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Multicultural Teacher Education: Why Teachers Say It Matters in Preparing Them for English Language Learners

Numerous studies show that mainstream classroom teachers still remain inadequately prepared to teach diverse students and lack the knowledge base and skills to teach English language learners (ELLs). This has profound implications, particularly in the Southeast, where the rate of school-aged Latino immigrants has grown significantly. Thus, this study examined the perceived effectiveness of teacher-training programs and professional-development experiences of 157 content-area teachers in North and South Carolina. Specifically, researchers analyzed self-report questionnaire data from teachers to explore the role of academic course work, professional development, and multicultural experiences in preparing teachers to work with ELLs and other diverse learners. Overall, teachers overwhelmingly reported feeling underprepared to work with this population until they sought more substantive academic training and professional-development experiences. Teachers had diverse experiences but reported that the quality of courses and depth of multicultural experiences had an impact on their attitudes and classroom practices.

Dare the school build a new social order? (George S. Counts, 1932)

Writing on the heels of an era of unprecedented immigration to the US nearly a century ago, sociologist George S. Counts asks us to consider the potential of schools to reverse social inequalities, such as poverty that resulted from rapid population growth in urban centers across the country. In the midst of a fourth wave of immigration (Rong & Preissle, 2009), schools, and

teachers in particular, are asked to serve an increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse student body, a significant proportion of which is low income (Nieto, 2004ab). According to data that have been disaggregated on the national level, one of the most significant problems yet to be effectively addressed by public schools is class, ethnic, language, and racial disparities in student performances on end-of-grade and end-of-course-tests, as well as low high school and college graduation rates (Lorence, Dworkin, Lawrence, Toenjes, & Hill, 2002; McMillian, 1999; Valenzuela, 2002ab). These test scores are often portrayed in light of how US students fare when compared to their peers in other countries, and how students compare by race and by language proficiency. Considerably less emphasis, however, is placed on the role of teachers and of teacher-education programs in preparing teachers to work with diverse immigrant student populations.

The limited existing data on the effectiveness of teacher-education programs illustrate that teachers are underprepared to work with English language learners (ELLs) (Hollins & Torres-Guzman, 2005; Hones, 2002; Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2001). In contrast, there is evidence to suggest that teachers who have been engaged in programs with more critical models of multicultural education are more receptive and responsive to diverse students who may need additional academic support (Ball, 2009).

Our research study examines the perceptions of the teachers working with ELLs in North and South Carolina and the role that multicultural education through course work, professional, and personal experiences affects their effectiveness in teaching diverse learners. Using critical multicultural pedagogy as an analytical lens, we argue that a fundamental reason for this lack of culturally congruent pedagogical practices (Gay, 2000) in the classroom is the failure of teacher-education programs to prepare teachers for classrooms that reflect racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student populations. We offer unique perspectives on the influence of demographic change on teacher-education programs by examining the perspectives of teachers in two states that have experienced tremendous growth in their immigrant populations in the last two decades. More specifically, we aim to address the following questions: What are the efficacy beliefs of teachers enrolled in a graduate-level English as a second language (ESL) add-on licensure program in working with English language learners? What components of multicultural teacher education do these teachers believe are most effective in helping them work with populations that are culturally and linguistically diverse? As the inquiry reveals, while teacher-education students value multi-

cultural education course work, they have found such course work to be absent or merely cursory in the traditional undergraduate teacher-preparation programs.

A Changing Country, Changing Classrooms

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2003), students identified as “minority” made up more than 50% of 50 of the largest school districts in the country. Additionally, the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction, formerly the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE, 2000), reported that there were 4.5 million students who had limited English proficiency. The overall K-12 population continues to grow at a steady rate in the US while the growth in the population of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) has increased significantly. Interestingly, the areas of the highest growth have been in nontraditional destination areas that include the southeastern, southwestern, and northwestern US (Pandya, McHugh, & Batalova, 2011). The majority of LEP students are Spanish speaking. Recent trends show that between 2000 and 2020, the number of second-generation Latinos defined as those who are US citizens by birth with at least one foreign-born parent in US schools will double (Suro & Passel, 2003).

Teachers who once taught relatively homogeneous populations are now challenged to meet the needs of students who are not only culturally but also linguistically diverse (Walker, Shafer, & Liams, 2004). Despite the growing diversity of schools, most students are taught by white classroom teachers of European descent (Lewis, 2006) in monolingual classrooms in which the language of instruction is English (Nieto, 2004a; Cummins, 2000). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the teaching force is predominantly white. Specifically, white teachers make up 84%, while African American teachers make up 8%, with Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native constituting less than 8% in total (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Sleeter (1995a, 2011) argues for the increasing need to diversify the teaching force. He asserts that

rather than re-working desegregated schools around principles of equity and multiculturalism, generally White educators maintained institutionalized schooling processes that continued to benefit Whites more than communities of color. The production of teachers today reflects continued institutionalized White privilege. (p. 4)

Data collected from *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers* reported that while most teachers felt either “moderately” or “somewhat” well prepared in the classroom, 17% of teachers did not feel at all prepared to address the needs of culturally diverse students with limited English proficiency (Lewis, 1999; NCES, 2002). Even after more than a decade of research that has called for more focus on teacher education of ELLs, teachers continue to remain ill prepared to teach this population of students (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Goodwin, 2002). This concern regarding underpreparation is particularly true for states in the US Southeast (Pandya, McHugh, & Batalova, 2011; Scott, 2008).

The “New” Southeast

North and South Carolina have quickly become one of the nation’s leading new regions of immigrant resettlement. North Carolina’s immigrant population doubled between 2000 and 2004, and its Hispanic immigrant population quadrupled between 1990 and 2002 (Grieco, 2004). South Carolina’s foreign-born population grew by 77% between 2000 and 2009. The challenges presented by this rapid demographic transformation are particularly visible in North and South Carolina’s public schools. North Carolina’s limited English-proficient (LEP) population nearly doubled between 2002 and 2007 (from 60,149 to 112,532 students) (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010). South Carolina’s LEP student population grew by 522% between 1993 and 2003 (Batalova, 2006). In the face of these demographic changes, statistics show that teachers in many cases are ill prepared to work with LEP populations. The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (SECTQ) published a policy brief showing that only 6% of teachers who taught LEP students in their classrooms in the Southeast received eight or more hours of training for working with these students, even though 29% had LEP students in their classrooms. When one examines the data on teacher preparation for states such as North Carolina, the numbers are even more discouraging. In this state 47% of the teachers reported teaching LEP students in their classrooms with only 6% having received training related to working with this population (Berry, Luczak, & Norton, 2003).

Review of the Literature

As our analytic backdrop to the present study, we draw on aspects of multicultural pedagogic frameworks as well as literature on “21st Century Learning” to inform our interpretations of data. These bodies of literature draw inspiration from critical theory and strive to bring about transformation in society, to eliminate power structures

that maintain disparities across social class, race, gender, and language proficiency. They transcend traditional one-dimensional teaching and curricular approaches and instead emphasize social justice through collaborative and reflective engagement as well as global mindedness.

Multicultural Pedagogy

Regardless of how well intended teachers may be in their professional roles, it must be recognized that the majority come to the classroom with an alarmingly limited understanding of teaching and learning with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, & Dalhouse, 2009). Teachers' attitudes and dispositions also vary toward working with ELLs both in the classroom as in-service teachers and in clinical settings as preservice teachers (Gomez, Strage, Knutson-Miller, & Garcia-Nevarez, 2009). Culturally responsive teaching through the transformation of affective professional attitudes and dispositions is absolutely essential for teaching and learning within the second language acquisition process (Calderón, 2011; Grant & Wong, 2003; Huber-Warring & Warring, 2006).

While recent studies have shown that institutes of higher education are beginning to train teacher educators to better meet the needs of diverse learners and adopt more critical practices (Costa, McPhail, Smith, & Brisk, 2005; Gay, 2010), the long-term effects of this training are still unclear. Still, most programs have not recognized the importance of more critical approaches and the importance of culturally responsive teaching within the course work as well as field-experience opportunities (Colbert, 2010; De Pry & Cheesman, 2010; Sleeter, 2011). Even with more critical training, many teacher educators espouse cultural homogeneity or reified versions of difference in their teacher-education frameworks (Nieto, 2004a). In less frequent cases teacher educators embrace or adopt a critical approach in the classroom. To do so would mean that preservice teachers would need to change themselves and the ways in which they teach (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Prior studies have shown that change in faculty beliefs as related to issues of diversity, for example, must occur on a personal level (Olafson, Giorgis, & Quinn, 2007), and that if change is to take place, it requires time (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Nevárez, Sanford, & Parker, 1997) and commitment even in the face of resistance. Similarly, the importance of culturally responsive teaching within teacher-candidate-education programs includes preservice teachers' understanding diverse students' cultural contributions in order to link awareness and thinking from global cultures to classroom culture for effective teaching and learning (Frye, Button, Kelly, & Button, 2010). As a dynamic and

changing context, the classroom cannot be examined without considering the backgrounds of the preservice teachers. This means a preservice teacher's prior exposure to these philosophies, as well as demands from the public, will either help or hinder the teacher educator's delivery of an effective multicultural teacher-education experience (Asher, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2003; LePage, Boudreau, & Maier, 2001; Sleeter, 2001).

Teacher Characteristics

Teacher-education programs have typically recruited predominantly white females in their early 20s who share profiles similar to those of beginning teachers (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). As such, many students share some common characteristics and lived experiences that do not prepare them to see the power of privilege (McIntosh, 1999), and therefore they have little exposure to prevalent power differentials (Smith, 2000) and often view diversity using cultural-deficit models with little awareness of the larger societal context (Asher, 2007; Paine, 1990; Sleeter, 2008). The literature suggests that these limited experiences affect the degree to which prospective teachers support multicultural education (Levine-Rasky, 2001; Nieto, 1996; Smith, 2000). Many practicing and preservice teachers embrace meritocracy, attribute low achievement in minority students to cultural-deficit models (Davis, 1995; Lee, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999), describe themselves as color-blind (Sleeter, 1995b), and often use this as a coping strategy for fear of and ignorance in teaching culturally diverse students (Valli, 1995). In general, the best educators of culturally diverse students have been described as those who do not easily fit the typified profile of a beginning teacher (Haberman, 1996).

Research on adequate preparation for teaching in culturally diverse settings suggests that teachers need to be exposed to a combination of multicultural course work, field experiences, modeling by successful practicing teachers (Baldwin, Buchanan & Rudisill, 2007; Ilmer, Snyder, Erbaugh, & Kurz, 1997; NCATE, 2008; Wiggins & Follo, 1999), and a long-term commitment to culturally relevant pedagogies (Bartolomé, 1994; Seidl & Friend, 2002). Wiggins and Follo (1999) contend that it is more important for educators to understand the cultural norms of the community than to learn specific skills. Similarly, Walton, Baca, and Escamilla (2002) argue that mostly homogeneous (white, female, etc.) preservice teachers in clinical settings and teacher-education programs must undergo experiences that afford them more than superficial exposure to linguistically and culturally diverse students.

In sum, our review of the literature on frameworks of multicultural pedagogy and teacher characteristics suggests that teacher-preparation programs often present preservice teachers' first exposure to questions around cultural, racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic differences in US public schools. With this in mind, our research examines teachers' perceptions of their training for working within diverse classrooms.

Methodology

Data for our study were collected through surveys, written questionnaires, and interviews. A total of 252 survey packets were mailed to teachers in North and South Carolina involved in ESL add-on licensure training programs. Completed surveys were reviewed for missing data, and surveys that could not be fully scored because of missing information were discarded and were not included in the final analysis. A total of 157 respondents completed all of the critical items on the questionnaires and were ultimately included in the study.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that only teachers who serve culturally and linguistically diverse students were included in the study. The participants recruited for this study were mainstream classroom teachers who were seeking an ESL add-on licensure in North or South Carolina. All of the teachers were mainstream classroom teachers who, at the end of the program, would be qualified to teach ESL at the K-12 levels. Within this population, teachers were at varying stages in meeting the program requirements. It should be noted that a majority of the teachers in the study were currently teaching ESL in schools while taking the course work necessary to add ESL to their existing licenses. Those who were not teaching ESL had ELLs in their classrooms.

Study participants were predominantly white and female. Ninety percent were female teachers ($n = 141$) and 10.2% were male ($n = 16$). Most of the subjects in this study (88%) self-identified as white, which is consistent with the proportion of white teachers at the national level (Berry, Luczak, & Norton, 2003). Demographic data also revealed that the teachers were not only knowledgeable of foreign languages and well traveled, but they also had more diversity training than the average teacher. More than 39% ($n = 77$) of the teachers identified themselves as bilingual or trilingual. More than 79% ($n = 119$) of the teachers had traveled outside of the US at least twice, with a majority of them reporting that they had been outside of this country more than three times.

Data Analysis

Data collected in the surveys included open-ended questions about respondents' comfort level, perceptions of, and experiences teaching racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse students and questions about overall opinions of teacher preparation for working in racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse educational settings. All responses were read and coded analytically for emergent themes, and once coded for themes, data were separated and filed accordingly (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Finally, responses were analyzed using discourse analysis (Gee, 2005), which provided a clearer picture of the respondents' opinions of personal experiences and efficacy and of their thoughts about teacher preparation for working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. Common trends within each question were identified and the frequency of those responses was used to support these findings.

Findings

Overview of Descriptive Statistics

Of the total respondents in this study, only 11% ($n = 17$) reported that they had not taken any diversity-training courses at the time the survey was completed, and only 7% ($n = 11$) had taken no courses that integrated diversity into the content. Compared to the larger teaching force, and based on the high number of courses and hours spent in professional workshops and conferences, the teachers in this study reported that they were better trained than the average classroom teacher. These results were not surprising as all of these teachers were participating in an add-on licensure program designed to provide them with the training that they needed to obtain a license to teach English as a second language.

Conference attendance was comparable to national averages in terms of the hours spent in professional training workshops for these respondents. Of the sample, 14% ($n = 24$) spent less than two hours in professional-development workshops that related to issues of diversity in the past five years and 26% ($n = 41$) reported that they attended fewer than two regional or national conferences. This finding was expected because professional-development experiences often require funding that most public school systems lack.

The findings presented below highlight teachers' mixed experiences within their initial licensure teacher-education programs and that their perceptions of efficacy derived to a large extent from hands-on experiences in the K-12 classroom or in culturally immersive experiences outside of the school context. These findings reveal ongoing tensions around what to include in and how to design course work

related to diverse learners. These tensions, in turn, reflect broader political debates over competing interests.

Perception of Multicultural Course Work

When participants were asked to reflect on how they were prepared to teach ELLs in the mainstream classroom, most indicated a lack of exposure or emphasis. One teacher stated:

ESL training in college? What training? My program didn't do anything. I think they thought we would all go teach in white suburban schools where students were all gifted. I couldn't believe how unprepared I was to teach students who didn't look like me. It was easy to do less with them because you could just blame it on their behavior or lack of motivation. I remember thinking why don't these parents care and why won't these kids get motivated?

Nearly all (88%, $n = 130$) of the respondents discussed the lack of emphasis on culturally and linguistically diverse students and the inadequacy of their teacher-training programs in preparing them to teach ELLs. When linguistic and cultural diversity were discussed, it was often done in a cursory manner. One participant said, "The one chapter of the one book that talked about ESL was skipped altogether because the professor said we didn't have time." Others commented on the absence of critical materials and in-depth discussions about such topics, as well as the complete absence of strategies for working with these students. In fact, one teacher reported, "I think I had one chapter out of one book that talked about diversity out of all of the courses I took in education at my college. It was ridiculous." While another explained that because of a lack of time, the instructor left this part out of the course: "I remember we were supposed to talk about ESL in a class but ran out of time so the professor said we could skip it." Another respondent suggested that having more instruction on specific linguistic theories such as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (see Cummins, 2000) were completely left out of the teacher-education program.

Several respondents reported that their teacher-education programs placed all minority and exceptional children and ELLs into one category, emphasizing the characteristics and needs of each. One respondent reported, "I did take a class that talked about culture, but we really focused on black kids who were disadvantaged somehow. We talked some about race, but not really anything else." This type of coverage of diversity is representative of teacher-education programs

in the South primarily because the student population has historically comprised mostly white and black children.

Teachers reported that in regular education courses, the differentiated instruction for students with special needs is sometimes the same as that suggested for ELLs. One participant explained:

I remember a class that focused on modifying instruction for diverse students. The professor lumped ESL students with the EC students and we talked about what we could do for students who were academically behind. I am not sure looking back how helpful that was when ESL students are so unique.

Teachers identified several factors that they found had been the most helpful in preparing them to teach ELLs. While teachers found staff development, in-service workshops, and conferences to be helpful, they often reported that the lack of follow-up prevented them from implementing innovations learned at these training sessions. Course work and experience working within the community and the opportunity to collaborate and engage in discussions with other teachers were the most powerful sources of preparation. Teachers also identified the courses in which the professors allowed dialogue and taught with an emphasis on diversity as most effective.

Variables Influencing Teachers' Feelings of Effectiveness

Survey results suggest that the following components influenced teachers' perception of effectiveness in working with ELLs: adequate training or education in strategies for teaching language and strategies for teaching diverse learners, teaching experience and confidence in abilities, exposure to diverse cultures and languages/ability to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, amount of support and resources available, constraints or lack of control of testing, planning time, class size, and schedule, empathy and understanding of students' needs/rapport, and relationship with students.

Prior Experiences. Respondents reported a feeling of effectiveness in working with ELLs when they were able to get to know more about the students' individual needs, customs, and culture. One teacher reported, "I feel quite effective because I am familiar with their special needs and have experience communicating with them when language is a barrier." Although language is a barrier between the teacher and ELLs, this teacher understands the specific learning needs, which makes her feel much more confident in working with these students. Similarly, another teacher explained that she believed she was becoming more effective in working with linguistically and culturally diverse

students with experience: “As I work with more students and encounter more situations, I believe my effectiveness increases because my confidence grows, I learn what works and what doesn’t work too well, and I also learn from mistakes.” Taken together, responses from these teachers suggest that the more time they are given to get to know the individual needs of students and the more opportunities they have to work with ELLs, the more their confidence grows. These revelations have implications for teacher-education programs; with more opportunities to work in classrooms with ELLs, preservice teachers might feel more prepared and comfortable working with ELLs in their own classrooms.

Structural Constraints. Teachers also felt that external factors exacerbated their feelings of ineffectiveness in teaching ELLs. Specifically, they identified constraints or lack of control over testing, planning time, class sizes, and scheduling. Teachers felt extremely challenged by extraneous and often unrealistic expectations placed on them by administrators and districts to focus on testing. One teacher claimed, “I feel inadequate, especially when all the pressures of EOG tests, CRT tests. A focus on tests and the lack of modifications we are able to make in classrooms take creative potential of learning away from students.” Likewise, another teacher commented, “How are we expected to teach these kids when all they [administrators] expect us to teach students how to take a test. Any language they learn seems to be so unauthentic and out of context.” Other factors that teachers identified in making them feel like less effective teachers of ELLs included other demands on time in teaching, adhering to the Standard Course of Study, filing, testing, paperwork related to ESL learners, meetings, and adherence to other policies imposed by administrators.

Immersion in a “Foreign” Culture. Teachers offered a variety of responses when they were asked to describe their levels of comfort in teaching ELLs. In general, teachers who felt the most comfortable or confident in working with ELLs in the mainstream classroom were those who self-identified as bilingual or had particularly powerful experiences abroad or with culturally and linguistically diverse people. Moreover, teachers described feeling comfortable because of their extensive numbers of years teaching special-needs populations or other diverse learners. One teacher reported, “I feel very comfortable through my experiences as an ESL teacher I’ve learned so much about diverse cultures.” Another replied that she was “very comfortable due to the number of years in experience. I find it a challenge and thrive teaching diverse groups.”

Speaking a Language Other Than English. Teachers who were bilingual expressed having the language ability to communicate with

students as a powerful factor in their levels of comfort. One teacher noted, “I am extremely comfortable with most of my Spanish-speaking students because of my knowledge of their language and culture.” These teachers thought that they were better able to serve the needs of the students with whom they shared a common linguistic understanding.

On the other hand, despite being able to speak two or more languages, some teachers felt extremely limited by their inability to speak in students’ first language. As one teacher explained this situation, “I have no problem with the Spanish speakers because I can communicate, but I am at a loss when it comes to my Hmong students.” Even a minor understanding of another language increased teachers’ confidence levels. One teacher wrote:

Other teachers ask me if I am fluent in some of the students’ languages because they will hear me say a Spanish word or two. I only know a few words and wish I knew Spanish. I think this would make me feel more comfortable teaching them. It wouldn’t hurt to know another language.

Several teachers reported understanding the importance of learning a language that would enable them to support their ELLs and commented that it would increase their confidence and comfort level in the classroom.

Appreciation and Respect for Diverse Learners. Overall, teachers expressed personal appreciation or enjoyment in the teaching of diverse learners. One teacher attributed her personal growth as a teacher to her students: “I seem to migrate towards those from other cultures naturally—I love the richness of cultural and racial diversity—these children have enriched my teaching experience tenfold.” One teacher said, “I am very comfortable. Instead of xenophobe, I am xenophile. I enjoy learning about the cultures of my students as much as I enjoy teaching them American culture and academic.” Personal experience with diversity was the primary factor identified when teachers were asked to describe their levels of comfort with ELLs. Several respondents explained that their levels of comfort were related to their own ethnicity or lived experiences. One teacher said: “I am very comfortable teaching students who are racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse, because of the ethnic background that I do have. I can relate with my students who are racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse.” Although not all teachers elaborated on these lived experiences, they recalled these experiences and identified them in the survey. A teacher wrote that she felt “very comfortable.”

The actual experience of teaching ELLs in the classroom and training on the use of appropriate models for instruction for these students also played a major role in the development of confidence in teachers of ELLs. An overwhelming number of teachers described how uncomfortable they were in teaching ELLs until they were given adequate preparation and resources:

I used to be terrified about having ESL students in my class. When a principal would tell me he was giving me one, I used to smile but go back to the classroom and shake my head. Now, I am somewhat more comfortable with working with diverse students because I feel that I have resources that I may use to help me teach effectively. The courses I have taken have been very helpful.

Another respondent commented on specific aspects of her ESL training that were particularly helpful in working with ELLs:

In my class, we learn how to communicate effectively together using diagrams, illustrations, nonverbal gestures and body language. Communication is of top priority instead of learning large amounts of content. I will switch from English to Spanish if I think it will help them.

Effective ELL Training Experiences. When teachers were asked to describe how effective teacher-training programs were in preparing teachers for diverse classrooms, the answers reflected a wide range from *very poor* to *very effective*. However, the overwhelming majority responded that training programs were moderately effective to poor. Teachers identified the ESL-specific education courses as the ones that provided the most help in the mainstream classrooms. One teacher said, “ESL training has been the most powerful. Learning about this diverse population really requires many semesters of study to fully understand.”

Add-on Licensure Programs and Professional Development. Practicing teachers pointed to the training they were receiving or had received in ESL add-on licensure training programs as providing the most useful teaching methods and practical teaching strategies. “ESL methods and culture courses I took were the most influential on my teaching. Provided some good strategies I can use.” These courses were taken while teachers were actually in classrooms with ELLs, which might account for their approval of the strategies.

Although some teachers identified ESL training programs as being helpful, others stated that the course work was limited and/or that

real-life experience was more effective for them. One teacher reported, "My regular Ed (K-6) program did little to prepare me for this. The 'training' came in the actual teaching/classroom experiences." Other teachers critiqued methods courses for failing to place enough emphasis on strategies, hands-on methods, and modifying content. When asked if these methods courses provided enough assistance and strategies, one teacher responded:

A lot that is taught is good in principle but in reality despite good intention all modifications are not possible due to time and resource constraints. Along with highlighting problems and unique needs of these students, effective strategies to deal with them should also be taught.

Another teacher maintained that "experience, empathy, openness, flexibility and adaptability are all key factors in how effective teachers will be in a diverse classroom."

Self-Selected Personal and Academic Experiences. Participants were also asked to describe the most effective ways to prepare teachers in teaching ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Their responses overwhelmingly showed that adequate teacher training must include a combination of personal and academic experiences.

Most of the participants indicated that travel experiences were and could be particularly powerful in changing how one views others. One teacher said, "I would like to travel more to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures, and to get a better sense of how these students and their families feel when they are totally immersed in the American culture." Another explained:

I wish I had the resources to go to Mexico to learn about the country so many of my students are from. It would be such a rich experience to get firsthand knowledge about the way they live their lives there.

One teacher went so far as to suggest that

Travel needs to be mandated for all college students. Travel abroad literally changed my life and how I see the world. Everyone needs to learn how it feels not to be able to communicate even your basic needs in a foreign country. It teaches you not to be so arrogant.

Teachers participating in the survey also described a desire to learn a foreign language. "Personally I would like to know more phrases from

other languages so that I can make the linguistic link with the students and their own backgrounds.”

Development of Community. Teachers also identified the need to have experiences with diverse students in school and in the community. Furthermore, teachers wanted the opportunity to become more familiar with the learning needs of ELLs. More specifically, one teacher noted that “most importantly adequate time to get to know the students and time to develop strategies appropriate to their needs” was a necessity. In essence, as in many other aspects of teaching, becoming more involved in the lives of students and within the community enables the teacher to gain valuable experience that increases overall feelings of effectiveness and preparedness.

In addition to understanding the need for learning more about the communities in which the students live, teachers also indicated that there is a great need for administrators and teachers to form a supportive community to support ELLs. Teachers suggested their students would benefit from a schoolwide plan and extra support staff to deal with needs such as translations or conferences with parents. Many also recognized that educating ELLs is also the responsibility of the whole school, not just the responsibility of the one teacher who might be trained: “Teachers need to stop expecting the ESL teacher to teach these kids. It should be the responsibility of all the whole school to take ownership in their success and/or failures.” Teachers also indicated that their practice would benefit from development of professional community. One teacher suggested “talking to other teachers and sharing ideas and strategies. I find it very helpful to talk to other professionals and find out about the strategies and practices that have been successful for them.” These responses suggest that teachers who participated in this survey recognize the importance of developing community with all stakeholders.

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine practicing teachers’ perceptions of their multicultural-education course work in helping them work more effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Findings indicate that teachers embraced course work that infused critical multicultural understandings throughout, as well as course work that helped them more thoroughly understand the linguistic and academic challenges of ELL students. Teachers’ sense of efficacy in working with ELLs increased as a result of such course work, as did their understanding of the transformative nature of their work. When analyzed against the contextual backdrop of the US Southeast, findings suggest several opportunities as well as persistent challenges.

Diversity in the Southeast

The educational context of North and South Carolina is marked by a disquieting history of race relations and the political, economic, and educational marginalization of African Americans. Equally troubling are newer racial tensions precipitated by the influx of immigrants to the region. Latino immigrants, the majority of whom are low income and from rural areas in Mexico and Central America, have faced particular hostility, labeled as “illegals,” backward, and unwilling to learn English or assimilate in other ways to the local context. Despite common rhetoric of inclusivity and equality in public institutions, as well as a veneer of “southern etiquette” (Goldfield, 1994) in everyday intercultural interactions, deep fissures remain that perpetuate racial, socioeconomic, and educational inequalities.

As teacher education serves as a logical space for a deeper appreciation among in-service and preservice teachers of these critical issues, it is logical that we analyze current practices in this arena. Further examination of discourse around diversity in teacher-preparation course work reveals that such course work does not always respond to broader demographic and social and cultural changes that affect education. Though North and South Carolina’s teacher-education standards require course work on diversity, it is ultimately up to teacher educators themselves to decide on which aspects of diversity to focus. And because North and South Carolina’s populations have historically reflected Caucasian and African American communities, discourse around diversity in teacher-preparation programs has naturally tended to focus on black and white race relations. Course work on diversity, whether intentionally or not, often renders new immigrant groups as invisible or problematic, and “less deserving” of attention. Thus, while attention to the lived experiences of African American students (the majority of whom are enrolled in low-performing public schools) is essential in diversity course work, equally important are the experiences of other minority groups, including ELLs. All this said, it is necessary to highlight the inherent diversity within any racial group, and within populations of students who are designated as ELLs.

The framework we suggest promotes broad understandings of multiculturalism, including elements of racial diversity, gender, socioeconomic status, language, sexuality, religion, and ability. We recognize that thorough engagement with each of these elements is all but impossible in a semester-long course. In addition, much teacher-preparation course work also relies on student participation and reflection, and students may show disinterest or discomfort with discussing certain topics. In other words, the amount of time spent on any given topic may sometimes depend upon factors outside of the instructor’s

control. For this reason, teacher-preparation programs must include course work that addresses multiculturalism in a variety of ways and across multiple semesters. For example, teacher-preparation course work in math should prepare teachers to modify instruction, to draw on aspects of students' cultures and communities, and to introduce cross-cultural variations in the teaching and learning of mathematics. In addition, we believe that teacher-preparation and development programs must advance specific course work across all content areas geared toward the learning needs of ELLs. Such course work should highlight elemental theories of second language acquisition, literacy, and acculturation. A sobering caveat in all of this is that awareness of diversity does not automatically lead to acceptance of diversity. The presence of (and requirement of) such course work in teacher-preparation/development programs, however, signifies its importance in preparing teachers who are not only skilled but also knowledgeable, aware, and engaged.

The Importance of Immersive Experiences

Given the contemporary focus on teacher accountability and the preparation of "highly qualified teachers," a striking contradiction is that many of our least prepared teachers are working in the most diverse and economically, socially, and politically marginalized communities. These teachers often have few tools to meet the learning needs of their students, and they have difficulty identifying with the challenges these students face. A critical key to preparing teachers to work in these schools are experiences within teacher-education programs that enable students to understand, and more important, internalize what it means to be "foreign," a "nonnative speaker," or unaccustomed to certain cultural codes.

Much has been written of the importance of experiential learning in teacher education (Brown & Howard, 2005). Not surprisingly, the teachers in our study suggested that experiences in which they were immersed in a new cultural, social, or linguistic setting led to greater understanding of the experiences of their ELL students. Being able to empathize with their students on a personal level led them to feel more effective in the classroom. Because many of the teachers in diverse classrooms have linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds that are different from those of their students, it is important that teacher-education programs create opportunities for students to experience the vulnerability and marginalization that many ELLs face in US classrooms. It also means being able draw on those experiences of discomfort to create and implement pedagogy that recognizes and taps into the resources students bring with them to school.

Teacher-education programs must include opportunities for students to be immersed in new and unfamiliar environments, to challenge preexisting beliefs and assumptions, to feel and own discomfort, and to apply socially transformative pedagogic approaches. Such opportunities include study-abroad components, course work that necessitates community involvement (e.g., attending a community festival, church, or teaching adult ESL classes), and ethnographic fieldwork. Practicing content-area teachers might benefit from observing ESL classes to gain a better understanding of how to work with ELLs and how to collaborate with ESL teachers. Site-based course work for preservice teachers can have a particular impact, as it allows students to contextualize and reflect on knowledge gained. Practicum hours for course work allow students to immediately apply and refine ideas and skills in a hands-on manner. Problem-posing and consciousness-raising (Freire, 1970) assignments such as self-reflective journaling on challenges and successes in teaching and learning can be particularly beneficial in helping students realize the impact of their work as well as how they themselves may have changed through the process. On a policy front, this research can push university administrators and political leaders to understand the importance of multicultural teacher education in teacher preparation. As Darling-Hammond and Bullmaster (1998) argue, "Regulations do not transform schools. Only [well-trained] teachers can do that" (p. 1072).

Implications for ESL professionals

The relevance for this study in the ESL profession is based on myriad factors. A poignant and current emergence from the study's outcomes solidifies the need for teacher-preparation programs to address the continued notion that alarmingly high numbers of teachers, even recent graduates of teacher-preparation programs, truly feel ill equipped to fully address the cultural, linguistic, and therefore academic needs of diverse populations of students. Moreover, within these diverse classrooms in North and South Carolina, even broader pedagogical challenges are posed because of the extreme variance within the ELL student population, compounded by numerous and somewhat dissimilar programmatic structures. Therefore, ESL teachers in this region are consistently asked to serve as professional consultants regarding language learning with colleagues, administrators, and other key stakeholders in the ELL student-education process. The study reveals illuminating details from content-area classroom teachers that truly glean clarification for those ESL professionals serving as educational consultants, therefore facilitating effective, pertinent,

and comprehensive consultative services. Finally, in the era of the Common Core State Standards and the truly heightened awareness of academic language acquisition, the researchers also contend that the revealing details from the study's participants help clarify how educators can continue to examine the nuances of language learning across content areas and grade levels.

For the ESL professional, it is important to reflect on one's own training experiences and compare them with how educators are being prepared in different regions across the US. We believe that a critical key to achieving a bridge between school and society's vision lies in teacher-preparation and development programs that engage students in deep and critical understanding of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. In a region of the country experiencing significant demographic change, teacher-education programs must prepare teachers to be transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988) to solve new and unfamiliar problems by drawing on acquired knowledge to reinvent practices.

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