

Beyond Data Collection and Analysis: The Broader Impact of the Dissertation
Process on a Novice Researcher

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The Dissertation--Exploring Elementary Teachers' Experiences with
English Language Learners

Doctoral programs differ in their expectations of students embarking on their dissertation processes: some programs frame these tasks rather pragmatically ("Don't try to change the world; Just get it done!"), while other programs may expect candidates to demonstrate some professional significance to their projects. As I began my own dissertation process in the fall of 2002, my program's expectations were both practical and lofty; while I knew that degree completion was valued, I also realized through department newsletters and through "the grapevine" that many dissertation writers go beyond the simple completion of their degrees to publish and/or present their findings in rather significant contexts.

Consequently, I entered the dissertation experience with great hope that it would be a multi-purpose endeavor: First, and most obviously, it would be the final step in order to complete my Ph.D. Beyond project completion, I wanted my dissertation to demonstrate my skills as a researcher and writer—to show that I had what it takes to complete the task and to continue to grow professionally beyond the scope of my doctoral

program. If I succeeded in this regard, then the research would more likely be worthy of acceptance for presentation or publication. The result would be a trifecta, of sorts, with the primary objective of degree completion leading to my additional two objectives of successful research and professional development, or contribution to the field.

Fortunately, I achieved my goals, thanks in great part to two of motivating factors, my intrinsic motivation to complete the task and my selection of a compatible and supportive dissertation chair and committee. Regarding my own motivation, I believed that degree completion would be a rite of passage into academia, and that membership would have its privileges; so far, joining the ranks of the terminally-degreed has been rewarding in terms of my own professional growth and development.

An additional factor contributing to my own motivation was my professional context. As a faculty member at a small liberal arts “teaching” institution, I have somewhat different professional development experiences and expectations than from my peers at larger state institutions. For example, regarding my primary goal of degree completion, I was hired for this position prior to completing my doctorate, so I had been approaching my professional context from a one-down position, a junior member of the faculty whose Ph.D. was “in progress.” Furthermore, my degree completion was expected in a reasonable amount of time as part of my employment. Also, while my institution primarily values faculty members’ work in the

classroom, professional development outside of the classroom is well supported, and in the increasingly competitive market of higher education, more and more of my peers are presenting and publishing in a variety of contexts.

Thus, while the dissertation was tantamount to job security, it also had the potential to open doors to professional development opportunities that would enhance my position in my own university and create opportunities beyond its walls. All of these goals—degree in hand, demonstration of research and research writing skill, and contribution to the field—were for me something of a rite of passage into a full, adult-like status in academia. As an instructor who loved his job and saw it as a life-long commitment, completing these goals was essential not just for job security, but also for optimal growth.

First I will provide an overview of my research experience, including a rationale for the project, an overview of the process, and challenges I faced as a researcher. Next, I will consider the three aforementioned goals that I achieved in this process and broader implications. In doing so, I intend to show how invaluable a successful dissertation process can be.

The relationship among the comprehensive exams, dissertation development, and the chair and committee selection is rather synergistic in nature. Of course, the unifying element is the doctoral student's personal interests and goals in completing the degree. Ideally, the doctoral student

enters this stage of the process with some idea of how these three elements might come together. Typically, the student studied under a professor who shares an interest in the particular topic, and this relationship subsequently develops into comprehensive exams and dissertation. This was my experience. While I found many things interesting in my program of study, I knew that my personal interests and professional development thrust was in language teacher education. Thus, I looked to a course professor proficient in this area, and we began looking ahead at what my comprehensive exams and even dissertation might look like.

Beyond the sensible and obvious need for my chair and me to have shared interests and experiences, my selection of a chair and a committee, like many doctoral students' approaches, was based on a range of criteria including positive classroom experiences; some sort of connection, or professional relationship between the students and faculty members; and faculty members' own successes as researchers. All were critical for me as I saw the dissertation process as one of mentorship and nurturing. With a committee in place, and comprehensive exams behind me, I was ready to begin the process of developing a rationale for my project and proceeding with the research.

My Dissertation

My dissertation was a descriptive case study of the behaviors, concerns, challenges, and successes of four elementary mainstream

teachers who work with English language learners (ELLs) in their mainstream classrooms at Chickasaw Elementary, a Title I, K-4 school located in the Southeastern US. Specifically, I conducted a case study of non-ESL professionals working with ELLs at Chickasaw Elementary School. This case is a “topical arena” since its members are “affected by a problem or who interact intensely on a narrow issue” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 22). Specifically, the “problem,” or phenomenon, is the challenge of ELLs in the mainstream classroom. While I was able to gather the data I needed in order to gain valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of mainstream teachers, my “freshman” efforts at research revealed to me some important lessons for future research. Despite these challenges, the qualitative approach I took with this study, including its means of data collection, was appropriate and in the end, worthwhile.

The purpose of the study. Why did I need to know more about mainstream teachers working with ELLs, and why through a qualitative approach to research? At the onset of this study I had a three-point rationale for this particular topic and the research methodology. First, as a language teacher educator, I needed to know what was happening with English language learners in mainstream classrooms from their mainstream teachers’ perspectives. While I had a fair grasp of the second language instruction situation in the local school system that I could share with pre- and in-service teachers, my experiences led me to ask additional questions

in order to have a more complete picture. Specifically, I wanted to know more about mainstream teachers, those who spend a significant amount of time during the school day with ELLs. I was obliged to provide my pre-service teachers with as rich a set of information and experiences as possible, including their understanding the broader set of experiences ELLs have in pre-K-12 education. Also, this case study enabled me to better manage my students' field experiences and the interpersonal and political complexities that can often be stultifying for the pre-service teacher.

A second reason for this study was the lack of abundant research on mainstream elementary teachers' perceptions of their behaviors with ELLs. While information was readily available that relates to and/or addresses the needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms and provides suggestions for mainstream teachers (Becker & Hamayan, 2001; Conrad, 2000; Constantino, 1994; Gibbons, 2002; Harklau, 2002; Lindfors, 2002; Penfield, 1987; Rigg & Allen, 1989; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000), minimal qualitative research on mainstream elementary teachers with ELLs in their classrooms had been published.

A third reason for my study stemmed from what I saw as mainstream teachers as language educators by proxy. Specifically, mainstream teachers in the Sunflower County school system (SCSS) played a critical role in the education of ELLs for two reasons: No Child Left Behind (US Department of Education, 2002) and pullout ESL programming (Cummins, 2000), which

both place a high amount of time and responsibility on the mainstream teacher. Thus I described these professionals as language teachers by proxy in an attempt to elucidate the potential that a rich and supportive mainstream teacher's classroom environment could play in the language development and overall educational experiences of ELLs (Rigg & Allen, 1994; Constantino, 1994; Gibbons, 2002; Harklau, 2002; Hudelson, 2002; Verplaetse, 1998; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000; Williams, 2001).

None of these purposes could have been achieved through quantitative approaches to research. Since my goal was not to generalize, but to gain insight into individual teachers' experiences in specific contexts, approaching this project using ethnographic approaches to develop a case study was the logical way to go. (For additional information on the role of ethnography and a case study approach, see Adler & Adler, 2000; Agar, 1996; Bishop, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, *Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 1998; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Kirk & Miller, 1996; Spradley, 1979; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Watson & Gegeo, 1988).

Selecting participants and developing a design and methodology.

Having pulled a committee together while developing a topic and choosing the research approach I would use to conduct the case study, and having completed all the necessary paperwork for conducting research with human subjects, I then embarked on the participant selection process. During the 2001-2002 academic year, I had become a familiar face around Chickasaw Elementary, observing my pre-service teachers conducting field experiences and working on a pilot service-learning project between students in my program and Chickasaw. Because of the positive relationship I have there, the principal was more than willing to support my dissertation research at her school. Thus, my research plan was to have the principal assist me in selecting the participants since she was familiar with schedules and could help me identify teachers who satisfied my criteria for participation, including:

- One participant from each of the grades represented at Chickasaw Elementary (kindergarten through third grade)
- Minimal to no prior language teacher education
- Monolingual English speakers
- ELL students in participants' classrooms
- Ample time for data gathering during the spring semester, 2003

The principal and I met twice in order to develop a list of possible participants. Her efforts and time were invaluable; with only one rejection

from a possible participant, I was able to gather four participants in approximately one week.

Because no one had ever conducted a descriptive case study at this school, I surmised that each of these participants might see my work as evaluative in some way, especially since I am an English as a Second Language (ESL) specialist coming to watch them, untrained in ESL, work with ELLs in their classrooms. Therefore, when I made initial contact with potential participants, to invite them to participate and provide them with an informed consent form approved by the university's institutional review board, I felt that emphasizing the descriptive nature of the case study and the non-evaluative nature of my initial research goals would increase the probability of participation.

Triangulation, or the verification of data via multiple sources, was critical to the establishment of themes that emergent during the data collection process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to achieve this, I managed to create a cyclical effect with my data collection methods, including descriptive observation, ethnographic individual interviews, group interviews, and my researcher's journal. I deliberately began with descriptive observation (Adler & Adler 2000; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999), establishing myself as a peripheral-member-researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b); I felt this would provide me with some framework for asking

questions in the interviews. Observations were ongoing during the spring semester, punctuated by interviews spread out during the semester, beginning in February 2003 and ending in May 2003. I chose to alternate the three individual ethnographic interviews (Seidman, 1998) with each participant as well as two group interviews (Morgan, 1988), beginning first with the individual interview. I felt that this would give me a chance to get to know each the participants and give them a chance to become more comfortable about the research itself before being placed in the group interview. Also, I could capitalize on the integrated role that the interviews, observations, and my journal would play in developing emergent themes. Observations would lead to questions for the initial interview, which would in turn lead to more informed observations, which would lead to more focused interview questions, and so on, all leading to developed emergent themes.

Based on this approach, I attempted to answer the following initial research questions:

- What constitutes the ESL program at Chickasaw Elementary?
- Who is considered an ELL at Chickasaw Elementary?
- With whom do ELLs spend their day beyond the ESL pullout period?
- How do mainstream teachers interact with ELLs in and out of the classroom?
- What are mainstream teachers' perceptions of ELLs? Their role

with ELLs in their classroom?

Some of these questions I answered, others I did not answer in lieu of emergent themes more relevant to my research goals. This is wholly appropriate considering the exploratory nature of this particular case study naturally lent itself to the exploratory nature of qualitative research.

An emic perspective, foundational to qualitative research, is inherent in the process. For example, Kirk & Miller (1996) suggest that qualitative research involves “watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, their own terms” (p. 547). This places the subject(s) at the center of the study, not the researcher. Similarly, Agar (1996) distinguishes between the “one-up” position that more positivistic research requires of its researchers—they are in control of the hypothesis, the variables, and the participants—and the “one-down” position held by ethnographers, a position described metaphorically as that of a child or student. In this one-down position, I looked to the participants in the research study to answer my foundational questions, and perhaps more importantly to contribute to emergent research questions, in effect, to contribute directly to the emergent design of this study and to its emic quality. Thus, while my initial questions acted as a valuable starting point, I readily followed the data as it presented new, emergent themes that reflected different research questions.

Specifically, as I delved into this case study, what emerged for me was

a shift in research focus almost exclusively to the participants, their behaviors and their perceptions. For example, instead of answering the question, "What constitutes the ESL program at Chickasaw Elementary?" the question became, "What are these participants perceptions of the ESL program at Chickasaw Elementary?" In fact, three broad, primary research questions emerged from my study, initially through the observation then through the data I collected in the interviews:

1. What are the participants' perceptions of the ESL program at Chickasaw Elementary?
2. What are the participants' perceptions of ELLs in their classrooms?
3. What are the participants' perceptions of their own teaching behaviors with ELLs?

I calculated that this research would take one semester. My goal was to achieve the following criteria by that time: exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories, emergence of regularities, and overextension of information (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996, p. 562). Were my criteria achieved by the end of the time allotted? Yes. By the end of the spring semester, I feel that I had achieved these criteria. For example, the participants' responses in the final individual and group interviews were becoming redundant, as were my field notes from the observations. The aforementioned themes had emerged and nothing new was emerging. I felt that I had exhausted my sources, that I had saturated the categories, or

emergent themes, that I had achieved an emergence of regularity in the findings, and that by the end of the semester my information had been overextended.

Findings. In response to these research questions, I found that these participants' negative perceptions of the school systems' "ESL" program, their positive perceptions of these particular learners, and their attempts to make their classrooms inclusive despite their lack of teacher education all play significant roles in their classroom behaviors. I found that caring does count for something, even though it may not be a panacea for the challenges of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. In this sense, the care that these participants demonstrated for the ELLs was a motivator to provide what each felt was the best they could for these learners in these classrooms. I also found that these participants are able to identify professional development needs for themselves and their peers related to ELLs in their classrooms, and that they are able to articulate reasonable, productive solutions to the present challenges of the ESL program at Chickasaw Elementary.

These findings forced me to re-visit many of the negative biases I had identified early in the project about ELLs in mainstream classrooms, based primarily on my involvement in these sites as a language teacher educator and some negative reflections from pre-service teachers about these type of settings in which they often painted a picture of ELL marginalization.

Certainly, I was not approaching this research notionless about what happened in mainstream classrooms. However, I didn't want this research to have an a priori agenda, for example, implicating mainstream teachers of egregious practices with ELLs before I ever got started. In the course of this research process I discovered four classrooms that were by their very nature different from many of those I had witnessed in the past. Of the vast array of methodologies, approaches, and perspectives prescribed for working with ELL students, I didn't expect to find much substantive evidence in these classrooms. And yet, I did find elements that could be categorized as positive and supportive, not just in intention, through the emergent theme approach to my research.

For example, the participants found great fault with ESL pullout programming, in which ELLs are removed from the mainstream classroom for a portion of the day for ESL instruction. While their frustration over this curricular approach was based on their concerns of ELL stigmatization and their perceived disconnect between the mainstream classroom and the ESL curriculum, their frustration paralleled the vast majority of research pointing to the limitations that pullout programming (as compared to, say, bilingual curricula) (see Baker & Hornberger, 2001; Bialystock, 2001; Collier, 1995; Cummins, 1981, 1992, 2000 2001; Hamers & Blanc, 2001; Hartman, 2002; Macedo, 2000; Phillipson, 2002; Reyes & Royer, 2001). Second, their positive perception of the ELLs in their classes suggested a strong source of

positive external motivation for their ELLs (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 2002; Garcia, 1991). Their frustration with pullout ESL programming, coupled with their positive perception of the ELLs in their classes resulted in their belief that ELLs were better served in their own classroom for the entire day; that, in fact, ELLs' needs in the pre-K-4 arena were not that different from their other students' needs (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 2002). Instead of perceiving the ELLs learners in their classes as markedly different, and thus beyond the scope of their mainstream training, these participants felt that their emergent literacy curricula, coupled with their belief in their ELLs' abilities, were what these learners needed. This included a strong value on the part of the participants on a sense of place and a sense of belonging.

This value of inclusion was evident in these participants' classroom practices. I observed and participants told me about their teaching behaviors that were modified only minimally for ELLs. Furthermore, participants were consistent in suggesting that modifications made were no different from the modifications they would and do make for native English speaker (NES) students' varying needs. My researcher's journal entries, based on my observations, included recordings of ample visual reinforcement around their classrooms, integrated seating arrangements, and ELL engagement in the classroom, from class activities to 4H club; These descriptions reinforce these teachers' self-perceptions. Certainly, the prevalence of initiate-

respond-evaluate communication patterns (see Cook, 2001; Harklau, 2002; Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 2002; Mehan, 1979; Toohey, 2000; Urzúa, 1989), the tendency to depend on atomized, discrete pieces of language information instead of more whole language approaches (Anderson, 1999; Birch, 2002; Cazden, 1986; Clarke & Silberstein, 2002; Franklin, 1989; Lindfors, 2002; Long & Cookes, 1992; Perez, 1998; Rigg, 199; Roller, 2002) and the minimal space for cultural identity (Ellis, 1985; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Hilles & Lynch, 1997; Igoa, 1995; Luke & Kale, 1997; Lynch, 1997; McKeon, 2001) were elements in these classrooms that many theorists suggest can be challenges for ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

However, as I began to analyze my data in light of current research on language education, I realized that despite these classrooms not being actual language classrooms by design and intent, they were, in fact, language classrooms by proxy, and their teacher were language teachers by proxy. In this role, these language teachers by proxy had the dedication, commitment, and belief in their language learners; they were well aware of their lack of training and skill, but still committed to being the primary educator in their ELLs' learning experiences. No abandonment, no rejection, no worksheets in the back of the class for these teachers. In enhancing their ELLs' experiences, these participants suggested that that there be more cooperation and communication between the ESL pullout program, and suggesting that their own professional development should include Spanish

language instruction in order to increase their communication skills with students initially arriving into their classes and with the parents of ELLs.

Reflections on the Research Experience and Its Challenges

As my first major research project, my dissertation was a lesson in research methodology as much as it was a means of discovery about my subject. As a neophyte researcher, I was unaware of the many challenges that lay ahead, including the following:

1. The participant selection process
2. My role as inquirer, not authority
3. My interviewing “technique”; and
4. Unforeseen scheduling challenges

While I was able to gather the data necessary to better understand mainstream teachers working with ELLs, I realized that as a researcher I needed many more opportunities and experiences in the research field to continue honing my craft.

First, one of my initial concerns with this research was how different these participants’ classrooms were from other mainstream classrooms in the Sunflower County School System. While recognizing my own biases about the challenges that some ELLs may face in some mainstream classrooms, and not looking for this data to be generalizable, I noted early in the data collection process the unexpectedly integrated nature of these mainstream classrooms. I had discovered four classrooms that were by their

very nature different from some of those I and my students have witnessed in the past. I found seemingly functional language classrooms by proxy, with teachers who defied the mainstream teacher prototype that I knew existed, at least to some degree. This is especially notable considering these participants have no language teacher education and little to no foreign language instruction. How can I explain the differing nature of these classrooms as opposed to other mainstream classrooms that seemed less receptive and supportive of ELLs?

I speculated early in my research that this result possibly stemmed from the participant selection process. In fact, one aspect of this decision-making process that I did not consider was the principal's influences on the participant selection process. An additional criterion she might have used was based on her concern about the school's image despite the anonymous nature of the research. In other words, she not only suggested participants who would fulfill my criteria, but perhaps ones who would allow Chickasaw to "put their best foot forward." Or, it is possible that my final criterion, available time to participate, implied teachers who were willing to make time, and thus teachers who were willing to invest in the broader issues involving the education of ELLs. Thus, selecting participants based on my criteria automatically resulted in teachers who valued ELLs in their classrooms. Similarly, the principal could have been using an additional criterion of cooperativeness in order to make my research more fruitful, and

perhaps cooperativeness is a also correlational quality to positive perceptions of ELLs. Certainly, my ability to analyze her motives is limited. Regardless, I am unrealistic to think that I would have had different participants with a different selection process. I think it is highly unlikely that someone who has prejudices against language minority students, or who blatantly disregard their needs in the classroom would agree to participate in a study about their own behaviors with language learners. Thus, I question whether or not I will ever have official access to these types of classrooms as a researcher or if I will have to simply see what is happening in them out of the corner of my eye or vicariously through my students' experiences.

A second challenge I faced was the potential power dynamic between my participants and me and its influence on the data collection process. For example, I occasionally experienced throughout the interview process was the need to put the participants at ease about my role as a researcher, not as an evaluating authority. Sometimes during interviews participants would often ask such questions as, "Am I doing this right?" Participants would also open doors for me to comment on their work, providing suggestions as I see fit. My typical responses of "I am the one learning a lot here," or "I am not here to evaluate what you do. I am here to learn from you," would seem to only minimally satisfy their craving for evaluative feedback. I tried to employ the methodological suggestion that I review my purpose and role at the

beginning of each interview, simply as a reminder. Also, I tried to employ grand tour questions (Spradley, 1979) whenever possible, and with these the participants were able to act as authority.

However, some of my questions might have been too implicitly judgmental of the lack of training these teachers have. For example, I established early on that they have no language teacher education in their backgrounds and no language learning experiences. I felt that this was important in determining the influences behind the decisions these teachers made. Perhaps this set a "deficit" tone for the rest of the research. Also, I would review ideas and information from the field as background to a question, and this, too, might have acted as implicit reminders that they are unfamiliar with language teacher education principles.

Although not a stultifying aspect of my data gathering, these occasional questions were cause for concern. I wanted the participants to be completely open; I wanted them to see me in the "one-down" position, thereby giving my less-garnered access to their perceptions and behaviors. For the most, I feel that this was achieved, despite my concerns.

The third challenge I faced involved my interview technique, and in particular the difficulty of putting ethnographic interviews into practice. I designed the questions prior to the interview; I tried to use "grand tour questions" (Spradley, 1979) as much as possible; and I recorded and transcribed interviews for detailed analysis. And yet, as I look over the

transcripts, I cannot help but notice how much talking I did. Although I am a trained tutor who employs a Socratic method with learners, structuring minimal questions with great ease and eliciting rather voluminous responses, in the context of this research, I sometimes failed to create an interview environment in which the participants could really reflect on my questions. This is perhaps due to my own nervousness, or feeling that I needed to make the interview process as painless and expedient as possible. Certainly, time was a constraint, with interviews often having to be conducted while students were working on projects in the room or during a short planning period. In addition, in my research journals I noted how difficult it was for these participants to really explore their own classrooms and behaviors. I contributed to limited answers, too. Because I felt indebted to them for their willingness to cooperate and didn't want to become a nuisance, I often rushed through some questions, skipped others that I felt were redundant, and talked over their answers.

My plan was to regularly visit these four participants' classrooms during the spring semester. I would arrive early in the school day and attempt to observe at least one classroom if not more before having to leave around midday for work. While my observations allowed me to reinforce what I was hearing in the interviews, at the same time provide me with additional points of discussion for subsequent individual and group interviews. I designed this plan as a best-case scenario, not taking into

account work-related or personal hindrances to my observation schedule. Unfortunately, Mother Nature was a far greater challenge for my observation (and interview) schedule than my work or my personal life was. Specifically, the school system missed thirteen days of school due to ice and snow during the first half of the semester. Then, the school system missed another week of class due to a devastating tornado that killed twelve people in the community. Other schools were destroyed or without power, and with the intricate busing system used for desegregation purposes at a virtual standstill, everything closed. Still, I was able to observe consistently enough in each of the four classrooms that my field notes were beginning to look the same; I had satisfied the observation component enough to move forward with the analysis of the data.

Conclusion

As a faculty member at a teaching institution (by tradition), it had not occurred to me that being a researcher could be a possible component of my professional development. I had had little exposure to research methods, even in my master's program, and, as having previously mentioned, my employer rewarded professional development activities, but course loads were more often than not research-prohibitive. At the onset of the project, my goal of going beyond the completion of the dissertation—to actually produce a document of significance in my field—had more to do with what I perceived to be the timeliness of the content of the project rather than with

the research approach. It never occurred to me that the research itself would be of interest or value since I didn't see myself as a researcher. However, the professional growth and development opportunities stemming from my dissertation had far more to do with my research methodology than with the actual findings themselves. These opportunities, namely presenting at various professional conferences in the US and abroad, were incredible honors for me, and made me realize that research does not necessarily exclude academics employed in institutions not designed to support research through course reductions or through research positions.

I utilized these conference experiences to begin to reconsider my professional self as an individual who can research, and who should continue doing so beyond the scope of the dissertation. Listening to other projects, some more elaborate and insightful than my own, and some not, I felt that I was entering the professional full adulthood that I had previously mentioned. I began to look critically at topics that I had been curious about—phenomena that I wanted to explore and began pursuing what might be considered my first post-dissertation research, my “sophomore effort.” On the advice of members of an ethnography and education association I had joined, I have developed a plan for taking my dissertation and expanding it, moving from a case study to a more multi-vocal, longer-range ethnography.

Furthermore, this experience contributes to my own classrooms in which I teach through the insights I have gained about ELLs in mainstream

classrooms and also through the inclusion of qualitative and case-study-inspired assignments. Thus, I am motivated not only to pursue my own potential as a researcher, but also to pursue the role that qualitative research could play in the undergraduate applied linguistics courses and the smattering of graduate courses that I teach at my institution. How could I introduce research methods to my students? To begin to introduce them to what meaning-making really means? Case studies, descriptive observations, and interviews are now regular components of the courses I teach. I have also had the opportunity to direct graduate student projects that were qualitative in nature. As a result, I can now share with my students the rewards, complexities, and sense of accomplishment that come with qualitative inquiry.

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