

# **The Leadership Prize: APPLICATION**

## **Part I: Preliminary Information**

**Title:** Looking Beyond the Classroom: Responding to Educator Needs in Linguistically Diverse Schools

### **Abstract:**

This Leadership Prize project seeks to understand—and respond to—the everyday challenges of teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students. This project works with local teachers, administrators and staff to create a community of practice that explores their pedagogical challenges and enacts local solutions. I will use an institutional ethnography method to interview teachers, administrators and staff to identify their most significant challenges. Second, I will lead “Coffee & Conversation” groups with ABSS staff to work collectively to recommend solutions and begin to take action. Third, this prize will enable me to convene a TESOL Colloquium at Elon, inviting local educators to share their work with Elon students and faculty, continuing the collaboration. By utilizing a research methodology that builds upon the experiences of local educators, this project will create a valuable community of practice here in Alamance County of individuals empowered to create change.

## **Part II: Problem Description and Personal Statement**

### **1. Problem Description**

As a result of an increasingly globalized society, people are crossing borders and communicating with those far away more than ever before. It is vital that school systems adjust to meet the needs of this new, increasingly diverse, school population and prepare all students to live in a complex world where cross-cultural skills are necessary. Moreover, there are increasing numbers of US students who speak languages other than English at home. The Pew Research Center states that by 2020, one in four of American students will be an immigrant or a second language learner (Baltzer, 2015). Further, by 2050, the Pew Research Center estimates that 34% of school age students will be either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant (Maxwell, 2014).

In North Carolina, there has been a rapid diversification of school populations. The Center for Public Education (2012) reports that between 2000 and 2010, North Carolina minority populations grew more quickly than the total population: Non-Hispanic whites increased by 10.2%, while the number of black students increased by 17.9%, Hispanic students increased by 111.1%, and Asian by 83.8%. This increased diversity, both culturally and linguistically, of school populations requires new approaches to education, both nationally and locally. Despite the increased diversity of public schools, a lack of teacher training, assessment-focused policies, and limited resources have prevented schools from adapting to this diversifying student body. As a result, English language learners (ELLs) are often left behind. In North Carolina, where teacher pay ranks 44th of the 50 states, this problem is paramount (NEA Research, 2017). As indicated by the Pew Research Center, in the next several decades, the United States’ population of second language speakers will increase radically, and this increase is already evident in North Carolina schools.

Changing structures of assessment and teacher pay are enormous systemic challenges; however, working locally with experienced teachers and educators can provide innovative solutions to better serve the students in this community. This Leadership Prize project focuses on our local school district—the Alamance-Burlington School System (ABSS)—to understand the everyday challenges educators are facing in light of demographic changes. As a result of complex policies and low teacher pay in North Carolina, ABSS, which has a large Latino and ELL population, is struggling to meet the needs of all of their students.

During my school placements in ABSS, I have witnessed cultural divides both in the community and in the classroom, and a lack of or cultural awareness taught in mainstream courses. Additionally, I have noticed negative stereotypes and attitudes held by both teachers and students toward pull-out classes and the English as a second language (ESL) program. With the number of ELL students increasing, school district budgets tightening, and an array of unfunded policies focused on testing and outcomes, finding a way to both address the challenges of ELL education while also providing sufficient educational opportunities for these students is an tremendous challenge.

Current research on ESL education primarily focuses on either student experiences or education policies. There is also new research on parent-school relationships (Panferov, 2010). However, there is little research on how teachers, administrators, and staff implement policies and how those policies are affected by their daily lives. There are a few scholars who focus on teachers, and when they do it tends to be new teachers (ex. Motha, 2016). This lack of representation of expert teachers in ELL research leaves important voices out of the conversation, as Motha (2016) writes, it's important to “listen to voices that have traditionally been delegitimized within educational research, that is the voices of practicing teachers” (p. 80). We need to create a community of practice where new educators, experienced teachers, and educational administration can come together. This project aims to fill this gap by listening to, and working with, ABSS teachers, administrators, and staff to define their challenges and provide space and funding to enact local solutions to these problems. While I do not have the ability to change policy or teacher pay, as a student leader, I do have the ability to work locally, basing my methods on scholars like Motha, to work with teachers in order to raise their voices and use their expertise to find novel solutions.

In order to understand the specific challenges schools are facing, I will utilize the resources provided by the Leadership Prize to, first, execute interviews which will enable ABSS teachers and administration to define the problem locally. Second, I will lead “Coffee & Conversation” working groups with ABSS staff to work collectively to recommend solutions and begin to take action. Third, this prize will enable me to convene a TESOL Colloquium at Elon with local educators from both ABSS and Elon University as an opportunity for individuals to join the conversation and collaborate with one another to find solutions. By utilizing a research methodology that builds upon the experiences of local educators, this project will create a valuable community of practice here in Alamance County of individuals empowered to create change.

## **2. Personal Background and Motivation:**

As an Elon University English major with Teacher Licensure, I strive daily to learn more about teaching by asking questions and working with diverse learners, ultimately in an effort to make an impact on the education system.

I have seen how valuable the relationships between teachers and students are, as it was the teachers who believed in me that fostered my love of reading and working with diverse learners. In my education classes, however, I learned that we should not necessarily mold our own pedagogy on our best teachers, because although their pedagogy reached us—presumably the best students in the class—it might not reach every student. Instead, we must push ourselves as educators to find new ways of reaching the students left behind in order to meet all students' needs.

My sophomore year at Elon I took an Intro to teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) class, and tutored at the Center for New North Carolinians in Greensboro with English language learners (ELLs). Each week, I attended at least one tutoring session and worked with students age 5-18 of all different ability levels. Although it was a challenge to meet the varying needs of these students during short tutoring sessions, I became interested in their educational experiences as immigrants and ELLs. Since completing the TESOL course, I have continued pursuing opportunities to work with ELLs locally in the Alamance-Burlington School System (ABSS), in my Texas hometown, and abroad in Oxford, England. In my placements in ABSS, I have also witnessed the challenge that teachers face in meeting the needs of all students, and have realized complicated classroom dynamics which coincide with the complex lives of teachers.

While studying abroad in Oxford, I interned weekly at a local Oxfordshire school, tutoring ELLs with vastly different backgrounds and abilities. My job was to sit with a specific ELL during each class period and assist with their understanding of classwork. One student, a Chinese immigrant, had endured domestic abuse and was a selective mute. At the beginning of the semester, this student was extremely distant and unengaged, and my task was to work with him throughout the school day. At first, I felt frustrated that I didn't have the skills to help him learn. Over time, I realized that I could connect with him by relating classroom assignments to his life back in China, which he dearly missed. We wrote back and forth on a white board and, over time, he began to open up and engage with the lesson. While he did not start speaking by the end of our semester, we certainly achieved our overall goal: progress. Working with this student showed me that we, as educators, must adapt to meet students needs. This ignited my passion for working with diverse learners: we must do better for all students who enter our public school systems.

In addition to my internship working with ELLs in Oxford, I interned this summer with Fort Worth Sister Cities International, providing logistical support for their Spanish Immersion Camp and serving as a facilitator for their International Leadership Academy (ILA). As facilitator for the ILA camp, I led a group of local students from Fort Worth and international students from Germany, Hungary, Italy, Swaziland, Japan, and Mexico in team-building activities and facilitated discussions about cross-cultural communication, individual diplomacy, and leadership. As Intern for the Spanish-immersion camp, I supported the camp Director with

student intake, program organization, and program assessment after the camp ended. During the two-week camp, I coordinated logistics for the ten college students and two faculty from the Monterey Institute of Technology and Higher Education in Toluca, Mexico who were teaching immersive Spanish to 80 first-fifth grade students from Fort Worth Independent School District. I also coordinated after-school cultural activities for the visiting college students. Not only was this an important leadership opportunity, but it also gave me experience working in a well-run language program. This summer camp experience inspired me to continue my own Spanish language education by taking classes at Elon's El Centro.

At the end of my time in Oxford, I completed a research project for my Comparative Education class, which focused on how policy affected the ESL students I worked with at a local school. I researched ESL policy in England and took field notes during my classroom observations, then interviewed teachers and the ESL coordinator to understand their experiences implementing policies and responding to student needs. This project inspired me to continue my research more in depth here in the ABSS school district. As a future educator, I value inquiry and continually seeking to learn and answer big questions.

In each of these contexts, I have enjoyed the challenge of working closely with both teachers and students and finding ways to bring people together. My coursework as a student at Elon University and abroad has given me the academic preparation to take on this project. The teaching and leadership experience I gained working with Fort Worth Sister Cities has inspired me to work with teachers and administrators to improve the lives of students. As a student teacher at Alamance-Burlington School System, I have become familiar with local schools and the many individuals who work there. As a Elon School of Education Teaching Fellow, I have begun the preliminary research that informs this project.

The Leadership Prize is an important opportunity for me, as an undergraduate student, to develop my abilities as both a researcher and as a leader, while also making an impact on a community I know and love. The resources that the Leadership Prize provides will allow me to learn from local ABSS educators and give them a space in which to learn from each other. I enjoy the challenge of working to solve a problem and would be honored to be chosen as a recipient of the Leadership Prize.

### **Part III: Plan for Intellectual Inquiry**

Analyzing the current education system and exploring methods for reaching new students is no straightforward task. In order to narrow my scope, I will focus on the ABSS school district as a case study. In order to elevate teacher voices in their natural, authentic contexts, I will utilize Institutional Ethnography (IE) as my approach to this project. Developed by Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith (2005), IE provides a framework for ethnographic inquiry into the ways that institutions—as sites of everyday work practice—organize people and their experiences. The goal of IE research is to uncover *how things happen* by examining what practices create an institution as we think of it, how discourse can be understood to create and shape those practices, and how everyday practice speaks to, for, and over individuals. In other words, IE enables me to analyze the policies and practices that make up English as a second language policy (ESL) at ABSS schools, how those policies are interpreted by individual

administrators, staff, and teachers, and how the everyday lives of those individuals shapes their choices within the their schools. This methodology gives researchers important insight into how individual experiences shape how policies are actually implemented.

Examining individual experiences is valuable because teachers are the experts of their classrooms, and I wish to value their voices as such. In the IE framework, the institution is co-created in the “interindividual” interplay between discourse and the work of individuals (Smith, 2005). Using IE as the main data collection methodology in this project reveals the influences of policy, individual experience, and institutional history on everyday work. By seeking to reveal the influence of policy through the teachers themselves through semi-structured interviews and more informal “Coffee & Conversation” groups, I plan to learn about the teachers’ and administrators’ daily practices in order to gain insight on the problem itself.

As stated previously, I will conduct multiple rounds of interviews with ABSS teachers, administrators, and staff, of various ranks and ask them a set of questions in order to evaluate their role in the school, their job position, and their everyday experiences. Motha (2009) explains that this type of methodology, “Allow[s] teachers to be the authors of their own experiences, a departure from a format in which researchers wrote teachers’ lives” (p. 108). Further, I will hold “Coffee & Conversation” groups with these same ABSS educators. At these casual meetings, I will invite Elon faculty members to join us and base conversation off of theoretical text. This structure is, again, based off of Motha’s (2009) own study, which focused on young teachers, and found, “The decision to look beyond the classroom afforded me a deeper exploration of issues of identity, brought me closer to the teachers and their voices, and allowed me later on to make methodological decisions nourished by connectedness and relation” (p. 115).

In the last semester of my Leadership Prize, I will synthesizing my findings regarding the nature, causes, and consequences of the problem and bring together individuals both from ABSS and Elon University for a one day TESOL Colloquium to further the community of practice that I am cultivating throughout my prize. Leadership Prize resources will be used to incentivize this program as professional development for the ABSS teachers and staff members. The Colloquium will feature a keynote speaker with expertise on faculty development in TESOL, and our colloquium format will focus on discussion space to empower teachers to tackle their everyday challenges and find concrete solutions. This type of professional development and teacher education highlights the value of multilingualism as a contributor of transformation, and empowers all faculty to challenge the deficiency model of ESL when they encounter it (Motha, 2016, p. 95). Elon University professors and students will also benefit from this colloquium discussion, as well as through the connections they make in this new community of practice.

This study will allow me to uncover the relationships between teachers, staff, and administrators in relation to English language learners, as well as increase my understanding of the institutional structures that allow or restrict students’ educational access and opportunities. Finally, this project will give me insight on how teachers perceive their ELL students and their motivations, and the challenges teachers face when working with this student population (LaFrance, 2016). This project has the potential to assist school districts by opening the conversation about how the hierarchical structure of the school impacts English language learners (Valenzuela, 1999). Ultimately, we hope that our findings will better the Alamance-Burlington area by opening

conversation considering how faculty and administrator relationships with ELL students influence their educational experiences.

In order to continue developing personally and professionally during my next three semesters at Elon, I plan to attend three conferences which will provide me with important observation and learning experiences, as well as opportunities to share my own research. I will also continue my own development as an ESL classroom teacher during summer 2018. This May, I will attend the ESL Symposium at N.C. State which offers plenary speakers, professional development, and community-building over the course of a two-day conference. The following May, I will present my research at this same conference. Additionally, I will present my project at SURF day both years and at the Carolina TESOL Fall Conference in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in November of 2018. During Summer 2018, I will teach English language learners either in the US or abroad and obtain a certificate in English language teaching.

These opportunities enable me to enter the professional TESOL community of practice and provide professional guidance for my research. This will continue the professional development I have gained as a Teaching Fellow, which has shown me the value of a community of practice in my educational journey. The director of the fellows program, Dr. Carpenter, has been a valuable resource for my Teaching Fellows research thus far. The Leadership Prize will enable me to continue the research I began as a Teaching Fellow and provide momentum and funding towards working with local teachers to solve those problems.

#### **Part IV: Feasibility, Budget and Timeline**

##### **Feasibility**

My Leadership Prize project lends itself well to the timeframe and budget allotted by The Leadership Prize. The timeline below presents my research plan; however, it can be adjusted as needed. This project works with local teachers, administrators and staff to create a community of practice that explores their pedagogical challenges and enacts local solutions. I am confident that researching how ELLs are regarded in ABSS schools is feasible because I have already received permission from the ABSS school district to begin conducting interviews with faculty in the Spring. It is my intention to lay the groundwork for research that may be continued in future years or be used as a template in other school districts. Through this study, I hope to give teachers and faculty members a space to talk and discuss solutions which do not require additional resources. Providing a space to empower teachers to find innovative solutions to their everyday creates a powerful ongoing community of practice. Because I have already started the preliminary data collection through my Teaching Fellows project, the additional data collection: interviews, “Conversation & Coffee” groups, and TESOL Colloquium described in this project is feasible to complete, in collaboration with my mentor, Dr. Jennifer Zinchuk, and the Teaching Fellows directors, during the 3 semesters of the Leadership Prize.

The timeline below shows the progression of the various steps of the Prize, but in the most general terms, the next three semesters will be split into three categories: researching, planning, and launching. Spring semester of 2018 will be used to research theories, visit ABSS schools to conduct interviews with staff members, and attend relevant conferences in order to learn about current research and gaps between policy and implementation. Fall semester of 2018 will be used

for working with local teachers, planning the TESOL Colloquium, promoting interest in the colloquium, and finalizing goals and outcomes. Spring semester of 2019 will be used for hosting the colloquium at Elon and presenting at a conference and SURF.

The funds provided from the Leadership Prize would go towards: travel, conferences and training for learning purposes, and the colloquium we plan to host at Elon University. These resources are outlined below and are well within the budget allotted by the Prize. While it is very difficult to know at this point exactly how funds should be best utilized, this is my best estimate of how the funds will be used based on the research I have done thus far. The funds provided by the Leadership Prize will allow me to take my (unfunded) Teaching Fellows project further and implement a solution to the research and data collection that I will begin in the Spring.

### **Timeline**

The following is a tentative timeline of major steps in completing the project, and will most likely need to be adjusted as time goes on:

Fall 2017	Proposal, literature review: research ESL policy in North Carolina and ABSS specifically and current research on high school ESL students and teachers
January 2018	Teaching Fellows: Washington Center Seminar on Educational Policy
February 2018	Begin conducting interviews with ABSS staff
March 2018	Analyze data from interviews Research successful ESL programs
April 2018	Present preliminary research at SURF for Teaching Fellows project
May 2018	Attend the ESL Symposium at NC State
Summer 2018	Teaching internship & TESOL certification
September 2018	Complete second round of interviews at ABSS
October 2018	Analyze data from interviews
November 2018	Present research at the Carolina TESOL Conference in Myrtle Beach, SC  Begin Teacher “Coffee & Conversation” groups
December 2018	Read and analyze scholarly literature connected with my research findings
January 2019	Continue Teacher “Coffee & Conversation” groups

February 2019	Hold TESOL Colloquium at Elon
March 2019	Culminate Teacher “Coffee & Conversation” groups  Debrief TESOL Colloquium, create continuity plan for future colloquia
April 2019	Present completed Leadership Prize project findings at SURF

## Budget

<b>Conferences/Training Programs</b>	
Learning Opportunity: ESL Symposium at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC (May 19-20, 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gas to and from N.C. State \$40</li> <li>● Registration \$150</li> <li>● One night in a hotel (200) \$200</li> </ul>	<b>\$390</b>
Learning Opportunity: ESL Symposium at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC (May 19-20, 2019) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gas to and from N.C. State \$40</li> <li>● Registration \$150</li> <li>● One night in a hotel (200) \$200</li> </ul>	<b>\$390</b>
Present research findings at the Carolina TESOL Fall Conference, Myrtle Beach, SC (November, 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gas to and from Myrtle Beach \$50</li> <li>● Registration \$225</li> <li>● Two nights in a hotel (150 X 2) \$300</li> <li>● Food \$200</li> </ul>	<b>\$775</b>
Summer internship and TESOL certification	<b>\$2,500</b>
<b>Data Collection</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interview meetings with ABSS teachers, administrators, and staff</li> <li>● Coffee (drinks, etc.) \$200</li> <li>● Participation Incentives (gift cards, vouchers, etc.) \$200</li> </ul>	<b>\$500</b>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gas to and from interviews</li> </ul>	\$100	
Coffee and Reading Group (up to 6 meetings with up to 6 teacher participants) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coffee (drinks, etc.) \$300</li> <li>Participation Incentives (gift cards, vouchers, etc.) \$150</li> </ul>		<b>\$450</b>
<b>Teacher Professional Development</b>		
TESOL Colloquium at Elon (25 participants, including ABSS teachers, Elon students, and Elon faculty) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catered lunch (\$20 x 25)</li> <li>Stipend for teachers (\$100 x 10)</li> <li>Keynote speaker (transportation, hotel, honorarium)</li> <li>Printing costs</li> </ul>	\$500 \$1,000 \$1,500 \$200	<b>\$3,200</b>
Use additional funds as necessary to support collaborative solutions and/or the dissemination of research		<b>\$1,795</b>
<b>Total:</b>		<b>\$10,000</b>

**Part V: List of sources**

Please provide full bibliographic information for all supporting work that you cited in your narrative, using the style conventions relevant to your discipline.

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