and secondary English teachers.

Two studies document the impact of faculty collaboration between TESOL and English teacher candidates to address this need. De Oliveira and Shoffner (2009), faculty members in TESOL and English education at the same institution, documented their collaborative efforts to strengthen ELL preparation for English education students through coteaching in Shoffner's English methods class. To demonstrate instructional strategies to support ELLs, de Oliveira taught in her native Brazilian Portuguese. In her presentation, she modeled instructional modifications for ELLs that included visuals, gestures, and strategies for vocabulary support.

When they analyzed candidates' reflective journals, de Oliveira and Shoffner found their collaborative efforts had a positive impact on English education candidates' understandings about teaching ELLs. They also discovered that focusing on "instructional strategies is not enough, however; English educators must draw connections between the specific strategies and the needs of specific populations" (p. 108). Additionally, they recommended three primary areas to address in future research initiatives: mixed classes of English and TESOL teacher candidates, greater focus on culturally responsive pedagogy, and more elaboration on methods for instructing ELLs.

Dellicarpini (2009a, b) conducted a study on collaboration amongst TESOL and mainstream English teacher candidates at her institution. The participants were both pre- and in-service teachers enrolled in respective TESOL and English education methods courses. These courses were coconstructed to develop collaborative teaching through joint unit planning around works of young adult literature to build ELLs' academic literacy skills.

Drawing on qualitative data sources that included candidates' reflective writing, interviews, and focus group transcripts, her study contributed important findings regarding collaboration. For example, barriers to collaboration included time constraints for planning and marginalization of TESOL teachers and ELL students by school and mainstream teaching staff. Additionally, candidates believed the collaborative project deepened their understandings of the content demands placed on ELLs. Implications from her study included building in more time for collaboration among candidates and explicit instruction on collaboration skills. Web-based technologies were suggested as having the potential to remove barriers that have in the past prevented candidates from working together across disciplines.

Blogs as a Tool in Clinical Experiences and Language Learning

Across institutions of teacher education, clinical experiences are seen as providing essential opportunities for teacher candidates to contextualize understandings about K-12 students and apply theories gained in campus-based coursework (Zeichner, 2010). Technology has come to play an important role in enriching these understandings. Hixon and So's (2009) review of the literature on the role of technology in clinical experiences distinguished three contexts for their use: primary (teacher candidates are physically present in the classroom), secondary (teacher candidates are vicariously inside the classroom via live video-conferencing software), and tertiary (as when a teacher candidate plays the role of a teacher in a virtual context such as a simulation). Hixon and So noted that each of these experiences has potential benefits and limitations for teacher candidate learning.

For instance, while vicarious and simulated experiences can be controlled and, therefore, more readily facilitated by the teacher educator, they may lack the authenticity and interactivity of activities that place the candidate in direct interaction with learners. At the same time, primary field experiences may be difficult to enact, due to lack of high-quality cooperating teachers and geographic remoteness. Also, they are often more difficult for faculty to construct and monitor, resulting in inconsistent or noneducative field experiences. For these reasons, online writing exchanges between teacher candidates and K-12 pupils may be means to provide a type of primary clinical experience through distance education, while teacher candidates are still assessed and monitored by faculty.

A blog (or web log), which is a one-to-many interactional web tool, has been found to benefit language learners in a number of key ways. First, it provides ELLs with authentic writing practice (Brooks, Nichols & Priebe, 2004) to write for real purposes and for real audiences, rather than only to have their writing read by the instructor and receive a grade within the class (Lowe & Williams, 2004). By supplying an audience outside of the classroom, blogs are thought to be a vehicle to develop audience awareness (Chapelle & Jamieson, 2008; Palfreyman, 2005) and increase motivation to write (Ward, 2004). In addition, with the guidance of an instructor, blogs provide a means of recycling the language learned in a lesson (Pinkman, 2005) and, through the social interaction of the blog exchange, refine that learning.

Examples of blogs between teacher candidates and K-12 learners are beginning to appear in the research literature. One successful example is from Gibson and Kelland (2009), who described the results of their investigation into the blogging exchange of preservice teachers with fourth-grade students in a social studies methods class as being mutually beneficial. The pupils wrote with a sense of audience, and the teacher candidates were able to see theories they were learning about in their course enacted in the classroom. Witte (2007) shared her experiences connecting middle school students with preservice teachers through literary discussions. She found that besides the technology demands blogging required of the school infrastructure (time, hardware, and Internet access), the middle-school students needed to meet face-to-face, as well as through the blogs, in order to generate meaningful collaborative writing.

Blogs were chosen in this study as a medium through which the collaboration between TESOL and English teacher candidates could be explored, possibly sensitizing them to the writing demands placed on secondary English language learners. The research questions guiding this inquiry were as follows:

1. What perspectives did TESOL and English teacher candidates gain from their experience in the blog exchange?
2. What were the affordances and constraints of blogs as the medium for this initiative?

Methods

Research Context

The weekly blogging project was designed through collaboration among teacher educators at one college in TESOL (authors Baecher and Rosalia) and English (author Schieble) and a TESOL cooperating teacher (author Rorimer) from a nearby public secondary school, River East High (pseudonym). Both the college and the high school are located in a large urban city in the northeast US. The cooperating teacher had been teaching at the school for 4 years. State-mandated school reform for schools identified River East High as "Persistently Lowest Achieving." One of the main reasons the school had been identified as being in need of improvement is that ELLs had consistently not met Annual Yearly Progress (a measurement defined by the United States federal *No Child Left Behind Act*) in English. These factors pointed to the need for designing engaging activities for ELLs to support their growth in academic English.

Participants

The River East High class profiled in this study consisted of 24 11th- and 12th-grade students in the cooperating teacher's ESL English language arts class. All of the students in this class were receiving ESL services and represent high, intermediate, and low-level proficiency with academic forms of English. The students' home languages and countries of origin included Spanish (from Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico), Korean (from South Korea), Chinese (from China), Polish (from Poland), Albanian (from Albania), Urdu (from Pakistan) and Bengali (from Bangladesh). During the time of the study, the cooperating teacher was preparing her students for the upcoming high-stakes state English exam.

Teacher candidates who participated in the blog exchange were enrolled at the same college, either in the areas of TESOL or English education. Candidates registered in the fall 2010 TESOL and English methods courses were invited to participate in an online

field experience using Blogger, a freely accessible Google blog product. Baecher and Schieble were the course professors for each respective methods class and devised the project based on perceived need for candidates to learn more about working together to support ELLs' academic writing.

Each of the authors has taught in secondary school settings for more than 5 years, with only one author bringing prior experience in the use of blogs with ELLs. The teacher candidates all had familiarity with what a blog was, but none had specifically used Blogger (or other software) to write a blog. Candidates were all preservice students working toward the master of arts degree and initial teaching certification.

Procedures

Six teacher candidates from each program volunteered to participate in the blog exchange ($n = 12$). The teacher candidates were randomly matched and assigned to a blog group. Each blog group consisted of 4 ELLs, 1 TESOL candidate, and 1 English candidate.

To assemble the blog groups, the cooperating teacher used two diagnostic measures to rank order the whole class of students by English language proficiency. These measures included the results from the spring 2010 state ESL achievement exam and the scores from a department-wide diagnostic test that was administered during the first week of school. She then created six homogenous groups ordered from beginning to advanced levels of English proficiency. Groups were each leveled by proficiency to facilitate differentiated support, but the teacher did not reveal that information to either the student or teacher candidate participants, so as not to bias their perceptions or impressions of the ELLs' proficiency levels.

The blog groups were created through Blogger as six private groups, although all of the faculty facilitators could view them. Within each group, the paired teacher candidates and their group of four ELLs were able to view and respond to blog posts. Once a week for 6 weeks the cooperating teacher brought a cart of netbooks into her classroom and had her students log in to their computers and find the blog. TESOL faculty visited the class to observe and assist for the first two sessions.

The purpose for each blogging session was for students to respond to a writing prompt called a "critical lens quote" to practice writing for academic purposes. For each weekly response, students were to relate the quotation to works of literature they had read in class. For example, one critical lens quote prompted students to consider: "The test of a courageous person is the ability to bear defeat without losing heart." The writing process emulated the same format and writing expectations that students would encounter on their upcoming state English exam.

After the students had posted their response to the blog, the cooperating teacher alerted the teacher candidates via email, who then responded with feedback to individual students over the course of the week. The teacher candidates were given a rubric (see Appendix A) developed by the cooperating teacher to guide them in providing feedback on students' writing. Candidates were instructed to respond first to the message or content of students' writing, and then attempt to pose critical thinking questions to encourage the student to develop their response. Teacher candidates were told not to correct grammar directly and to follow any expressed wishes on the part of the cooperating teacher.

No protocol was established regarding which teacher candidate would respond first or second: Teacher candidates in English and TESOL shared the roles of being a first or second reader to student writing, and their order varied without any consistent pattern across groups or by student exchange. The cycle was then repeated the following week. Student writers were encouraged to respond to the feedback, usually content questions given to them by the two teacher candidates. Although teacher candidates' responses were monitored, the course professors did not intercede at any point in the process to redirect candidates, nor did they ever directly interact with student writers. A sample interaction from the blog to demonstrate format is shown in Appendix B.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative methods were employed to construct an information rich case study (as in Yin, 1994) to address the research questions for the study. In particular, an intrinsic case (Stake, 1995) was formed to provide data regarding candidates' perceptions within the particulars of one teacher education program. An intrinsic case study positions the researchers as seeking greater insight into an issue in a certain place and time rather than seeking to generalize, though similar findings may emerge in a different context. Data sources included (a) the archived blogs and email exchanges between the faculty, cooperating teacher, and candidates; (b) questionnaires completed by the ELLs, which targeted students' prior experiences with blogs and other online writing, both before and after the project; (c) field notes taken when observing ELLs in the classroom; (d) weekly rubrics for their students' writing completed by both groups of teacher candidates; and (e) an online questionnaire consisting of 10 open-ended questions and one Likert-scale rating item, completed by the teacher candidates after the project was completed. Reflection prompts in this final questionnaire included the following:

- What did you learn about English language learners from your involvement in this project?
- What did you notice about your students' writing over the course of the project?
- What types of language errors or difficulties did you notice in the students' writing?
- How would you rate your students' level of English language proficiency?
- What did you learn by reading what the fieldwork student from the other program posted in the blogs?
- What was valuable to you in participating in this project?
- If this project were replicated, what considerations or changes should be made to improve the virtual experience for teacher candidates in your program?

The purpose of the questionnaires was to collect information about participants' experiences and attitudes toward the collaboration. Our findings are primarily based on the perceptions of the project as experienced by the teacher candidate participants.

All data sources were read, reread, and categorized using a constant comparative method to search for patterns and themes related to the research questions (as in Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As the research questions guided our inquiry into participants' attitudes toward the project, data from the questionnaires were selected as our primary source. Data from the blogs and field notes served mostly to triangulate questionnaire data. We engaged in a process of collaborative coding (Smagorinsky, 2008), where each data segment is thoroughly discussed before assigning codes. A collaborative coding process allows for "levels of expertise [to] emerge through the process of discussion in relation to data" (p. 402), and each author brought her own disciplinary-informed perspectives to the data set.

At a first level of analysis, we sorted raw data based on inductive codes. These inductive codes were generated by a review of relevant research literature and the authors' experiences as TESOL and English teachers in K-12 and higher education settings. Examples of inductive codes included "deficit language" (viewing ELLs' language and culture as a deficiency vs. a strength), which we used to construct ELLs as learners, and "focusing on conventions" versus content regarding candidates' evaluative feedback.

At a second level of analysis, deductive codes were applied to raw data to identify patterns that emerged outside of inductive codes. For example, TESOL and English teacher candidates' desire for more collaboration and their struggles to provide feedback on students' writing were examples of deductive codes. Both inductive and deductive codes were then collapsed into larger themes. We then searched across the data record for examples of raw data that were both typical and illustrative of themes generated by inductive and deductive codes, and the cooperating teacher served as a key member check.

Synchronous and asynchronous online tools such as Google Docs and Skype supported our iterative process in identifying and developing emerging themes. In this way, interpretation of the data was cross-checked by each author and the case was collaboratively constructed.

Findings

Three major themes emerged as a result of data generation and analysis procedures. Overall, the initiative appeared to have a positive impact on the TESOL and English teacher candidates' becoming sensitized to the needs of ELLs and to the importance of collaboration between their disciplines, especially as they intersected in addressing adolescent ELLs' academic writing skills. The use of blogs as a medium was found to have some limitations for the project's purpose, however. These findings are further described, explained, and analyzed in the remainder of this section.

Teacher Candidates' Learning About ELLs in the Blog Exchange

Based on survey data, teacher candidates from both programs had positive experiences learning more about ELLs through participation in the blog exchange. Common themes identified in their responses were the opportunity afforded by the blog to (a) interact with ELLs, (b) practice responding to the writing of ELLs, and (c) develop appreciation for the difficulties of academic writing.

Opportunity to Interact With ELLs. As might be expected, TESOL candidates had experience working with ELLs; therefore, none said it was novel. The one-to-one interaction, however, was perceived as beneficial as opposed to traditional fieldwork where candidates observe large classes or work with small groups of ELLs. One TESOL candidate stated in the post survey, "I could personally relate to the kids, and I was able to give them a kind of feedback that might be motivating for them….I could individualize my responses to each student."

The blog exchange provided several of the English candidates a first-time opportunity to work directly with ELLs: "Interacting with student writing was extremely valuable. I had had very little to no interaction before."

Another English candidate shared her enjoyment of seeing the same works of literature through the lens of a student from another cultural background:

> It helped to reaffirm why I love literature so much—because there are so many different interpretations and our experiences directly affect those experiences. What I love about ELLs is that their responses are so colorful and enriched with their culture.

The blog exchange put the English candidates in a position to work individually with ELLs and also affirmed the cultural resources that students bring to bear on their literary interpretations through writing. This statement directly challenges the deficit model that English and other content area teachers often use when constructing ELLs as learners (Cutri & Johnson, 2010).

Practice Responding to ELLs' Writing. All of the candidates reported that the blog exchange provided them with a unique opportunity to respond to student writing. Although this is often the case at the point of student teaching, in prestudent-teaching candidates had not yet worked directly to provide feedback to student writing. This finding was nearly identical across participants' survey responses, as demonstrated by this statement from a TESOL candidate: "Practice in deciphering what the students were really trying to say in their essays was valuable to me in participating in this project."

However, while the TESOL candidates tended to perceive the ELLs as having improved their writing skills over the course of the project, the English candidates did not. TESOL candidates may have been able to point to more features of students' language that had developed, whereas English candidates may have still evaluated the writing at the discourse or rhetorical levels, especially for writing at lower proficiency levels.

Appreciation for the Difficulties of Academic Writing. Both English and TESOL candidates reported increased understanding of the challenges of academic writing for secondary ELLs as a result of the blog exchange. One English candidate stated, "This project was extremely valuable. I now understand the difficulties that ELLs face when writing." A TESOL candidate stated, "It is difficult for them to express their ideas in writing and to connect the quotes with things they've read or experienced."

For the most part, TESOL candidates viewed the task (reading and interpreting the critical lens quote) as overly difficult, commenting on it rather than commenting on the learners' lack of ability. For instance, one TESOL candidate responded: "I do think that some of the quotes are not so easy for ESL students to understand." However, several English candidates viewed the difficulty as resulting from learners' lack of motivation rather than stemming from the demands of the task. One candidate said, "It was pretty transparent when the student wasn't really trying." TESOL candidates appeared to be more sensitive to the academic challenges posed by the writing prompts than were their English counterparts.

Addressing the content of ELLs' writing, TESOL candidates did not indicate difficulty in understanding the meaning students were trying to convey: "There was an array of grammatical and lexical errors, punctuation errors and spelling errors. Nevertheless, it was generally easy to understand what they were trying to say."

English candidates, however, were less able to see beyond conventions to focus on the meaning. One English student responded in her survey: "ELL students lack the vocabulary and grammatical skills that English teachers may normally expect from students. Personally, I felt like it was very difficult to understand the content of the students' blog posts when standard English conventions are weak."

When asked about how the blog exchange prepared them for classroom teaching, some English candidates noted that they had developed awareness of the need for lessons on the structure of English:

> I now understand the difficulties that ELLs face when writing; simple grammar problems are found across the student population and can be practiced with all students. I think it will help me with non-ELLs as well. I learned that I need to be explicit with what I require from their writing. I think we assume that students know what you want from them, but it is helpful if you show them how you want them to write and which vocabulary is appropriate. This was emphasized on the blogs.

Among TESOL candidates, the implications of the blog for future teaching of writing related more to concerns about how they would eventually manage lessons with students of wide-ranging English proficiency levels. One TESOL candidate stated,

> I was glad that I could see just how challenging it will be once I am in the classroom. Even though students are grouped together by level, the gradations of differences are still quite vast. It will be interesting to try and differentiate materials once I start teaching.

These comments indicated that TESOL candidates were not surprised by the various proficiency levels of ELL writing. Yet, considering them closely in a small group underscored for them the wide range they could expect to encounter in large classes.

Teacher Candidates' Experience With Collaboration in the Blog Exchange

All of the participating teacher candidates expressed enthusiasm for pursuing future initiatives that would engage them with colleagues across program boundaries, commenting on how they depended on one another's interpretation to guide their own. In regard to the interaction with each other, common themes were (a) the opportunities provided by the blog to witness how the other teacher candidate responded and (b) the desire for more extensive collaboration.

Following the Lead of the Other Teacher. English and TESOL teacher candidates reported that seeing what the other teacher candidate (their counterpart assigned to the blog group) had posted helped them in preparing their own feedback. English teacher candidates tended to do so to in an effort to parallel the manner in which the TESOL candidate replied, as in this statement: "As a secondary English teacher who has never been exposed to ELLs I found reading her responses helped me." A TESOL candidate's statement mirrors this sentiment: "Reading what the English candidate wrote helped me respond more accurately to the posts."

Both candidates also attempted to avoid repeating a response that had already been posted, as in this TESOL candidate statement:

> I definitely made sure I read the post of the student from the other program before I wrote my comment in order to make sure I wasn't repeating similar comments and suggestions to the ELL. If the other coach focused on one aspect of the students writing, I made sure to question or comment on a different portion.

This incidental collaboration suggests that engaging candidates more directly in purposeful communication could enhance not only their understanding of how each discipline approaches writing instruction, but also could expand their repertoire of possible feedback approaches.

One TESOL candidate indicated, however, that the discourse of the English teacher candidate was not sufficiently modified for the ELL student:

> The other student was often good at picking out areas that the student needed to improve upon while still sounding encouraging. However, his language was often far too complex for the level of ELLs we were working with. I felt that we collaborated insofar as we avoided asking the exact same questions and sometimes drew from each other's points.

This feedback suggests the need for content area teacher educators to provide instructive feedback on feedback to candidates to support ELLs' academic writing development. Attention could also be given to the uniqueness of online feedback so that feedback is judged based on criteria such as attention to the writer's question(s), positive affect, encouragement of more learning, modeling of good language, and quality of explanations (as in Rosalia & Llosa, 2009).

Extent of Collaboration. Teacher candidates from English and TESOL expressed a desire for more extensive opportunities for collaboration across programs, as well as a recognition that although the project was not directly collaborative there was exposure through the blog posts. One TESOL candidate stated, "Perhaps an unspoken collaboration was in use due to both of us seeing each other's blog posts." An English candidate stated, "I don't think we were collaborating much, but we generally had the same responses and those responses started with positive feedback, our own example, and ended with follow-up questions. We had good chemistry, but I wouldn't say we 'collaborated.'"

One TESOL candidate stated that future collaborations would be

> valuable, since it will be happening quite often when we are all working teachers. Content and ESL teacher collaboration will be essential to the success of ELLs. Maybe it would be helpful to add in a required once-a-week check-in between the two different teacher candidates.

An English candidate supported this point, stating, "I think that both kinds of teacher candidates should absolutely work together, and that English teacher candidates should be learning more about how to work with ESL students." One English candidate said,

> I think it is really difficult for this type of collaboration to occur, since English teachers are not trained as thoroughly as ESL teachers to deal with the issues that ESL and ELL students face....I think it would probably be a good idea to have teacher candidates comment on each other's posts as well.

The major limitation of the project was the lack of opportunity for the teacher candidates to engage in a direct interchange about their experiences in the project as it was occurring.

Affordances and Constraints

Although the online format enabled English and TESOL candidates who would never normally interact to engage with the same classroom of ELLs, the blog was found to be a problematic format. First, because of inconsistencies in expectations for writing in blogs versus an analytic essay, the blog platform may have led to greater informality in student's language. Second, the way the blog was formatted was confusing to the learners, in that the posting and responses were not always readily visible. The technology posed significant challenges to the ELLs, although they slowly overcame these over the course of the project. Third, because comments on blogs are released simultaneously and publically to all followers of a blog (there is no built-in hidden comment or delay post feature), teacher candidates found that the tool itself limited their collaboration. Teacher candidates could not negotiate with each other about what would be the best advice or comment to give to the student-writer before posting.

The teacher candidates told us that taking on the role of a second reader made them feel like Internet "voyeurs" needing to conform to first readers. For example, a second reader would read what the first reader had said and feel compelled to make their comments in accord with those previous comments. To not do so, would mean the second reader could cause loss of face to the other teacher candidate or might confuse the specific lower level language learners. A lack of a built-in space within the tool of Google blogs for discussions of feedback on feedback between teacher candidates seems to have contributed to their feeling of the interaction not being true collaboration because it transpired only in a linear fashion. Last, students expressed a desire to know the teacher candidates personally in order to feel comfortable writing to them.

Language of Blogging

One finding that indicates constraints with using blogs as a tool to promote academic writing is that several ELLs conformed to *netspeak* (also known as *textspeak*) appropriated by the blogging tool. Netspeak is defined as the "rapidly emerging jargon associated with the Internet and its use, and to the associated terminology of mobile communications" (Crystal, 2004, p. vii). ELLs increasingly engage in writing online for meaningful purposes in their out-of-school literacy lives (Black, 2008). Depending on the context, students who write online need not conform to the academic expectations demanded by writing for school purposes.

As novice language learners, several of the students in the study used informal language, netspeak, and slang to develop the content of their ideas in the blog. Blogs, in general, connote textual and genre-specific cues where informal uses of language and conventions are commonplace; therefore, the use of blogs as a format may have confused ELLs about the expectations for academic writing.

In the postsurvey, for example, many of the teacher candidates noticed this phenomenon and commented that their ELL students used "text language" to write. An example from a student's blog entry demonstrates this point: "my mother always say, 'study hard, *u* have to go to school everyday, *u* need to get high grades" [italics added]. In this example, the student clearly drew from the familiar convention of replacing the pronoun "you" with "u," a typical and time-saving convention used in text messaging, online chat rooms, and other forms of Internet communication.

Although this finding does not suggest blogs are an insufficient or inappropriate tool for developing ELLs' academic writing, it does point to the need for teachers of ELLs (and

teacher educators) to clarify the conventions and language use appropriate for academic purposes. For example, using netspeak is useful and appropriate when writing is shared among friends in an online chat room. The social groups involved and purposes for school-based writing necessitates formal academic language and conventions associated with standard forms of English. It may be that Google docs or an online word processing tool may be more appropriate for developing ELLs' academic writing skills.

At the same time that writers are not sensitive to formal registers once online, they may also be unaware of the different communities online. For instance, the genre of political or journalistic blogging could have been introduced to model online writing written in formal registers (e.g., writers could have been pointed to an excerpt from a news blog such as *The Huffington Post* and asked to read and respond to the larger blog article). Our class blogs used blogging as a means of providing an online writing forum for the participants of our study, detached from a genre-approach to blogging.

Demands of the Technology. The cooperating teacher, although she had taught at this school for several years, was surprised to discover the wide range of technological literacy levels among students, ranging from complete beginners to web designers. In setting up the classroom for the blogging activity, students had trouble entering their passwords, getting into the blog, and understanding the difference between creating a new post and responding to an existing one. Since students need to learn these skills, this practice appeared to have helped increase their technology skills.

The school infrastructure did not support the whole class of students going online simultaneously, and while some students had no problem getting web access, others had frozen screens and very slow connections. Almost half a class period could pass before some students actually began their writing. Issues such as selection of a web browser also arose, as one did not support the blog while the other did. Most students had not been aware that different browsers would affect the tools they could use.

The cooperating teacher noted that as students became accustomed to the routine of using the netbooks, they grew more motivated, and they wrote lengthier posts in the latter weeks of the project. Students wrote more on the blogs as well as on paper, as they became more familiar with the writing demands of the critical lens quote task.

Lack of Personal Relationship in Online-Only Communication. The students who participated in the project provided feedback via a questionnaire distributed in class and were in strong agreement on several items. Ninety-eight percent of the student responders stated that they liked participating in the project and believed that their writing had improved as a result. Students commented that they became more aware of their errors and also, through practicing the task of interpreting the critical lens quote several times, found themselves more prepared to do this writing activity. Representative student comments included the following:

> "I liked participating in this project...I improved in my writing."

> "I learned better to write about what the quote means."

> "I noticed that my writing improved a little bit."

Another area of agreement was that they enjoyed having someone write back to them, although at the same time they found it strange to write to someone they had not met. Most of them felt unsure about meeting the teacher candidate in person. Several

students stated that it was uncomfortable for them to try to write with someone they had never met.

Discussion

Findings from this study revealed that teacher candidates recognized the challenges academic tasks and writing pose for adolescent ELLs, as well as ways collaboration across disciplines may support future teaching of ELLs. Although the project was limited by several factors described in this paper, candidates found this fieldwork project to be of benefit to them as a unique experience, unlike any others they had encountered in fieldwork. Candidates from both programs were unanimous in their agreement that such projects would encourage collaboration between content-area and TESOL teacher candidates and would, ultimately, be supportive of developing their readiness for ELL pedagogy.

Although research on preservice teachers' use of technology with K-12 learners shows that fewer than 5% have utilized blogs with elementary or secondary students (Thieman, 2008), many classroom teachers may be open to email exchanges between their students and competent tutors, particularly those enrolled in schools of education. Based on the results from this project, such exchanges increase individual attention given to students, as well as provide for deeper teacher candidate learning. To enhance the potential of both these benefits, blogs or other modes of online communication need to be moderated or supervised, so that adjustments to the project design may be made. The asynchronous nature of blogs and other modes of online communication provides certain advantages:

- Both supervisor and cooperating classroom teacher can intervene seamlessly.
- Posts are automatically time-stamped and saved, providing an automatic archive of candidates' professional interactions with students.
- The recorded interactions are open displays that can be mined for personal and group reflection and evaluation (as noted by Hounsell, 2007); the interaction is retrievable in order to generate even more interaction from multiple parties.

We discovered benefits for partnering our teacher candidates in this project, but we also became more aware of the benefits of collaborating ourselves. Analysis of our data would have been less valid without the contribution of the cooperating teacher. The very process of reviewing candidates' reflections, blog postings, and perceptions across program boundaries was revealing for the teacher educator authors, who normally have access only to the experiences of teacher candidates in their own discipline.

The importance of having candidates in English education directly interact with ELLs as part of a supervised field experience was reinforced. In addition, reviewing these interactions and subsequent reflections captured through the online exchange served as a reminder of the biases and preconceptions about ELLs that English candidates may bring to their teaching. The English candidates' attribution of the quality of ELLs' writing to laziness was unwarranted and points to deficit models noted elsewhere in the research literature. Teacher educators must prepare content area candidates to better understand the language demands ELLs face as they assess and evaluate ELLs' academic writing. Candidates across both programs need to learn how to appropriately design and scaffold academic writing experiences for ELLs. The TESOL candidates' surprise regarding the extent of high-stakes academic reading and writing demands highlighted the need for more explicit preparation involving actual interaction with a student writer in addition to examining anonymous writing samples. The dynamic interchange of the writing feedback cycle needs greater attention in preparation programs.

Discrepant observations across program specializations revealed candidates' prior knowledge, which at times differed from the classroom teacher's. For instance, while English candidates did not see improvement in the ELLs' writing, TESOL candidates believed that the ELLs' writing had improved, and the cooperating teacher was somewhat more ambivalent. Teachers trained specifically in TESOL may be more sensitive to the process of second language acquisition and, therefore, see small changes that they appreciate as improvements. English candidates may need more familiarity with evaluating writing of nonnative speakers of English. Structured fieldwork provides candidates with the nuanced understandings of pupils in classroom contexts that can only be understood by practitioners close to the action.

Implications for Teacher Education

Collaborative, cross-departmental field experiences, then, may offer rich opportunities for teacher candidates to learn about ELLs, about collaborating with other education professionals, and about deepened pedagogical understandings. The following are recommendations for collaborative approaches faculty might take to connect content-area with TESOL teacher candidates:

> 1. *Teacher educator co-planning.* Bringing together the expertise of TESOL and content-area faculty might begin simply through common time being set aside to share resources, key readings, online learning modules, videos, and other materials that can readily be incorporated during the development of syllabi. Encouraging a culture of collaboration at the higher education level can lead to interclass visitation, shared online course activities, and common assignments that lay the groundwork for subsequent candidate-to-candidate collaborations.

> 2. *Joint class sessions.* By physically bringing together content-area and TESOL teacher candidates, teacher educators can model collaboration, jointly review and debrief classroom video of instruction for ELLs, create small-group and partner activities that invite candidates to pool their expertise, and use these meetings as springboards for follow-up activities online, such as collaboratively constructed lesson plans.

> 3. *Collaborative video review.* Creating a video library of lessons taught to classrooms with ELLs in the content-areas can provide a vicarious field experience, with the added benefit of teacher educators being able to screen, select, control for, and anticipate key findings.

> 4. *Online collaboration.* Establishing relationships with schools and teachers who welcome the added support for their ELL population and have the technology in place—whether blogging or even mobile phones—to allow for K-12 pupil-teacher candidate interaction can be a first step in developing projects and assignments that could link ELL students to teacher candidates. TESOL/content-area partnerships can be created, as described in this study, or one-one-one exchanges using writing or video conversations.

> The benefits to teacher educators include authentic, primary experiences for their teacher candidates, which are virtual rather than simulated. Monitoring how teacher candidates provide feedback to ELLs can actually allow for more understanding of how the clinical experience is serving to develop the professional learning of a candidate. Teacher educators need to provide

systematic feedback-on-feedback for the candidates to develop their skills as writing teachers.

5. *Common clinical experiences.* If both TESOL and content-area teacher candidates can be placed in the same school sites, then teacher educators can develop assignments that involve observations, materials review, case studies, and coteaching experiences that involve ELL and non-ELL K-12 classrooms.

Where possible, direct experiences, in which teacher candidates are matched and placed in classrooms should be sought. In these opportunities they can not only observe classroom teachers and ESL teachers collaboratively provide content-based language instruction but also practice collaborative teaching themselves. Where constraints of personnel, geographic location, and institutional structures bar these opportunities, online interactions may be a more feasible option. By harnessing the temporally and geographically unrestricted environment of online communication, teacher preparation has exciting possibilities for moving forward in the direction of collaborative and interactive clinical experiences.

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Author Notes

Laura Baecher
Hunter College
City University of New York
email: lbaecher@hunter.cuny.edu

Melissa Schieble
Hunter College
City University of New York
email: mschiebl@hunter.cuny.edu

Christine Rosalia
Hunter College
City University of New York
email: crosalia@hunter.cuny.edu

Sarah Rorimer
New York City Department of Education
email: srorimer@gmail.com

**Appendix A
Rubric to Evaluate Student Writing**

0 = No credit

The blog post is missing, copies the prompt, or consists of only one or two disconnected sentences. It shows *no* original thinking about the topic.

1 = Below the standard

The blog post is under-developed and unfocused, or repeats previous comments. It shows *little* original thinking about the topic.

2 = Approaching the standard

The blog post is partially developed and partially focused. Only a few connections are made between ideas. The writing includes only a few of the target vocabulary words and/or phrases. The blog post shows *moderate* thinking about the topic.

3 = Meeting the standard

The blog post is developed and focused, and there are some connections between ideas, but they are not fully developed. The writing includes 3-5 vocabulary words and/or phrases. The blog post shows *a good amount of* thinking about the topic.

4 = Exceeding the standard

The blog post is developed and focused, and there are many well-developed connections between ideas. The writing includes more than 5 vocabulary words and/or phrases and considers multiple perspectives. The blog post shows *deep* thinking about the topic.

Appendix B
Sample of Blog Post Interaction

Coffee

Hi, everyone! Welcome to our blogging project. The purpose of sharing your writing on this blog is to develop and strengthen your academic writing skills in preparation for the ELA Regents. It is a space that you and your writing coaches can use to collaborate with each other to produce and publish writing.

Tuesday, December 14, 2010
Sook Week 6

"Success seems to be largely a matter of hanging on after others have let go."
In other words, I think this quote means when you keep doing something that you want instead of giving up you will be successful. I agree with this quote because if you give up, you not going to get anything. For example, when I had a test I never study for the test so I got low grade in Korea. But when I came to USA I started to study. When I have a test I studied a lot and then I got high grade. Another example is when I try to memorize the new vocabulary, I studied for long time and now I could remember the vocabulary. The final example is you try something you may get fail, but if you don't give up and keep trying to get something, you'll get it.

CLASS DOCUMENTS

- Home
- Rubric

FOLLOWERS

Join this site
with Google Friend Connect

There are no members yet.
Be the first!

Nathan December 16, 2010 9:51 PM
Hi Sook—

First of all, all your studying has definitely paid off, so congratulations on that! I think you've got a good piece going here, especially when you make the point that if you keep doing something "instead of giving up you will be successful." Yes!

The examples you give are great examples of hard work, but can you think of a moment in your life where you really wanted to give up, but didn't? Or can you think a moment when you actually did give up? It would be very interesting to know how your determination (or your lack of determination in a particular task) changed your life in some way!

Reply Delete

BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ 2010 (24)
  ► December (8)
  ► November (16)

Sook December 17, 2010 12:11PM

i just didnt do anything in my country. i never study for the tests or quze. i didnt go to class.i didnt do the homework

Reply Delete