

# Preparing Pre-Service Secondary Teachers in Arizona Using Culturally Responsive Approaches to Learn from Diverse Secondary English Learners

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## Introduction

Over the last 10 years secondary English learners (ELs) have been underperforming academically (Echeverria, 2011). In secondary schools in the United States, there has been a large increase of ELs from diverse backgrounds, many who face harsh barriers they must overcome when entering U.S. schools.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, secondary ELs have the highest dropout rate in comparison to other student populations and are more likely to leave school in their first year for several extraordinary reasons (Kholer, 2012). ELs demonstrate a 15-20% higher high school dropout rate compared to that of mainstream students (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013).

One component contributing to this dropout pattern is that many ELs are taught by underprepared teachers who do not understand diversity or English language learning (ELL) instructional strategies (Haycock, 2001). Up until eight years ago, not much attention had been paid to older ELs in the education system, thus prompting a need for discourse surrounding this topic.

A series of research reports on secondary ELs has documented the underperformance of ELs in reference to their academic trajectory. Studies by Faltis and Coulter (2009) contend that schools lack a rigorous curriculum and effective teacher preparation and consequently these factors have shaped the way in which ELs in secondary schools are instructed. Sleeter (2011) argues that the lack of quality teacher preparation for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth and ELs

continue to impact future students. The common theme of quality is one descriptor of the myriad changes that need to be advocated for in U.S. schools that serve minority populations, especially those with linguistic diversity.

Teacher preparation programs have a significant role in preparing new teachers to teach secondary EL youth in our schools. In the last 20 years little attention has been placed on how pre-service teachers should teach secondary ELs. Instead much research tends to focus on primary level instruction. Moreover, in many states, pre-service teachers are not required to take courses associated with language and cultural diversity. Research reports associated with teacher preparation and ELs show that only a few states make it mandatory for pre-service teachers to take course on language learning (Samson, 2012).

This is especially problematic in areas with high concentrations of minority and linguistically diverse students and a high percentage of Caucasian teachers in the college of education programs. Teachers who are not exposed to this type of preparation lack the experience and the empathy to work effectively with these diverse populations.

Lucas and Villegas (2011) contend that pre/in-service teachers continue to leave teacher education programs without the necessary skills to teach ELs. This is an alarming phenomenon due to the rise of immigrant communities from various countries influencing the changing demographics of the U.S. school population.

Short and Echeverria (2011) articulate a need to reframe the way in which teachers prepare for secondary ELs. They contend that even when teachers are provided course work, they still have to demystify issues impacting teaching instruction such as the age of ELs, the schooling/home background, language levels, and proper language assessments for ELs.

Many pre-service teachers continue to

hold a mainstream view of secondary ELs, which is grounded in assimilation and deficit based practices (Salinas, 2011). This in turn has a negative impact on students' self-efficacy and their ability to be successful when faced with such adversity on a daily basis due to such negative attitudes on the part of their teachers.

In Arizona, secondary ELs as well as their teachers are struggling in the educational system (Camarota, 2012). In the past 10 years issues concerning race, school segregation, and the banning of books and ethnic studies have been shaping the academic trajectory of secondary EL/immigrant students.

As a teacher educator and researcher working with pre-service teachers in Arizona, I find it is essential to unmask, discuss, and reflect on the major educational issues impacting our work with diverse ELs in the field. While working with pre-service teachers over the past six years, many of these new teachers have shared their desire to be better prepared for diverse students. One pre-service teacher commented on the role of teaching secondary ELs in Arizona. She stated,

You know it is like we can't use certain books or approaches that we have studied and know that work with ELs and other students. So, its one size fits all. This is not education-we have to change this. (Pruse, V., personal communication, September 20, 2013)

This important observation by a pre-service teacher brings to light the fact that pre-service teachers need to be prepared for their students and the issues that arise from working with diverse populations.

The purpose of this study was to chronicle the manner in which a cohort of pre-service teachers, during their one-year residency, used an EL project to better understand secondary ELs, thus informing their emerging teaching practices and promoting reflexivity in their praxis and ideologies. This one-year study

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documented the journey of six pre-service teachers working in an urban high school in Arizona. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) What factors influence pre-service teachers' understandings of secondary English learners? and (2) How do these factors inform pre-service teachers' practices? The results of the study can potentially support teacher educators, teachers, and schools with respect to secondary ELs and teacher development, preparation, and attitudes.

This article involves first a review of the literature associated with secondary EL teachers, second a discussion of the theoretical lenses used to examine pre-service teachers, third a demonstration of the methodology guiding this study, and fourth the findings which illustrates the four themes that emerged. Finally, the study is synthesized and is accompanied with recommendations for future research.

### Characteristics and Practices of Effective Secondary ELL Teachers

To ensure effectiveness, secondary teachers must understand the process through which adolescent ELs become proficient in English while ELs are also learning academic content. As development of academic language demands more time and effort from ELs, content-based teachers must integrate English-language proficiency standards into their classroom instruction. A series of studies by Walqui (2000) found that older ELs' language acquisition benefits when secondary teachers provide a meaningful language instruction with high expectations.

Furthermore, teachers should also provide multiple opportunities for ELs to develop and apply their social and academic language in varied contexts, such as heterogeneous small groups and homogeneous learning communities. Providing ELs with contexts that span academic disciplines to acquire and apply social and academic language is integral to the development of discourse affiliation, the ability to use language to express understanding and knowledge within specific groups (Faltis, Arias, & Ramirez-Marin, 2011; Gee, 1992). This is relevant to creating and planning lessons that are comprehensible to students and accessible to students despite their level of proficiency.

Secondary teachers must also implement theme-based lessons to engage and encourage participation from ELs. Theme-based curricula present ELs with concepts and vocabulary through numerous ap-

proaches that spiral and connect content across disciplines. Studies by Freeman (2003) and Short (2011) on secondary ELs language growth demonstrated that ELs academic language was improved when teachers uses culturally relevant themes in literacy instruction.

To ensure that ELs are able to access and participate in thematic curricula, secondary teachers must engage and build the students' background knowledge. This type of scaffolding is particularly vital within secondary education because ELs present a myriad of academic experiences, as well as cultural and lived experiences, that impact their learning. While some ELs possess little to no prior formal schooling, others may exceed their placements determined by English proficiency assessments.

Moreover, ELs are more effectively engaged in academic as well as language acquisition when the classroom content is meaningfully connected to their back-

inside and outside of the classroom for both students and their families.

### A Cultural Responsive and Linguistic Teaching Framework

The research study presented here draws from three theoretical lenses associated with a culturally responsive and linguistic teaching (CRLT) framework. These lenses were used to inform the way in which pre-service teachers engaged with diverse EL students in regards to instructional practices inside and outside of the classroom setting. These lenses also helped to explain some of the behaviors that emerged within the study.

The first lens, guided by Lucas and Villegas' (2011) seminal work on culturally responsive teaching, focuses on teachers' sociocultural conscience. According to Lucas (2002), teachers must be able to challenge their own views and beliefs about

*Teachers that have an affirming attitude towards diverse youth are able to understand students and this, conversely, guides their practice and fosters caring relationships.*

ground knowledge. Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo (2004) found that the purposeful integration of background knowledge into classroom learning creates a safe space in which ELs can connect their lived experiences with academic content as well as expand upon it to develop more critical academic knowledge.

Finally, secondary teachers must also possess knowledge of the legalities surrounding EL education in order to advocate on behalf of ELs. In addition to the legal cases regarding the education of ELs, secondary teachers must also understand individual state laws that appropriate the use of a primary language for non-instructional purposes in school as well as the rights of parents to access school policies, routines, and safety precautions.

Knowledge of these issues empowers teachers and parents to challenge ineffective policies and practices and to advocate for equitable and quality education of ELs (Faltis, Arias, & Ramirez-Marin, 2011). It is important that educators take the time to train parents in advocacy as parents are the most powerful advocates for their children. Empowering families, especially those from diverse backgrounds, is of utmost importance for promoting success

students of color. Thus, teachers develop a sociocultural conscience that is needed in the educational system. Teachers that have an affirming attitude towards diverse youth are able to understand students and this, conversely, guides their practice and fosters caring relationships. Teachers who are reflexive in their practice and able to identify their own biases through creating consciousness are more effective in working with diverse youth.

The second lens uses de Jong's (2005) conceptualization of language instruction regarding diverse secondary ELs. De Jong contends that ELs acquire a new language when students are engaged in meaningful learning experiences that take into consideration their first and second languages and their cultural background. Moreover, secondary ELs acquire language when they are able to use their first language and draw from their lived experiences to comprehend the second language.

In regards to language teaching and learning, de Jong (2005) argues that effective teachers understand ELs' language needs and are able to monitor ELs' development. This is significant since many secondary ELs have a range of language levels that impacts their second language

acquisition and ultimately their success in school.

Third, a socio-cultural lens (Lave & Wegner, 2000) is used to explain the outcomes of this study, which draws specifically from Faltis' (2009) and Walquis' (2000) notions of language development via meaningful contexts. Faltis (2009) argues that secondary ELs acquire language via learning communities. Within this process of learning, youth interact and engage in meaningful language activities that foster language growth. Teachers are responsible for creating a learning community that engages learners in activities that promote the acquisition of a new language.

According to Faltis (2009), in these communities (inside and outside of school) secondary ELs develop their first (L1) and second language (L2) and develop social networks. Through these lenses this study was able to document the manner in which pre-service teachers engaged with secondary ELs in an urban school in Arizona.

### Situating the Researcher within the Study

The researchers' positionality in this study was critical to the roles of observer and interpreter. I am a Latino teacher educator, a former secondary ELL teacher, and a scholar of color. Further, I examined the practices of pre-service teachers through a culturally responsive linguistic teaching (CRLT) lens.

I have engaged in similar research studies in teacher education and have utilized a CRLT lens in an attempt to explain tensions pre-service teachers face when seeking to challenge and transform status quo practices impacting ELs in the educational system.

### Methodology

A multiple case study approach (Yin, 1994) was used to collect data and examine how eight pre-service teachers documented the lives of their EL students at Centennial High School (all school, teacher, and student names are pseudonyms to protect privacy) in a variety of EL and general education programs within the school. Interpretive research (Denzin, 2000) was utilized to analyze participants' practices and beliefs regarding their school community.

This case study looked at various types of data collected over the span of a year. I interpreted this data to explain some of the phenomenon occurring and how it can be generalized to society at large.

### Context of Study

The site of this study is in an urban high school in Arizona serving grades 9-12. Centennial High School has a student population of 1,500 students—70% are Latino, 5% White students, 8% Black students, and others represent 10% of the student population. Furthermore, 15% of the student population is classified as ELs.

In the past five years, Centennial High School has had low achievement scores on state standardized tests, including Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). The ELs that attend Centennial are highly diverse. In 2013 ELs represented 15% of the total population at the school. Of the 550 ELs, 60 % are identified as Latino, 20% are Middle Eastern, and 10% are classified as ELs from Africa. The other EL population is labeled as other ELs. This means that they are refugees and or recently classified ELs (ADE, 2014).

Pre-service teachers were assigned to Centennial High School for their one-year senior residency student teaching experience. Moreover, they took courses from their university in the fall and spring semesters of 2013-2014. The education courses were offered at the school site for the entire year so as to promote using the strategies learned in the college classroom directly into the secondary classroom for use with the students.

### Project with Secondary ELs

The course where this research project was introduced was BLE 407 (Secondary ELs in Education). The researcher served as the professor. In this course pre-service teachers examined issues impacting the lives of secondary ELs. Pre-service teachers reflected on effective teaching practices for secondary ELs. Further, I also introduced pre-service teachers to a culturally and linguistically embedded teaching framework. I worked with pre-service teachers on analyzing factors outside the

classroom that shape students language development, academics and foster their cultural heritage.

The major project in this class is an EL research project, whose objective is for pre-service teachers to better understand factors influencing the trajectory of ELs so that this could shape their emerging mind set, ideologies, and pedagogy in relation to ELs. Pre-service teachers in this study conducted an EL project with secondary ELs for a period of ten months. They used ethnographic approaches to chronicle their work with students and they followed and documented the lives of ELL students in their respective classrooms.

In addition, pre-service teachers had to conduct student interviews as part of the research project. Much of the observations and field notes collected from pre-service teachers derived from student interactions outside the classroom setting.

### Participants

The six participants (see Table 1) in this study conducted research with ELs for 10 months. There were five female and one male participants. Five were White teachers while one was Latina. Of the six teachers, four taught tenth grade, one taught ninth grade, and one instructed in an eleventh grade classroom.

Three pre-service teachers taught English/Literacy, two pre-service teachers taught in social studies classrooms, and one teacher taught science. Of the six pre-service teachers, only one teacher had one previous year of experience working with ELs.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study are being presented in a case study format that includes, interviews, classroom observations, artifacts, and group interviews. Each participant was interviewed three times, with each interview averaging 70 minutes, using questions related to ELs,

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of Pre-Service Teachers**

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade	Content	Experience with ELs
Kayla	Female	White	10th	Social Studies	0
Jessica	Female	White	10th	Science	0
Violet	Female	White	9th	Literacy	0
Dakota	Female	White	11th	Literacy/ESL	0
Tanya	Female	Latina	10th	Literacy	1
Tommy	Male	White	10th	Social Studies	0

(pseudonyms are used to provide for confidentiality)

cultural responsiveness, language acquisition, and teacher beliefs about EL youth. Two interviews per participant were conducted during the fall semester while the last interview was conducted in the spring semester.

Each participant was observed in the classroom setting eight times across the year. It was critical to observe and chronicle pre-service teachers growth across the year. I conducted four observations in the fall and four observations in the spring semester.

Once the data were conceptualized, the data coding procedures of constant comparative analysis were executed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The themes were based on a thorough analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes. Descriptors were highlighted to identify patterns. After the data were coded and patterns emerged, those particular descriptors were placed under a stated theme. This process was repeated three times to seek clarity of themes, then themes were member-checked (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by pre-service teachers for accuracy and content validity.

Further, external peer reviewers examined and critiqued themes identified in this study. Four salient themes emerged including (a) teachers consciousness; (b) language matters; (c) developing language in meaningful contexts; and (d) multicultural (forbidden) resources.

## Findings

### Teachers Consciousness

Lucas and Villegas (2011) contend that pre-service teachers must be prepared to work with diverse populations. To attain this, teachers must have a sociocultural conscience when teaching and developing relationships. Pre-service teachers responses indicated that their views towards ELs were changing.

Pre-service teachers in this study were able to reflect on their beliefs concerning ELs across the academic year and how this impacted their teaching.

Many of the pre-service teachers in this study were influenced by their classroom observations, student interviews, and relationships formed with secondary EL youth. Pre-service teachers had a range of views and attitudes represented. For instance, Violet had strong beliefs and views about working with secondary ELs at Centennial. She explained in an interview/conversation that she viewed EL students as not having a solid understanding of English

skills. Violet expressed this view early in the academic year.

In the beginning of the year in my class, I had ELs that sort of fit the image I had about ELs. They only spoke one language. But, I worked with students that were classified as LTELs in my class. I saw that they have a foundation in English that they just struggle. This made me really think about the language needs of my students. (Pruse, V., personal communication, September 1, 2013)

The comments made by Violet reflect a deep understanding of the types of ELs that exist in the educational system. She is aware that there are students that have language difficulties and that have been labeled ELs for a long time. Many new teachers struggle with understanding students' linguistic background and how to fill the gaps inspired by their language difficulties.

Violet expressed that her views about ELs changed across the year. She articulated that she only knows one language and it was difficult to feel like her students in the first two months of the school year. Violet commented on this matter,

I just found it really difficult to put myself in the position of my students. I tried it. I felt like it was just not real. I had to really follow my students and be very aware of everything that happened in their lives in and out of class to get it. I also saw that my biases about ELs were still there. I really believe that understanding students in the classroom was sufficient. This was way off! My students did not trust me until I got real and I started to participate in their lives outside the classroom. (Pruse, V., personal communication, September 1, 2013)

The comments made by Violet reinforce the notion that teachers must challenge their views and beliefs about ELs to be effective and caring educators. According to Sleeter (2012), teachers that understand students' lived experiences will develop caring relationships with diverse youth. By building relationships educators can more effectively meet their academic and linguistic needs.

Jessica's attitudes and views on immigrant students were influenced by her project and work at Centennial. She described that she had only one point of view pertaining to immigrants that was focused on their education level. Jessica explained during an interview that she always believed that older immigrant students had low levels

of understanding in their first language and that English should be an important priority. Further, she illustrated that her first semester impacted some of her views on immigrant EL youth. She expressed,

I really had this idea that older students were just low across all content areas such as reading and writing. I could just see my students stare at me all the time and they would be writing all that I said. But, I was not sure why this was happening. I had students from Africa, the Middle East, India and refugee students. All 15 students were extremely talented in their first language. Many of the students knew so much that they were bored with what I was teaching. I had some students that had taken college courses in Mexico and India, but their English was low. I saw that talent in my students. I still have a tough time with how much English I should push. They still have to pass tests in English to graduate. (Rodernick, J., personal communication, October 3, 2013)

The views expressed by Jessica show that she is able to really acknowledge and identify the academic talent students have. Moreover, she made an important discovery in that she changed her views about immigrant youth and broadened her understandings in relation to older EL students through the connections she made with students and through her understandings of the academic attainment they had in their home countries.

Across the year, Jessica also reflected on her beliefs concerning immigrant students at Centennial. Further, she articulated that English was still very important in her class and she wanted to provide the best support possible for her students. Jessica expressed that her role was to prepare older students with the English skills necessary to graduate. She stated,

Across the year my students came into my science class with different language levels. All my students are super smart, but, still needed lots of help in English. I had tenth graders and other ELs that were really bright, but I just think that it was my responsibility to advance their English. Also, my school really pushes that we support English as much as possible. I tell my students all the time that they are smart. (Rodernick, J., personal communication, April 1, 2014)

Jessica's statement shows that her view on ELs is complex. She cares for the future of her students, but only sees them

being successful if they achieve success in English. Although she acknowledged their talents and the knowledge they have in their first language, Jessica continues to push assimilation practices and subtractive instructional strategies on her students.

Even though some pre-service teachers had experience with ELs, their beliefs and attitudes were still challenged across the year. Tanya has some experiences working with Latino ELs in secondary schools. She explains that most of the students she worked with in Phoenix were Mexican-American. According to Tanya, her image of an EL student was of Mexican-American descent. She explained that in her first two months she confronted some of these beliefs. Tanya expressed,

I had worked in a Central Phoenix School as an assistant and volunteered. I thought I was ready to work with ELs because of my background. But I realized that the Spanish speaking youth were not at all from Mexico or Mexican-American. I had students from El Salvador and other countries from Central America. I could not relate at all because we were from diverse backgrounds. Our Spanish dialect was different. My students saw me in a different light it was tough. I was wrong about ELs. (Sotelo, T., personal communication, Jan 20, 2014)

Tanya's comments reinforce the notion that teachers must challenge biases and beliefs about diverse ELs in order to better understand ELs and other diverse youth in the educational system. Further, she began to realize that Latino ELs are very diverse and bring to the classroom rich experiences from distinct countries.

Tanya believed that being a Latina teacher could help in understanding Latino ELs. She articulated and pointed out that because she had success with Latino ELs she could use the same communication approaches that had worked in the past. Tanya explained that she challenged her own beliefs about Latino ELs in the classroom. She stated,

I really believe that Latino ELs spoke the same Spanish, the way I spoke and the way my family speaks Spanish. I took a while to realize I was wrong. My students were awesome, but I only saw one perspective. I was just viewing my students and lowering my expectations by how they spoke Spanish. This was not who I am as a teacher, but, I was thinking this way. I have to really learn a lot about my students and the talent

they bring so I can be better prepared. (Sotelo, T., personal communication, Feb. 5, 2014)

Tanya's comments represent a shift in attitudes towards diverse ELs. She is beginning to reconcile her beliefs about Latino ELs and broadening her understanding. Further, she recognizes that she lowered her expectations, had a negative view of her students and that this could potentially have a negative impact on them. Darder (2001) affirms that it is essential that teachers reflect on their beliefs as they could impact their way of thinking and of teaching. Self-reflection for a teacher is of utmost importance prior to beginning to plan and execute lessons as internal bias may impact how lessons play out in a classroom and how management techniques and discipline are carried out.

#### **Language Matters**

Pre-service teachers understood the significant role language learning has in the lives of ELs at Centennial. For instance, Jessica, a science teacher, had a complex

#### *Self-reflection for a teacher is of utmost importance prior to beginning to plan and execute lessons . . .*

time understanding how to best serve ELs from Africa. She had no prior experience engaging with such students until her first month at Centennial. Jessica explained that in some of her classes at the university refugee ELs were not discussed at all. She describes a process used with ELs to foster language practice in her classroom. Jessica stated,

I knew that my students had just arrived to Centennial and were learning English and science all at the same time. So, I really spent time with two students that I could really learn from. I did vocabulary work related to every day conversations. I modeled a lot and spent time explaining. They were smart to begin with. They began to pick up words. (Rodernick, J., personal communication, October 3, 2013)

Jessica's work with refugee ELs demonstrated that she is aware of the needs of ELs in her classroom and she has identified language levels as a baseline for students' progress in language acquisition. Furthermore, she enacts practices to support oral language development to promote acquisition.

Jessica explains that making science

content comprehensible for her students was important. She used songs, chants, visuals and group conversations with students to help youth talk in the classroom. As part of her work (project), Jessica believed that students should be immersed in meaningful learning experiences to comprehend important science concept and to love science. She described an activity used to foster language development with her ELs.

I just want to create an authentic and real context for students to learn and practice language. In class we talk about Africa and their hometown. This was important/ my students spoke in their L1. They made connections to some of the ideas we had discussed in science. They used their home language to understand. Their first language is key. (Rodernick, J., personal communication, October 28, 2013)

The language work demonstrated by Jessica and her students show that they co-constructed a rich language experience by using students' lived experience and

their home language. Jessica values her students first language and sees that it essential in teaching and learning.

Kayla, a social studies teacher, worked with long-term ELs in her classroom. Long term ELs have issues concerning language that have impeded them from moving into mainstream English courses. Kayla describes one student, Ricardo, she observed and worked closely with for one year. According to Kayla, Ricardo influenced her thinking on language teaching. She described Ricardo in the following way:

Ricardo is brilliant. He knows so much, but cannot seem to pass the language test to move out of the ELL block. It does not make sense. He is really bright. I could not tell that he was an ELL until he explained that he was in the four-hour block. We work hard in class. He does everything. I still do not know why he can't pass the test. (Jackson, K., personal communication, October 4, 2013)

Kayla was very concerned that her student continues to be placed in the schools ELL four-hour block. Furthermore, she is aware of his talent and continues to reflect on how she can best support Ricardo regarding

language. Across the year, Kayla stated that she worked with Ricardo on presenting his ideas and articulating his opinion in class. She noticed that Ricardo would many times use the same vocabulary and word choice in his social studies' reports and journals. She challenged Ricardo to reframe his ideas and vocabulary. I observed and documented Kayla and Ricardo discussing an essay on citizenship that Ricardo was developing for social studies. The following is an exchange between Kayla and Ricardo.

**KAYLA:** The paper is really well thought out. Your ideas about citizenship are important, but you start to use the same words here to describe an idea. What do writers do when they repeat themselves?

**RICARDO:** I think that I have to go back an re-read to see which words are the same. But, I re-read a lot and I still don't know what vocabulary to use.

**KAYLA:** Ok. Let's take this sentence you have here. We will work it together. Let's think here. So, it says. Ricardo, you have other words in your own essay you can use. Look here. Okay. Now use it in the sentence. Think.

**RICARDO:** Oh. I get it. But, it takes a long time to re-write with new words. I like how it sounds. Man it takes a long time to write.

The exchange between Kayla and Ricardo shows that Kayla is very supportive in helping him reflect on his writing. She challenges Ricardo to think and to use his own work to advance his essay. Kayla understands Ricardo's language concern and conversely, sees the talent he possesses.

### **Developing Language in Meaningful Contexts**

Pre-service teachers in this study observed ELs engaged in diverse contextual settings inside and outside of the classroom. Faltis (2009) argues that older ELs need to practice language in diverse contexts where learning is connected to their lives and can be made comprehensible and meaningful, giving them purpose for authentic practice throughout their acquisition.

Pre-service teachers challenged myths about secondary ELs and were able to see the power of language learning in the community, home and school contexts. Tanya observed her students in multiple contexts where their L1 and L2 were used to communicate. Tanya had reclassified ELs in her classroom. Re-classified ELs are students who have transitioned to

mainstream courses based on a language assessment tests given by the school district. Tanya described experiences outside the school that have shaped her view of her students.

I was really excited to make home visits for my students. I wanted to learn more about David's home. Once I was there David was really quiet, but when I saw him interact I could see that he was like a genius translator. He was just interpreting everything I said to his mom from English to Spanish. I went to his house more times. I could tell how valuable and vital Spanish is to him and his family. (Sotelo, T., personal communication, Feb. 3, 2014)

The observations made by Tanya helped her understand the value of being a bilingual student. Further, she understands the way in which language is honored at home. Nieto (2005) affirms that teacher should honor students' language and culture at all times. The home visits are essential in learning about EL youth. By validating students home life and culture, trust can be built for strong relationships between school and home.

Tanya was also able to explore and examine the manner in which ELs engaged in community contexts outside the school environment. At Centennial, many community events associated with the school were developed for parents and students by staff. Tanya attended a community event related to education. She explained the way in which her students demonstrated linguistic skills.

I went to an event for several Saturdays in the community center close to the school. My students and parents were at the event. It was fun. My kids were super-attentive during the meeting. It was about health care and education. Laura and Esteban translated so much information in English for their parents, but also used Spanish to communicate ideas. The information was all in English and I could see how fast students were able to analyze and interpret for their parents. I love the fact that my students have so much linguistic talent. I don't see this side of their language skills in class. This is powerful. (Sotelo, T., personal communication, March 1, 2014)

The comments made by Tanya show that she is identifying bilingual strengths that her students possess and understanding how these strengths can empower her students in school and in the community.

Even though they are considered reclassified ELs and are seen as student that are ready for mainstream, she observes other language talents youth possess.

Group thinking in Spanish and English is key for supporting ELs in the secondary schools. According to Tanya, she has included more language activities that focus on student home and community background. Further, she affirms that she truly want to foster students' bilingual strengths as much as possible.

Jessica created a community environment in her classroom with the purpose of promoting conversation amongst students of differing bilingual backgrounds. In this study, she decided to focus on her refugee student from Africa who had been in the US for almost seven months. She explained what she noticed about her ELs as such,

As I started this project, I noticed that the ELs from Africa were different than the other ELs I had worked with. I just believed that they were not engaged or doing things like other students. Nothing I was doing worked. I started to really ??? (Roderick, J., personal communication, Feb. 6, 2014)

Jessica explained that she began to learn a lot more from her students by having lunchtime conversations during the first three months of school on the student lawn with them. She stated that they would not visit with her for a long time. According to Jessica, two of her ELs, Delee and Maii, joined her. She describes these interactions,

I had lunch with my students several times. We would just sit in the lawn and we would laugh a lot because we were so quiet in the beginning. The girls then would talk to each other as we ate and then more laughing. I did not know what they were saying, but we were just learning from each other. We would just connect. We taught each other words in their home language and some of the words that I use in English. I really noticed that it was key for my students to be in a good environment where they can laugh, relax and use their own ideas to learn and talk. (Roderick, J., personal communication, March 5, 2014)

Jessica's comments reinforce the notion that secondary ELs are very diverse and talented. Further, the environment where youth practice language is also key to promoting language development. Gandara (2009) affirms that optimal learning and language development occurs in an engaging environment. Based on her work

with ELs, Jessica affirmed that her communication style has changed.

In addition, she expressed that she understood the significant role a relaxing and welcoming environment has on ELs. According to Jessica, afterschool and lunch-time meetings with students were used across the year to connect with students and to support their learning by reviewing homework and clarifying science concepts.

Tommy coached football for the ninth grade team while student teaching, during this time he observed some of his ELs participating on the football team. Tommy explained that some of the ELs that had recently arrived to the U.S., rarely wanted to talk or engage in his social studies classroom. He began to see another side of how EL youth engage in a distinct environment, the football field.

Tommy described learning about ELs,

Some of the students in my class were on the football team. I would see them all week. I got to really know them. I was amazed that my students were learning English so fast. Two of my ELs would not say much in class, but were very attentive. But, out on the practice field, they showed off their English and their home language. When the coaches called plays or instructions, they knew what to do. I heard them really talk English. It was like seeing another side. We would talk a lot before and after practice. (Clark, T., personal communication, March 6, 2014)

Tommy's statements reinforce the notion that ELs develop language when participating in meaningful contexts. The EL students are members of a team and feel that they are valued. Moreover, the community that the football team represents is important to the EL students in question. Tommy is able to recognize the linguistic skills the youth possess.

### **Multicultural (Forbidden) Resources**

Pre-service teachers in this study made affirmations about the resources they had to teach with regard to secondary ELs. Further, the pre-service teachers noticed a lack of quality resources for EL youth. Multicultural resources that are used in the classrooms impact ELs' level of engagement and language development, therefore they must be selected based on criteria that will promote quality curriculum and engagement in general. Pre-service teachers found that some of the students and other diverse learners were fully engaged when the lessons took into consideration

their culture and home background.

Kayla stated that in her social studies class, many things she wanted to use were not available for use with her ELs. In her project, she explained that students wanted to see more real life visuals that came from the community. Kayla explained,

The students that were in my class for the year would really share with me ideas about what would make things better for learning about social studies

themes, like citizenship. Many of the ELs said Centennial artifacts, visuals, murals and art should be used to teach. Some students wanted to see material from Mexico while learning about citizenship. My students can tell what is missing. They are bright. This helps me with my teaching. (Jackson, K., personal communication, April 8, 2014)

Kayla's statements affirm the fact that youth understand what type of material should be used to learn and what materials are lacking. Students are quite aware of the inequities that exist across schools and across the nation. This feedback from her students caused Kayla to reflect on her teaching practices in relation to ELs in her classroom.

Kayla expressed during an interview that she was able to see major differences in her classroom when she used multicultural resources in her teaching. Further, she contends that her ELs level of participation would shift. Kayla commented,

I really saw my students jump out of their seat when I would use Centennial art materials or visuals from Mexico and Africa. My ELs were willing to speak up more and talk more about the visuals used in the class. A few times I would use songs in Spanish to introduce ideas for the text. I would see EL youth really engaged. I would not do this all the time because of the pacing and curriculum standards. (Jackson, K., personal communication, April 8, 2014)

Kayla's statements reinforce the fact that EL youth require meaningful multicultural resources to support learning. Faltis (2009) argues that many teachers are not willing to use multicultural resources because of fear of being reprimanded by school administration. This culture of fear is hindering

the quality of curriculum and praxis taking place in diverse classrooms.

In similar fashion, Dakota believes in using multicultural resources, especially in literature, to support her ELs. She expressed that she noticed across the academic year, that some of the most effective materials were considered taboo in schools and were prohibited.

Dakota explained that she was able to use novels to teach topics that were banned

*Pre-service teachers found that some of the students and other diverse learners were fully engaged when the lessons took into consideration their culture and home background.*

in places like Tucson, Arizona. Further, according to Dakota, her students were truly passionate about their learning and consequently, were engaged in language / literacy activities. In an interview, she described the teaching process used with youth using the novel, *Breaking Through*. Dakota commented,

To be honest, I did not know some of the books in my mentors' library. I did not know about the banned list. I used these books to read aloud and for conversation starters. Books like *Breaking Through* are so powerful because the characters in the novel reflect the struggles and hopes of ELL/ immigrant youth. My students were into the book. Some could not read at the 7th grade levels at all and still they were very interested in getting and holding the book. These books are treasures and to remove them would hurt my students' learning. (Lee, D., personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Dakotas' statements acknowledge the fact that critical books influence the way in which ELs learn and acquire language. Her statements also suggest that many ELs have the potential to read quality multicultural literature with appropriate scaffolding at various reading levels that can be above their labeled level. Nieto (2005) contends that critical books empower diverse youth in the educational system. Through empowerment we can promote critical thinking and critical reasoning strategies for students to use not only in school, but in life.

Dakota expressed that she was able to see how some of her students bonded with books that were considered taboo. She explained that through student interviews and conversations outside the classroom setting, a few of her students would initiate discussion about books they were reading

in class. Dakota described a conversation she had with one of her students.

On several occasions I would run into Maria in the coffee shop by the school. We would talk a bit, but often she would take out her book, *Eperanza Rising*. I was excited to see her living with the book. We would talk and she would explain ideas in Spanish and English. Maria would always focus on the themes of the novel. It was powerful to see her engaged with the novel. (Lee, D., personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Dakotas' interactions and work with her students reinforce the fact that EL youth have the potential to be academic superstars and critical readers, while engaged in multicultural literacy. Further, Dakota understood that EL youth have strong skills that can support language learning via multicultural books and critical literature.

### Discussion

Participants in this study examined their beliefs about ELs and learned about issues impacting secondary youth in the educational system. Pre-service teachers utilized a one-year project to chronicle and document the educational journey of ELs at Centennial High School. The issues

*Pre-service teachers were emerging as conscious educators; further, some teachers in this study were heavily influenced by student interactions and the relationships they developed.*

impacting ELs academic success were discussed by pre-service teachers in this study in a reflexive format so as to promote self-reflection and effective praxis. Their one-year project raised awareness about teaching practices and the influence they have on EL language development.

The participants in this study demonstrated a shift in their own beliefs about ELs and they expressed a range of views about ELs that were tied to their work and the project at Centennial. Teachers reflected Lucas' (2011) notion of sociocultural consciousness in that they began to challenge their own views about ELs by examining their biases and attitude towards ELs. Lucas (2011) affirms that it is key that the teacher develops a sociocultural consciousness so that they are aware of the many factors that may impact their teaching praxis and their relationships with students.

Pre-service teachers were emerging as conscious educators; further, some teachers in this study were heavily influenced by student interactions and the relationships they developed. However, some teachers still maintained a deficit view of ELs as demonstrated by Jessica's perspective of English dominance in the classroom setting. She had a positive view of ELs home language, but still maintained complex views about their language development in English. This view reflects assimilation practices popular in the mainstream education system, especially in states like Arizona where anti-immigrant sentiment runs deep and English only policies are rampant.

Pre-service teachers were able to examine, via classroom practices, student interaction, and the complexities of second language development; their teaching praxis as well as their philosophical understandings of how effective instruction with ELs can and should take place. De Jong (2005) argues that teachers working with ELs should be cognizant of language development at all times and be prepared to support youth via an array of approaches.

Teachers in this study identified some of the language needs their students were facing and were able to identify the power/potential of students L1 in terms of lan-

guage development. In addition, teachers were able to enact some language teaching practices to support diverse ELs. Teachers such as Kayla had to reframe their view of ELs by fostering literacy development of long term ELs in their classroom. Moreover, teachers reinforced the value of teaching EL youth through meaningful experiences, caring relationships and consequently, this informed their instructional knowledge base, which is critical when working with diverse EL youth.

Faltis (2009) contends that ELL immigrant youth need to be immersed in a learning community where youth are actively engaged in language production. Pre-service teachers identified strengths of students' L1 by engaging in diverse spaces in and out of the classroom setting. Teachers were able to see how youth were developing as bilingual learners.

Moreover, community environments

become essential when learning a second language. For instance, Jessica created a science environment that extended outside the classroom to support EL youth. This process helped her learn about youth and consequently, she was able to reframe her practices and lines of communication to support her students' learning.

Diverse youth at the secondary school level require multicultural resources to support their language development and foster their academic growth within the educational system. Teachers understood that the lack of multicultural resources had an impact on EL youth. Some resources have been labeled as taboo and/or banned. Sleeter (2012) argues that rich multicultural resources are needed to promote the critical thinking skills of students in K-12.

Pre-service teachers should understand the role multiculturalism and culturally relevant books has on the lives of EL youth. Teachers in this study began to reflect in a critical manner on how banned books were devalued in classrooms and how this in turn impacts the ways that culture and identity are devalued in society. Cammarota (2012) argues that critical resources and curriculum are essential in empowering marginalized youth in U.S. schools. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to advocate for resources that promote critical thinking for multicultural EL youth.

### Recommendations

Given the findings shared in this article and the existing literature regarding secondary teachers and ELs, future research must focus on supporting pre-service teachers who will teach diverse ELs in secondary schools. First, teacher education programs need to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to learn about CLRT and provide strategies for addressing challenges commonly faced by secondary EL educators.

Second, pre-service teachers must continue to be immersed in rigorous teacher education courses that examine new barriers faced by diverse ELs. These courses must be accompanied with community observations and home visits. Pre-service teachers need to be immersed in community contexts so that they are able to comprehend socio-cultural factors influencing the academic trajectory and language development of diverse EL youth and that are better prepared to scaffold their instructional strategies with these socio-cultural factors in mind.



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