Meeting the Need for K-8 Teachers for Classrooms with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students:
The Promise and Challenge of Early Field Experiences

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Introduction

Following the mandates of state and national accreditation bodies and in keeping with what is considered best practices, teacher education programs nationwide require students to engage in early field experiences as part of preservice preparation. Accreditation bodies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) suggest that field experiences be implemented and evaluated as a means of fostering development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of teacher candidates. These skills and dispositions include interest in and commitment to teaching as a career, particularly in settings with linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

According to data from a joint survey by the

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) and NCATE, 77% of elementary and 70% of secondary teacher preparation programs require a field experience during the early college years (AACTE/ NCATE Joint Data Collection System Clinical and Field Experience Survey, as cited in Huling, Raffeld & Salinas, 1998). Similarly, many state credentialing agencies, such as the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2001), call for undergraduates to participate in multiple discipline-based field experiences as part of their preservice preparation. Several large-scale studies document the role such hands-on experiences play in ensuring that new teachers are ready to "hit the ground running" (Ball, 2008) and that they will remain in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2008). But still, research is needed to systematically study contextual variables in order to better predict outcomes or align early field experiences with specific learning and professional development goals (Huling, 1998; LaMaster, 2001; Maxie, 2001; Oppewal, 1994).

Teaching As a Career Goal

Universities have turned to early field experiences, infused into undergraduate courses, as potential vehicles for recruiting future teachers and for helping them to refine their career objectives. Prospective preservice teachers oftentimes consider these field experiences as the most important aspect of their teaching preparation (Richardson-Koehler, 1988). Several studies on early field experiences have reported positive personal and social outcomes (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Boyle-Baise, 1998; Brown & Roodin, 2001; Green, Dalton, & Wilson, 1994; Gutstein, Smith & Manahan, 2006; Moyer & Husman, 2006; Peetsma, 2000; Root, Callahan & Sepanski, 2002; Schutz, Crowder & White, 2001; Vadeboncoeur, Rahm, Aguilera, & LeCompte, 1995), as well as civic, leadership, and problem-solving outcomes (Moely, Mercer, Iluster, Miron, & McFarland, 2002). Others have suggested that these experiences may be something of a reality check, as participants emerge less committed to teaching or less enthusiastic about working in some settings than they were at the outset (Gomez, Garcia Nevarez, Knutson Miller, & Strage, 2006; Malone, Jones, & Stalling, 2002). In this study, we investigated how preservice teachers' career goals and commitment were impacted by their participation in an early field experience.

Placement Type in Early Field Experiences

While a growing body of research documents many positive effects of course-embedded field experiences in general (cf, Billig & Furco, 2002; Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001), little systematic research is available to guide decisions about ideal characteristics of the placements themselves. Findings in several studies indicate that effects are mitigated by characteristics of the placement such as site type (school or other), contact hours, type of student, and challenges encountered in the setting, such as lack of resources (Blieszner & Artale, 2001; Brown & Roodin, 2001; Potthoff, Dinsmore, Eifler, Stirtz, Walsh, & Ziebarth, 2000; Root,

et al., 2002). In the present study, we sought to clarify differences in participant outcomes that might be attributable to whether students completed their placement in a Title I school or in a school serving middle class families.

Commitment to Teaching in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Settings

Current figures from school districts across the country paint a consistent picture. Although the demographic make-up of K-8 classrooms is increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, the composition of the teaching force remains relatively homogeneous (i.e., White, English speaking). In order to serve the educational needs of diverse learners, prospective teachers must possess more than a strong interest in teaching as a general career goal. They must also demonstrate commitment to teaching in diverse classrooms, as well as the linguistic and cultural understandings necessary to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Walton, Baca, & Escamilla, 2002). One third of all students in California elementary schools have limited English proficiency (Gandara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly & Callahan, 2003); similar diversity is increasingly found in other states (Menken & Antunez, 2001). If future teachers are to effectively serve such students, they must emerge from their professional preparation programs ready, able, and eager to meet the needs of this large segment of the student population.

Existing studies provide conflicting evidence about the impact of early field experiences on participants' sensitivity to and interest in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Several studies have found positive changes in attitudes and commitment to engagement in culturally diverse schools (Siegel, 1994; Fry & McKinney, 1997; Burant, 1999; Mason, 1999; Bondy & Davis, 2000; Groulx, 2001). For example, Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill (2007) reported that many preservice teachers initially held stereotypical beliefs toward minority children, such as, that they were difficult to work with, were unmotivated, and had poor attitudes toward school. Participation in the field experience in this study produced a positive effect on dispositions toward teaching in a diverse setting. These preservice teachers gained understandings about cultural diversity and started to question the societal inequities that they experienced at their site.

In contrast, other researchers have reported only partial or superficial changes in participants' attitudes (Boyle-Baise, 1998; Vadeboncoueur, et al., 1995). In some instances, preservice teachers reported that the field experience exposed them to culturally diverse students and contributed to greater awareness and acceptance of the differences, while in other instances participants reported that they learned nothing new. And finally, some researchers have argued that field experiences in culturally diverse settings may actually reinforce participants' negative attitudes and reluctance to work in those settings (see Haberman & Post, 1992, for example). In the present study, we also sought to clarify the impact of early field experience on prospective teachers' interest in teaching in settings with such diverse student populations.

Preservice Teachers' Facility in a Second Language

Several studies have examined preservice teacher outcomes associated with a match, or mismatch, between teacher and student characteristics, with particular focus on cultural and linguistic differences. Researchers have reported that the most competent teachers for diverse learners possess knowledge of students' cultural and linguistic norms (Gandara, et al., 2003) and that teacher understanding of English Learners' native language, in both structure and usage, is important (Fillmore & Snow, 2002). Tellez and Waxman (2004) reported that bilingual teachers were able to assist children in transferring knowledge of their native language and that they used their students' native language to support their learning English. In addition, bilingual teachers were able to relate better to the challenges their English Learners face as they learn English. In a study of Latina teachers working with Latino students, Monzo and Rueda (2001) further noted that teachers' facility with students' language promoted cultural understanding in the classroom as well as student learning. But little is known about whether facility in a language common among learners (Spanish, for example) promotes preservice teachers' interest in and commitment to teaching, or whether it facilitates their enjoyment of working with culturally diverse learners. In the present study, we sought to clarify outcomes attributable to participants' language backgrounds.

Research Questions

The present study was conducted to address three critical questions pertaining to the role early field experiences may play in the recruitment and professional preparation of teachers:

1. How do early field experiences contribute to preservice teachers' commitment to and certainty about teaching as a career goal?

2. Does the type of classroom where the field experience takes place impact participants' career goals and their commitment to teaching in diverse settings? In this study, outcomes associated with completion of classroom-based field experiences in Title I and non-Title I schools were compared.

3. Does facility in a second language affect preservice teachers' career goals and commitment to teaching in diverse settings and with English Learners?

Answers to these questions will advance our ability to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers qualified for and committed to teaching in the settings where they are most needed.

Theoretical Framework

We approached these questions from complementary theoretical frameworks proposed to explain the potentially transformative nature of preservice teachers'

college experiences. We envision the potential impacts of students' field experience as propelling them forward along several of Chickering's identity development vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993): first, striving for greater intellectual and interpersonal competence as they interact with and learn about the children and adults at their placements; second, achieving increasingly mature interpersonal relationships, as they become more open to people whose ideas, values and experiences are different from their own; third, developing a personal sense of purpose, as they explore possible career paths and reflect on their efficacy working with the children and teachers at their sites; and fourth, developing a sense of personal integrity, as they clarify their values and beliefs. In this sense, our approach is also aligned with Erikson's (1968) construal of this transitional period of adolescence to adulthood as marked by identity formation processes centered on the challenges of career exploration.

Our approach also draws upon two cognitive-structural theoretical perspectives. We envision that reflecting on their experiences in the field may well help preservice teachers move to more relativist thinking as they bring their analytical skills to bear, revisiting assumptions about the children they work with, including assumptions about the children's culture, their academic potential, and about their own level of commitment to careers working with these children (Perry, 1970). Similarly, Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1997) provides a basis for understanding teacher learning and teacher change. We expect that the field experiences will provide fodder for this process of change as students' beliefs, values and expectations are challenged by what they see and do in the classroom. We envision that preservice teachers may emerge from their field experiences with new meaning perspectives and new meaning schemes, that is, new lenses through which to appreciate the challenges and realities of contemporary classrooms.

Method

Participants

The data reported below were drawn from a larger archive collected from approximately 500 students enrolled in six undergraduate child development courses at three state university campuses, each of which included a mandatory field experience. All three campuses were located in urban areas of California (Los Angeles/Orange Counties, Sacramento and San Jose). As faculty members charged with implementing and/or overseeing the early field components of their respective programs, the authors had engaged in informal conversations with one another about issues of early professional preparation. These conversations led to the articulation of more explicit research questions that could be addressed more fully in a collaborative study. The analyses discussed in this paper were based on a subset of the larger data set, comprised of quantitative and narrative responses from undergraduate students (N=335) who completed field experiences in K-8

classrooms. Approximately three quarters of these participants completed their fieldwork in classrooms in Title I schools ($n=265$, 79%), defined as a school where 50% or more of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, while the remaining quarter completed their field experiences in non-Title I schools *($n=70$, 21%)*. Participants were free to select from a list of school sites prearranged by their course instructors. All participants committed a minimum of 20 hours to their respective placement sites over the course of one semester. Additionally, participants engaged in ongoing reflection linking field experiences to class content (e.g., writing in journals and engaging in class discussion).

The majority of the participants were female ($n=313$, 93%). They ranged in age from 17 to 47 years (*M=22* years of age, *Mdn=21*). The majority were child development majors. Just over half were upper-division students ($n=190$, 57%). Almost all had prior experience with children. Just over half ($n=197$, 58%) identified themselves as "White/Caucasian." Among this group, nearly two-thirds ($n=118$, 63%) were monolingual speakers of English, while the remaining third reported some fluency in Spanish ($n=18$, 10%) or in another language ($n=52$, 28%), including a wide range of Asian and European languages. A little less than a fifth of the participants ($n=52$, 17%) identified themselves as Latina/o. Among this group, just over three-quarters ($n=40$, 80%) reported some fluency in Spanish, and a small number ($n=5$, 10%) reported some fluency in another language. Approximately 16% of participants ($n=48$) identified themselves as of Asian descent. Well over three-quarters of these students ($n=40$, 83%) reported some fluency in one or more Asian languages, while the remainder reported being monolingual speakers of English ($n=6$, 17%). A small number of participants declined to provide information about their ethnicity ($n=15$, 4.4%) or their language fluency ($n=13$, 3.9%).

Survey Instruments

Matched pre-and post-field experience versions of a survey developed by the researchers were administered to assess outcomes of the field experience. The survey contained both open-ended and Likert-type items designed to capture participants' attitudes pertaining to their career goals and to working in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. Likert-type items on the pre- and post-versions of the survey differed only in the time frame to which the statement applied—for example, "I expect to enjoy…" versus "I enjoyed …" For the purposes of this report, analyses focused on four sets of items: (a) participants' reported career goals; (b) their certainty with respect to these goals (4-point scale); (c) their anticipated/actual enjoyment of working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners in their field experience setting (4-point scale); and (d) their interest in careers teaching culturally or linguistically diverse learners (5-point scale). The presentation and discussion of the quantitative data are supported by inclusion of themes and quotes from participants' responses to two open-ended questions included on the posttest: "How has this experience affected your career goals?" and "How has this experience

affected your attitudes about working with people whose cultural, ethnic and/or economic background is different from your own?"

Results

Below, we present results from our data analyses as they speak to our three research questions.

1. How do early field experiences contribute to prospective teachers' commitment to and certainty about teaching as a career?

Participants were asked to identify their intended career goal, as well as their level of certainty about that goal on both the pre- and post-field experience surveys. On the pre-field experience survey, over three quarters of respondents (n=265, 80%) indicated that their goal was to be a teacher. Nearly all of these participants (n=241, 93.3%) reported they were "certain" about this career goal. At the conclusion of the field experience, a marginally smaller proportion of the participants indicated that they wanted to be teachers (n=251, a net decrease of 5%). However, there was a fairly substantial drop in *certainty* about this career choice. Just 138, or 58% of these respondents, reported being "certain" that they wanted to pursue teaching as a career on their post-field experience surveys.

In order to assess the impact of the field experience on *individual* participants, we compared respondents' answers to questions pertaining to their career goals and their career goal certainty on the pre- and post-experience versions of the survey. As a result, we identified four sample subgroups:

(1) a *retention* group comprised of participants who identified teaching as their career goal on both the pre- and post-field experience survey. Of the 265 participants who initially expressed an interest in teaching, nearly all (n=230, 87.1%) still wanted to be teachers at the end of the field experience. Although almost all of the participants in this group *(n*=222) had started out certain of their career objectives, by the end, nearly half *(n*=94, 40.1%) were now uncertain about their career goals.

(2) an *attrition* group comprised of participants who had expressed an interest in a career as a teacher on the pre-experience survey, but who indicated they were unsure of their career goals or who indicated they wanted to pursue a different career on their post-field experience survey. Of the 265 participants who initially expressed an interest in teaching, 34 (12.9%) indicated on their post surveys that they were either unsure about their career goals or that they now wanted to pursue a different career. Slightly more than half of these participants (n=19, 55.9%) had been highly confident that they wanted to be teachers at the outset.

(3) a *recruitment* group comprised of participants who expressed an interest

in a career as a teacher in their responses to the post-experience survey, although they had not expressed such an interest on their pre-survey. Of the 68 participants who indicated on their pre-surveys that they were unsure about a career goal or who specified a career goal other than teaching, approximately one-third ($n=20, 29.4\%$) reported wanting to pursue careers as teachers on the post-survey. Over half ($n=12$) of these new recruits indicated that they were certain of this new career direction.

(4) a *not-interested-in-teaching* group, comprised of students who did not express an interest in a teaching career on either version of the survey. Of the 68 participants who indicated on their pre-surveys that they were unsure about a career goal or who specified a career goal other than teaching, approximately two-thirds ($n=48, 70.6\%$) remained unsure about their career objectives or interested in pursuing a career other than teaching.

Content analyses of participants' narrative comments on the post-survey tended to echo the information they provided in their responses to the quantitative items. Participants in the retention and recruitment groups were significantly more likely than their peers in the attrition or not-interested groups to indicate that the experience had confirmed their interest in teaching as a career goal ($F=5.683, p=.001$). The following responses are illustrative:

> Before this experience, I was kind of "iffy" about teaching, but after the experience that I gained seeing the interesting students and how much they needed help and how eager they were to learn, it has made me want to choose this career path more.

> This field experience has definitely made me want to teach now. I went into this major uncertain about what I wanted to do. But after working with the children, it made me realize how much I can make a difference in a person's life.

> I learned so much! I got a feel for what it's like to be on the teacher-end of the classroom, structurally and curriculum-wise. I also learned techniques to teach different learners/styles. I also realized that I do want to work with special needs children and I'm not afraid of it. It has solidly reinforced my desire to teach.

In contrast, participants in the attrition and not-interested groups were significantly more likely than their peers in the retention or recruitment groups to respond to this prompt by indicating that the experience had made them realize they wanted a different career ($F=10.580, p=.000$) or that they were undecided about a career ($F=2.729, p=.044$). The following responses are illustrative:

> I learned different teaching techniques and effective classroom management. Even though I really enjoyed working with my teacher and the students, I still have hesitation about pursuing a career as a teacher. It requires tremendous investments in time, skills, and efforts. After all, I don't know if I am capable of being a teacher.

> This experience did affect my thoughts about my career goal because it helped me realize that even though I enjoyed working with the students, I'm more interested in helping them "psychologically" than helping them and teaching them academic schoolwork.

Furthermore, as the following quotes illustrate, whether their enthusiasm for teaching increased or waned, many participants commented on how, as a result of the field experience, they had developed a more informed and realistic picture of the day-to-day life of a K-8 teacher.

> I got a chance to see some theory put into practice. It was exciting and energizing. I hadn't realized the difficulty of taking several students at different levels up to the same level. I have a less idealistic vision of teaching and a more realistic one.

> I learned that the enforced curriculum and mandatory standards can be very difficult for a teacher that is pressed for time and spends a lot of time on class management. I was surprised to see how important organization, leadership, determination, motivation and control play such a huge role in creating the right environment. This experience has reinforced my love for teaching although I realize the politics involved more now than before.

> I learned that being a teacher is not easy. They have to constantly follow the curriculum. There is really no time to be creative. At the same time, teachers need to make students learn the material. That requires creative lesson plans tailoring to all learners. I still want to be a teacher, though all I learned this semester are challenges teachers face.

(2) Does the type of classroom where the field experience takes place impact participant outcomes?

The next analysis compared participants' interest in teaching in different kinds of environments. A Chi-square analysis sought to verify whether participants who completed their field experience in Title I and non-Title I schools were similarly distributed across the retention, attrition, new recruits, and never-interested-in-teaching groups. Results revealed that participants in Title I schools were disproportionately likely to have lost interest in teaching as a career, while participants in non-Title I schools were disproportionately likely to have become more interested in teaching. These findings are presented in Table 1 (results reported as percentages of students placed in Title I or non-Title I schools).

Table 1

	Retention	Recruitment	Attrition	Not interested
Change in Career Goals by Placement Type				
School type				
Title I (n=265)	70.2	4.6	11.8	13.4
Non-Title I (n=70)	65.7	11.4	4.3	18.6

A second Chi-square analysis indicated that, among participants who remained interested in teaching careers, changes in confidence about career goal were related to placement type (X^2=16.218, p<.000). As the data reported in Table 2 indicate, retention—group participants in Title I classrooms were more likely to lose confidence in teaching as a career goal than those placed in non-Title I classrooms (results reported as percentages of students placed in Title I or non-Title I schools).
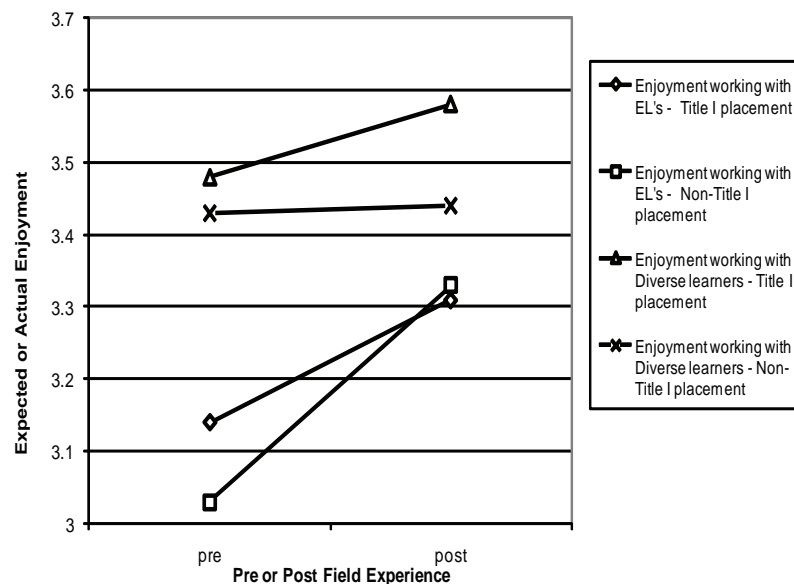
In an attempt to better understand the apparent differential impact of the field experience, participants' responses to four items were examined: the degree to which they expected to enjoy/actually enjoyed working with a) culturally diverse learners and b) English Learners (4-point scale, 2 items), and the degree to which they were interested in careers working with a) culturally diverse and b) English

Table 2

Change in Confidence about Teaching as a Career Goal by Placement Type
among Participants in the "Retention" Group

	Decrease	No change	Increase
School type			
Title I (n=184)	47.8	50.0	2.2
Non-Title I (n=46)	15.2	80.4	4.3

Figure 1

Participants' Expected and Actual Enjoyment
of Diverse and English Learners as a Function of Placement Type
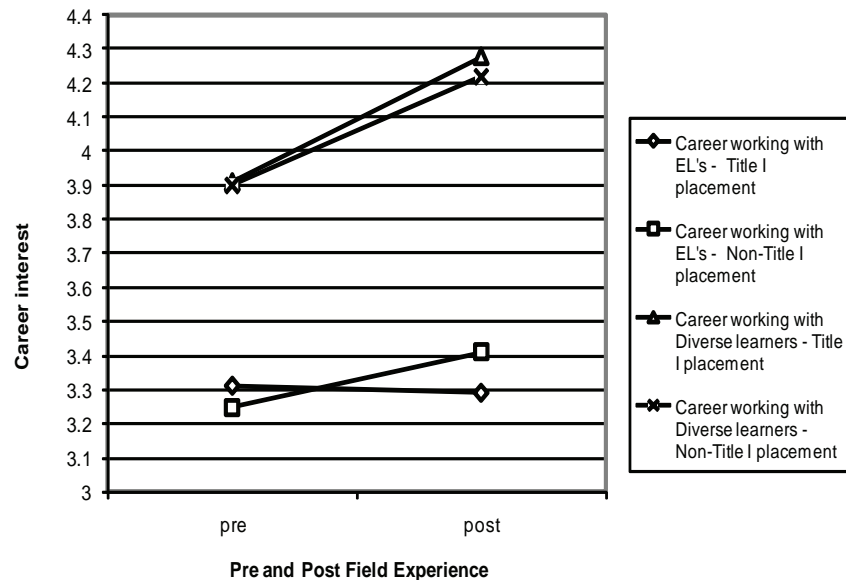
Learners (4-point scale, 2 items). Means are presented in Figures 1 and 2, and results of t-tests performed to identify changes in participant perspectives between the beginning and end of the field experience are presented in Table 3.

These results revealed that regardless of placement type, participants enjoyed working with culturally diverse students about as much as they indicated they had expected to, and they emerged with an increased interest in careers with culturally diverse students. In contrast, while both Title I and non-Tile I participants enjoyed working with English Learners more than they had expected, their interest in working with this population of students in the long run remained unchanged.

Table 3

Pre- and Post- Ratings by Placement Type

| | Title I (n=265) | | | | Non-Title I (n=70) | | | |
	Pre	Post	t	p	Pre	Post	t	p
Enjoyment (4 point scale)								
Culturally diverse learners	3.48	3.58	.872	.384	3.43	3.44	.173	.863
English Learners	3.14	3.31	3.555	.000	3.03	3.33	2.734	.010
Career interest (5 point scale)								
Culturally diverse learners	3.91	4.28	5.132	.000	3.90	4.22	2.801	.001
English Learners	3.31	3.29	-.203	.840	3.25	3.41	1.075	.286

Figure 2

Participants' Interests in Careers Working with Diverse or English Learners as a Function of Placement Type

Analyses of participants' responses to the narrative prompts revealed some differences in the impact of the two kinds of placements, however. Those placed in Title I schools were nearly twice as likely to report an increase in appreciation for and knowledge about diversity as those placed in non-Title I settings (42% vs. 26%, F=6.471, p=.011). Those placed in non-Title I settings were nearly twice as likely to report that their attitudes about working with learners whose cultural, ethnic and/or economic background was different from their own were unchanged as were those placed in Title I schools (31% vs. 18%, F=6.432, p=.012), although the non-Title 1 participants frequently added that they already held positive attitudes about diversity. The following quotes are illustrative:

> This experience has shown me how rewarding and difficult it can be to work in a low-income school. I can see how a motivated and emotionally connected teacher can make a difference. (Title I placement)

> The majority of the race in the classroom that I worked at was Mexican American who some speak a little English and some speak fluent English, and I have never worked with those kids before. It gave me an experience that was wonderful, getting to know the Mexican culture. (Title I placement)

> I have always felt comfortable with working with persons whose cultural, ethnic and economic background is different from my own, and this has not changed. (Non-Title I placement)

(3) Does facility in a second language affect preservice teachers' career goals and commitment to teaching in diverse settings?

A final series of analyses addressed the question of whether speaking a second language would impact undergraduate students' outcomes. Initially, participants were identified as being monolingual speakers of English, Spanish-English bilinguals, Vietnamese- or Chinese-English bilinguals, and other-English bilinguals. Preliminary analyses revealed no differences between the Vietnamese-/Chinese-English and the other-English bilinguals, so these two groups were collapsed for subsequent analyses.

An initial Chi-square analysis revealed that participants from each of the language groups were distributed comparably across the retention, recruitment, attrition and not-interested groups (X^2=1.653, p=.949). A second Chi-square suggested differences in career confidence among participants who remained interested in teaching as a function of their language skills, although the differences did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance (X^2=7.862, p=.097). As summarized in Table 4, proportionately fewer Spanish-English bilinguals decreased in reported confidence about teaching as a career goal (results reported as percentages).

Our final analyses examined differences in participants' perspectives on working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, as a function of their own language backgrounds. Figures 3 and 4 display these means. Next, a series of one-
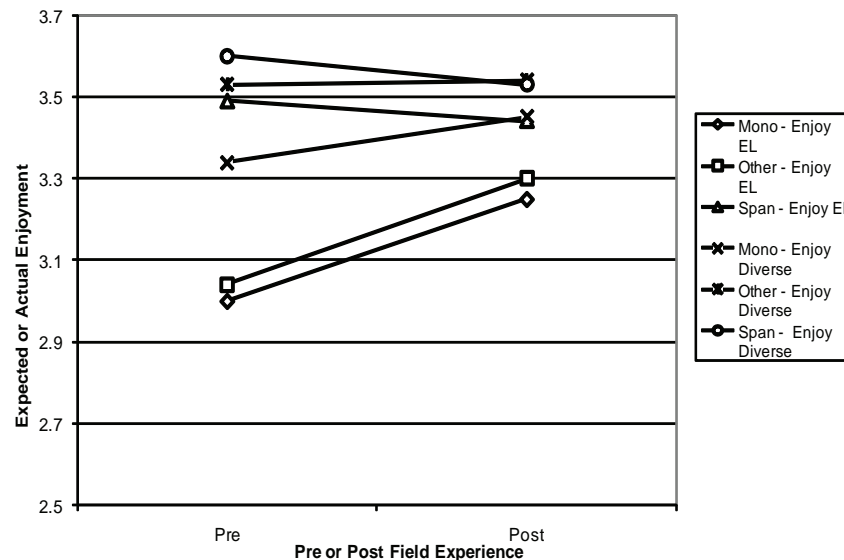
way ANOVAs compared responses of participants in the three language groups. These analyses revealed that, among the three groups, at the outset monolingual English participants appeared to have the lowest expectations that they would enjoy working with culturally diverse learners or English Learners ($F=6.700$, $p<.000$ and $F=10.984$, $p<.000$, respectively). They also began their field experience with the lowest reported interest among the three groups in careers working with culturally diverse learners or English Learners ($F=5.030$, $p=.007$ and $F=15.164$, $p<.000$). By the close of the field experience, all three groups reported similar levels of actual enjoyment of their experience working with culturally diverse learners and English Learners, although monolingual English participants remained the least interested among the three groups in careers working with culturally diverse learners or English Learners ($F=7.798$, $p<.000$ and $F=9.411$, $p<.000$, respectively).

Table 4

Confidence about Teaching as a Career Goal by Language

	Decrease	No change	Increase
Language(s) spoken			
Monolingual English (n=103)	46.6	52.4	1.0
Spanish-English bilingual (n=42)	31.0	69.0	0.0
Other-English bilingual (n=80)	42.5	52.5	5.0

Figure 3

Participants' Expected and Actual Enjoyment of Diverse
and English Learners as a Function of Language Background

Few clear patterns differentiated the narrative responses of the three language groups as a function of their own language fluency, although Spanish speakers were the group least likely to report that the field experience fostered a greater appreciation of the challenges or opportunities inherent in diverse classrooms (monolingual speakers of English, 44%; other, 40%; Spanish, 26% (F=3.054, p=.049).

T-tests revealed that participants in all three language groups emerged with increased enthusiasm about careers working with culturally diverse learners, and that both the monolingual and other-English participants enjoyed working with English Learners more than they had expected (see Table 5).

Discussion

The present study was conducted to address several critical questions pertaining to the role early field experiences may play in the recruitment and professional preparation of teachers. We examined the impact of early field experiences on prospective teachers' career-goal orientations. We explored the relationship between school classification (Title I, non-Title I) and participant outcomes. Finally, as English learners comprise a large and growing segment of the K-12 population, we examined the relationship between participants' facility in a second language and their response to their placement.

Figure 4
Participants' Interest in Careers with Diverse
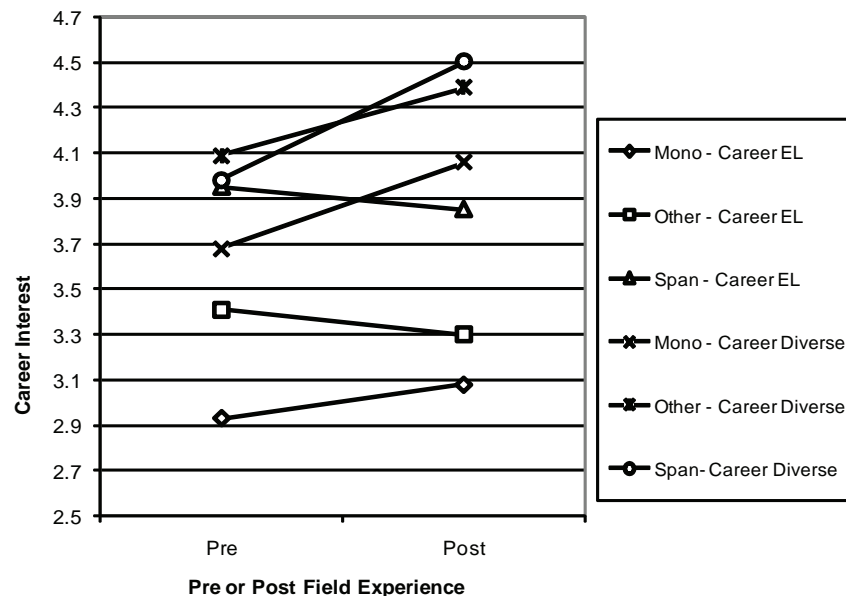or English Learners as a Function of Language Background

Table 5

Pre- and Post- Ratings by Language Group

Monolinguals (n=146)

	Pre	Post	t	p
Enjoyment (4 point scale)				
Culturally diverse learners	3.35	3.45	1.766	.080
English Learners	3.00	3.25	3.691	.000
Career interest (5 point scale)				
Culturally diverse learners	3.68	4.06	4.041	.000
English Learners	2.93	3.08	1.368	.173

Spanish-English Bilinguals (n=70)

	Pre	Post	t	p
Enjoyment (4 point scale)				
Culturally diverse learners	3.60	3.53	-.942	.350
English Learners	3.49	3.44	-.628	.533
Career interest (5 point scale)				
Culturally diverse learners	3.98	4.50	3.122	.003
English Learners	3.95	3.85	-.585	.561

Other-English Bilinguals (n = 114)

	Pre	Post	t	p
Enjoyment (4 point scale)				
Culturally diverse learners	3.53	3.54	.159	.874
English Learners	3.04	3.30	3.037	.003
Career interest (5 point scale)				
Culturally diverse learners	4.09	4.39	3.009	.003
English Learners	3.41	3.30	1.037	.302

Overall, our results are consistent with the extant literature (e.g., Richardson-Koehler, 1988) and support the notion that early field experiences can positively affect career goal clarification. From pre- to post-field experience surveys, the number of participants indicating an interest in a teaching career decreased only slightly. However, further analyses identified a more complex pattern of change and movement than that portrayed in previous research studies. Some participants started out highly certain about careers in teaching but became less so by the conclusion of the field experience; the opposite pattern, however, was found for some participants. Our finding that commitment and certainty were impacted by placement type is consistent with others' research (e.g., Malone, Jones & Stallings, 2002). While the majority of participants across sites maintained interest in teaching as a career goal, participants in Title I sites demonstrated greater attrition in teaching interest, and those who maintained interest in teaching reported lower levels of certainty than participants in non-Title I sites.

These findings have implications for decisions regarding field experience placements. The majority of teacher preparation programs, including pre-credential programs at the undergraduate level, require that students participate in early field experiences (Huling, Raffeld & Salinas, 1998). Most states and accrediting bodies suggest that placement sites include public schools with a range of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse learners (CCTC, 2001; NCATE, 2008). Of primary importance in this context may be the intended goals of the early field experience. For example, some programs may view early field experiences as a means of teacher recruitment and may want to provide a comfortable first experience. Others may see these experiences as a means of providing critical "reality checks" and may want to facilitate experiences that more effectively challenge students' comfort zones. Furthermore, opportunities for career exploration that result in decreased commitment and interest may not be necessarily negative. In fact, an emphasis on higher certainty and positive recruitment outcomes based on placement in non-Title I schools may create unrealistic expectations or challenge resiliency when prospective teachers are later faced with more complex contexts.

Another common goal of early field experiences is the development of positive attitudes toward and interest in working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Much of the research previously reported suggests that these experiences can lead to positive change in preservice teachers' attitudes (see Baldwin et al., 2007). More recent studies, however, suggest that developing more positive attitudes and cultural awareness does not necessarily equate to commitment to teaching in culturally diverse settings (Garcia-Nevarez & Gomez, 2004). The findings analyzed in this study indicated participants' initial attitudes toward working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners through their field experiences were positive, and their interest in working professionally with culturally diverse learners increased from pre- to post-field experience surveys. However, while participants' enjoyment in working with English Learners in their field experience was greater than they expected, their interest in careers working with English Learners did not appear to be affected.

Inasmuch as English Learners make up an increasing segment of the public school population, it would appear that we must do more than simply expose prospective teachers to English Learners to help them embrace the prospect of careers working with them. In this study, positive attitudinal changes did not translate into increased teaching commitment. Future research studies might examine the issue of where specific types of field experiences should be placed in relation to other components of the preparation program. The participants in this study might have emerged more enthusiastic about the prospect of working professionally with English Learners if the experience had been paired with related methods, tools, and strategies that increased their personal sense of teaching efficacy and enhanced their abilities to be successful in this context.

Since one hallmark of elementary school classrooms in states such as California is a large proportion of English Learners, particularly in Title I schools, of

interest in this study was the relationship between preservice teachers' language background and variables including interest in and commitment to working with culturally and linguistically diverse children. In general, regardless of participant language background, interest in careers working with culturally diverse students increased from pre- to post-field experience surveys. Monolingual English participants and participants who spoke both English and a second language other than Spanish reported higher enjoyment than they had anticipated in working with English Learners through their field experiences. Again, this did not translate into enhanced interest in careers working with English Learners. Participants who spoke both English and Spanish demonstrated a slightly different pattern. Differences between pre- and post-field experience reports of levels of enjoyment working with English Learners did not approach statistical significance for this group. However, it should be noted that both their anticipated and actual levels of enjoyment working with English Learners were higher in the English-Spanish group than in either of the other two language groups. Participants who spoke both English and Spanish also indicated greater interest in careers working with English Learners than those in other language groups; this interest was again relatively stable across the field experience.

Participant language background is an area where there is great need for further exploration, as most preservice teachers continue to be monolingual English speakers. These results suggest two additional important program considerations. First, efforts to expand the cultural and linguistic diversity of prospective teachers must be continued. At the same time, as many teacher candidates continue to be English-only speakers, efforts must be made to provide these preservice teachers with the support, skills, and training necessary to attract them to teaching in classrooms with English Learners and facilitate their success in these settings.

Finally, the data presented here are consistent with the theories of Chickering and Erikson, which posit that experiences such as these stimulate young adults' identity transformation along several dimensions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968). It appears the early field experience contributed to participants' developing sense of professional competence though their interactions with children and adults in their field sites. More specifically, interacting with culturally and ethnically diverse children led to an increasing openness or interest in these learners. Experiencing the "reality check" of actual classrooms led to an exploration and clarification of professional goals and commitment. Further research is needed to explore teacher perspectives related to working with linguistically diverse children. It is possible that field experiences linked to methods associated with successful interactions with English learners may provide opportunities for disposition shifts as teacher candidates develop additional scaffolding strategies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, results reported here indicate that early field experiences provide participants with opportunities for career goal clarification where outcomes may vary by site type. In general, these experiences may also foster interest in careers working with culturally diverse children and enjoyable opportunities to work with English Learners. Findings suggest that participant language background should be studied further, as trends indicated that participants who spoke both Spanish and English entered and exited early field experiences with greater interest in working professionally with English Learners than those from other language groups.

Early field experiences can play a significant role in helping prospective teachers examine their commitment to teaching. These experiences help candidates to explore and clarify career goals, gain a more realistic picture of life in classrooms, and expand their understanding of the diversity of learners in today's schools. Findings in this study suggest that the context of the field experience matters, and characteristics of the context may lead to outcomes that may or may not have been the initial goal of the experience. Thus, early field experience placement identification should be a thoughtful process which considers carefully the purposes to be achieved in the experience (e.g., recruitment, career commitment, career exploration).

Directions for Further Research

Research agendas for the study of field experience outcomes in teacher education must continue to examine multiple impacts across programs. Studies must move beyond affirming changes in students' awareness, attitudes, or interests to probing whether these changes relate to future actions and behaviors. Related findings must guide parameters for the strategic planning of field experiences as now mandated by accrediting bodies in teacher education. We propose three questions that can guide curriculum architects as they design early field experiences for prospective teachers:

1. *To the degree that conditions in contemporary schools may be quite different from what prospective teachers experienced themselves as young students, how much of a "dose of reality" should the field experience provide?*

2. *To the degree that many public schools afford prospective teachers the opportunity to work with children from circumstances different from those in which they grew up (culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), what sorts of measures will be incorporated into the field experience to assist participants in reflecting on their attitudes about and commitment to working in such diverse environments?*

3. *Similarly, to the degree that many public schools afford prospective teachers the opportunity to work with children with limited English proficiency, what sorts of measures will be incorporated into the field experience to*

assist participants in reflecting on their attitudes about working in such language environments? And what measures might be considered curriculum-wide, such as requirements that prospective teachers become more familiar with key constructs pertaining to second language acquisition and instruction, if not with a second language, themselves?

Finally, we close with the following quote from one of our participants that affirms how important and transformative early field experiences can be:

> At first, I had a difficult time in the classroom. I almost decided to change my mind about teaching. One day, while working with two students I saw them light up when they understood the concepts. It made my day. I also taught an origami lesson to the class. They all sent me thank you notes. One in particular said "Thanks for helping me when I didn't know what to do." That was when I knew I was supposed to continue on my career path.

As reflected in this study, early field experiences can reinforce preservice teachers' desire to teach, encourage their reflection about career goals and commitment, recruit students to the field of teaching, promote cultural understandings, open students' eyes to the challenges of the classroom, and inspire their dedication to serve children. But these positive outcomes depend on the thoughtful design of these field experiences, including attention to placement type, purpose, and desired outcomes. Mezirow writes "...in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education" (1997, p.5). Results from this study confirm that early field experiences can provide fodder for this transformative change, as students' beliefs, values and expectations are challenged by what they see and do in the classroom. Researchers and teacher educators must continue their efforts to understand how best to provide these transformative experiences that are so critical to the preparation of the teachers of tomorrow.

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