

From Blame to Awareness: Expanding Teacher Candidates' Understandings of Emergent Bilinguals' Literacy and Language Capacities

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ABSTRACT: Teacher candidates today are likely to blame students and their families in underserved communities for their inability to succeed in school rather than recognize the system of failure embedded in institutional practices that disfavors and disenfranchises minority groups (Castro, 2010, p. 207). In particular, many tend to view students' literacy and language abilities as delayed, often because they assume that students' caregivers do not have the requisite skills, knowledge, time, or desire to provide their children with school-valued print and language experiences. These deficit orientations of students and families need to be replaced with more informed understandings about the socio-political factors that shape schooling and access to school-valued literacies and languages and more critical awareness of the types of cultural wealth that exist in these communities (Yosso, 2005). Such inquiry is needed to help candidates to see students' inherent assets and their own roles in addressing students' literacy/language needs. This article examines one university's efforts to complicate teacher candidates' understandings of children and caregivers through a course called "Literacy, Language & Culture." Data collected over a two-year period with 191 candidates shows that many teacher candidates can evolve to see children's literacy and language capacities to varying degrees and their own responsibility in fortifying instruction for students and connecting with caregivers, but that more focused and coordinated work is required to make this a uniform goal across teacher preparation programs.

Introduction

The majority of emergent bilingual students (EBs) in the United States live in high-poverty communities (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003) and many attend underfunded, racially segregated schools (Cosentino de Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell, 2005). Issues of language, race, class, and equity converge in the education of EBs,

requiring knowledgeable, culturally sensitive educators who can understand and advocate for them. Yet, most teacher candidates are not as ready as they should be to teach the large and growing population of EBs in U.S. classrooms (Lucas, 2011). Candidates' negative assumptions about the language and literacy abilities of EBs and their caregivers can translate into a potent underassessment of EBs' literacy and language potential (Sharma & Lazar, 2014). Yet for many teacher candidates, these assumptions can change. In this article, I examine the impact of a teacher education program on teacher candidates' understandings of emergent bilingual students in Philadelphia. Findings from this study affirm that programs need to address the complex social and political landscapes that impact schooling for EBs and provide teacher candidates with opportunities to inquire about students' literacy and languages practices across school and community contexts.

Perspectives

The number of emergent bilingual students has grown exponentially in the United States over the last few decades. Between 1980 and 2009, the percentage of English Language learners increased from 4.7 to 11.2 million (National Center for Educational Statistics, NCES, 2011a). Latinos, constituting about 15% of the population, make up the nation's largest group of EBs (Fry, 2010). Seventy-five percent of EBs live in high-poverty, underserved communities (Zehler et al., 2003) and many are concentrated in the most financially disadvantaged school districts in the country (Cosentino de Cohen et al., 2005). In Pennsylvania, for instance, per-pupil expenditures for school districts serving high concentrations of Latino students are among the lowest in the state (Baker, 2014).

Schools that serve high concentrations of EBs are often located in urban areas and therefore have many of the features associated with large, under-resourced schools including large class sizes, inexperienced teachers, and high levels of tardiness and absenteeism (Cosentino de Cohen et al., 2005). Most attend schools that foster English proficiency over the development of students' home language, and many EBs are subjected to invalid testing and teaching practices that do not account for their knowledge traditions (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010). None of these practices are consistent with current research on second language acquisition and the instructional conditions needed to help EBs achieve in literacy. Further, federal policies such as No Child Left Behind, and the more recent Race to the Top, have promulgated a culture of standardized testing and controlled curricula that diminishes teacher authority and the kinds of intercultural teaching and translanguaging practices that are considered vital to EBs' language development (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010).

These factors, combined with the many environmental stressors associated with high-poverty status, contribute to the low performance of EBs in inner city schools. Many are not meeting proficiency standards in literacy. Only 26% of eighth graders identified as English learners scored at or above the basic level in reading, compared to 78% of English speaking students, based on most recent National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) data (NCES, 2011b). Low literacy performance in school correlates with high school dropout rates. Among Latinos ages 20 and older, 41% do not have a regular high school diploma and just one out of ten seek the General Educational Development (GED) credential (Fry, 2010).

A major concern is that the teachers who will someday serve EBs are not being adequately educated to do so (Lucas, 2011). Most teacher candidates in the U.S. are white, middle-class, monolingual, and English-speaking (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Many enter teacher

education programs with lower expectations of emergent bilingual students than English-fluent students (Marx, 2004; Sharma & Lazar, 2014) and also tend to have reduced expectations for the knowledge that students in high-poverty communities bring to school (Haberman, 1991). While many millennial preservice teachers today claim to embrace cultural diversity, they are still likely to blame students in underserved communities for their inability to succeed in school rather than “recognize the system of failure embedded in institutional practices that disfavors and disenfranchises minority groups” (Castro, 2010, p. 207). This means they are apt to interpret low literacy achievement rates among EBs in underserved schools as a consequence of inherently low student ability and effort or inadequate parenting, rather than the many structural and institutional factors that undermine schooling and opportunity for this group of students.

In response to these findings, research calls for teacher education programs to strengthen candidates' awareness of: 1) the sociopolitical factors that impact students and their education, 2) their appreciation of students' linguistic and cultural assets, and 3) the knowledge and skills necessary to teach this student population (Lucas, 2011). These goals are grounded by key perspectives that, when integrated into teacher preparation programs, can contribute to raising teacher candidates' understandings of EBs and the kinds of family and community supports that are available to them.

Theoretical Perspectives for Teacher Education and Development

Investigations of how teachers grow to understand and teach students in non-dominant cultural communities indicate that those who are most developed in seeing students' capacities have acquired both *individual* and *structural* orientations toward their students (Chubbuck, 2010; Whipp, 2013). In other words, these teachers think about students as individuals and also members of larger racial, cultural, and/or socioeconomic groups that are often marginalized in schools. This research supports the need for strong programs that allow teacher candidates to understand students within intersecting sociopolitical, cultural, and racial contexts. Several theoretical perspectives can be embedded in these programs to help candidates' construct capacity-oriented understandings about EBs.

Tara Yosso (2005) uses critical race theory to challenge deficit thinking about students of color. She addresses the idea that those most privileged in society possess the cultural and social capital needed to maintain their dominant status, which is perpetuated through education and inheritance (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Although this position invites a structural critique of achievement, Yosso believes it also casts some communities as “culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor” (p. 76). She proposes an alternative “Community Wealth Model” that exposes the rich varieties of cultural capital found in Communities of Color that allow members to accomplish specific goals, including those related to educational advancement. These varieties include aspirational, navigational, social, familial, linguistic, and oppositional forms of capital. For instance, aspirational capital relates to caregivers' hopes and dreams for their children's academic success. Social capital includes the networks of people in churches, businesses, and community organizations that provide youth with affirmation, guidance, and opportunities. Linguistic capital, especially significant in bilingual communities, includes the ways members utilize their varied linguistic resources to accomplish goals. Children who translate for their siblings and caregivers are utilizing their linguistic capital. Addressing these forms of capital within teacher education programs can broaden teacher candidates' understandings of EBs within complex and supportive ecologies.

Closely related to the Community Wealth Model is the funds of knowledge concept that

specifically refers to the varieties of strategic knowledge contained in local households that are critical to their functioning (Moll, 2005). Based on a study of working-class Mexican communities in Tucson, Arizona, investigators identified many varieties of knowledge within homes, such as ranching, plant management, car repair, child rearing, health care, travel, and budgeting, and the multistranded ways this knowledge is shared and appropriated by household members. This concept challenges deficit-oriented views of knowledge and teaching within high poverty homes and is central to the idea of educating in the *third space*. Third spaces are physical and or social spaces that unite the experiences and knowledge of learners' home communities with those of formal, official sites such as school (Gutiérrez & Lee, 2009).

Brian Street's (1995) ideological view of literacy complements the funds of knowledge concept because it recognizes literacies as cultural practices that serve legitimate communicative purposes within communities. Those taking an ideological perspective recognize all practices involving language and print that are not typically practiced in school but nonetheless accomplish particular goals, such as reading and discussing a train schedule and telling Bible stories in church (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988;). This contrasts with the autonomous view of literacy that situates literacy as a discrete set of reading and writing skills that are legitimized in school and require mastery for one to be considered literate. Those taking an autonomous view tend to judge children on the basis of their engagement in practices that mirror school, such as reading and discussing books at bedtime, because these literacies align most directly with school achievement.

In the area of second language acquisition, the theory of common underlying proficiency (Cummins, 1981) posits that knowledge and abilities acquired in one language can be used to learn another. Thus, instead of seeing students' first language as an impediment to second language learning, it can be viewed as an asset as students draw from their knowledge of the first language to learn the second – particularly if the language shares many linguistic features, such as Spanish and English.

These theoretical stances can be integrated into coursework to strengthen preservice teachers' (PSTs) understandings of emergent bilinguals. By addressing these perspectives in the university seminar and providing spaces on and off campus where they could inquire about these stances, I anticipated shifts in PSTs' understandings about EBs' language and literacy capacities. In order to explore the notion of PSTs' growth, let me turn briefly to a view of teacher development that considers learning across a variety of activity settings, including the university classroom and the field placement school.

Teacher candidates construct understandings of EBs based on their interactions with members of various discourse communities in and out of the teacher education program. In order to examine PSTs' growth in understanding EBs, I will draw from cultural-historical activity theory that reflects an expansive view of learning (Gutiérrez & Larson, 2007). Expansive learning considers both vertical development, from immature to more sophisticated understandings (Engeström, 1996), as well as horizontal development that occurs across different activity settings. In the teacher education program, for instance, PSTs are placed in different activity settings such as university classrooms, schools, and communities to access the kinds of expertise they need to grow as teachers. Additionally, the communities within each of these spaces offer distinct and sometimes contradictory opportunities for growth. An expansive view of development focuses on how learners construct understandings as they move in and across these settings and participate in different practices. Guided by an expansive view of teacher development, I explored PSTs' growth in understanding emergent bilinguals and the larger

socio-political contexts that shape their literacy education. I also looked at how the two contexts of the university classroom and the field setting afforded and constrained PSTs' ability to understand emergent bilinguals.

Method

This study examined the development of teacher candidates in a teacher education program at a private, urban-based Catholic university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. First-year PSTs (n=191) participated in a course called *Literacy, Language and Culture (LLC)*, and as part of this course, conducted inquiry projects that involved gathering data about EBs within their communities, schools, and classrooms.

LLC is a required foundations course that focuses on equity education and developing complex understandings of the language abilities and literacy resources of culturally and linguistically non-dominant students. Course readings introduced PSTs to key theories, frameworks, issues, and practices for understanding language and literacy acquisition within culturally non-dominant communities, with a special focus on emergent bilingual students. Coursework consisted of: 1) reading and responding to scholarship on research, policy, and practice on language and literacy in K-12 school systems; 2) viewing and responding to contemporary films on the politics of literacy and language; 3) working directly with emergent bilingual students in culturally and linguistically diverse schools through field placements; 4) participating in class discussions and critical analyses of course readings, films viewed, field experiences, and PSTs' own locations in relation to social class, race, language, and educational equity; 5) role-playing and simulations; and 6) critical reflection on their own growth and development as future teachers.

Course Readings

Course readings included *Bridging Literacy and Equity: The Essential Guide to Social Equity Teaching* (Lazar, Edwards, & McMillon, 2012), a text that addresses issues of poverty and race in relation to literacy achievement, literacy pedagogy, and educational equity. Another text, *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, & Practices for English Language Learners* (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010), is a critical review of current programs and policies that impact English learners and provides a rationale for transformative approaches to educating students including dynamic bilingualism. A third text, *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools* (Charity-Hudley & Mallinson, 2010), discusses standardized forms of English and American language variations in relation to power, privilege, and educational outcomes. PSTs were also required to analyze several articles and book chapters addressing the culturally situated nature of literacy and language (Heath, 1983), language identity (Delpit, 2002), funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005), and cultural capital/community wealth concepts (Yosso, 2005). PSTs were asked to read and respond to the readings in small collaborative groups. Following 15 minutes of group work, they were invited to discuss how power and social positioning played a role in the educational realities that were being exposed in the course.

Films

Three films were selected for the course, aimed at raising candidates' awareness of the politics of language and its impact on linguistic minorities and their educational experiences. The documentary film *American Tongues* (1988) focuses on non-standardized varieties of language and how they are perceived by the dominant culture. The film *Speaking in Tongues* (2009)

follows four students as they develop bilingual capacities through dual-language programs. The film *Precious Knowledge* (2011) chronicles four high school Latino/a students who resist the banning of their Tucson high school ethnic studies program by the Arizona legislature

Field Experiences

Teacher candidates were placed in eight K-12 schools serving populations of emergent bilingual students in two urban communities. Two schools served emergent bilingual populations of at least 70%, six served emergent bilingual populations of at least 90%; the vast majority of these communities were Spanish-speaking. All but one of these schools promoted English mastery; one school provided dual-language instruction. PSTs visited the school for one morning per week for ten weeks, assisting the cooperating teacher and working with students individually and in small groups. PSTs were also invited to gather information about the community and the school through speaking with school staff, accessing the Internet, or contacting community members (specific directions are provided in the Appendix). PSTs were also asked to collect information about the instructional programs for EBs, the curriculum, and the types of pedagogical accommodations made for students with differing levels of English language proficiency.

Simulations

Simulations offered opportunities for experiential learning in which PSTs took on different personas and roles assigned to them aimed at experiencing how social, cultural, academic, and institutional norms and practices privilege or oppress certain groups of students based on their group identity. Simulating a change in power dynamics placed PSTs in temporary positions of subordination. The first simulation involved handing out cards that listed particular institutional or structural factors that either privileged or subordinated students. Those who had cards containing a higher number of “privilege” factors moved physically closer to a space in the classroom designated as “achievement,” while those with a higher number of “subordination” cards moved farther away from this target. Two other simulations related to language ability. One involved telling candidates that new certification requirements for teachers would include tests of diction and that they would need to eliminate traces of regional accents from their oral language. Candidates were then invited to write about what the simulation meant to them and their understanding of students who use nonstandard English. Another simulation involved giving candidates tests that were written partially in Spanish. Immediately following each simulation, candidates were invited to write about the experience of being tested in an unfamiliar language.

Research Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 191 PSTs who took the LLC course between 2013 and 2014. The majority were white, monolingual, English-speaking and female, and most were raised in suburban communities in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In keeping with IRB regulations, pseudonyms have been used for all participants, and participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any point in the course of the study.

Data Sets

Surveys. The *Learning to Teach for Social Justice – Beliefs* (LTSJ-B) (Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow, & Mitescu, 2008), survey is designed to measure key beliefs associated with social justice, such as participants' attitudes toward differences in social class and language. For the purpose of this article, I examined participants' responses to Items 5 and 6 on the survey, which relate to teachers' assessments of emergent bilinguals. Item 5 states: *The most important goal in working with immigrant children and English language learners is that they assimilate into American society.* Item 6 states: *It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language.* Participants were asked to rank these statements using a Likert scale (Strongly Disagree=1; Disagree=2; Uncertain=3; Agree=4; Strongly Agree=5). Scores reflecting disagreement (1 and 2) align with positive social justice orientation. PSTs who disagreed with Item 6 rejected the notion that it is reasonable to have lower expectations of students. A rating of 3 (uncertain) would indicate that the PST either had not thought much about the statement or did not have an opinion about it. To prepare the data for analysis, scores for these negatively worded items were reversed such that higher scores correlated with a positive social justice orientation.

Essays. A subset of the larger group (n=55) wrote responses to the following statement on the first and final days of the course: *Describe the language and literacy abilities of students in urban high poverty communities.* At the end of the semester, PSTs were reminded to consider the students they had observed in their field placements when responding to this question. Participants were given 15 minutes to respond and were asked not to include their names on these documents.

Interviews. Nine PSTs were interviewed between weeks 12 and 14 of the course. The graduate student who conducted these hour-long interviews asked PSTs to describe their school placements and the students in their classrooms. Specifically, candidates were asked to describe students' culture and their literacy and language abilities. PSTs were also asked to describe the school-related factors they thought enhanced and constrained students' literacy achievement.

Analysis of Data

Analysis entailed open coding of themes to examine PSTs' responses across surveys, essays, and interviews. I looked for typical and atypical trends within each data set and common and discrepant trends across data sets (Erickson, 1986).

Survey data were examined quantitatively using the Wilcoxon rank sum test of significance. I looked for shifts in rank in participants' pre- and post-survey responses to Items 5 and 6. I then compared these shifts with those that surfaced in the pre- and post- essays. The essays were coded according to "deficit," "varied," and "capacity" orientations of students' literacy and language abilities. For the post-essays only, the code "culturally-situated language" emerged as a descriptor. Sub-codes for both pre- and post-essays related to the factors PSTs associated with literacy and language production, including: "home/community factors," "school factors," and "home, community and school factors." Two additional codes surfaced in the post-essays, related to teachers' responsibility to nurture students' growth ("teacher responsibility") and general critiques of schooling for EBs ("schooling"). Next I read and re-read the interview transcripts to locate language that was either consistent or inconsistent with that which was contained in the essays. Finally I looked at both post-essays and interviews to see how candidates' understandings were shaped by the theoretical perspectives addressed in the course.

Examining relationships across these data allowed me to generate assertions on the impact of the course and identify ways to improve course design. I will report the findings from the LTSJ-B survey and then summarize the typical and atypical themes that surfaced in the essays and interviews.

Findings

Surveys

The results of the Wilcoxon rank sum tests showed statistically significant differences between PSTs' pre and post scores on Items 5 and 6. Item 5 states: *The most important goal in working with immigrant children and English language learners is that they assimilate into American society.* Prior to participating in the course, 57% of PSTs either agreed with this statement or were uncritical of it. This suggests that the majority of PSTs either supported or did not question the idea that ELLs should jettison their cultural practices, including their home language, to conform to the English-dominant expectations of U.S. schools. This represents many candidates' underestimation of EBs' cultural and linguistic assets. At the end of the course, however, 25% of PSTs either supported or were uncertain about the primary need for ELLs to assimilate into American society. This drop in PSTs' support of assimilation as the primary goal for ELLs suggests their greater recognition of the cultural and linguistic assets that emergent bilinguals bring to the classroom.

Similarly, pre-post survey comparisons for Item 6 reflected a similar shift in PSTs' attitudes toward emergent bilinguals. Item 6 states: *It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language.* At the beginning of the course, 42% either agreed with this statement or were uncertain as to how to respond, indicating that a significant number of PSTs believed that teachers' low expectations of emergent bilinguals were either appropriate or noncontroversial. At the end of the course significantly fewer, 11.5%, either supported or were unsure about how to respond to this statement. This drop indicates that most PSTs' rejected the notion of low expectations for emergent bilinguals when they completed the course. PSTs' attitude shifts toward greater appreciation of EBs' cultural and linguistic assets was further illustrated in their essays about the literacy and language abilities of students in high poverty communities.

Essays

PSTs were asked to describe the language and literacy abilities of students in high-poverty communities and, specifically those in their field placements. Analysis of the essays showed shifts in candidates' understandings of EBs' language and literacy abilities, primarily from a deficit orientation to one that focused on students' capacities. These data also show that candidates broadened their ways of describing students' language and literacy abilities and the factors that influenced them.

Before their participation in the course, 64% of candidates used words such as "weak," "lesser," "lower," and "delayed" to describe students' language and literacy abilities. In the pre-course essays, PSTs anticipated that home factors, and particularly parenting, would have a detrimental effect on students' literacy achievement. Specifically, they pointed to the absence of a strong support system at home and a lack of funds to buy books and other learning materials. They also indicated that caregivers would be less apt to speak English and therefore less able to help with homework or support teachers' efforts. They also assumed that caregivers' education was deficient and that they would not have requisite knowledge to teach their children to read

well. Based on these pre-course essays, PSTs' believed these factors contributed to EBs' weaker language and literacy abilities.

Analysis of the post-course essays revealed dramatic changes in PSTs' orientation toward students' literacy and language abilities. One PST's pre- and post-course essays capture this shift in orientation:

Pre-course: *The language and literacy abilities tend to be on a lower level. They use slang and do not use proper grammar. This language is a cycle because many of the elders speak the same way.*

Post-course: *The language and literacy abilities are often assumed to be lower than those of middle/upper class communities. However, just because they may not have mainstream language and literacy abilities they still have these abilities as they are practiced in their culture.*

The post-course essay above reflects a perspective held by nearly 70% of the exiting PSTs that students' language and literacy practices are shaped by culture and therefore legitimate. Many PSTs' used descriptors such as "mainstream literacies," "school-valued literacies," and "home valued languages" that situated students' languages and literacies within particular cultural settings. One PST drew specifically from course readings to describe her own students' abilities:

Students from high poverty neighborhoods all have literacy and language abilities when coming into schools; they may just be different than those of mainstream ways. At home they may have less resources and parents may be working, so children are not read to as much. However, like the Trackton students, children in these situations gain literacy and language skills by being exposed to them. These students may also speak another language at home. This ability is different than the mainstream but not inferior. While students have been exposed and therefore obtained different (home-based) language abilities, they all come into school with some that can be used to help them learn through common underlying proficiency.

Notice this candidate's description of students' languages and literacies as culturally situated, legitimate practices. None of the pre-course essays contained descriptions of students' abilities as cultural practices, reflecting what seemed to be shift toward an ideological orientation of literacy (Street, 1995).

Additional findings from the interviews, however, revealed the shift to be somewhat superficial. Descriptions of students' literacies and languages as culturally situated practices were, for the most part, not reflected in the interview data. I will elaborate on these findings later and will underscore how these data reveal a discrepancy between acknowledging an ideological view of literacy, addressed within the university classroom, yet drawing more from an autonomous view when describing students in their field placements.

The essays did, however, offer other evidence that many PSTs adopted an asset-based view of students by the time they exited the course. About one-quarter of PSTs wrote that their students' abilities might be less advanced in relation to those of mainstream communities, but that they had potential to grow: *Students possess the same amount of potential for academic achievement as students in affluent schools. Often times their literacy and language abilities may differ from the mainstream, but that does not mean that they do not possess skills.* Further, about 10% of PSTs referred to students' funds of knowledge, as reflected in this comment: *I now realize my job as a teacher is to use the funds of knowledge each student brings into the classroom and use that to help them succeed.*

Further, PSTs' post-course essays reflected much more complexity in the number and variety of factors that they believed shaped students' literacy and language beyond parenting, including the inequalities of schooling for emergent bilinguals and the lack of recognition of cultural and linguistic needs. This is an important consideration for candidates because it opens up for them the possibility that they, as future educators, could act to offset these inequalities. Only one-third of the pre-course essays addressed some of the schooling factors affecting literacy achievement, while nearly 65% of post-course essays did. Sixty-two percent of PSTs focused on problems with school resourcing, including unqualified teachers, as key impediments to language and literacy development. Eighteen percent the PSTs pointed to inequitable systems of schooling as negatively impacting literacy achievement in underserved communities. The following PSTs' essay is representative of this group:

The lack of resources in the schools [that] students attend do not allow them to have the same quality of education as students in affluent communities. All students do, however, have the same potential when they enter school. They are all capable of success and it is the school's responsibility to give each student the education they deserve. Teachers must understand the differences in culture and language and incorporate both factors into their classroom to serve their students. At this point in time, students are not being served with equity that reflects on their test scores, literacy levels, and dropout rates, but it does not have to continue to be this way.

This candidate focuses on the inequitable distribution of educational resources as a primary factor impacting students' literacy achievement and identifies teachers as key agents in fostering equitable education for students. The post-course essays reflected a shift away from a primary focus on the negative influences of caregivers and homes to a more elaborate analysis of schooling practices and a critique educational funding inequalities for students living in underserved communities.

A few teacher candidates delivered sophisticated critiques of schooling practices, equity-oriented stances about their own responsibilities as teachers, and views of literacy. Equity oriented-stances would include those PSTs who identified particular schooling systems, such as the curriculum, as undermining EBs' education. Additionally, there were a few PSTs who accepted responsibility for the education of EBs, such as this candidate: *I expect that all of my students are capable academically. It is my job as a teacher to foster their abilities and encourage growth.* Also, there were a few PSTs who appropriated an expansive view of literacy that includes more than reading and writing. This preservice teacher, for instance, discusses the relevance of the oral tradition in some communities:

Many children have a literacy; it might not be English. Everyone grows up with literacy; it just might not be reading and writing, but hearing the spoken word. These children may not have the resources that wealthy areas do such as books or qualified teachers, but they are still exposed to a great deal of literacy.

This candidate, in theory, recognizes that students in underserved communities are engaged in many literacy practices. An examination of candidates' interview comments, however, reveals that while the majority of interviewed PSTs made positive, asset-oriented comments about students, unofficial literacies for the most part were not recognized.

In some cases, however, PSTs' post-course descriptions reflected underdeveloped, naïve stances toward students, caregivers, and schooling. A small cohort of PSTs continued to hold deficit orientations toward students in underserved urban communities as they exited the course. These PSTs tended to judge students' language on the basis of its resemblance to mainstream

English and focused on the responsibility of parents to teach these skills to their children. This PST's essay reflects such a view:

The language and literacy abilities before children start depend on their parents. It depends if the child has a lot to read around the house/neighborhood and if the parents read to the children. Once they get into school, their language starts to get better through what the teachers are teaching.

Note this PST's use of the word "better" to describe development as a function of a child's acquisition of school-valued literacies and academic language, reflecting an autonomous view of literacy. There were a few PSTs who articulated the idea that language and literacy are tied to culture, but continued to believe that *all* students in underserved communities would be delayed when they started school: *The kids often be literate [sic] and use language, but sometimes it will not be school-valued literacy. Their language and literacy abilities are not going to be as good when the students start school as with students in wealthier communities.* This PST had not considered the numbers of children in underserved classrooms who have attained high levels of proficiency in school-based literacies.

One PST acknowledged the language and literacy variations across students, in accord with their diverse backgrounds, but focused on students' limited access to books and caregivers' literacy practices as the principle factors influencing their development:

Every child is different and brought up differently. Everyone has their own unique background. Therefore, the abilities of children always vary. The language and literacy abilities depends on what the parents did and practices in their homes. The children in these communities may not have access or the money for books. While these factors shape literacy development, this PST does not refer to school or societal factors that also impact it.

Some PSTs simply traded one set of assumptions for another. Before the course, one candidate attributed students' difficulties with literacy to parents' low levels of education: *Their abilities are lacking because a child's parents are not always well educated.* At the end of the semester this candidate indicated that students' literacy achievement was undermined by their enrollment in underfunded schools: *They have lower literacy rates because they are forced to go to schools without proper funding.* This candidate's new realizations about the institutional factors undermining students' education translated to new generalizations about the nature of schooling in underserved communities. The first assumption is that all students attending urban schools are assumed to have lower literacy rates. The second is that schools without "proper funding" automatically deliver ineffective education. This view contrasts with descriptions of high quality teaching in some of these schools, as reported in the interviews.

Interviews

Most of the interviewed PSTs described the students in their field placement schools as "just regular kids" who were no different from kids in more affluent areas. A few, such as Liz quoted below, elaborated on their students' positive engagement with school and their language abilities:

The students seemed excited to be in school. They all brought different cultures to the classroom because they all brought different backgrounds. Some of the students didn't know any English, which added a different depth. There was one boy it was his second day of school and he didn't understand or speak any English so one of his classmates translated for him. There are others who can understand English but can't respond. The

kids really want to help each other out. Being a translator is a popular job. They would sit next to them at rug time.

Note the positive ways Liz describes the predominantly Spanish-proficient students in her classroom, including their excitement about school, their language translation abilities, and their willingness to help each other. Note, however, that she emphasizes students' inability to speak English, rather than their ability to speak Spanish. Prioritizing English over other languages was more typical in PSTs' descriptions, even though a bilingual/plurilingual perspective was stressed in the LLC course (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010). Six of the nine PSTs commented positively on students' English-speaking abilities, yet only three recognized their ability to speak languages other than English. Emily, for instance, recognized students' capacities in English and Spanish: *Some children seemed appropriately developed in English for their age and others seemed more confident in their Spanish speaking abilities.* One PST, Lisa, commented on her students' ability to use English for interpersonal communication: *The students all can speak at least social English and then it varies a lot on their reading levels.* Lisa's comment reflects an understanding of the developmental nature of second language learning in that students are in the process of acquiring academic English.

When asked to describe students' literacy and language abilities, however, PSTs tended to confine their descriptions to children's reading levels. Five of the nine candidates focused on whether their students were either above or below grade level in reading. Two described students' reading abilities as "low," two described them as being "varied," and one PST indicated that her students' reading abilities were strong. With the exception of recognizing students' translating practices, one candidate alluded to other types of literacies that students might have been engaging in at home: *They are reading from less structured materials.* The finding that most candidates did not acknowledge alternative literacies is inconsistent with candidate's descriptions of literacies and languages as culturally situated practices in their essays. Candidates' narrow emphasis on PSTs' grade level capacities reflects an autonomous view of literacy as a discrete set of skills to be mastered (Street, 1995).

Recall that in the post-course essays, most PSTs discussed the ways schools undermined the emergent bilinguals' literacy and language development. Yet in the interviews, candidates' comments were much more balanced. A few candidates commented on the lack of resources in schools and the overcrowded classrooms, particularly in relation to those schools they once attended. Others indicated that schools were well-resourced, particularly in the area of technology. Six of the nine PSTs described their cooperating teachers' use of iPads and smartboards. In addition, five candidates described bright, warm, and welcoming classrooms decorated with student art and other artifacts. A few of the candidates noted how schools provided breakfast for students, welcomed parents at the schools' entrance, and promoted community involvement.

In the area of teacher quality, seven of the nine candidates praised their cooperating teachers, focusing primarily on the intensity of teacher investment in the education of their students:

I know the teachers in the school definitely help the children with everything, not just school-related. - Liz

They really promote reading and they try to make kids happy about it. They have parties for kids who fill a reading log out in a certain amount of time. They have prizes and parties. They are having a popcorn party in a few weeks for something to do with their reading if they read a certain number of books. - Caitlin

The teachers, I feel, really do their best to reach out to individual students who they know will need extra help. The teachers are encouraging students to help each other and collaborate, which is developing a sense of community and social skills as well. - Cory
I mean, I guess especially with my teacher, she holds all her students to a high standard of learning. She expects them to do well in the classroom. If they are struggling, she will help them. She doesn't push them down and leave them behind. She makes sure that they can keep up with the group and understand everything. - Lisa

Two candidates, however, identified teachers who were either unqualified or inexperienced. One determined that a teacher she had observed held her emergent bilingual students to unreasonably low standards:

My teacher lowers test levels and stuff because she knows that kids won't achieve as well. She alters them. With a multiple choice test, instead of giving 4 answers, she will give 2 because she knows that it will help them do better. I don't know if that's a bad thing or not. She reads all the tests to her students. Even if they are doing packets they will do the packet as a class. – She feels that they are just so low in reading. She said: “This kid can't read,” but she doesn't do anything about it. She says, “Oh, he just can't read.”

Another candidate felt her cooperating teacher did not differentiate instruction, which compromised learning for those students who could handle more challenging work:

There is one lesson they always do where the teacher is focusing on a word family. She will say I'm thinking of a word with the /at/ sound in it. Some students I help and they struggle. Other students that are “above” get the word very easily and then will play with something and not get the explanation of the next activity. The higher-level students also get bored easily during reading time when she's conducting the questions at the end.

A few candidates also observed teaching behaviors that indirectly undermined students' development. One commented that the teachers in her school seemed to hold biases toward students' caregivers:

I don't think all of the teachers have the best viewpoint on homes. I think that they do assume things. I just heard one conversation in the hallway: one teacher was talking about “of course the parents don't cross the street with them they just stand on the corner and wave” (it's a very busy street).

Another focused on the rigid and unrealistic behavioral expectations of the young children in her school:

They had bathroom time. All the students had to stand in line and couldn't talk. Had to go in and out of the bathroom. No freedom. In the classroom, they get breakfast every morning. The day that I was there they had to eat it silently, which I thought was a bit much for second graders.

Finally, some PSTs believed that the curricula in their placement schools did not fit with the needs of emergent bilinguals. One PST charged that her school did not deliver culturally relevant instruction or material for its students:

From what I'm seeing they aren't touching upon any other cultures except the European American culture, briefly. Books even aren't necessarily guided towards one group. It doesn't touch upon other cultures in any way to show that those actually matter to everyone else, not just for themselves. They are an important part of the curriculum not just for the individual families.

Two students believed the “English-only” focus of their schools stunted students' development. One candidate complained, *the school is expecting them to learn everything in*

English, and therefore those who did not know English well were not able to grasp academic content. The other PST indicated that her school kept EBs and English speakers in separate classrooms which prevented both groups of children from learning from each other: *They're not benefitting from the other kids that are learning English as their second language at the school.* These critiques reflected PSTs' newly acquired understandings about second language acquisition and dynamic bilingualism (Cummins, 1981; Garcia & Keifgen, 2010).

Another candidate praised her dual-language school placement for teaching both Spanish and English to the children in her field placement school, but felt the rules governing when students could use either language were much too rigid:

They really only encourage Spanish during Spanish class. All other classes are to be English. Talking with friends in Spanish is fine. Pledge they say in English and then they say the school's own pledge in Spanish. My teacher knows both! The times to use Spanish and the times to use English are very defined.

This candidate felt students should be able to use language more flexibly throughout the school day, an idea consistent with the notion of dynamic bilingualism (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010).

Discussion

Survey, essay, and interview data support the primary finding that many candidates who participated in the LLC course appropriated some asset-oriented views of emergent bilinguals who attended urban, underserved communities. Additionally, most exiting PSTs demonstrated more complex understandings about the multiple contexts that shaped EBs language and literacy development. The co-occurrence of these two findings relates to the research on teacher development, in that teachers who tend to recognize students' capacities also acknowledge students' membership in multiple cultural and socioeconomic groups (Chubbuck, 2010; Whipp, 2013). This finding affirms that the combination of experiences offered in the LLC course helped many PSTs acquire structural orientations toward the students they taught.

Based on the essays and interviews, most PSTs grew more aware of the impact of underserved schools on emergent bilinguals' literacy and language development. On-campus discussions about systematic disadvantage was both reinforced by and, in some cases, refuted by their involvement in schools. Many affirmed the lack of resources in these schools, especially in the areas of resourcing and staffing, yet some also observed bright, inviting, and well-resourced classrooms. Many who were interviewed observed the ways their cooperating teachers worked to offset some of the disadvantages of urban schooling by instilling a culture of high expectations and positive engagements with literacy. This underscores the need to place PSTs in high quality urban classrooms, where teaching energies are focused on overcoming the systemic challenges of under-resourced schools.

Some PSTs critiqued schools based on their new understandings about dynamic bilingualism (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010) and funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005), and these added to their constructions about the nature of systemic advantage/disadvantage for EBs attending underserved schools. PSTs described English-only or English-dominant programs that did not develop students' biliterate abilities or draw from their linguistic knowledge. One of the PSTs in the dual language school discussed the ways EBs were encouraged to use their home language, but at specified times during the day. Some PSTs described scripted curricula or Euro-centric curricula that did not reflect students' culture and heritage. In these instances, theoretical

knowledge informed PSTs' understandings of some of the educational conditions that shaped EBs' experiences in schools. From the perspective of cultural-historical activity theory, this represents vertical learning because it captures PSTs' accumulated knowledge of what equity and opportunity look like for EBs in urban schools. It also reflects the horizontal learning since PSTs' demonstrated theoretical understandings about institutionalized racism, dynamic bilingualism, and equity teaching by virtue of their on-campus studies, but refined these understandings according to what they encountered in urban schools. Yet, this kind of horizontal learning was not exhibited in all areas.

Analysis of the pre-post course essays showed that many candidates articulated ideological views of literacies as culturally-situated practices (Street, 1995), but when interviewed, candidates focused primarily on students' acquisition of grade level reading skills, reflecting an autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1995). This suggests that the ideological view remained a superficially understood construct for most PSTs. They did not draw from an ideological view to describe the literacy practices of the students in their field placement schools and therefore could not construct fuller assessments of EBs' literacy capacities.

I attribute this result primarily to candidates' field activities that were confined to assisting cooperating teachers during reading instruction. Candidates were not directed to explore contexts where students' unofficial literacies could be observed (playgrounds, cafeteria, afterschool clubs). Nor were they able to observe students' language and literacy use beyond schools, in settings such as homes, churches, or community centers. Since horizontal learning was limited in scope, PSTs could not draw from a variety of field-based engagements to affirm or reject the perspectives they encountered in their courses. PSTs' studies of literacy and language acquisition theories seemed to coincide with their more positive views of caregivers' influence on students' language and literacy development, but these perspectives were not authenticated by direct inquiries in the field. These findings illustrate the need to place PSTs in community settings where they can directly inquire about literacies and languages as culturally situated practices, and how these practices emerge as a part of authentic learning environments within homes and communities (Moll, 2005). This finding illustrates the need to have candidates investigate varieties of literacy and language practices in non-instructional spaces, including EBs' homes and communities. These explorations could fit within a course on family diversity or embedded in courses that addressed language development or literacy teaching methods.

This study not only informs what PSTs might see and do in school and community settings, but how they collect information. They need to be explicitly taught how to see patterns in their observations and interactions across different discourse communities. They need to be shown how to develop assertions about the typical and atypical ways their students demonstrate literacies and languages, based on evidence from their own observations and work in and out of schools. Helping PSTs develop these kinds of inquiry stances will help them formulate more tentative, qualified, and informed assertions about students' languages and literacies and how these are shaped by multiple factors and contexts.

Conclusion

In order to raise teacher candidates' understandings of the capacities of emergent bilinguals in high-poverty, underserved communities, teacher education programs need to create programs that explicitly address candidates' deficit orientations of students and families. This study looked at the PSTs' growth in a course that focused on the systemic inequalities that EBs

and their families often face in underserved communities, and it introduced capacity-oriented, ideological views of literacies and languages as culturally situated practices. It also provided opportunities for PSTs to inquire about these stances through directed field activities in schools. These engagements fostered PSTs' understandings about complicated contexts that shape EBs' language and literacy growth and it helped many acquire more capacity-oriented views of EBs. This study showed how the course allowed for expansive learning as PSTs construct understandings on campus and refined them in their field placement schools. It also revealed the need for teacher educators to construct projects and placement experiences that build stronger theory-practice connections, especially in the areas of discovering unofficial literacies, uncovering forms of cultural capital in homes and communities, and investigating families' funds of knowledge. Such inquiries would do much to accelerate teacher candidates' growth as potentially effective teachers for this significant and growing population of students.

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Appendix**The Field Paper (20%)**

Write a 5-6 page paper (double-spaced) that includes 5 parts:

1. Community:

Describe the community surrounding the school (this might involve asking school employees, students, or doing Internet work). Describe the ethnic enclaves near the school and the languages they speak. Who is represented in this community, where are they from and when did they arrive (approximately)? Describe the demographics in terms of income level, race/ethnicity, and languages spoken. What can you find out about employment, average income levels in this community? What kinds of stressors might impact families in this community? What kinds of cultural capital do you find in this community?

2. School/Classroom Setting:

Describe the school building and general area surrounding the school. Describe the entry hall and the environmental print it contains – in what ways does this school welcome students and caregivers? Describe the arrangement of the classroom where you observe (student work posted? standards posted? white boards? books, materials in one or more languages?). Describe the desk arrangement and whether it is conducive to group work, partnering, and or translanguaging?

3. Student Population:

Describe the demographics of the student population in terms of race, ethnicity, and the languages students speak. Describe the **English Language Proficiency levels** of the students in the classroom where you intern. (You will need your teacher to provide this information). How many students are represented within the various ELP levels (1-6)? Describe the literacy and language abilities that ONE student demonstrates. What CAN he/she do in terms of reading, writing, and speaking?

4. School Programs/Instruction/Assessment

Programs: Are programs slanted more towards English immersion or do they promote development of two or more languages (English included)? Is it a pull-out or push-in program? Would you describe the program as subtractive, additive, or does it align with the idea of dynamic bilingualism?

Curriculum: Describe the curriculum – is it scripted or can the teacher modify it to suit the individual learning needs of students? Is it based on students' funds of knowledge? In what ways do the curriculum guides, reading materials, or other printed materials in the classroom reflect the student's heritage or culture?

Pedagogy: What kinds of accommodations are made do to help students learn English (or another language)? In what ways does the teacher make language/literacy learning comfortable for students (refer to Krashen's notion of affective filter)? In what ways does the teacher made accommodations for students with different ELP levels? What kinds of accommodations are made for your target student? Discuss the different kinds of accommodations that are used (sensory, interpersonal, graphic organizers?). Are efforts made to develop multilingualism or is there an English-only emphasis? Does the teacher engage in critical pedagogy that helps students notice and solve community/societal problems?

Assessment: Describe the kinds of assessments that are used. Do these seem valid or reliable? Explain.