Building Teacher Interculturality

Student Partnerships
in University Classrooms

Elizabeth Smolcic & Jessica Arends

The "achievement gap" for English learners and those of marginalized groups has been documented for well over a decade (Banks, 1995; Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2006; Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2001, 2011). Culture is a critical factor in the learning process (Cazden & Mehan, 1989; Heath, 1983), and when teachers use knowledge about students' cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds in planning and implementing instruction, students' academic achievement is strengthened (Gándara, 2002). It is widely recognized that socioeconomic status, language, and the fluid construct of culture play significant roles in school learning. However, despite the dismal academic progress of students learning English in U.S. classrooms and the rapidly diversifying student demographic, teachers who enter the profession continue to be predominantly White and monolingual with little or no intercultural experience (Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Such a critical lack of experience may lead teachers to view diversity as a problem rather than a resource. Teachers may have difficulty understanding or relating to those who do not benefit from the White, middle-class privilege that they themselves enjoy (Gomez, 1996;

Elizabeth Smolcic is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the College of Education at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. Jessica Arends is a faculty engagement associate in the Center for Civic Engagement at Binghamton University, Binghamton, New York. Email addresses: eas260@psu.edu & jarends@binghamton.edu

Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Therefore part of the desired preparation for teachers who will work with English learners (and, more broadly, *all* teachers working in public school classrooms) should include knowledge, skills, and experience that contribute to intercultural competence and the development of a teaching practice that is responsive to students of other linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Building Teacher Interculturality

Scholars have outlined what teachers need to know to develop culturally respon-sive pedagogies (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2006). Furthermore, institutional bodies concerned with teacher preparation have formulated explicit goals for teacher candidates to understand diversity and equity and to develop cul-tural competencies to work with diverse student populations (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; NCATE, 2008). Teachers (like all of us) tend to see the world from their own racial, gendered, and cultural locations. Teacher education should help teachers develop a reflective process, a goal that requires critical analysis of one's own culture and a consciousness of how human differences are used by people in power to rationalize inequities and maintain their position in society (Castro, 2010; Merryfield, 2000; Paris, 2012). Central to successful implementation of pedago-gies for instruction of English learners is a capacity to recognize how cultural and linguistic background shape learning and to utilize cultural differences to develop meaningful learning experiences for all students. This capacity may be included in the notion of *intercultural competence* or *interculturality*, for which there exists a range of theoretical constructs, emerging from a variety of fields (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Recent reviews of the literature on how to prepare all teachers to teach English learners (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Palmer & Martínez, 2013) have argued that teachers need to experience other cultures and have contact with people who speak languages other than English to develop "affirming views of linguistic diversity" and "an awareness of the sociopolitical dimensions of language use" (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008, pp. 612–613).

Teacher educators who have taken up the call to move teachers toward intercul-turality face a complex challenge. It can be especially daunting in a university that is predominantly White (situated within a mostly culturally and racially homogeneous community), in part because these conditions afford few openings to question one's own cultural, racial, and linguistic identity and the privilege that comes with it. To respond to this challenge, our university offers a cultural/language immersion program in another country for preservice teachers to study another language, immerse themselves in another culture, and engage in a field experience teaching bilingual learners. Unfortunately, this international experience is not accessible to all students owing to the cost of study abroad and the time commitment of study in the summer. And, while the large public university in which we teach welcomes many international students (who likewise are engaged in their own process of

language/cultural immersion), they are often not well integrated into the social fabric of campus life, particularly those who are enrolled in the Intensive English program before matriculating to their chosen degree program.

Purpose of the Study

In responding to these issues, the authors decided to collaborate to develop a course-embedded student partnership among students in their respective courses: preservice teachers and international students who were learning English themselves. The two courses were (a) an intermediate-level Intensive English course for nonmatriculated international students and (b) an undergraduate teacher preparation course that is the initial course of an add-on credential for teaching English learners in our state. A course goal for both groups was learning from personal interaction and project-based work with cultural/linguistic others. Specifically, we aimed to better equip preservice teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, through an opportunity to note the complexity and ever-changing nature of "culture," to grapple with their own linguistic and cultural privileges, and to move beyond essentialist representations of those who come from backgrounds different from their own. Thus we designed a learning experience that would encourage the students to explore the cultural practices, histories, and contemporary experiences of people from different national cultures and linguistic backgrounds and simultaneously provide a means of support for the international students in their adjustment to life on a U.S. university campus.

Our teacher education program is located in one of the most rural areas of the United States; however, the state (Pennsylvania) is now considered a *new destination state* because of a significant upswing in immigrants settling in the state (Massey & Capoferro, 2008). While the raw numbers of immigrants arriving to Pennsylvania schools may not match those of the traditional "gateway" states of California, Florida, Texas, or New York, new immigrant populations frequently result in stresses on local communities that have not received immigrant populations since the early 1900s. Significantly, both in-service teachers and teacher candidates in these new destination areas often do not have life experience with bilingualism; academic preparation to understand the second language acquisition process; or exposure to the cultural, racial, and linguistic differences that people who grow up in more multicultural communities experience as a part of daily life.

The purpose of this study was to articulate, from the perspective of the preservice teachers, themes related to (inter)cultural learning arising out of their reflections on the student partnership over the course of the semester. Our intent was to describe the intercultural development of prospective teachers of English learners; therefore the data we present focus exclusively on the preservice teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Defining Interculturality

Theoretical understandings of intercultural competence have grown out of a wide range of disciplines, including applied linguistics, sociology, social psychology, speech communication, and cultural studies. Within the literature on language teaching and learning, the process of intercultural learning and its assumed goal of intercultural competence or interculturality are frequently investigated, while their exact meanings are also debated (O'Dowd, 2003). A comprehensive framework to outline teaching objectives for intercultural competence was developed by Byram and colleagues (Byram, 1997; Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002) within the area of second language education. Much commentary and further theorizing have proceeded from Byram's framework, including analyses of cultural complexity and flow (Risager, 2004, 2006), third space theorizing (Gutierrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Kostogriz, 2005; Kramsch, 1993, 2009, 2011), intercultural language learning (Liddicoat, 2002; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, & Crozet, 1999), and assessing intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). Recent critiques of Byram's model of intercultural competence emphasize that we need to move away from approaches that focus on cultural difference and learning about the "facts" of a target culture and toward a dynamic conceptualization of "culture" that acknowledges its co-constructed and fluid nature (Dervin, 2015).

We have adopted the concept of *interculturality*, which expresses a more fluid understanding of culture, acknowledges intersectionality, and views intercultural interactions as inherently instable and prone to discomfort and failure, while moving away from an individualistic perspective on intercultural learning (for a comprehensive explanation, see Dervin, 2016). For this analysis, James (2008) has offered a succinct definition:

> a dynamic process by which people from different cultures interact to learn about and question their own and each other's cultures. Over time this may lead to cultural change. It recognizes the inequalities at work in society and the need to overcome these. It is a process which requires mutual respect and acknowledges human rights. (p. 1)

This definition recognizes the fluid nature of culture and societal inequalities that exist between groups of people. We highlight the ongoing and dynamic nature of the process of intercultural learning—one without a definite end point, as the word *competence* implies. We also acknowledge that we are all culturally diverse as individuals as well as within the national, regional, and microcultural communities in which we participate.

Interculturality is also defined as both a critical look at how people with whom we interact are represented and an introspective process on the part of the student (Dervin, 2016). It involves an awareness of one's own biases and being able to

shift one's perspective to analyze values, beliefs, and representations arising from intercultural experiences and social group membership, revealing aspects of cultural identities and complexity that heretofore may have been unconscious or invisible. Our goal was to support students in questioning a typical overemphasis on national cultures that can hide unequal power relations and structural inequalities that result in poverty, violence, and racism. We hoped that they might begin to see culture as the possibility of multiple identities and identifications.

Sociopolitical Consciousness

Additionally, interculturality entails the critical study of one's own cultural lens and a willingness to recognize culturally centered thinking, which may encompass awareness of one's own ethnocentrism, White privilege, or racism. The process of developing interculturality, therefore, necessitates not only exposure to those who are culturally different to create pause or judgment (a student writes, "my partner is weird") but also a willingness to ask why ("why do I think my partner is weird?") and to be open to the possibility that one's own cultural stance is not necessarily normal or right and may actually be oppressive to others. In outlining what fosters intercultural competency, Hanvey (1982) stated that neither temporary nor sustained contact with cultural others will achieve this; there must be a "readiness to respect and accept" and a "capacity to participate" on behalf of the student; "some plasticity in the individual, the ability to learn and change, is crucial" (p. 15). Research into student teachers in overseas teaching experiences have documented that as participants reflected on their experiences in another culture, they began to consider aspects of their own cultural identities that were invisible to them previously (Colon-Muniz, SooHoo, & Brignoni, 2010; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012).

Likewise, the conceptualization of culturally sustaining or relevant pedagogy includes the objective of sociopolitical consciousness, which for teachers refers to understanding the linkages between macro-level political, economic, and social variables and subordinated groups' academic performance at the micro level of classrooms (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001; Zion, Allen, & Jean, 2015). In sum, the definition of interculturality is consistent with the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy that attempts to bring preservice teachers to understanding the power of hegemonic dominant cultures and the values and practices of subordinate cultural groups in immigrant nations.

The Study Context

Course Linkage and Student Partnership

A group of 16 preservice teachers was enrolled in Language, Culture, and the Classroom, the first course in a sequence of five three-credit courses that make

up the state-approved English as a second language (ESL) certificate program, an add-on endorsement to elementary/secondary certification in our state to prepare K–12 educators to teach English learners. Each course included a field experience, such as tutoring an English learner, shadowing an English learner during several school days, interviewing local immigrant families, or a semester-long student teaching experience in a public school classroom supervised by an ESL teacher. Learning goals for the course examined in this study included the following: (a) understand culture-general concepts, such as representation, cultural identities, cultural hybridity, cultural complexity, and essentialist versus nonessentialist notions of culture; (b) develop an awareness of one's own cultural identity/identities; (c) understand the power of cultural/linguistic identity and its impact on student learning and classroom interactions; (d) explore and reflect on the dynamics of stereotyping, racism, and White privilege as they relate to intercultural interactions and school contexts; and (e) analyze the concept of culture and differing views of cultural change in a globalized world.

Two projects required the preservice teachers to interact with international student peers outside of the classroom:

1. *Autobiography, biography, and cultural analysis (ABC) project*. Students first wrote a cultural autobiography supported in class with cultural exploration activities and readings (Schmidt, 1998), then interviewed a person perceived as culturally/linguistically different to produce a biography of that individual. (The interviewee was not part of the cultural partnership explained later.) Finally, students compared the two papers and wrote a third analysis paper in which they highlighted cultural similarities and differences and any new awareness or reflections on culture-general concepts.

2. *Student partnership*. International students and preservice teachers were matched in groups of three, and the following learning objectives guided the student interactions within the partnership: (a) interact over a sustained period of time with international students from a linguistically and culturally different nation; (b) explore the sociocultural and historical contexts that the partner(s) grew up in and become aware of their cultural values and worldviews as well as your own; and (c) examine how the theme of globalization interfaces with cultural change, global migration, and English language learning.

Reflective Practices to Guide Learning

The instructors matched the students randomly, and a joint class meeting brought both groups together for one 2-hour class period to facilitate the partner introductions and identify learning objectives that the students wanted to explore. Thereafter the partners met weekly outside of class for at least an hour over a period of 8 weeks; the students reporting frequently going beyond an hour-long meeting.

The instructors gave both class groups the same cultural topic and initial guiding questions to help structure the weekly meetings. Examples of the topics included

their respective experiences adjusting to life on a college campus, their histories learning other languages, and personal experiences with stereotyping and language bias. The preservice teachers wrote weekly blog entries to summarize new awareness or questions arising from the weekly meetings (and the international students wrote brief reflection papers, which the ESL instructor responded to directly). The writing prompts directed students to notice specific aspects of intercultural communication during the meetings, for example, their attitudes toward nonnative speakers, cultural stereotypes they had about people of particular nationalities or regions of the world, and cultural expectations of how to interact in a discussion in the U.S. university context. In other words, the process of *interacting* across cultures was emphasized rather than knowledge or facts about specific cultures. Observations that were posted on the blog posts were then brought into the classroom for small- and large-group discussion. At times, the comments discussed were selected by the students (and read aloud in class as texts), and at other times, the instructor developed questions or pulled specific pieces of student-written text from the blog as a basis for discussion.

Collaborative Research Project and Presentation

After the first year of the course partnership, we saw the benefit of moving the partnership from a weekly conversation to a more collaborative relationship among the students. To increase engagement and accountability, each student group collaborated on a research project structured with mini-assignments for each weekly meeting. The partners researched and presented a topic of their choice related to the course themes of analyzing and understanding cultural identities. Student groups then orally presented their findings on posters in a public exhibition at the campus student center during the final week of the semester. The preservice teachers completed a final written reflection to synthesize what they had learned from the class discussions and their interactions with their partners.

Methodology

Our purpose was to uncover possible indications of intercultural learning on the part of the preservice teachers as they explored cultural identities and practices and their partners' experiences with second language learning. We hoped to delimit how the partnership experience, when supported by class discussion and reflective practices, contributed to the development and awareness of interculturality for preservice teachers.

Data sources included written blog postings completed weekly by the 16 preservice teachers, a cultural analysis paper (which was the final step in the three-phase ABC assignment), and a final reflective paper in which the preservice teachers were prompted to reflect on their experiences during the semester with their partners.

We began by conducting a qualitative analysis to observe what themes arose from the assignments written by the preservice teachers. Our intent in this research was not to claim a causal effect between course activities and student learning but to illustrate how the preservice teachers' reflections on the partnership experience might help them begin to develop a critical perspective of their culture(s), their own positioning in society, and the systematic nature of inequalities in society and in schooling for immigrant English learners.

Study Participants

Early in the course, the preservice teachers wrote a cultural autobiography in which they considered questions of family, national and individual identity, and values as well as linguistic heritage and language learning experience. From these biographies we constructed detailed profiles of the study participants. Generally, of the 16 preservice teachers, 14 were women and 2 were men; one student was an international student from China, and all were undergraduates aged from 19 to 22 years. Many students had some high school language learning experience but frequently indicated that their learning experiences had not been effective or motivating. Three of the students were working toward teacher certification as world language teachers and planned to study abroad in the future as a requirement of their program. Although the majority of the students identified as monolingual, White, and of European American descent, four students had significant cultural/linguistic experience.

Helen grew up in a Korean American immigrant family. Her parents did not speak much English when Helen was a child, and Helen often acted as the translator. She related her struggles as a child constantly trying to fit into a mostly Anglo community, but she ended her autobiography by claiming, "I have come to love being Korean as well as American and I feel special that I have both of those cultures with me."

Harriet moved to Switzerland in the ninth grade, when her father got a new job. She attended an international school, learned German, and now wants to be a teacher of German or ESL. She discussed how she has come to see her cultural identity as hybrid and struggles against a reified idea of national cultures. She asserted, "To me, Americanism is hybridity."

Veronica identified as Hispanic of Puerto Rican/Italian/Colombian/Spanish heritage. She explicitly wrote about being the victim of racism as a child and was very aware of her familial cultural heritages.

Wendy was an international student in the United States for 1 year and has bilingual competencies in Mandarin and English. She identified as Chinese.

The ESL class numbered 22 students from many parts of the world, including nations of the Middle East, Asia, and South America. Most had recently graduated from high school and were new arrivals to the United States aiming to matriculate to undergraduate programs at the same university. The international students were

proficient in conversational English, as they had tested into and were enrolled in the highest level available in the Intensive English program. Previous students enrolled in the Intensive English program requested the opportunity to engage authentically with native English speakers; thus this partnership aimed to provide a service that students desired and that was previously absent from the English language curriculum. The Intensive English course topics included American culture and cross-cultural communication so that students could link ideas they were discussing in class to their partner interactions. In class, the students explored the role of culture in communication and were asked to think meta-cognitively about their own English skills. This partnership added unique value to the program, because both curricular and co-curricular interaction between ESL students and local native speakers is often rare (Chang, 2009; Daly & Brown, 2004). Research has shown that intentional programming to connect the two groups would prove beneficial (Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kashima, 2010), including student pairing for projects (N. Glaser, Hall, & Halperin, 2006; Stone, 2000; Westwood & Barker, 1990).

On student evaluations, the ESL students responded very positively to the partnership, indicating that it increased their communication skills and awareness of American culture, and requested that the partnerships be expanded to include all ESL classes in the Intensive English program.

Data Analysis

We first generated conceptual categories or their properties from concepts or themes arising out of the data (Flick, 2002; B. G. Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This first phase of data analysis entailed "no interpretation, but simply the attribution of a class of phenomena to a segment of text" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 56). Open coding, or examining the data line by line to define actions or events, led to the refinement and specification of evidence in the data. In this process of selective coding, we consulted conceptual memos written during the coding process to develop theoretical categories that arose directly from the concerns and experiences of the students and related to the research questions (B. G. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne, 2011). Each author analyzed the data separately, and ongoing comparisons were made to clarify codes and condense categories into themes and subthemes. The authors were intentional about preserving the voices of the preservice teachers and representing them as accurately as possible. Pseudonyms were used to refer to both the preservice teachers and international students to maintain anonymity.

The subjectivity of the authors was uncovered by two methods: by maintaining research memos and through sustained engagement with the data. Subjectivity was monitored through careful observation over time (Peshkin, 1988) and by maintaining sensitivity toward aspects of the analysis to provide a window into how our own interests, values, assumptions, and biases may influence the research process (Glesne, 2011). We each maintained a researcher memo during the process of

analysis to observe ourselves in a focused way and to capture reactions, emotions, and questions the analysis process caused. This is especially pertinent because we came to the study with a clear commitment to this pedagogical approach as instructors, and for this reason, we intentionally separated our roles as instructors and researchers.

The most substantive data emerged from the blog entries, in which the preservice teachers discussed their interactions with the student partners online in small groups. We acknowledge the situational factors that may influence student responses to course assignments, such as instructor expectations and academic standing; however, in the case of the blog activity, the preservice teachers were writing to each other—the blog space was constructed as a place where they could share their experiences with other preservice teachers in this course. The instructor neither graded nor evaluated the blog entries, and the blog space was closed to outsiders. Additionally, the data were analyzed after the course had concluded, grades had been submitted, and students had left campus for the summer. Finally, the interactions between the international students and preservice teachers took place outside of class. Thus we were not present to observe or influence partner interactions during their meeting times.

The Findings:

Building Cultural Awareness Through Interaction

The partnership experience was not always comfortable for the preservice teachers, but their reflections made clear that the work with international partners stimulated an introspective process and cultural self-awareness that may not have come about through traditional course readings and discussions, nor through field experience in public school classrooms, where the attention is appropriately focused on teaching and the learners. We argue that it was the combination of reading, writing, and talking about concepts related to cultural self-awareness and issues of equity in education in class, along with the actual life experience of conversing (and then working together) with culturally and linguistically different English learners, that led students to new understandings.

In the analysis that follows, we turn first to how students began to explore their own cultural backgrounds and identities. We then present the preservice teachers' emerging understandings of cultural complexity and the dynamic nature of cultural identities. Finally, we share student comments that demonstrate a beginning "critical cultural awareness" (Byram, 1997) of power relations within society, including the privileges of first language speakers of English. Our conclusion offers reflections on the value of preservice teachers examining and articulating their own cultural identities and the importance of course linkages to field experience within intercultural spaces.

Cultural Self-Awareness

An early writing assignment in the course, a cultural autobiography requiring students to articulate characteristics and origins of their cultural identities, was a task that many found challenging. Although a few of the U.S. students in the class initially claimed that, as Americans, they have no culture, when they began writing a draft of the paper and talking in class about shifts in cultural values over genera-tions, many aspects of the regional, national, and familial cultural frameworks in which they grew up came into focus. In commenting on the process of writing her autobiography, Andrea said this explicitly: "I used to think of myself as someone with little or no culture. I didn't understand that no matter where you are from, or who you are, you have a culture."

As a way to help them begin to think about this task, the students shared in class symbols or artifacts that represented their home cultures and discussed values that underlie cultural traditions or familial norms. A first draft of this paper was shared in a peer-review process, and the instructor gave individual written comments. Still, much of the writing at this point focused on superficial aspects of culture, such as preferred holiday traditions or a family history of participation in organized sports. Over time, as students began interacting informally with international students in the partnership, they began to describe and specify their cultural identities even further.

Engaging with international partners in a conversation in which they were asked to describe their home cultures began to make the abstract and amorphous concept of culture a bit more concrete. Veronica (one of the students with a more recent immigrant family heritage) said,

> I think I learned more about myself by trying to explain my own culture to him [student international partner]. It made me think about it in a clearer way. Explain-ing yourself is sometimes a difficult task, but it made me reflect and figure out the right words to say. (partnership blog)

As students began to outline and describe their cultural traditions, values, and common attitudes, the role that culture has on producing particular perceptions of the world became more clearly visible. Diane, who was partnered with a Saudi woman, assumed her partner would embrace U.S. gender roles; she commented,

> I found out that although I felt like I knew so much, in actuality I knew very little. Because I initially did not understand how my partner and her country looked at their culture, I felt that deep down, every person, every woman who did not receive my rights felt oppressed. . . . My beliefs were, in a way, keeping me from fully seeing all interpretations. . . . What I gained from this experience was the openness to listen and understand multiple sides to a culture. My partner did not exclaim her love for this culture; instead she said she felt uncomfortable. She did find it to be freer, just another way of going about life. I realized that my initial expectations were naïve. I was projecting my experiences and feelings from my culture and thinking that it was exactly what she desired. (partnership blog)

This example illustrates how Diane began to see that her perspective on a woman's role in society is culturally determined rather than natural. She acknowledged that there may be another view on the "freedoms" of U.S. culture and that another cultural perspective may prioritize distinct values from the ones that inform her own worldview. The choice of words "I realized" also demonstrates that the process of reflection allowed her to see that she was actually projecting her own values onto her partner. Another cultural awareness that developed over time through conversations with partners is seen in Josie's final reflection on the partnership experience:

> Although I considered myself "culturally competent" before this assignment, I now realize I did not know exactly what that meant. Before I thought that since I had studied two other languages and two other "cultures" in my language classroom, I was both knowledgeable about and accepting of "otherness." My thoughts on this have changed, however. Throughout my discussions with my partner, I would, on occasion, think about how "strange" her thoughts or practices were. Certain things that were extremely important in my life did not matter to her life. . . . Somehow, through our studies and through my meetings . . . I began to realize that her views were not "weird." . . . They were simply *different*. (final partnership paper)

Josie changed her perspective from an evaluative stance, in which she considered her partner's thoughts and practices as "strange," to one where she realized they are "simply *different*," an indication that she was beginning to see other cultural experiences as valid.

Another type of cultural learning that came of the partnership experience was an awareness of stereotyping and identity representations. Jake acknowledged that he had a particular stereotypical representation of how his African partner would look and would be like:

> In retrospect, my image of who he would be and what he would look like was pretty stereotypical of how I envision a man from Africa. On the one hand, this was helpful because he actually did fit the image that I had, so that I could find him semi-easily. On the other hand, I felt a little guilty about how quick I was to make a judgment about a person from a different culture. . . . I think that even though this is not a particularly negative stereotype, my reflection about it allows me to understand and be wary of my future initial meetings with people from other parts of the world. (partnership blog)

Class discussion throughout the semester gave students the opportunity to explore new awareness that came up when talking with their partners. In class, we read about bias toward nonnative English speakers based on accent (Lippi-Green, 1997). We discussed a tendency to dismiss international speakers due to accent or nonstandard grammatical usage while not recognizing the rich educational backgrounds and life experiences of those same speakers. Holly acknowledged judgments she made because she saw her partners as part of this nondominant group of nonnative English speakers:

No matter how nonjudgmental I claim to be I realized that there is really no such thing. I'm sure I made unconscious assumptions about their culture, religion, and race, but [sic] I did realize that after a certain point I started to judge them on how well they spoke English. (partnership blog)

Hearing that they were not alone in holding these biases and noting the depth of experience of their international partners, the preservice teachers began to appreciate the challenges that English learners face in their educational trajectories in the U.S. university. This awareness is critical for public school educators in a context in which teachers often hold a "deficit" perspective about their English-learning students (Delpit, 2006; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; MacSwan & Rolstad, 2003).

Conversely, many students who at first regarded their partners as exotic and "foreign" began to note common interests and even similarities in values or life experiences. Harriet realized that cultural stereotypes led her to expect many areas of difference between herself and her partner, but instead she found more similarities than differences:

Starting this assignment I was very closed minded. I had expectations of the answers I would receive and ideas of how Leslie's life was. Quickly I learned I was completely wrong. I had a stereotype of students that came from another culture and I assumed that many were the same, but I was very far off in my thinking. Leslie was almost more like me than different. (partnership blog)

Awareness of the Dynamism and Complexity of Cultural Identity

As explained earlier, the students not only interacted in conversation with the campus international partners during the semester but also recorded interviews with culturally different people (not their partners) in the ABC project. The process of questioning and documenting allowed them to witness cultural hybridity through the life histories of others, as many of the interviewees were immigrant individuals who had been living in a culturally different context over a period of years (in contrast to the student partners, who were newly arrived to the university). Also, many of the interviewees and some of the student partners were raised in multilingual families and communities or had previous cross-cultural life experiences in which they had recognized their cultural values or been positioned as a cultural others. Additionally, the ABC project required an explicit comparison of the values, beliefs, and practices of the learner's culture with those of the person interviewed. Many learners found the task of making cross-cultural comparisons helpful to understanding the complexity of cultural identity as well as thinking about the shifting nature of their own cultural identifications:

The differences I found definitely allowed me to further understand what I find important to myself. I was able to recognize what I consider to be a "normal" parent–child relationship in most families when Anya explained to me what her relationship is with her parents. As she explained and I recognized my feelings of

disagreement, I realized this was a part of my cultural identity that differed from Anya and most likely other people, as well. (Maria, partnership blog)

For some students, the work with their partners helped them to see that cultural practices and beliefs are not static or fixed and that individuals have some degree of agency in how they identify or choose to move away from the primary cultural norms of their home cultures:

> I was lucky enough to talk with someone who has a strong sense of her cultural identity even though she has been exposed to multiple cultures. Priya helped me understand my own culture a little more, and she mentioned that picking one culture over another in reference to her identity would be unfair. This statement made me think about my own newly developed sense of cultural identity and how I have tried to distance myself from some aspects that I found "unfavorable" such as the Pennsylvania Dutch influence from my hometown. (Laney, ABC project)

In the following quotation, Randi compares the person she interviewed for the ABC project, Al, who moved to the United States from Mexico as a young adult, and her student partner, Ally, who was Saudi. In this excerpt, she asks herself questions about concepts discussed in class (cultural pluralism and cultural hybridity) as she contrasts the life experience of her partners:

> Understanding the differences between cultural pluralism and hybridity has both enhanced and complicated my grasp on cultural identity as well. For Al, I feel he is continuing toward a sense of cultural hybridity, where he draws from both Mexican and American culture. Yet, my partner Ally, for example, seems to more closely experience cultural pluralism, by enjoying American culture while still adhering mostly to her Saudi Arabian culture. So, I wonder why this differentiation exists—is it because of language (English) proficiency? Is it because of what our larger cultures have taught us? Or is it something innate within us as individuals? These are questions that I don't have answers to, but I think they are all important to consider as we try to see ourselves culturally. (ABC project)

In another example, Josie reconsidered her own cultural identity in light of the changes that she saw her partners having made in how they defined themselves and which cultural norms they accepted:

> By realizing that doing things differently in different cultures is a result of thinking about things differently, I realize that there is much more to cultural awareness and cultural competence than I originally thought. . . . I can try to work their views of life into my own. This has helped me question the priorities that I currently have in my own life. . . . The most powerful thing that I have learned through this experience, through talking to my partner and seeing that we do not always place importance on the same things, is that I am not required to view things in any particular way. . . . Even more amazing, I can constantly change the order in which I place my priorities to what works best for me as an individual. (ABC Project)

Josie realized that she has some choice in deciding how cultural norms might con-

strain her. As she prepared for a study abroad experience, she felt "a new sense of empowerment as a human being." Josie had gained not only awareness about how her cultural identities shift but the sense that a change in her own cultural identity is possible. This is a significant point, because it signals what Dervin (2016) has called the *liquidity of culture* and the importance of looking at discontinuities and culture as process rather than as something stable. Josie saw that cultural identity is not a given based on which country one is raised in and acknowledged her individual agency in shaping who she is and might be.

Empathy and an Emerging Critical Cultural Awareness

Over the course of the semester, there were moments when the preservice teachers appeared to be heading toward sociopolitical consciousness; however, there were few examples where they acknowledged larger social structures or systematic inequalities or expressed intentions to take action to work against those inequities. The students expressed empathy for language learners, and we can note how they attempted to link what they were learning about cultures and their partners to thinking about their future English learners.

For many students, the societal privilege of English-speaking individuals within an English-dominant society became visible. In the following excerpt, Andrea explained that she hadn't felt a need to learn another language; however, she also made a connection to her future role as a teacher of culturally diverse students and her desire for future life experiences with other cultures and "the world":

> Although there are opportunities for me to learn other languages and about other cultures I have never taken the time to do these things, because other than pure interest, it is not necessary for me to learn English. This leaves people who do not know English to be the "other" in my life. Throughout the semester, I've begun to really notice the "other." . . . As a future ESL teacher I know that I need to further my competence in knowing about other cultures. . . . I understand that I need to explore the world around me and begin to learn about other places. (partnership blog)

Additionally, some students discussed how issues of who has power in society are not easily discussed or readily examined. In fact, these issues may be silently avoided in curriculum, teacher education programs, and daily life (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Liggett, 2009). As illustrated in the following extract, Laney discovered a tendency to avoid sensitive issues, such as race and racism, and noted that her Whiteness and linguistic privilege are factors that may make these issues invisible:

> I do not think I was aware of my discomfort with racism until activities in this class. I knew I did not agree with it, but I was always afraid that it was too touchy to talk about. I do not feel like I have a right to talk about it because I have never experienced it first hand. Along the same lines of feeling uncomfortable, I certainly did not realize until my interview with Priya that I am even hesitant to ask questions about someone else's culture for fear of being rude or prying too much. (ABC project)

We also see some indications that the students were linking the experience of working with their partners and their learning about cultural concepts to their future teaching of English learners:

> A discussion we held in class involved cultural stereotypes and how we tend to use them to categorize students. It is good to be aware of these characteristics but sometimes a problem is that these preconceived notions determine or affect how we treat a student. And, we cannot let these generalizations get in our way from truly learning how this student is as an individual. . . . I had never considered it before, but when we single out a student in order to gain insight, we are pressuring that student to be the face of an entire complex culture. (Diane, partnership reflection)

Holly thought about how she might react to future English learners in her class based on her initial reactions to her partners. She described the frustration she experienced when she had to repeat herself or avoid topics because she was afraid her partners would not understand her: "I feel terrible thinking this, because I'm afraid I might project this same impatience with my students, when in reality it is my job to help them instead of shut them down" (partnership blog). In the same way, Mindy claimed an early awareness that equal treatment in a classroom is not achieving equity in education:

> Before this class, I thought that every child should be looked at as the same. I thought it was bad to see them as different, but taking this course has made me realize I was wrong. Now, I see the importance of recognizing cultural differences in the classroom, and it is my mission as a future ESL teacher to not ignore it [sic]. (partnership blog)

Other students gained sensitivity and a deeper awareness of processes of second language learning and use in another cultural/linguistic context through developing personal relationships with their partners and actually working with them to collaborate on a research project and presentation. Helen began to use a communication strategy, paraphrasing, that will be useful in her interactions with other second language speakers. And Maria acknowledged the greater challenge of completing academic work in another language. Finally, Randi noticed the social power inherent in being the native English speaker and recognized the value of building personal relationships with her future students:

> When we first began to meet, I had trouble understanding what both of my partners were saying because of their accents. I remember having to ask them to repeat things a few times and also remember them struggling with trying to find the right words. What I found helpful was to paraphrase things they said and make sure that what I got was what they meant to say. (Helen, partnership blog)

> My partners explained to me that there is absolutely a component of an extra difficulty in completing assignments in English, as opposed to their native language. However, as they have spent more time doing assignments using their "L2," they have gotten more and more used to it. Lucia explained to me that she finds herself

translating from German to English less and less and Ahmad agreed. (Maria, partnership blog)

I have learned from this project that it is easy to help Ally learn in a situation where we are considered equals. She may feel more intimidated or shy if there is a clear hierarchy existing between us, such as one where I am the superior native English speaker. However, since this is not the relationship we have formed, I think Ally feels comfortable with me and does not recognize our time together as explicitly a learning environment. This has taught me a lot about my own expectations as a future ESL teacher. Our conversations are very interactive and I benefit from her as much as she benefits from me. While my role as an ESL teacher will obviously position me more in the role of a leader, I still would like to maintain this relationship founded on interpersonal communication. (Randi, reflection student partnership)

The breadth and range of awareness about culture, cultural complexity, and a more nuanced understanding of the second language learning process seem to hold value as first steps in preparing these students for the diverse classrooms they will surely encounter in their careers as educators. While we cannot claim that any of the students approach *sociopolitical consciousness*, which would entail recognizing systematic social inequities and an intention to act to change those inequities, reflection through the blogs and papers allowed these students to integrate their experiences with culturally different people and begin to relate learning about cultures to their emerging understanding of teaching in diverse classrooms. We suggest that the concept of *critical cultural awareness* might be more appropriate to conceptualize the learning in this one-semester experience. Byram (1997) defined this awareness as "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 53).

Implications and Recommendations

Culturally responsive pedagogy has inspired teachers and teacher educators alike to consider what it means to teach responsively in respect to the language, discourse, and cultural practices of students from minority backgrounds. Pray and Marx (2010) observed that although teachers may care deeply about their students and truly want to "help" them, they often have little empathetic knowledge of what their English learners are experiencing linguistically and culturally. Clearly learning that can unfold through a course that includes teaching cultural concepts, guided cultural analysis, and relationship building with international partners is only an initial step and must be followed by field experiences in classrooms with English learners and within multilingual/multicultural communities. Nevertheless, this study illustrates the potential of collaborative work and conversational interactions among international students and preservice teacher peers.

In our analysis of the data and looking back on the experiences of the course

linkage, we argue that several practices are essential: (a) explicit teaching of cultural concepts, such as the liquid qualities of culture, the changing nature of cultural identities, cultural stereotypes and essentialized ideas of cultures, and globalization and its effects on culture (among others); (b) reflection through writing shared with classmates and writing that requires students to consider their own cultural histories and life experiences; (c) opportunities to bring student reflections into the classroom space for discussion and to develop shared understandings; and (d) a collaborative assignment (in this case, an investigative project and oral presentation) in which both power dynamics and cultural expectations come into play and where cultural conflicts and challenges arise.

Partner meetings allowed for both informal interaction and a collaborative task, which have been identified as critical mediational means for intercultural relationships to develop. The collaborative nature of the student partnership required sustained interaction over time and cooperation toward a potentially mutually beneficial goal (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001; Mezirow, 1981). Interestingly, when these students began their work together to investigate a cultural topic of their choosing and create an oral presentation to display what they found, the dynamic shifted from informal conversations to cooperative work, which quickly uncovered levels of dissonance or cultural disequilibrium. Rather than simply noticing cultural differences, they had to interact within those differences to produce something mutually valuable (and worthy of presentation in a public space). In other words, the stakes became higher. Some of the challenges included varying expectations of what "research" for this assignment might entail and what an oral presentation would look like, differing levels of motivation among group members, fear of offending or violating cultural norms, how group work would be distributed, and power dynamics around being a native English speaker.

These data illustrate how going beyond studying culture in the classroom to collaborate with cultural others helped our students to develop greater cultural self-awareness. Future research might be concerned with how students develop critical views of cultural representations and how attitudes and awareness translate to classroom interactions with their own students. Productive research directions in this area might follow students over the course of their entire teacher preparation program (or, better yet, into their classrooms) to track their responses within differing types of field experiences and to be able to explain in more detail the development of critical cultural awareness and how these skills can act as a bridge toward sociopolitical consciousness and the development of interculturality.

It would have been valuable to have had additional sources of data, and our plan was to involve external researchers to conduct interviews with the students in the subsequent year of the partnership; however, circumstances of our respective teaching schedules changed, and we were, unfortunately, not able to carry out that plan. These limitations mean that our findings must be viewed as initial findings. Nevertheless, this study uncovers the potential of creating a collaborative space be-

tween prospective teachers of English learners and international students, especially to build awareness of the students' own cultures, behavior, and assumptions. We assert that this is essential learning for both preservice teachers and international students developing English proficiency in U.S. university contexts. Thus future research would also benefit from analysis of data that more fully incorporate interaction within the student partnerships and that would represent all voices in a dialogic fashion to highlight the challenges of immersion in a new cultural context.

The primary impetus for this study was to explore the development of interculturality among preservice teachers when collaborating with international students in a semester-long partnership. We acknowledge that it is not a realistic expectation that preservice teachers develop interculturality or sociopolitical consciousness in one course and through an initial field experience within a teacher preparation program. However, this study gives hope that intercultural learning can occur through a structured course-based interaction that involves conceptual learning about culture in combination with personal interaction to locate those concepts within the routines and daily lives of individuals. The analysis uncovered indications of developing cultural awareness, cultural identity, and an emerging critical cultural awareness. Neither personal, cross-cultural experiences alone nor, on the other hand, learning about cultural concepts in classroom situations seem to be sufficient for shifts in views of the self and cultural identities. What this study underscores is the benefit of personal experience with cultural others, complemented by the critical mediation of conceptual and guided reflection, both of which are necessary to the development of interculturality.

Finally, from a programmatic teacher education perspective, any pedagogical intervention that structures experiential learning with the goal of intercultural learning must be developed within a coherent teacher education program that shares common goals among faculty, cooperating teachers, and school administrators. Sleeter (2008) has outlined a three-pronged approach to prepare preservice teachers to teach in diverse contexts and asserted that all three components are necessary and essential elements of teacher preparation. First is a coherent set of courses that emphasizes equity and that values diversity and, in turn, has direct linkages to school-based fieldwork. Both of these activities, courses and field experiences, should intentionally develop students' conceptual foundations and culturally responsive teaching skills and be informed by a shared vision that values diversity and the resources it brings to classrooms. A third component is cross-cultural community-based experience in which prospective teachers are equipped with listening skills, observational skills, and skills of interacting across cultures and which then support their capabilities to interact effectively in intercultural spaces.

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