Teacher Candidates' Dispositions Toward English Learners: The Impact of Field Experiences

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Abstract

This article explores the experiences of seven elementary teacher candidates and their participation in varied field experiences during the last year of their teacher preparation program in response to the question: In what ways does a one-on-one tutoring practicum with an English Learner (EL) and a semester-long student teaching experience in a linguistically diverse classroom impact the dispositions of elementary teacher candidates and their efforts to support ELs in the mainstream classroom? As is characteristic of an interpretivist approach to a collective case study inquiry, data sources included three semi-structured interviews, a tutoring portfolio, several classroom observations, and various artifacts from the student teaching experience. The study confirmed the significant value of field experiences for teacher candidates, particularly as they were given opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with the EL students, practice planning and implementing effective learning experiences, and gain increased confidence in their ability to support ELs in their learning through critical reflection, feedback, and modeling. The study revealed the benefit of cross-cultural learning and second language proficiency for enhancing the dispositions of teacher candidates in preparation for working with ELs.

Keywords: teacher education, teacher candidates, dispositions, English learners, field experiences, linguistic diversity

Introduction

"I don't know what I'd do if a new student came to my classroom and didn't know how to speak any English!" (Donna, teacher candidate). "Is it possible for teacher ed. programs to offer practicums specific to EL classrooms?" (Lacey, teacher candidate).

These teacher candidates (TCs) shared these comments after participating in a Jigsaw activity during which they had discussed with their peers some articles on the topic of supporting readers who, for various reasons, are not reading on grade level. Their evident discomfort and inexperience with relating to English learners (ELs) in the mainstream elementary classroom is representative of the perceptions of most pre-service teachers (Samson & Collins, 2012), and even the majority of in-service teachers (Ross, 2014).

In 2000, 61% of K–12 public school students were white. By 2015, this percentage dropped to 49% (NCES, Feb. 2019). The percentage of K–12 students in U.S. public schools identified as English learners in 2016 was 9.6%, up from 8.1% in 2000 (NCES, May 2019). A language other than English is spoken in the homes of more than one in five students in this country (López, Scanlan, & Gundrum, 2013). This is in contrast to the relative stagnation of white monolingual teacher candidates who continue to enter the profession. According to 2016 data reports (NCES, Feb. 2019), 80% of K–12 public school teachers are white. At 13%, few teachers, regardless of ethnicity, are proficient in a language other than English (Williams, Garcia, Connally, Cook & Dancy, 2016). Even though various programs throughout the U.S. have sought to address the unique needs of ELs (Jimenez-Silva, Olson, & Jimenez Hernandez, 2012; Nutta, Mokhtari, & Strebel, 2012), including those instituted by both state and federal policies, the achievement gap for this growing number of students remains stable (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). The benefits of bilingual education are many; however, less than five percent of all ELs enroll in these programs. The others are educated in mainstream classes with minimal supports from specially trained educators (Coady, Harper & de Jong, 2011). Based on a comparative study of both pre-service and in-service teachers and their beliefs about

teaching ELs, the majority of all participants felt insufficiently prepared to teach students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Polat, 2010). Furthermore, research provides evidence that teachers' attitudes and beliefs about students can significantly impact students' academic achievement (Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, & Dalhouse, 2009). This compels our profession to consider how we can improve teacher preparation programs (TPPs) to better prepare general classroom teachers to more effectively work with linguistically diverse students. In particular, teacher candidates need more intentional and supported interaction with ELs as part of their teacher preparation program (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

In 2010, NCATE commissioned a panel of educators to prepare a report focused on the value of clinical practice in teacher education (NRC, 2010). The panel cited additional research to suggest that field experiences have significant potential to improve teacher preparation and the learning outcomes for P–12 students (NRC, 2010). The concept of transformation, as well as formation, is key to the purposes of educator preparation.

Providing opportunities for teacher candidates to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to support all students in their learning, including ELs, is at the heart of the standards for effective teaching (CCSSO, 2011). The goal of this study was to get a closer look at how field experiences, which allow a teacher candidate to work closely with an EL in the school setting, can impact the formation of these skills and dispositions. Therefore, Mezirow's Transformation Theory, or Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), provides a helpful theoretical framework as a foundation for this study (1994, 1997). Mezirow (1997) describes transformation as a change in our frames of reference, or habits of the mind, initiated by an event or series of experiences, which lead to critical reflection of the assumptions that inform our beliefs and consequently impact our behaviors. In the context of educator preparation, providing teacher candidates with field experiences that allow them to develop personal relationships with ELs can be a critical part of their formation and potential

transformation as they begin to examine their own frames of reference, previously held beliefs about ELs, develop plans to provide equitable learning environments for the ELs, and make changes to their perspectives and practices.

This view of TLT also encompasses other theoretical frameworks that are important for understanding this study: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and Ethic of Care Theory. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) raised awareness of the importance of CRT by advocating for an equitable education for all students. An understanding of race and equity is critical if teacher candidates are going to examine their own beliefs, experiences, and dispositions toward ELs. Equity for ELs in the school setting includes, in part, providing increased opportunities and choices for students and their families, holding high expectations for all students, providing the necessary supports and resources, and valuing biliteracy (Tung, 2013).

An equitable learning environment for ELs requires cultural responsiveness. In order for teachers to be culturally and linguistically responsive, Villegas and Lucas (as cited in Wallace & Brand, 2012) suggest that teachers must possess the following qualities: "sociocultural awareness, having an affirming view of the students; embracing constructivist views about teaching and learning; designing instruction that builds on what students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar; and being familiar with students' prior knowledge" (p. 347). Therefore, if preservice teachers are prepared to provide an equitable learning environment in their future classrooms, a critical component of CRT, they must identify the bias in their own attitudes and experiences to make strides toward developing these aforementioned qualities.

Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) focus on linguistically responsive teaching in their explanation of five essential understandings of ELs for classroom teachers. These understandings provide a critical lens for how pre-service classroom teachers are prepared to support the language development of the ELs in their future classrooms. Linguistically responsive teachers understand the second language acquisition process. They realize that first language (L1) skill development is critical

to learning English as a second language (L2). And based on social learning theory, these teachers are keenly aware of the important role that peer interaction plays in language learning.

Although Mezirow's explanation of transformative learning led to the development of the learner's autonomous thinking, it was not his intent that this process occurs apart from a social context (Mezirow, 1997). Often the development of social relationships helps learners to examine more carefully their own beliefs, and then through dialogue they consider alternative perspectives. The ethic of care theory considers the importance of a caring relationship between the teacher candidate and the EL student and the impact that it has on each one (Noddings, 2005). Nieto (2012) shares the opinion of many others in the field who believe that, "True teaching must be accompanied by a deep level of care in order for learning to take place" (p. 29). Effective teachers not only care about their students, they care for each student in a way that seeks to meet their individual needs while considering their unique interests and abilities.

Being a caring teacher means moving beyond a personality trait, and is evidenced in deliberate actions (Goldstein, 2002). This study aimed to gain a closer look at how the development of relationship between the teacher candidates and the ELs in their field experiences impacts the formation, or transformation, of their dispositions through self-examination and changes in practice.

Literature Review

Even though the debate continues regarding the best ways to teach ELs, there is general agreement that most grade-level and content area teachers are ill-prepared to meet the needs of students in their mainstream classrooms who are emergent bilinguals (Feiman-Nemser, 2018; Samson & Collins, 2012; Shreve, 2005). They express frustration with the inability to communicate effectively with students and their parents, and they lack the materials, information, and strategies to support ELs in their classroom. Although approximately nine of ten teachers in the U.S. have ELs in their classroom, the majority have had little, if any, specific training or professional development in

this area (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Hamaan & Reeves, 2013). The vast majority does not have proficiency in a language other than English. This combination has led to an ill-prepared teaching force that is working with an increasing number of ELs in their mainstream classrooms each year (Hamaan & Reeves, 2013).

Some would argue that strategies for teaching ELs are just good teaching practice for any diverse group of students, including graphic organizers, cooperative learning, and hands-on activities (de Jong & Harper, 2005). While these considerations support learning for all students, they do not address other unique needs of ELs. Greater teaching effectiveness requires an understanding of the process of acquiring a second language; the incorporation of native language and culture as a medium for learning English and core content; understanding the difference between conversational English proficiency and academic language proficiency (García & Kleifgen, 2010); the incorporation of explicit instruction to support reading and writing development; and an understanding of students' background knowledge and experiences as impacted by their native culture (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

Although there is some benefit from revised coursework to help TCs prepare to work with ELs, greater results have come from participation in field experiences targeting ELs as part of their preparation (Correll, 2016; Fitts & Gross, 2012; Hutchinson, 2011; Pappamihiel, 2007). This is especially true when the teacher candidate is given the opportunity to develop a relationship with an EL student, often times dispelling the TCs' preconceived ideas about ELs as deficient students. Personal interactions with ELs can also expand and correct TC's limited or erroneous perceptions of these students as having similar backgrounds and characteristics, when in reality ELs represent a wide variety of languages, ethnicities, skill development, prior knowledge, and external factors.

Field experiences, as part of teacher preparation, vary greatly. Consideration of the opportunities that teacher candidates have to work with students in the local K–12 schools is one way to assess the quality of a teacher preparation program. While varied field

experiences can be a good indicator of a quality program, many teacher educators are quick to note that not all field experiences are created equally. In their study of the impact of field experiences on preservice teachers' attitudes toward ELs, Wiggins, Follo and Eberly (2007) pointed out that many field experiences are too brief and often relegate the teacher candidate, or practicum student, to the role of observer in the back of the room. The TC needs to have opportunities to apply what they are learning in their methods courses, while also engaging in focused reflections with the mentor teacher and course instructor, for field experiences to be effective (Daniel, 2014; Wiggins et al., 2007).

What is lacking within the literature is a more in-depth understanding of the transformative learning that takes place when a teacher candidate is given the opportunity to work with ELs and is able to apply theory to practice. Beyond completing hours for a required field experience and responding to an attitude survey regarding multicultural education (Fehr & Agnello, 2012), the field of teacher education is in need of more qualitative research that allows the participants to provide us with an insider's perspective of the value of critical reflection regarding the beliefs and dispositions that guide, or perhaps transform, their relationships with ELs (deJong, Harper, & Coady, 2013; Feiman-Nemser, 2018). The purpose of the study that is the focus of this article is to add to our understanding of how TCs adjust their dispositions regarding ELs and develop an increased sense of preparedness for working with these students in the mainstream elementary classroom as a result of field experiences as a part of their preparation.

Methodology

In keeping with the purpose of this study, the methodology was characteristic of a qualitative approach to research. This took the form of a collective case study of seven elementary teacher candidates and their experiences of relating to ELs in a couple of contexts during their final year in program: first, through a one-on-one tutoring practicum as part of a larger literacy-focused field experience; and second, working with ELs over the course of the student teaching semester which involved English and content learning in a mainstream classroom. With the goal of providing

opportunity for the case study participants to reflect critically on their own knowledge, skills, and dispositions regarding ELs, data sources included interview transcripts, written reflections, field observations, lesson plans, and a couple other practicum related artifacts and documents.

All data sources were coded and analyzed using a process of highlighting and sticky notes that resulted in the identification of four categorical themes: aspects of the participant's self-identity, their perspective of ELs as people and as learners, their efforts to apply strategies and techniques to support ELs in their learning, and comments related to the participant's perceived ability and comfort level when working with ELs. An additional round of selective coding (Saldaña, 2016) led to the creation of a matrix for each participant (Maxwell, 2013). Constant comparative analysis throughout the duration of the study, and triangulation of the varied data sources, provided the basis for the resulting discussion and recommendations.

Participants

Qualitative analysis provided insight into the experiences of teacher candidates as they interacted with ELs in varied educational contexts. Unlike quantitative studies that seek to include a large number of participants for the purpose of generalizing the results, the goal of this qualitative study was to delve more deeply into the thoughts and experiences of a few individuals to analyze particular themes and understandings to help inform future practice (Creswell, 2008). As mentioned previously, the purposeful sampling of participants allowed for the analysis of varied perspectives and experiences to better inform the study.

All participants completed similar coursework, including Liberal Arts requirements, elementary methods courses, one diversity course, and four previous field experiences. The 20-hour one-on-one tutoring practicum was completed simultaneously with a 40-hour practicum with a focus on literacy instruction in the regular elementary classroom.

Table 1
Characteristics of Each Participant

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Linguistic Background	Educational Background	Cross-Cultural Experiences
Lily	F	Latina	L1-Spanish L2-English	K–3 public school in El Salvador	Lived first 8 years in El Salvador; since then in U.S.
Ethan	M	White	L1-English Intermed. Spanish Beginner German	K–12 public	Lived 1 yr. in Honduras as pre-schooler. Lived and studied in Europe 3 months in college
Evelyn	F	White	L1-English Beginner Spanish and Arabic	K–8 public 9–12 private	Lived and studied in Middle East 3 months in college
Sophia	F	African-American	L1-English Intermediate Spanish	PK–2 private 3–12 public	Lived and studied in Guatemala 3 months in college
Abigail	F	White	L1-English Beginner Spanish	K–12 private	Lived and studied in Myanmar 6 weeks in college
Emma	F	Asian-American	L1-English Beginner Spanish & Arabic	K–12 public	Lived and studied in Middle East 3 months in college
Olivia	F	White	L1-English Beginner Spanish	K–12 public	Vacation in Costa Rica; Studied 3 weeks on Navajo reserve-Arizona

Thematic Findings

Four themes emerged from the collection of cases which help to understand factors that influenced the dispositions of these teacher candidates regarding ELs as identified in the primary research question that guided this study. These themes are enveloped in the importance of prior knowledge and experience of the teacher candidate, building personal relationships with the ELs, opportunities for practical application of EL strategies, and reflection and feedback regarding those experiences.

Prior Knowledge and Experience

Several factors influenced the candidates' previous perceptions of ELs, ideas for how to support ELs in their learning, and their perceived effectiveness or comfort level for applying that support: prior knowledge of, and experience with, languages other than English; having personal cross-cultural experience; and previous coursework and practical experiences with at least minimal mention of, or opportunity for, supporting ELs in the classroom setting. It became apparent during the course of this study that this theme and related subthemes had a significant impact on many of the other learning experiences that were a part of this study, as processed by each participant.

During the first interview, each participant talked about some experience with studying a second or third language for at least one year during middle or high school, as well as another semester or more in college. For Lily, this second language was English, and she served as the single participant whose first language was not English. For the other six participants, at least one of their language experiences included Spanish. Most participants described those experiences as having a minimal impact on their learning. In contrast, Lily talked at length about her experiences of learning English as a second language and the positive influence of her first ESL teacher. Throughout the study, Lily referenced Ms. Madison as someone who made learning fun, who took a personal interest in her, and who modeled effective strategies for learning English that Lily drew upon in each of her practicum experiences with ELs.

Much more profound than studying another language in the context of a U.S. school was time spent living or studying in a cross-cultural setting. For six participants, this meant spending at least six weeks in one or more other countries. Emma, Evelyn, and Sophia each provided some description during the first interview of their semester-long cross-cultural study experience. The first two spent nearly a month studying Arabic while living with a host family in Palestine, and Sophia had a similar experience studying Spanish in Guatemala. All three of them spoke of the increased value of this opportunity to learn another language in a context where that is the majority language and where they were

"forced" to practice what they learned each day with members of their host family. Each one also mentioned a range of emotions including frustration and feeling overwhelmed, to personal satisfaction when reflecting on their growth.

Building Personal Relationships

The importance of building caring relationships and creating a safe learning environment was a second theme. Each participant spoke of relationships as foundational to learning. This was evident in three particular dimensions: the impact that the relationship had on the teacher candidate's perception of ELs; the teacher candidate's perception of how the relationship affected the ELs; and the impact of the relationship on the teacher candidate's pedagogical decisions and perceived effectiveness.

In the first interview, each participant made comments that reflected their value of relationship-building when they considered their future work with ELs. Ethan mentioned the importance of building a trusting relationship with ELs during those first few days so that they are assured that everything will be okay even if it is really hard at first. He recommended building a friendship with each EL around common interests and then doing what you can to incorporate those interests into the learning experience, while also emphasizing that this is a reciprocal relationship. Sophia and Evelyn echoed this sentiment of creating a relationship as co-learners: "We're all in this space. We're all learners" (Sophia). "Let's learn together" (Evelyn).

Olivia, Evelyn, and Lily mentioned the importance of creating a safe learning environment as one way to establish a positive relationship with ELs, including setting clear expectations for how to treat one another with respect (Olivia). Other components of this are creating an environment that is welcoming and nonjudgmental (Evelyn) and where students are not afraid to make mistakes (Lily). Abigail, Emma, and Sophia commented on the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment—wanting the EL students to be in the regular classroom so they can participate in activities with their peers and so they feel like an equally valuable part of the class, "not just like the new kid that doesn't understand anything" (Abigail).

Olivia and Emma acknowledged that different language backgrounds can make relationship-building challenging, requiring more effort and initiative on the part of the teacher. Emma said that it is important to help other students overcome a perceived language barrier to make their EL peers feel welcome in the classroom. Lily emphasized that building these relationships will take time, and therefore it is important to make it a priority each day.

Several participants commented on how the tutoring experience with one EL student in particular broadened some of their previous perceptions about ELs in general. Several participants imagined ELs to all be at beginning stages of English development and therefore were surprised with the amount of English that their tutees already knew, at least on a conversational level. Evelyn said, "Kelly impressed me with how good her English was," and Abigail commented on her realization that ELs "can really be anywhere on quite a broad continuum" of English proficiency, even within a particular grade level. Ethan noted this during his second interview: "My tutee didn't necessarily present himself in the same way as ELs are sometimes presented." Ethan observed his tutee in the classroom setting and noticed that there were other ELs at significantly different stages of learning English. However, he noted that some of them had significant strengths in other areas, and therefore the label "EL" shouldn't be viewed as a deficiency. He observed some students whose English skills were emerging but who were amazing in math. For him, this was a good reminder that, "Just because they don't speak fluent English doesn't mean they are any less capable." Because of this variance in language proficiency, personality, and prior knowledge, several participants concluded that it is important to see every student as a unique learner. This reinforced for Evelyn the importance of getting to know the student first before focusing on instruction.

Student teaching provided many opportunities for each participant to develop relationships with EL students. Relating to a whole classroom of students, and in some cases two or more classes of students, certainly impacts the amount of individual attention that can be given. However, nearly every student teaching evaluation included comments about the teacher candidate's

ability to develop trusting and caring relationships with the students.

Five of the seven participants commented on at least the occasional effort to affirm the native language of the ELs in their student teaching classroom. This was most comfortable for Lily who is already fluent in Spanish and who was interacting with many Latino students. Olivia tended to connect with some of her EL students over conversations about food from their native country, simultaneously learning new vocabulary in their language. Before or after school and during other non-instructional times of the day, several of the participants took advantage of the opportunity to engage in informal conversations with the ELs and other students in the class. Ethan learned a few Russian words from a couple of his fourth-graders, and Sophia talked about how the afternoon dismissal time became like a daily mini-Spanish lesson for her and some of the students.

Emma struggled more at the beginning of her kindergarten placement because she needed to learn the names and unique characteristics of two classes as part of the dual immersion program. With encouragement from her supervisor and cooperating teacher, Emma began making an intentional effort to get to school early to devote her attention to interacting informally with the students as they entered the room. Abigail noted some behavior challenges from a couple EL boys in her first-grade classroom, and focused more on relating to these students outside of instructional time so that she could build a trusting and respectful relationship with them.

By the end of student teaching, Lily and Evelyn commented that the EL students are their "favorites": Although relationship-building was sometimes challenging with these students, it was also more rewarding. Evelyn observed how the majority of her EL students had higher-than-average levels of motivation to learn while maintaining positive attitudes in the face of many personal challenges. Having a trusting relationship with students was helpful when addressing occasional conflicts between peers. Lily recounted a situation in which she was reminded of the importance of listening to what they students are feeling and experiencing, rather than jumping to conclusions about a particular incident.

Each participant commented on relationships with individual students which informed their own perceptions of ELs and how to create a caring learning environment for them in the classroom.

Not only did relationship-building result in improved attitudes, perceptions, and an overall positive learning environment, it also served as a foundation for making good instructional decisions as the participants sought to support the ELs in their learning. While reflecting on the tutoring practicum, Evelyn highlighted the importance of learning to know the student first. By finding out their interests, as well as using assessment data to determine their strengths and needs, she was able to effectively choose materials and plan activities that would work best for her tutee. She said that a similar process would be important when transitioning to student teaching and working with every student, including the ELs. Lily supported this approach when anticipating the student teaching experience. Additionally, she encouraged building collaborative relationships with the cooperating teacher, supervisors, reading specialists, and even parents so that she will be better prepared to provide the instruction that each student needs. Lily said that this is best applied when using a constructivist approach to learning, which she described as including: hands-on activities, experimentation, manipulatives, visual support, and technology.

Practical Application of EL Strategies

A third theme that emerged from the data was the importance of direct interaction with ELs that is facilitated by practicum experiences. Each of the participants said that the tutoring practicum and student teaching experiences were instrumental in helping them learn new strategies for the classroom while boosting their own confidence level. The first interview provided evidence that each of the seven participants had at least some prior knowledge of strategies and approaches that have been used effectively by many educators. Collectively, they mentioned at least 30 different ideas; several were noted by at least four of the seven participants. These included: collaborating with other staff (6), visual support (4), peer support (4), incorporating the student's first language (4), and demonstrating patience and care for

the EL student (4). Other strategies mentioned only a couple times were: repetition, use of songs and videos, supporting vocabulary development, word sorts, asking and rephrasing questions, and differentiating instruction according to the varied needs of the students in the class.

The tutoring practicum almost immediately provided opportunity for learning and applying additional strategies to support their tutees' learning. Because this practicum focused on supporting reading and writing skills, many of the strategies referenced in the tutoring portfolio and the second interview included effective pedagogy for literacy instruction for any student, not only for ELs. Some of the common applied strategies included: creating a "Word Wall" to support vocabulary development; providing students with choices when deciding on texts to read and writing prompts; using graphic organizers to help generate ideas for writing or when summarizing main ideas and events of a story; providing supports for reading such as modeling, paired reading, echo reading, and rereading of texts. Several other strategies were particularly helpful for EL students: providing a lot of visual supports by using picture books; using leveled readers to provide practice at each student's instructional level; doing word sorts and picture sorts that often included having the tutees create an illustration to support their learning of key vocabulary and sight words; and using sentence frames to guide their written responses. Although some of these strategies were likely included in previous coursework, the practical application of these approaches with ELs in the field experience allowed the TCs to gain confidence and see first-hand the impact of their efforts to supports ELs in their learning.

The student teaching experiences allowed the participants to expand and hone their skills for supporting ELs in their classrooms. Many of the participants commented on the importance of providing clear directions or instructions throughout the day in ways that would be more easily understood by those with less advanced English skills. Sophia identified several factors that guided this process in her fifth-grade classroom, especially with a group of three "newcomers" who joined their class half-way through the Spring semester. First, she gave instructions to the

whole class and then met with this group of EL students to go over them again and provided needed clarification. She began providing additional examples that could serve as a reference for these students while they worked. When possible, she paired them with another student who was also fluent in their first language.

Three participants spoke of the importance of integrating language skills into every content lesson. Lily's cooperating teacher made sure that there was a language objective next to each content objective in every lesson. Evelyn said that her cooperating teacher spent several days specifically modeling for her how to include all four language components into her small group math lessons so that students had the opportunity to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills while they were learning about different types of polygons. Lily noted her appreciation for her first-grade cooperating teacher's classroom library. Not only did she include books representing a variety of reading levels and genres, she also intentionally included books representing different cultures and races. Lily used this strategy as well in planning her social studies unit on heroes.

Assessment of student learning was another focus for each of the participants. They mentioned the importance of pre-assessment data for helping to guide their instruction as well as for planning small groups. Emma said that in her kindergarten and second-grade placements, it was important to read test questions aloud for students while providing a lot of visual support and modeling.

Self-Reflection and Feedback

A fourth theme that emerged from the varied data sources of this study is the importance of self-reflection of the teacher candidate and feedback from others during each practical experience of working with ELs. Reflective practice is important for every aspect of teaching, and therefore it was a key component of the tutoring practicum and student teaching experiences. During each experience, the participants received feedback from a reading specialist and the course instructor for the tutoring practicum, as well as from their cooperating teacher and university supervisor during each student teaching placement. In an informal manner,

the participants received feedback from their students in the form of student engagement and academic achievement.

Each participant's self-reflection provided the opportunity to consider what was working well or what needed to be changed as they worked with their tutee and other EL students in the regular classroom. Intentional reflection allows for thoughtful implementation of instructional strategies and improved effectiveness. The participants provided written reflections within their tutoring plans after teaching each session, and then they also had opportunity to reflect orally after occasional observations.

About halfway through the practicum, Evelyn noted that she needed to make some changes. She felt like she was introducing blends too quickly, that her directions were not explicit enough, and that the one poem she had written for her tutee had too many difficult words. Based on these reflections, she made some changes to her plans for the next week. Ethan noted that in his effort to give his tutee some control or choice in his learning, it was important to find a balance. Therefore, he began to explicitly state his expectations and the parts of the session that were "non-negotiable," while providing Andrew with options to help keep him motivated and actively engaged. After one tutoring observation, Olivia commented on the temptation to make assumptions about Kevin's learning: "I really need to make sure that he understands what we are doing, rather than just assuming he does." This caused her to ask more questions of her tutee and encourage him to think aloud as he participated in the various word study activities that she planned for him.

During a particular science unit while student teaching, Abigail was intentional about supporting vocabulary development, especially for the ELs in her first-grade class. She commented on one strategy in particular that she felt worked well: "As I introduced the vocabulary cards, I would read the word, show them a picture, and then anchor it with a motion." After one of her math units on calendar skills, Emma reflected on the effectiveness of music with her kindergarteners, especially those who were non-native English speakers: "This goes to show the power of using verbal language and songs in everyday activities to help them learn important content."

After her third-grade science unit on soil, Sophia shared her reflections on the aspects of her unit that she felt were particularly effective for the ELs in this dual language classroom: the Jigsaw activity allowed students to become the "experts" while providing peer support; students learned cooperative learning skills; multi-sensory learning and project-based learning appeared to be beneficial for all of her students; and offering students choice increased their motivation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Even though educators and researchers have identified teacher preparation for working with ELs as an area of need for the last couple decades, the concern persists (Feiman-Nemser, 2018). This study affirms the value of field experiences as part of the teacher preparation program, while revealing particular considerations to help maximize the learning for future teacher candidates and their work with ELs. Attracting bilingual candidates into the profession and/or encouraging cross-cultural learning and language study can positively impact the dispositions and self-confidence of pre-service teachers as they work with ELs (Gándara & Santibannez, 2016). Having multiple and varied types of field experiences not only broadens the TC's perspective of ELs, it also provides greater opportunity for skill development and effective application of appropriate strategies. Another finding of this study reveals the importance of building meaningful relationships with EL students as part of the field experiences. Finally, the TC's learning process is enhanced when the field experiences include intentional opportunities for critical self-reflection and feedback from knowledgeable mentors (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018).

Each of the participants in this study desired to grow in their ability to effectively support EL students in the mainstream classroom, and each one progressed toward this goal. Each participant came into this study at a different point in their learning to work with ELs, and not one concluded the experience with a degree of complete confidence as they anticipated working with ELs in their future classrooms. Yet, all of them grew in their appreciation for the varied backgrounds, English language skills, and other strengths of the ELs with whom they worked during the tutoring

practicum and student teaching experiences. They gained confidence in their own abilities to support ELs even as they identified some specific aspects that require continued growth.

Through their active interaction with ELs in varied field experiences, each participant was prompted and supported in their efforts to examine their own frames of reference and previous perceptions of ELs, develop plans to provide an equitable environment for these students in the regular classroom, and make changes to their own perspectives and practices (Mezirow, 1997). Transformation, like learning to teach, is a process and it won't look the same for any two people. Rather than discussing ELs in hypothetical terms or relying only on theory, each participant in this study gained valuable experiences from having invested in the lives of the ELs in their classrooms in ways that have left them different people than they were before. By studying the experiences of pre-service teachers, as well as the mentors and EL students with whom they work, researchers can continue to inform the preparation of teacher candidates and impact teacher educators' design of coursework and field experiences that will effectively prepare them to support each student's learning.

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