

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 264

SP 040 556

AUTHOR Jones, Toni Griego
TITLE Preparing All Teachers for Linguistic Diversity in K-12 Schools.
PUB DATE 2002-02-01
NOTE 40p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (54th, New York, NY, February 23-26, 2002).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Higher Education; Language Minorities; Minority Group Children; Native Language Instruction; Preservice Teacher Education; *Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning; Student Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This study assessed a range of pre-service teachers' beliefs about second language learning and teaching language to minority students. A group of 91 beginning pre-service teachers completed a survey that asked them to rate their agreement with 16 statements about non-English speakers and second language learners. The statements reflected key language acquisition principles drawn from research and practice in the fields of bilingual education and English as a Second Language (ESL). Data analysis indicate that respondents generally agreed with language acquisition principles that are widely accepted as core to bilingual education and ESL. The strongest agreement was with statements about the importance of developing a child's native language. The strongest positive correlation was between agreement with accepted language acquisition principles and pre-service teacher proficiency in a second language and with coursework in bilingual education. A significant percentage of all student teachers claimed some prior experience working with non-English speaking children, mostly through classroom observations in public schools, volunteer work in youth programs outside the classroom, and one-on-one tutoring. Most respondents did not intend to teach in bilingual or ESL classrooms. (Contains 34 references.) (SM)

Preparing All Teachers for Linguistic Diversity in K-12 Schools

Toni Griego Jones

2002

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Preparing All Teachers for Linguistic Diversity in K-12 Schools

by Toni Griego Jones
University of Arizona

Statement of the Problem. Most teacher preparation programs do not address the knowledge base or understandings that all preservice teachers need in order to teach second language learners. Only teacher candidates in programs specifically designed for prospective Bilingual and ESL teachers receive training in teaching English as a Second Language and meeting needs of children from non-English home backgrounds. However, due to the changing demographics of student populations and the relatively small numbers of children actually in Bilingual or ESL programs in public schools, all teachers need to be prepared for children from non-English home backgrounds. In a report on the preparation and qualifications of public school teachers, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 54 % of teachers taught limited English proficient students, but only 20% felt very well prepared and 17% did not feel at all prepared to address needs of students who lack proficiency in English (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Without diminishing the need for Bilingual and ESL teachers, the author believes that the practice of *only* preparing Bilingual and ESL teachers for the responsibility of educating children from non-English backgrounds needs to change. Colleges of Education need to be held accountable for preparing all teachers for the linguistic reality of K-12 public schools.

Limited English proficient students are the fastest growing student populations in public schools and account for almost 8% of the total school population in the United States. ESL learners have always been in urban districts, and increasingly, they are enrolling in rural and suburban districts in every part of the country. In some districts of the West, Southwest, East Coast, and Midwest they even constitute majority percentages of school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Traditionally, district personnel and teacher educators have assumed that children from other language backgrounds are the sole responsibility of Bilingual and English as a Second Language Programs - at least until they learn a minimum level of English and are “exited” from Bilingual/ESL programs and placed in “mainstream” English only classrooms where teachers generally do not have the knowledge or skills to continue the education of ESL learners. Research on second language acquisition overwhelmingly demonstrates that it takes years for most children to become academically proficient in a second language (Collier, 1995). Unless children are able to complete their entire education in a bilingual program (and very few do), ESL learners at some stage and to varying degrees are in non-bilingual classrooms. The reality is that “regular” monolingual teachers are increasingly responsible for second language learners. This is particularly true in states like California and Arizona where voters have approved Propositions that drastically cut back bilingual programs. Estimates are that more than half of children identified as limited English proficient students in public schools are actually in classrooms that are not staffed by Bilingual or ESL teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

Since the late eighties, I have been engaged in teacher preparation in large state Universities with bilingual teacher certification programs as well as “regular” elementary and secondary programs. I’ve had the good fortune of working with preservice teachers in both bilingual (Spanish/English) and monolingual (English) programs, and although we were basically preparing all teacher candidates for positions in the same public schools, it often felt that I was wading in two distinct streams because of the radically different expectations and views of the bilingual certification and regular certification preservice students. Granted that the preservice teachers were preparing to teach in different programs within the public schools, but their visions

of the children they would eventually teach were so dissimilar that it seemed we were preparing teachers for children in different countries. The teacher candidates in bilingual certification were focused exclusively on children who, for the most part, were Spanish speakers and those in non-bilingual programs envisioned their children to be monolingual English speakers. The “regular” preservice teachers in fact, rarely thought about the possibility that they would be expected to teach children from culturally diverse backgrounds, even less those with different languages. Having spent many years as a classroom teacher in bilingual and regular classrooms in public schools, I knew that both groups’ expectations reflected some reality, but I also knew that both groups were in for some surprises. Those who were headed for bilingual classrooms probably would teach mostly Spanish (or some other language) dominant children, but because of the need to desegregate schools and the increasing popularity of dual language schools, they would likely teach monolingual English speakers as well. The monolingual teacher candidates on the other hand, were very likely to have non-English speaking children in their classrooms although they didn’t anticipate it.

Further, my monolingual students, like most teacher candidates, believed that they would someday teach in schools like those they attended. Like most preservice teachers, these monolingual students were primarily White, middle class, mostly females who had received a very segregated education and had little personal experience with children learning English as a Second Language. When I talked about teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, I experienced some resistance in my classes, sometimes open, sometimes subtle, from my monolingual preservice teachers. While we debated this eventuality in my education foundations courses, students could still keep the idea of teaching children who didn’t speak

English at arm's length. However, the reality of the K-12 student demographics hit when they went out to do supervised field work, particularly student teaching.

Preservice teachers' disbelief about teaching children from non-English backgrounds was something I encountered wherever I taught as I moved from one part of the country to another. The disbelief and sometimes intimidating encounters between monolingual preservice teachers and English as a Second Language learners seemed to be happening across the country. In the Midwest, I remember supervising elementary student teachers who were studying for bilingual certification and others who were in "regular" non-bilingual programs. Those who intended to be bilingual teachers were very focused on learning about second language acquisition and how they could meet the needs of second language learners. The non-bilingual teacher candidates, on the other hand, did not know about second language learners, nor did they assume they would someday have responsibility for teaching them.

Everyone's Responsibility. After the *Lau v. Nichols* court ruling in 1974 and subsequent federal and state legislation, more and more children were provided with Bilingual or ESL services in public schools. However, the notion that *all* English language learners (ELLs) are served by bilingual and/or ESL programs is false. The fact is that many children who are from other language backgrounds are *not* in bilingual classrooms or English as a Second Language programs. Many are in English only classrooms staffed by monolingual English speaking teachers with very little training for teaching second language learners. Estimates are that over half of the children identified as needing special language instruction, that is, those identified as limited English proficient, do not receive instruction from certified bilingual or ESL teachers (Abramson, Pritchard, & Garcia, 1993). Looked at another way, most regular classroom teachers, up to

66%, have second language learners in their classrooms (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993).

However we look at services for ELLs, the fact is that the majority of children who are in the process of learning English as a Second Language are actually in regular, mainstream, English only classrooms taught by monolingual classroom teachers, teachers who have not received any preparation for teaching English as a Second Language. This situation was exacerbated in the 1990s with the national move toward deleting or diminishing bilingual programs in states like California and Arizona. For example, the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998 in California, (the state with the largest percentage of non-English speaking students at 1.5 million), there are even more “limited English proficient” students in non-bilingual classrooms with teachers who have not been trained or oriented toward responsibility for English language learners (Mora, 2000). According to Mora, one year after the passage of the Proposition, the percentage of students receiving instruction in bilingual classrooms fell from 30% to 12% (Ibid.). Children who had previously been in bilingual classrooms are now in regular classrooms.

Looking at this from a program perspective, the intense political debates in the national media during the 1990s gave the impression that bilingual programs were pervasive in the country’s schools, but according to a national survey conducted by the U. S. Department of Education, the percentage of public schools that provide bilingual or ESL programs is relatively small and doesn’t reach all children identified as needing special language services. This national survey reported that approximately 33% of central city schools had bilingual and/or ESL programs, 22% of urban fringe or large towns, and about 12% of rural and small towns provided bilingual and/or ESL programs in 1993-94 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). This means that most of the schools in all areas did not have bilingual or ESL programs. Clearly, my

monolingual teacher candidates' assumptions that bilingual and ESL teachers would teach all the children whose first language was not English, and that *they* would not teach second language learners was false. At the end of the 1990s even schools that hadn't needed bilingual and ESL programs in the 70s and 80s began to experience the pressures of immigrant populations and subsequent demand for programs for second language learners. The result of the burgeoning language minority populations and declining number of bilingual and ESL programs at the beginning of the new millenium was that teacher educators were left scrambling to learn what it means to teach children from other language backgrounds and tryng to figure out how to prepare prospective teachers for them.

College of Education Responsibility Awareness of the need to prepare *all* preservice and inservice teachers is on the rise in teacher preparation programs across the country, even though they are far from adequately addressing the need for teachers who are prepared for the cultural and linguistic diversity in schools. The two factors mentioned above in particular are putting pressure on teacher preparation programs to open up and include knowledge about teaching second language learners. First, the burgeoning population of language minority students and second, the political move to curtail bilingual programs exert pressure on teacher preparation programs to expand training beyond bilingual and ESL certification programs and educate all prospective teachers about the needs of second language learners.

Most states have standards that attempt to address diversity in teacher preparation, but only one state, California, has offered certification in the area of teaching culturally diverse students for *all* teachers. This has been in place since 1992 but only 32% of the monolingual teaching force held this cross-cultural certification at the time of the passage of Proposition 227

(Mora, 2000). Another indicator of the importance of addressing preparation for cultural and linguistic diversity is the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2001) inclusion of a Standard for Diversity among the six Standards used to review and approve teacher preparation programs. Most Colleges of Education have a required multicultural course in their teacher preparation programs, but the country still has a long way to go in preparing all teachers for teaching linguistically diverse student populations.

According to many who study cultural diversity, the challenge for Colleges of Education to prepare the predominantly White middle-class preservice teachers with limited or no experience with children from racial/ethnic, cultural, and social class backgrounds different from their own is growing more urgent by the day (Banks, 1991; Nieto, 1997; Sleeter, 2001). Learning about cultural differences can be difficult enough even when teachers and students speak the same language. Add to that the fact that teachers need to learn how to deal with *language* differences, with not speaking or understanding the same communication code of their students. Understanding what it means to communicate with children in an entirely different language takes cultural sensitivity to a new level.

Colleges of Education need to take up the challenge of preparing prospective teachers for linguistic diversity as it is the incoming teachers who will have to stem the tide of language minority students' failure in K-12 schools. Those who are already teaching in the nation's schools do not feel prepared for limited English proficient students and their district inservice training does not appear to be addressing their professional development needs. According to a report on teacher quality analyzing results from a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, 54 % of teachers report they teach limited English proficient students, but relatively few

of these teachers (only 20 percent) felt very well prepared to teach their children (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).

What Educators Need to Know. Where do teacher preparation programs start? What should be included in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers for teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) can be sorted into two categories - 1) what they need to know about second language learning and learners and 2) what preservice teachers need to know and understand about themselves. There is a research based body of knowledge that is accepted as good practice in teaching English language learners (August & Hakuta, 1997; Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Cummins, 1999; Krashen, 1999; Wong-Fillmore & Valadez, 1986). These practices are based on the assumption that there is an interdependent relationship between language development and cognitive development (Mora, 2000). Some key concepts for second language acquisition are: 1) proficiency in the native language enhances learning in content areas and in a second language, 2) learning a second language depends on the amount of comprehensible input in that language, 3) there is a common underlying proficiency for both language systems so that one supports the other in learning content, and 4) there are differences in the levels of proficiency needed to succeed at various tasks, from interpersonal communications to working at academic subjects. In spite of the knowledge base, though, some teacher educators contend that teachers do not receive enough training in teacher preparation programs to understand the structure, purposes, and patterns of language to teach all children in their native language, much less in a second language learners (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). They point out that when speakers of languages other than English are not learning efficiently in bilingual or non-bilingual classrooms, they are not being *taught* effectively.

Wong-Fillmore & Snow also believe there is a real need to ensure that knowledge about language teaching and learning is widely shared with policy makers as well as teachers (Ibid.). Events such as the passage of Proposition 227 in California and Proposition 203 in Arizona revealed a “dismaying lack of understanding about the facts of second language learning and the nature of bilingual education” (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 10). I would add that the knowledge base on second language acquisition theory and effective practices for second language learning is something that principals, central administrators, and all who are responsible for implementing policy decisions should know and utilize. Research on change and program implementation indicates that *all* relevant personnel must take ownership for a new orientation or practice in order for the change to take place (Griego Jones, 1995). In this case, everyone in the key implementation positions in districts as well as all classroom teachers must take ownership for effectively educating language minority students.

Most importantly, all of what we know about teaching language minority students must be used in preparing new, incoming educators, particularly teachers, as they are the front line for the children. To do this, we need to understand what preservice teachers already know and believe about second language learners and learning. As extensive as it is, the body of knowledge about effective practices for second language learners is useless if it doesn't connect with the preservice teacher's beliefs about second language learning. There has to be some readiness within the preservice teachers themselves to receive the knowledge and do something with it. Therefore, in order to begin preparing teachers for the linguistic diversity found in today's schools, it is important to know what preservice teachers believe about goals for the schooling of children from non-English backgrounds, what they believe about the process of learning a second language, and

how they feel about languages other than English being used for instruction. The rest of this chapter reports on selected findings from a study that assessed a range of preservice teachers' beliefs about second language learning and teaching language minority students. The findings reported here are about how preservice teacher beliefs related to prior experiences working with language minority students.

Preservice Teachers' Readiness for Second Language Learners

Theoretical Framework/Literature Review. Within the larger context of preservice teacher preparation, this paper addresses the readiness of prospective teachers to accept the responsibility of teaching children from non-English home backgrounds, specifically by exploring the role and importance of beliefs about second language acquisition and second language learners in the preparation of preservice teachers. What do preservice teachers know about working with children who are learning English as a Second Language? Equally important, what do they **believe** is important in working with second language learners? These questions, and the study reported here, are nested within the larger framework of research on why beliefs are important in preservice teacher education in general, and specifically, why beliefs are important in learning to teach linguistically diverse students. Richardson (1996) summarizes the literature on the importance and function of beliefs in teacher education by stating that 1) beliefs strongly influence what and how preservice teachers learn and 2) beliefs should be the focus of change in the process of educating teachers. Theories that view learning as an active, constructive process acknowledge that existing knowledge and beliefs strongly influence individuals as they approach a learning task (Fang, 1996; Nesper, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Resnick, 1989). Constructivist theory also helps to understand the importance of beliefs in learning to teach. For example, when students enter preservice teacher education programs, they bring beliefs about teaching, learning, and subject matter they have acquired during many years of being students (Brookhart &

Freeman, 1992). These existing beliefs determine what they build upon, what they can accept or reject in teacher education. Further, in the area of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, research indicates that the majority of preservice teachers have had very little contact with minorities prior to entering teacher education programs (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). They have not experienced cultures and languages other than their own and this has resulted in lack of knowledge and parochial beliefs about minority children. Gomez and Tabachnick (1992) even suggest that views of prospective teachers could actually limit minority children's opportunities to benefit from schooling because of the parochialism inherent in their beliefs. Finally, there is a small but growing body of research showing the effectiveness of identifying and modifying preservice teachers' beliefs about minority children as part of teacher preparation (Baca, 1989; Cabello & Davis-Burstein, 1995; Pajares, 1993). Teacher educators need to identify preservice teachers' beliefs in order to prepare them for the linguistic mix in K-12 classrooms. It is not enough that prospective teachers learn about pedagogy and content areas, if their beliefs affect their learning.

Current controversy over bilingual programs also suggests it is important to understand what preservice teachers believe about children from non-English backgrounds and how they feel about them. There are few topics that can trigger conflict within our society more than language usage in public education (Crawford, 1992; Reagan, 1997). Assuming that preservice teachers reflect the larger society, they too can be expected to hold beliefs, opinions, and judgements about languages used in schools that will influence what they learn in their teacher education programs. Research then, suggests that in order to begin preparing teachers for the linguistic diversity found in today's classrooms, it is important to know what teacher candidates believe about goals for the schooling of children from non-English backgrounds, what they believe about the process of learning a second language, and how they feel about languages other than English being used for instruction.

Where beliefs come from. To understand why preservice teachers are not all prepared to understand needs of English language learners (ELLS), we need to review where teacher candidates' beliefs come from. For most subject areas, preservice teachers have some prior experience. They have all taken mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts, but when it comes to second language learning, the majority of teacher candidates have very little experience to draw upon. For most, the closest experience they have had to learning a second language will have been studying a foreign language in high school. Most preservice teachers do not have proficiency in more than one language because they come from monolingual homes and unfortunately, American students do not develop high levels of proficiency in foreign languages when they study them in school. There is some hope, however, that may change in the 2000s as foreign languages are now recognized as part of the core curriculum in *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and foreign language instruction is more prevalent now in elementary schools. Foreign language instruction increased by nearly 10 percent in elementary schools and remained stable at the secondary level between 1987 and 1997 (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2001) so there may be reason to expect that more prospective teachers will have more exposure to languages other than English. Coincidentally, the most popular language to study in elementary and secondary schools is Spanish (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2001) and this is a direct match with the most common home language other than English in U. S. K-12 public schools. Currently, most Colleges of Education do not require foreign language study, so prospective teachers do not have the opportunity to learn a second language as part of teacher preparation and have had no reason to perceive second language learning as part of teacher preparation programs.

The lack of experience with learning a second language is an important consideration in preparing prospective teachers for today's schools because researchers of teacher knowledge, beliefs, and behavior believe that preservice teachers' own schooling experience is one of the most powerful predictors of how they themselves will teach (Richardson, 1996). Since prospective teachers get their knowledge and their beliefs about teaching from their own schooling experience as well as from teacher preparation programs, they can hardly be expected to understand cultural diversity and its implications for teaching from their own experience. If they have not experienced learning a second language themselves or if they have not witnessed the process in others, what do they have to build upon in their teacher preparation programs?

Even if teacher candidates don't know a second language, they could learn about cultural differences in using language and develop some understanding of the needs of second language learners if they at least had opportunities to learn about cultural backgrounds other than their own. However, significantly, for the preparation of teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students, research indicates that the majority of White preservice teachers have had very little contact with minorities prior to entering teacher education programs (Sleeter, 2001; Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). They have not generally experienced cultures and languages other than their own and this has resulted in lack of knowledge and parochial beliefs about minority children. Gomez and Tabachnick (1992) even suggest that views of prospective teachers could actually limit minority children's opportunities to benefit from schooling because of the parochialism inherent in preservice teachers' beliefs.

Cultural match or mismatch. When educators first became concerned about the condition of schooling for minority children, one of the first "solutions" to the problem was to find more

teachers like the students themselves. In the 80s much of the literature in teacher education implied that the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations would be met by recruiting more racial and ethnic minorities into teaching. Recruitment and retention of minorities (and of bilingual candidates) was given as a solution to the problem of ineffective schooling for minority children and in fact, some gains were made after the Civil Rights Movement in recruiting underrepresented minorities into teaching. Those gains are reversing though, and the population of preservice teachers is expected to be even more homogeneous in the early 2000s (Gay, 2000).

Although more teachers from minority backgrounds and teachers with bilingual skills are absolutely needed in the profession, they alone cannot provide for the education of the massive numbers of language minority children. Further, we can't make the assumption that all minority teachers automatically understand the educational needs of minority children, particularly the linguistic needs. According to research, whether prospective teachers come from majority or minority backgrounds, most are from monocultural backgrounds and thus wouldn't have any personal experiences to draw upon for *cross-cultural* understanding (Aaronshohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999). Because of the segregated nature of public schools, most preservice students of any racial and ethnic background probably attended schools with others of their own race and ethnicity and do not have a great deal of experience with people from another group (Gay, 2000). If prospective teachers don't have opportunities to learn about the variety of cultural differences in this country, they are even at a greater disadvantage when it comes to understanding what it means to learn a second language. Would prior contact with second language learners inform their beliefs about second language learning? Would the type of contact make a difference? These are some of the questions explored in the study reported here.

Study of Preservice Teachers' Beliefs About Second Language Learning

Study & Data Collection. The sample for this study was a group of 91 preservice teachers beginning their teacher preparation program at a large university where the majority of graduates teach in schools with high percentages of Spanish speakers and Native Americans. A survey was given early in the fall of 1996 to students taking their Educational Foundations course, one of the first education courses in the professional sequence. Students were asked to voluntarily complete a two page Likert scale questionnaire that asked them to rate their agreement on a scale of 1-5 (strongly agree to strongly disagree) with 16 statements related to non-English speakers and learning a second language. The statements reflected key language acquisition principles drawn from research and practice in the fields of Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language. They were asked if they had had any kind of prior experiences working with non-English speaking children and to describe any such experiences.

Data Analysis. Responses were analyzed to determine alignment with statements and were clustered into the following categories of beliefs: 1) beliefs about the importance of maintaining & developing a child's non-English native language at school and home, and 2) about how a first and second language relate to each other in classroom contexts. Data were analyzed using SPSS to determine relationships between agree/disagree responses and variables such as preservice teacher proficiency in a second language, race/ethnicity, gender, prior experience with non-English speakers, and coursework dealing with bilingualism, Bilingual Education, and/or ESL. Information about their teacher preparation program to date, including coursework and prior experiences with non-English speakers, was also compared to agree/disagree responses to statements.

Findings. Respondents generally were in agreement with language acquisition principles that are widely accepted as core to bilingual education and ESL although there was a wider range on the "how to" statements than on the goal related statements. One important finding was that the strongest

agreement was with statements about the importance of developing a child's native language. A majority (82%) of all preservice respondents strongly agreed that it was important for language minority students to maintain and develop their native language as well as to learn English. A complete analysis of agreement/disagreement with statements is included in the body of this paper as are correlations between variables and clusters of variables. The strongest positive correlations were between agreement with accepted language acquisition principles and preservice teacher proficiency in a second language and with coursework in bilingual education. Comparisons between elementary and secondary students, male and female, bilingual education majors and "regular" students, are all explained in detail in the paper.

A significant percentage of all students (77%) claimed some prior experience working with non-English speaking children, mostly through classroom observations in public schools, volunteer youth programs and tutoring. This was high because applicants to the College of Education were required to submit documented experience in educational settings as part of the admissions process. This experience variable however, did not have a consistent correlation with alignment with accepted language acquisition principles. This suggests that preservice teachers need more than unsupervised experience with language minority children to make sense out of the children's situation. Descriptions of prior experiences with ESL learners also indicated misunderstandings about the time it takes to become proficient and underestimating the difficulty and depth of the task of learning a second language.

The statements they were asked to react to reflected language acquisition principles that are commonly accepted in the fields of Bilingual Education and ESL or they were commonly held beliefs by the general public. The cornerstone of bilingual education is the development of and the use of a child's native language in instruction (Krashen & Biber, 1988) so some statements

were about the importance of developing a child's native language and using the native language for classroom instruction. Developing a child's native language, whatever it is, helps in cognitive development and the development of literacy. Research strongly supports the value of not only maintaining, but developing the first language of a child. Those children who are literate in their native language have a great advantage in learning a second (Hakuta, 1986; Krashen, 1993). All research on biliteracy demonstrates the importance of developing a child's main line of communication for literacy and for teaching the entire curriculum.

Other statements addressed the relationship between first and second languages. An accepted tenet of bilingual education is that it is not only possible for children to grow up bilingual and biliterate, but the interplay of two languages actually helps each language to develop. There was a time in the seventies when researchers worried that the first language sometimes interfered with learning a second. Since then, however, more researchers believe that knowing the rules and structure of one language helps children understand the purpose and structure of a second, and that, in fact, children who are bilingual have a cognitive advantage in learning all aspects of the curriculum (Hakuta, 1986). Research also tells us that spending more time in English only environments does not necessarily result in learning more English (Hakuta, 1986; Krashen, 1993; Cummins, 1999).

All statements were grounded in language acquisition research, but they also reflected assumptions commonly held by the public about second language learning. The assumption that using two languages is confusing to children or that spending more time in English automatically results in learning more English are pervasive in media debates about bilingual education. For most citizens of the U. S., the media is a primary source of their "information" about second

language learning, bilingualism, and bilingual education. Statements in the survey were clustered into the following categories: Belief statements about the 1) importance of maintaining and developing native language, 2) importance of using native language for instruction in school, and 3) statements about the relationship between L1 and L2 in classroom settings.

When the majority of students agreed or disagreed with statements supported by research, they were considered to be in alignment with the statements accepted in the field of Bilingual/ESL education. When preservice teachers agreed with statements that would be considered “false” in the field, the percentages were coded as misalignment (M). The largest percentages (agreed, disagreed, don’t know) were recorded in Chart 1 with DK indicating that the largest percentage response for a given statement was the category of Don’t Know.

Prior experiences. One of the more interesting findings was that a significant percentage of all students (76%) claimed some prior experience working with non-English speaking children, mostly through classroom observation in public schools, volunteer work in youth programs outside of the classroom and one to one tutoring. These experiences seemed to be telling in that they gave clues to how preservice teachers learn or might learn about how children acquire a second language. Although the sample size and make up of the students in this study make it impossible to generalize findings, the comments of preservice teachers about their experiences with L2 learners suggest that this is an area that should be researched further in preservice teacher learning.

Most of these experiences were within the few years before entering the College of Education. Analysis of descriptions of experiences indicated that the reason for the high percentage of prior experiences for on-campus students (72 of the 91) was that applicants to the

College of Education were required to submit documented experience in educational settings as part of their application. Applicants are asked to document their experiences working with children in schools or other settings. When teacher candidates apply, their experiences in schools working with teachers “count” more than volunteering in day care centers, after-school programs, or alternative programs in their applications. Consequently, pre-education majors regularly arrange to observe and volunteer in local schools or educational settings in anticipation of applying to the College of Education. The preservice teacher contact with language minority children in this sample, therefore, was much greater than in the general population of preservice teachers and made this a particularly interesting sample to study.

Only twenty-two students said they did not have prior experiences working with non-English speaking children, even though they may have had experiences with other children in schools. For those who did report some experience with children learning a second language, their prior experiences fell into the following categories:

- 1) Observation/helping in bilingual classrooms in public schools (10 students)
- 2) Observation/helping in “regular” classrooms in public schools (30 students)
- 3) Employment in school programs such as alternative programs, preschool, after-school programs, summer school (10 students)
- 4) Volunteer work in summer day camps in the U. S. and Mexico (13 students)
- 5) Tutoring ESL one-to-one in formal settings (6 students)
- 6) No prior experience (22 students)

The duration of time spent in these experiences varied widely from several months to three years, but not everyone reported how long they had spent working with non-English speakers so

it was not useful to compare this variable with agreement/disagreement statements. Neither did enough of the sample describe the kind or amount of supervision they had while doing their work with non-English speakers. The few descriptions that alluded to supervision indicated that preservice students were on their own when they had their interactions with children learning a second language. The questionnaire did not have written directions asking preservice teachers to talk about duration and supervision. Instead, they were given oral directions and this could account for the fact that not much was reported on these two variables. On the other hand, it could be that the preservice students just did not have much supervision during their volunteer experience. In terms of time, their experiences could have been one shot events or part of an experience with a bigger group of children and so were difficult for preservice teachers to report.

Discussion. There were no consistent patterns, although there were some differences between preservice teachers who had experiences with second language learners and those who did not, depending on the statement. The following describes differences or similarities for each statement. For Statement #1, about the importance of developing a child's native language in school, there was agreement across all categories. All groups of preservice teachers, those with prior experiences and those with none, agreed with this statement by significant percentages. These responses are in alignment with what research and practice accept as true regarding the importance of developing the native language of children. Maintaining a child's native language, in fact, is a key principle of bilingual/ESL education. The percentage of agreement was particularly high across all categories of preservice students with prior experiences, ranging from 66% to 83%. Preservice teachers with no experience with second language learners also reported a high percentage of agreement at 67%. For this statement, there was no difference between

those with prior experience and those without. The high level of agreement indicates preservice teachers believed in the importance of developing the native language of children.

In the case of statement #2, that it is important that children from non-English home backgrounds speak English at home, preservice teachers from all prior experience categories except one agreed with the statement. This statement would be regarded as false in the Bilingual/ESL fields so the response percentages were coded as M, misalignment. Researchers support the idea that children should communicate with their parents and caregivers in their *native* languages so that they develop the high levels of native language proficiency necessary for the acquisition of literacy and cognitive functioning (Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Practicing English should be left to situations where children have English role models to practice with. When children use English and parents don't know English, they can't communicate with each other and this has had devastating effects on parent/child relationships. The loss of ability to communicate with parents has been detrimental to the emotional as well as cognitive well being of language minority children over the years. Therefore, knowledgeable bilingual and ESL teachers do not encourage children to use English at home. Instead, they encourage children and parents to speak and practice literacy skills in their native language, knowing that the development of native language will automatically assist the learning of English as a second language in school. This statement can be important because one of the most common "errors" classroom teachers make in dealing with language minority parents is to exhort parents and children to "speak English at home". For this statement, there was no particular difference between preservice teachers with prior experiences and those without as the preservice teachers with no experience also had a 41% agreement with this false statement, almost the same as those who observed/volunteered in

bilingual classrooms where native language and English were part of the instructional day. It is unlikely that preservice teachers would observe anything in their prior experiences that could enlighten them on this point, but if left unchecked they would join others in their well-meaning, but counterproductive advice to parents.

Statement #3 is also about the native language, but it asks about the use of a child's native language for *instruction* in schools. It puts the role of teacher and the teacher's use of languages other than English into the picture. Preservice teachers with prior experiences again had very high levels of agreement with this statement, with percentages ranging from 62% to 90%. Those without prior experiences, however, only agreed at 50%. Both #3 and #1 statements contain the very core of bilingual education, the use of a child's native language for instruction is the distinguishing characteristic of bilingual programs. All bilingual programs in this country, Transitional, Developmental, or Dual Language, use the native language for instruction in subjects and literacy development in addition to teaching English as a Second Language. The high level of agreement with statement # 3 infers a belief in the inherent usefulness of communicating with children in the most efficient way. However, the difference between those with prior experiences and those with none when asked about the use of languages other than English indicates hesitancy on the part of those who have not directly confronted the situation of communicating with children who don't understand English.

In Statement #4, the idea that using more than one language in schools is confusing to children is a commonly held belief in the general public and is an assumption that is often used as an argument against bilingual instruction. The statement is not however, substantiated by research in second language learning. On the contrary, research demonstrates that using a child's

first language can be helpful in learning a second (Brown, 1987; Krashen, 1993). For this statement, preservice teachers needed to disagree in order to be in alignment with accepted research and practice in second language acquisition - and they did disagree. Across all categories except those with no experience, disagreement with the statement ranged from 54% to 90%. Those with no experience also disagreed, but were the only group with less than 50% disagreement at 45%.

Statement #5, children learn more English if they are taught only in English, is also a common misconception. It seems counter intuitive to say that using more English will not necessarily, nor even usually, result in learning more English. But, in fact, research (Collier, 1995; Krashen, 1999) does not support the “sink or swim” approach of immersing children in English. Research supports the practice of structuring and phasing in the second language as children continue to develop their *first* language, that is, of providing meaningful, comprehensible input. This is especially true for language minority children from less enriched educational backgrounds who are also struggling to learn subjects as well as English. The most effective bilingual programs have a very carefully planned phasing in of content areas to correspond with developing proficiency in the second language (Krashen & Biber, 1988).

Preservice teachers with prior experiences with L2 learners were mostly in alignment with accepted practice and research as they disagreed with this statement about learning more English is only taught in English, with percentages ranging from 38% to 100%, with one notable exception - those who observed in bilingual classrooms. Although the group that taught in volunteer programs had a rather low percentage of agreement, 38%, this was still the largest percentage in that group for that statement, with 31% agreeing and 31% saying they didn't know.

Those preservice teachers who had observed in bilingual programs *agreed* (60%) with the statement. The percentage of misalignment (60%) of those who had observed in bilingual programs was surprising and could be a cause for concern. This statement is completely against principle and practice in bilingual education. The agreement of preservice teachers who observed in bilingual classrooms indicates that something about bilingual instruction needs to be explained. The other preservice teachers who observed in non-bilingual classrooms or other settings disagreed and therefore were more in line with accepted practice in second language acquisition. This is surprising because we might expect that students observing in bilingual classrooms would pick up more about second language acquisition. However, since we don't know what kind of bilingual classrooms students observed, whether transitional, dual language, or developmental, we do not really know what they observed about learning English. The only constant throughout bilingual classrooms is some use of the native language of the children for instruction. Perhaps these preservice teachers didn't see the learning of English if they observed when the native language was being used and made no assumptions about children's learning of English. A relatively low percentage, 36% of preservice teachers with no prior experience *also agreed* with the statement, putting them at odds with accepted research and practice.

Statement #6, using a child's native language (not English) in school will keep him/her from learning English also reflects a commonly held fear among educators and parents that children won't learn English if they have access to their native language as a "crutch". Again, the majority of preservice teachers with prior experiences disagreed with this statement. This aligned them with research and practice in second language learning which says that when children have native language support they learn English efficiently and less traumatically. In my experience as

a classroom teacher, children's motivation to learn English is generally so strong that, children do learn English, given comprehensible input in English. Percentages of disagreement ranged from 50 to 100% for those with prior experiences. There was a difference between preservice teachers with prior experience and those without for this statement. Students reporting no prior experiences split into thirds in their responses to this statement with the largest percentage, 36%, saying they didn't know. Preservice teachers with no preparation or experience dealing with second language learners would have no way of knowing the importance of native language in the development of literacy and in comprehension of content matter so it is heartening that preservice teachers are open to the use of both languages for educating language minority children.

Experiences in K-12 classrooms. An analysis of the categories of preservice teachers produced some interesting findings. Two of the groups of preservice teachers, those who observed in bilingual and non-bilingual classrooms, gained their experiences with non-English speakers by observing/helping in public school classrooms very much like the classrooms they will someday be teaching in. These two groups represented the bulk of respondents with prior experiences (41 of 70 or 59%). Presumably, some of their inferred beliefs about second language learning came from working in the most common schooling contexts for second language learning. Even without reflection or guidance (at best with minimal guidance since few reported anything about their supervision) on what they were observing, they tended to believe what generally parallels best practice in second language teaching. There were only a few instances of Misalignment across all categories of preservice teachers. Only two statements produced Misalignments, the statement about the importance of using English at home and the one about children learning more English if they are taught only in English. For the statement about learning

more English if taught only in English, only two groups (observers in bilingual classrooms and those with no prior experiences) were misaligned with accepted principles in the field.

Preservice teachers who observed/volunteered in “regular” non-bilingual classrooms were in complete alignment with accepted practice and research except in the case of #2 about the use of English at home. They observed in classrooms where non-English speakers would have been mixed with native English speakers and would not necessarily have been given any specialized instruction. Many preservice teachers in regular classrooms reported “helping” language minority children in these classrooms, primarily by translating or otherwise helping children understand the classroom curriculum. Some commented that they felt good knowing enough of the child’s native language (Spanish in all cases) to translate and explain curriculum.

Preservice teachers whose experiences had been observing and volunteering in regular (non-bilingual) classrooms gave the most detailed descriptions of their experiences. They wrote more in answer to the query that asked them to describe their prior experiences with non-English speakers than any other group. Preservice teachers in the other four groups with prior experience tended to just list the settings or give brief sentences or phrases about where and how they worked with non-English speakers.

Aside from their misalignment with # 5 and #2, the group that observed in bilingual classrooms was also strongly aligned with accepted practice and research. Their responses to the other statements were *very* strongly in alignment. Overall, this group seemed to hold the strongest beliefs with high percentages of agreement and disagreement. However, their misalignments (by 60%) that children learn more English if they are taught only in English could be of concern to bilingual teachers as it was a high percentage that came away with an

“erroneous” belief about the learning of English. The differences between those who observed in bilingual and non-bilingual classrooms were not strong enough or consistent enough to say that preservice teachers who observed in one setting as opposed to the other were in closer alignment with accepted practice and research, although the two cases of misalignment in the group that observed in bilingual classrooms could be cause for concern to local bilingual teachers.

Alternative and Volunteer Settings. A total of 29 preservice teachers with prior experience had their experiences in settings that are not the common context for schooling for L2 learners. Their experience was in alternative settings such as after-school programs, day-care, volunteer tutoring in groups or one-on-one. Even so, they were all engaged in some very direct way with second language learners as opposed to just observing or helping a teacher. They did more than observe and help out with individuals in classrooms, they were responsible for teaching something to the children, either in groups or individually. These preservice teachers did not report any training or preparation for the jobs they had dealing with second language learners, but it is possible that they had minimal training for what they were doing.

Not surprisingly, those who were actually employed to work with L2 learners had the second highest percentages of alignment with selected statements and the lowest percentage of misalignment with the #2. This group had been employed in some way in school programs targeting minority children and even though the programs were not necessarily targeting second language learners, they apparently often had these students in them. Employees in alternative instructional settings had the second highest overall alignment with principles and practice in second language acquisition. The preservice teachers who were *most* closely aligned with statements was the group with experience in tutoring one-to-one even though they also had the

highest misalignment percentage on #2 (100%). This could be an indication that direct involvement and responsibility for teaching ESL or teaching other subjects to English language learners by using native language or ESL is a most powerful and productive experience in developing beliefs about second language learning and learners.

The category of volunteers in alternative settings had the greatest variety of experiences within the category and their responses were also the most varied. They differed from all the other groups in that they agreed with #2 and their alignment responses with statements about how English is learned were not as strongly held as in other prior experience groups. Percentages of agreement or disagreement were lower than the other groups with prior experience and were generally more in line with the group that didn't have prior experiences.

Themes. The main themes that emerged from the preservice teachers' descriptions dealt with, 1) the time it takes to learn a second language, 2) the concept of levels of proficiency needed for various activities (for example, social, interpersonal interactions vs. academic tasks), and 3) comments on the academic achievement of language minority students. Some of the teacher candidates' comments appear to be misconceptions or misunderstandings about the time it takes to become proficient in a second language and about the level of proficiency needed for academic work. For example, there were a number of comments on how quickly and easily children learn English, illustrated by the comment made by one that children "started to understand English within a week and to speak within a month or two." In a dual language classroom where English speakers were learning Spanish, another observed that children were "forced to listen" to teachers using Spanish and thought that was "criminal". There didn't seem to be an understanding that children have to hear a language in order to learn it. This is a first and

very necessary “stage” in learning a language. A strong theme was the recognition that children learning English as a Second Language were “behind” their peers in achieving the goals of the school, that even though children learned English quickly, their “understanding still was not as good as children born speaking English”.

A key finding from the descriptions was that preservice teachers *learned* from their interactions with children, even though they might have misinterpreted some of what they observed. Some stated they had learned from the children who were acquiring ESL, but did not elaborate on *what* they had learned from the children. Most said they had enjoyed their experience helping children, usually by translating, and they felt good when they could help children understand.

Implications/Significance

The first significant implication for teacher preparation is that preservice teachers with or without prior experiences with second language learners are open to developing children’s native languages even when the language is not English. The majority were not in bilingual or ESL certification programs, but they were not in opposition to accepted principles in the bilingual education field. In fact, they generally agreed with key concepts important in bilingual/ESL education even though those without prior experiences did not express themselves as strongly (in the high percentages) that those with prior experience did. Those without prior experiences tended more toward the 50% mark, while those with experiences generally had higher percentages of alignment or misalignment. There were no significant differences between preservice teachers with or without prior experiences in the statements about the *importance* of the native language. However, for the statements that dealt with the *use of the native language in*

the classroom, there was some difference. For these statements, those with prior experiences agreed more strongly with accepted principles of bilingual/ESL education while those without again tended toward the middle, around 50% or less. The stronger (higher percentages) agreement of those with experiences might be an indication that they felt they “knew” something. It could be then, that prior experiences with language minority children make a difference in what they believe about second language learning, at least in that those with experience had stronger opinions. The experiences directly teaching ESL or using what they knew of a child’s native language to communicate with them may have been especially useful in forming beliefs. The small group that specifically tutored English language learners as opposed to observing and “helping” children in classrooms or programs expressed the strongest opinions. A word of caution is that the sample of preservice teachers in this study was relatively small compared to the population of preservice teachers and beliefs are always inferred, but the study provided useful information for adjusting the teacher preparation program.

The teacher preparation program for the university students who were not in the bilingual certification program needed to consciously connect course work and field experiences to the “incidental” second language learners encountered in the schools. Four components of teacher preparation in particular need to be adjusted - 1) Coursework, 2) Fieldwork, 3) Guided reflection on experiences with L2 learners, and 4) Instruction on methods of assessing second language learning, not just methods of teaching.

First, course work needs to incorporate theory and pedagogy in the field of second language learning. Teacher preparation programs vary considerably in the amount and content they contain relative to native language development, never mind second language development.

If students understood more about how humans learn their native language from infancy, they would have an easier time understanding what they observe second language learners doing. Beyond learning more about native language development for all humans, courses in foundations of education need to incorporate information about the history of language usage in American schools and about bilingualism in the world. Methods courses, particularly in reading and language arts, need to incorporate research about bilingualism, and how people learn a second or even a third language. Methods courses need to teach preservice teachers how to manage grouping, pairing, and allowing for L2 learners to practice both of their languages in an environment where there are native English speakers as well as other speakers of other languages. Second, all students need to have specific assignments/experiences with second language learners in public schools. As the small study reported here suggests, encounters with children who are learning English as a second language can be important learning opportunities, but they cannot be left to chance. Results suggested that providing assignments for course field work, experiences that directly give them responsibility for communicating and/or teaching ESL or content to L2 learners would be helpful to understanding how second language acquisition takes place. The experience of struggling to get something across when languages are not common has potential to help prospective teachers gain insight to second language acquisition. However, the experience alone does not explain what is happening with children. From descriptions in this study, it is clear that preservice teachers need guidance and time to reflect on what children are going through. As preservice teachers observe and “help” children who are learning English as a Second Language, they are making judgements about what is going on with the children. This third component, *Guided* reflection could be most effective in communicating concepts about the relationship of L1

and L2 and how native language proficiency helps second language acquisition. In the field experiences that are part of coursework and practica, students could describe what they see children doing and discuss these observations with faculty who are knowledgeable about second language acquisition. This would involve collaboration between university faculty in “regular” and bilingual certification programs and that in itself would be a learning experience for all preservice teachers. Since experience and interactions with children seems to be key to preservice teacher learning, field work assignments could ask them to collect and reflect on children’s oral and written samples in English and their native languages at various stages and to conduct case studies of children from non-English backgrounds. Preservice teachers could be asked to help children write autobiographies of second language learners and write their own autobiographies about how they themselves learned their native language or any second language. The guidance and explanations of bilingual and ESL faculty in the “regular” teacher preparation program is crucial to maximizing the learning experiences for preservice teachers. They can help preservice teachers to see connections between second language acquisition theory and what they are observing in children’s behavior.

One of the most powerful experiences for understanding how children learn a second language is for preservice teachers to learn a second language themselves. In our country, this seems to be an almost frightening thing to do, but trying it and reflecting on the experience could be the best learning experience for preservice teachers. Our schools have not done a good job of teaching foreign languages so that people feel they can communicate effectively in them. Perhaps learning some of the children’s language in a community setting, either in formal classes or by spending time in communities that speak other languages could teach preservice teachers what it

means to not be understood and not be able to express oneself.

Finally, the fourth component, learning to assess second language learning is neglected even in teacher preparation programs for bilingual and ESL teachers. How do we know what is going on in children's heads if we are not using the same language? How can you tell if a child is understanding what you are saying? When trying to figure out what Spanish speaking children know in English, observe how they react to what you say and listen to what they say to you. If a child didn't seem to understand you, did he/she just not recognize the sounds well enough to make out words or did they just not know the meaning of the word? Did the child repeat a word, but not know what it meant? If it is a matter of sounds, then the instruction the teacher needs to provide is more opportunity to listen to English words, especially English spoken in a normal steady stream instead of in isolation in word lists. If the assessment was that the child heard the word and repeated it, but that he/she didn't know what it meant, then it is a matter of explaining the meaning. Depending on the assessment, the follow-up lesson will deal with phonetic structure of English or with semantics (meaning of words).

Evaluating a child's listening skills can be difficult because it requires that teachers pay attention to each individual, and listening to each child requires a great deal of planning. Teachers need to look for every minute available to talk with individuals and note what children say to them. This can be done in small or large groups as well as individually, but if the exercises are done in English and children are unsure of speaking English, they are not likely to volunteer - even if they think they have understood. When teachers check understanding by questioning the entire class, individuals who are operating in a second language or limited English skills may drop through the cracks. This makes it necessary to find ways of individualizing the assessment, to see

exactly where gaps are. Teachers have to make use of any language produced by students at any time, not just when its time to test.

There is a growing body of research showing the effectiveness of identifying and modifying preservice teachers' beliefs about minority children as part of teacher preparation, with the goal of changing beliefs and behaviors (Cabello & Burnstein, 1995; Pajares, 1993; Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996). In this study, identifying preservice teachers' beliefs was the first step to understanding their teacher preparation needs relative to language minority children. The qualitative descriptions of "prior experiences" gave insight to preservice teachers' ideas of what working with children meant to them and suggested how supervised field experiences with non-English speakers can be structured to maximize learning about children's needs and how to meet them. The next step is to study how addressing their beliefs effected affected their learning to teach as they progress through the teacher preparation program.

Most of the preservice students (75%) in this sample did not intend to teach in bilingual or ESL programs, but the reality is they will have children from non-English backgrounds in their classrooms. Since these teacher candidates seemed open and supportive of native language maintenance and development, perhaps my student teacher of years ago and those who debated with me in my foundations classes are not typical of those going into teaching. They may have been more memorable because of their vocal resistance to the idea of teaching children who were different from them in language and cultural background. The results from this small study were encouraging and the job of preparing them for language minority students may not be as impossible as the demographic mismatch of teachers and children suggests.

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Organization/Address: <i>University of Arizona</i>	Telephone: <i>520-626-8062</i>	FAX: <i>520-621-8186</i>
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NEW YORK AVE. NW

SUITE 300

WASHINGTON, DC

20005-4701

202/293-2450

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