This assignment was one that I gave to my EDU 360 class. By the time students get to this point in the TESOL (Teaching English to speakers of other languages) major, they have learned a lot about writing, and a lot about TESOL. The first part of the assignment is to decide to have an “out-of-the-box” experience, meaning something related to TESOL, but different from what they’ve learned to do in their major, maybe even something out of their comfort zone. Laurie France is used to teaching English to young children who are English language learners. Therefore, she decided that her experience would be to give an hour-long talk to her SUNY Oswego peers about what ESOL teachers do. The next part of the assignment is to write about this experience in the same style as the papers they have been writing in other classes in their major. The paper was to be error-free and divided into sections, and subsections if the author saw fit. Each section was to be numbered and titled appropriately, and data within each section was to be set apart from text in figures that are numbered consecutively. The paper was to build from the beginning of the experience to the significance of the experience to the student as a pre-service ESOL teacher.

Teaching Pre-Service Mainstream Teachers about TESOL

Laurie France

1.0 Volunteering to Teach Linda Lord’s LIT311 Class About TESOL

On the evening of April 13, 2010, I volunteered to do a presentation to Linda Lord’s LIT311 class on Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) from 6:30-7:30 p.m. This class was full of Childhood Education (CED) and Adolescent Education (ADO) majors; many of which had never even heard of the TESOL major before. My presentation consisted of many important aspects and facts about TESOL. As a pre-service English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, this was a very valuable experience to me because I was able to take many of the things that I have learned thus far in the TESOL major at SUNY Oswego and actually put them to use in some way. It was very fulfilling to be able to share my knowledge with others, and I hope that some of the things I discussed will stay with the students on their journey to becoming teachers.

In the following subsections, I describe my experience in Linda Lord’s class in great detail. I will first discuss the content which I covered in the presentation in regards to the actual TESOL major, things about ESL students, and the importance of the collaboration of ESL and mainstream teachers (2.0). This is the bulk of my paper, but I will also discuss some of the questions, comments, and concerns of Linda Lord’s LIT311 students following the presentation (3.0), and lastly I will summarize the implications of the overall experience of volunteering to teach about TESOL (4.0).

2.0 Content Covered in the Presentation

When preparing this presentation I thought to myself, “If I weren’t a TESOL major what information would be most useful to me?” I really had to put myself in the shoes of all of the
CED and ADO majors that I was going to be presenting to in order to decide on appropriate content to include in my presentation. I found myself trying to dig up the past and bring myself back to the moment that I first learned about the TESOL program; but I remember having no clue what TESOL even meant! So, I decided to start off with the most basic things, such as acronyms that relate to TESOL (2.1), characteristics of ESL students (2.2), and the roles of the teachers when working with ESL students (2.3).

2.1 What is TESOL???

Since I realize that many people do not know what the TESOL major entails, I decided to give some general facts about the major. When exploring important aspects of TESOL to present I first thought to myself, “why not start with some of the basics?” So, I first began with the most used acronyms that I have come across during my time in the TESOL program. I thought that these would be useful to pre-service mainstream teachers because if they ever have the opportunity to work with ESL students, they might need to know some of them. I included the following acronyms with descriptions of each one: TESOL, TEFL, ELL, ESL, EFL, L1, and L2. I also made a clear distinction of the difference between TESOL/ESL and TEFL/EFL to the students.

After this, I decided to discuss some of the extra classes that TESOL majors must take and why, such as linguistics. I briefly explained that to become language development experts, TESOL majors must take linguistic classes in order to learn things like patterns of language and the acquisition of language. I provided an example on the board to the class using eth and theta; I explained the two different sounds (eth – a hard th sound / theta – a soft th sound), the symbols for them that we learn in linguistics (eth – ð / theta – θ), and where to place one’s tongue when articulating these sounds. I chose this example due to the fact that it is one of the most difficult sounds to make if a particular language does not have it in their language. I said, “One day, you might have students who physically cannot articulate these sounds. How would you try and get them to make the proper sounds? You must first know where the place of articulation is. You must explain to them and show them how to physically make this sound! That is part of our job as ESL teachers.”

In addition to discussing general facts about the TESOL major that I found important, I also decided to figure out what it was about the TESOL major that was so appealing to me when I first learned of it. First, I was interested because language has always been very intriguing and mysterious to me – especially trying to learn a new language; I actually had the desire to become a Spanish teacher when I first came to college. However, ultimately I knew that this was the major for me when I learned of its broadness in job opportunities. Unlike previous majors that I had been in, TESOL offered a new aspect in which I would not be as limited in what I decided to do in the future. It is for this reason that I decided to include the many job opportunities which come with a TESOL major in my presentation. I included both jobs offered within the United States as well and international opportunities. I also talked to the students about having the opportunity to teach English to a very wide range of ages. I spoke to
them about how the particular classes that we take at SUNY Oswego allow us to teach K-12, but also that we are not limited to teaching in a school setting; and that we can also go on to teach adult literacy classes.

2.2 Who Are the ESL Students???

Following the teaching of some important aspects of the TESOL major and what it entails, I thought to include another very important aspect of TESOL – the ESL students! I felt that learning about what TESOL had no use to the audience if I did not also include the actual students that they may be working with in the future. Again, I decided that I should start with the basics, so I began with explaining how students become a part of an ESL program. First, I told Linda Lord’s class that ESL students are mainly immigrant children who come to America with a previously learned language and that they must learn English as a second language in order to have any chance of succeeding in society. I also explained that even if they were born in America, they could also possibly qualify for an ESL program if there is another language which is spoken at home by their parents/guardians. It all depends on the students’ English proficiency (determined by tests) in order to determine whether a student should be in ESL or not.

I also decided to speak a lot about misconceptions of ESL students because I did not want these pre-service mainstream teachers to one day make the mistake of misjudging students that they might have one day. A point that I really wanted to make clear to these pre-service mainstream teachers was that ESL students are not bad students; that they just have a lot on their plate to deal with for such a young age. Besides trying to learn English, they are dealing with other personal struggles that many times go unnoticed. Things such as culture/language shock and an ethnocentric curriculum can really have a negative effect on these students; they can get overwhelmed by their new, unfamiliar surroundings and begin to have feelings of panic, anxiety, fear, curiosity, etc. When dealing with all of these new emotions, a student can enter a ‘silent stage’ in which the student will not talk at all. The misconception is that these are bad students, who are unwilling to talk and participate in classroom activities – this is not the case! I explained to the audience that they might be surprised to learn that many of these students actually have a great desire to participate and be involved, but that their lack of participation is due to limited English proficiency as well as overwhelming fear. I also explained that our rather ethnocentric curriculum can be a shock to immigrant children, as it leaves little room for cultural appreciation.

Another struggle I spoke about in regards to immigrant children is that they deal with dual-identity. In a school setting, students are encouraged to learn and speak English by teachers and friends, or feel obligated to do so in order to ‘fit in’ and not be an outcast. However, at home immigrant children are encouraged to speak their mother tongue in order to preserve their native culture, or to keep in communication with family members. Children who deal with a dual-identity can grow to have negative associations with their 1st language and/or 2nd language based on different situations.
In addition to the misconception of ESL students as being bad, I also wanted to make aware to the LIT311 students that sometimes ESL students are looked at as disabled; ESL students are not disabled! In EDU 360, we read an article titled, What Every Educator Should Know: Separating Difference from Disability by Dr. Catherine Collier. I used the author’s ideas from this article and included them into my PowerPoint in order to show them how important it is to not classify ESL students as having a learning disability, but rather a learning difference. As future teachers, it will be our job to provide the most appropriate learning environment for our students, and it is not appropriate in any way for an ESL student to be classified as having a learning disability; unless of course, the student has both a learning difference AND a learning disability – in which case proper action should be taken (which I discuss next).

I used another article by Dr. Catherine Collier as an example for the case in which a student has both a learning difference AND a learning disability titled, Serving Special Needs Students Who Are Limited English Speaking. I included the four fallacies that Dr. Collier discussed in her article, and in order to clear up any misconceptions I went over them in depth and explained why they are not true:

1. Students with exceptionalities cannot learn two (or more) languages.
   I explained that the truth of the matter is that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD students who also have a disability must learn a second language most of the time. However, if their exceptionality is that of language difficulties in his/her 1st language, then they will likely acquire a second language very slow. This is due to the fact that second languages are better acquired when there is a firm foundation of a first language.

2. Parents of CLD students, with and without exceptionalities, should speak with their children at home in English.
   This is very incorrect, and parents should not be encouraged to speak English to their children if they are not proficient in the language. This will only be a bad model of English for the child and useless. The best thing that a parent can do is to provide a strong model of the child’s 1st language, because as I mentioned before, second languages are better acquired when there is a firm foundation of a first language.

3. Acquiring more than one language is “difficult” and can lead to academic problems.
   I explained to the audience that the only way that bilingualism can affect a student is in a positive way. Through research, it has been shown that there are cognitive benefits for bilingual students, and acquiring more than one language is not a burden on them. There are other positive outcomes such as social benefits and more opportunities for employment in their future.
4. Some bilingual students don’t speak any language to a real extent and are “semi-lingual.”

I told the LIT311 students to never believe such a thing! That everybody has a language, and that some people might confuse students not speaking with the silent stage, which I discussed earlier.

2.3 What Are the Roles of the Teachers???

Following the discussions about what TESOL is and who ESL students are, I decided it was time to incorporate the people who can help to change the lives of ESL students – the teachers. I identified the roles of both mainstream and ESL teachers as having different areas of expertise. Mainstream teachers are experts in the content curriculum – and in the case of mainstream elementary teachers, they must be masters of a wide variety of subject matter. ESL teachers are language development experts with knowledge of second language acquisition, and we must share our knowledge with our colleagues.

In fact, it is not just ESL teachers who must share their knowledge, but mainstream teachers have to do this too in order to provide the best learning environment for the students. I made it very clear to the audience that the collaboration of ideas between mainstream and ESL teachers will give ESL students the best opportunity to succeed. Without communication, ESL students can easily slip through the cracks and it will ultimately be our fault that we failed to give them the same opportunity as we give our native students.

I mentioned different ESL classrooms that can be found depending on different types of communities. When working in a rural setting, one is likely to come across a push-in/pull-out system in which the teacher will either push into a classroom to provide assistance to the mainstream teacher and particular ESL students that may be in that class, or the ESL teacher will choose to pull ESL students out at a specific time in order to help them in a more one-on-one type of setting. On the other hand, in an urban setting, one is likely to find inclusion classes. This is when there is a high population of ESL students at similar levels, and enough to put them all in a classroom together. In this case, the ESL teacher will teach his/her classes as a regular classroom setting – which is less restrictive to the students, and help support learning.

Lastly, I decided to include different methods of ESL instruction and what research has shown to be the most successful among ESL students. I used another article that we read in EDU360 titled, Reforming Schools for English Language Learners: Achievement Gap Closure by Wayne P. Thomas & Virginia P. Collier to illustrate this point. I gave the audience a brief overview of the article about the research of various schools and their particular methods of working with ESL students. I did this in order to clear up one last misconception that I believed to be important and wanted to address; that is an English-only policy. I feel that people who don’t understand the acquisition of language and how ESL students work would think that forcing them to use English-only during instruction would work the best. However, English-only
proved to be the least successful method in the research findings. As I mentioned previously, the best way to acquire a second language is to have a strong foundation of one’s first language; and using only English prevents the students from forming a strong foundation of their first language, and ultimately will be less successful when it comes to acquiring English. The best method is actually two-way development bilingual education (DBE) with content ESL. DBE is instruction that uses two languages, English and another language. In a DBE program, half of the class consists of native English speakers while the other half consists of students who are native speakers of another language. The content is learned in both languages, which will enable students to become proficient in a second language, as well as continue to develop skills in their native language. I even provided the audience with a graph which was in the article in order to show them the different success rates of particular programs studied.

2.4 Future of ESL Teachers

After all of the general information about TESOL, facts about students, and the roles of teachers was provided for the audience, I decided to end things about the outlook of ESL teaching. I told the LIT311 class that ESL teachers are not going away due to the growth in immigrant population and that as future mainstream teachers they will be working with ESL students and teachers at some point in their careers. It is better to learn about what ESL means now, rather than just having it pop up in their class one day and not be prepared. I told them that, “this is what I’m here for today, to help provide you with a little bit of background knowledge in order to better prepare you for your future as teachers.” I hope that they really take the information that I gave them to heart, and will think about some of these things in the future when they work with ESL students.

3.0 Feedback From Linda Lord’s Class

After I said everything that I had wanted to say to the audience, I allowed them to ask any questions that they wanted to be cleared up. This was a super experience that I thought that I would not be ready for, but much to my surprise I answered all of their questions with no problems whatsoever. Many of the students seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say, (which I loved!) and asked numerous questions – some of which I have provided below (3.1).

3.1 Questions Following the Presentation

So, what if a student came to your class one day and you weren’t prepared? How would you explain this to your other students?

I answered that although this shouldn’t happen, it definitely does happen. A lot of parents of immigrant children do not know the process in which they need to go through in order to get their child registered for school. They think that they just send them to the closest school and the school will take care of it; and without any prior warning, they send their children to school. If a student were to just show up at your
door one day and not speak English, you should definitely call someone to come get
them (preferably the ESL teacher) in order to figure out what is going on. That way,
the school can hopefully get the student registered and figure out where they should
be.

I really think there is no explanation necessary for this case. However, if you know
that you will be getting an ESL student in your room, you should maybe go over with
the students about how to act and how to be polite to new people. You would want to
point out that they are from a very different place and point it out on the map, and tell
them that there they have a whole different way of life – including language. The kids
will think it is cool, and want to learn more about this new and intriguing place –
which would be a good activity for the whole class when the immigrant student does
actually come. That way he/she would feel accepted right away instead of wondering
if it’s okay to be different.

*Should you force your student to talk and be involved in classroom activities if they
are in the silent stage?*

I explained that the silent stage is a very sensitive stage to children. Many times,
children want to be an active part of the classroom – but either don’t because they are
terrified, or can’t because they don’t have the means to do so (low English
proficiency). It is preferable that you try to get the student to get involved so that they
don’t deal themselves out, but sometimes they will refuse to do anything – and that
usually, immigrant children will eventually come out of their silent stage on their own
and begin to gain more confidence in themselves; but as teachers, we must guide
them out of it and give continuing patience and support.

### 4.0 Summary of the Implications of the Experience

This experience was so significant and valuable to me. I learned a lot about what I know, and
how I can pass my knowledge onto others. So far in my college career, I have learned so much
valuable information, but have never had the opportunity to really use it for something other than
papers or assignments. I now know that all of that hard work actually does pay off. Sharing about
all of the things that I have learned thus far was an overwhelming, but amazing experience to
have. However, I don’t think that I really thought it was a big deal until it was all over. I read all
of the reflections and the letter from Linda Lord, and it was all very touching. I am glad that I
was able to experience teaching to college level students, and feel that this is something that I
might like to do in the future – teach an older audience. They appreciate your knowledge more
than children because children don’t recognize how much they appreciate you until a later time, I
think. All in all, this experience was life-changing, and it really gave me more confidence in
what I know and about what to do in my future!