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## Working with English Language Learners: Preservice Teachers and Photovoice

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This study utilizes documentary photography and storytelling, *photovoice*, to identify the educational realities of 16 Hispanic English Language Learners from an urban elementary school in the Southwest. Reflections from preservice teachers who utilized photovoice to gather data from the English Language Learners of this study are also discussed. Three main themes emerged from English Language Learners' photographs and stories: (a) meaningful and fun instruction; (b) struggles and joys with literature, and (c) a sense of determination to excel and support others. Preservice teachers indicate they were positively affected by the enhanced learning environment of the study.

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English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing group of students in the United States today (National Education Association, n.d.). Since 1995, ELL enrollment in the United States has grown 57%, compared with less than 4% for all students, reaching a staggering 5.1 million. Currently, second-generation students—defined as children born in the United States to at least one immigrant parent—constitute 23% of the nation's children and 75% of elementary ELLs. By 2015, nearly one out of three students will be second-generation, mostly Hispanic (Flannery, 2009). The United States Department of Education and National Institute of Child Health and Human Development estimate that by the year 2030, 40% of the school population will speak English as a second language (Albers, Hoffman, & Lundahl, 2009).

In 2008, 21% of children ages 5-17 (or 10.9 million) spoke a language other than English at home, and 5% (or 2.7 million) spoke English with difficulty. Approximately two million (or 75%) of those who spoke English with difficulty spoke Spanish (The Condition of Education, 2010). During the 2008-2009 academic year where this study occurred, there were approximately 57,000 ELLs

enrolled in the school district, of whom more than 90% spoke Spanish as their primary language.

In general, research concludes that ELLs are more likely than native English speakers to come from low-income families (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D'Emilio, 2005), consistently score below their White peers on mandated, state, standardized tests in English (Echevarria, Powers, & Short, 2006; Yturriago & Gil-Garcia, 2010), and are more likely to drop out of high school than White students (Cataldi, Laird, KewalRamani, & Chapman, 2009). ELLs who enter school at all grades rarely have the level of proficiency in English found in native English-speaking students in kindergarten or first grade (Echevarria, Powers, & Short, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to identify, through the use of documentary photography and storytelling, *photovoice*, the educational realities of 16 Hispanic ELLs from an urban elementary school in the Southwest. Reflections from preservice teachers, who utilized photovoice to gather data from the ELLs of this study, will also be discussed.

### Photovoice Overview

Photovoice is a form of qualitative research that utilizes documentary photography and storytelling. Photovoice puts a camera in the hands of individuals often excluded from the decision-making process in order to capture their voices about their lives, community, and concerns (Wang, Burris, & Xiang, 1996). Photovoice sets out to convey the point of view of the person holding the camera. It invites us to look at the world through the same lens as the photographer and to share the story the picture evokes for the person who clicked the shutter (Booth & Booth, 2003).

Photovoice challenges the established politics of representation by shifting control over the means for documenting lives from the powerful to the powerless, the expert to the lay person, the professional to the client, the bureaucrat to the citizen, and the observer to the observed (Booth & Booth, 2003).

Having participants share stories in their own voice provides meaning and context for the images (Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998) and enriches language learning by ensuring participant involvement in meaningful communicative activities (Gallo, 2001). Cortazzi and Jin (2007) argue that expressing intended meaning and understanding others' meanings is what drives language development.

The theoretical framework of photovoice served as the foundation of this study. Photovoice is grounded in participatory approaches to documentary photography and feminist theory (hooks, 2000; Kramarae & Spender, 1992; Smith, 1987). Feminist theory suggests that power accrues to those who have voice, set language, make history, and participate in decisions (Smith, 1987). Participatory approaches to documentary photography developed by activist

photographers (Ewald, 2001, 2005; Hubbard, 1991, 1994; Spence, 1995) also suggest a grassroots approach to representation and ownership of one's personal voice.

To date, photovoice has been used with middle school science students (Cook & Buck, 2010); middle school and high school students living in poverty (Zenkov & Harmon, 2009); alcohol and drug education (Goodhart, Hsu, Baek, Coleman, Maresca, & Miller, 2006; Wilson, Minkler, Dasho, Wallerstein, & Martin, 2008); adolescents with behavioral, social, and academic issues (Kroeger, Burton, Comarata, Combs, Hamm, Hopkins, & Kouche, 2004); assessing physical activity and nutrition environments (Fitzgerald, Bunde-Birouste, & Webster, 2009); individuals with mental illness (Fleming, Mahoney, Carlson, & Engebretson, 2009); understanding racism (Ornelas, Amell, Tran, Royster, Armstrong-Brown, & Eng, 2009); improving family planning services (Schwartz, Sable, Dannerbeck, & Campbell, 2007); low-income African American families regarding children's school-readiness (McAllister, Wilson, Green, Baldwin, 2005); low-income prairie women (Willson, Green, Haworth-Brockman, & Rapaport Beck, 2006); online instruction (Perry, Dalton, Edwards, 2009; Perry, 2006); central Appalachian coalfield communities (Bell, 2008); mothers of children with autism (Harte, 2009); homeless adults (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000); refugee youth from Bosnia (Berman, Ford-Bilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001); and immigrant workers (Gallo, 2002).

There are several advantages of using photovoice as a form of needs assessment. In an editorial article on photovoice in alcohol and drug education, Sharma (2010) notes that photovoice is an excellent means to initiate dialogue in a community setting. It is especially useful for those people who do not have a say in matters of importance. Photography provides a space in which individuals explore curiosity safely, considering differing opinions, styles, values, and similarities (Serriere, 2010).

Photovoice is accessible to anyone who can learn to handle a camera and does not presume the ability to read or write (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice provides opportunities to document permanently an image that may be evidence of a problem. This documentation can be used to compare images in the future and document that change has occurred (Sharma, 2010).

There are also several disadvantages of photovoice. Although photovoice yields images which can be analyzed to generate themes and obtain meaningful interpretation, data analysis from photographs is not an easy task. There can be multiple interpretations of the same photograph (Sharma, 2010). Further, Sharma (2010) argues that a photograph is a single snapshot of the reality. But reality is dynamic and changing, so the construction of the reality from a photograph is not always complete.

Wang and Burris (1997) contend that the outcome of participants' photographs on their family, friends, and communities is uncertain and unpredictable. Participants may be mindful of this, become fearful of those individuals with power, and censor what to photograph. Personal judgment may

also intervene at many different levels of representation (Wang & Burris, 1997). Who the person taking the photograph is, what frame has or has not been selected by the person taking the photograph, and which photograph has been selected for discussion are all subjective matters (Sharma, 2010).

## Method

### *Study Context*

I teach a 16-week, undergraduate second language acquisition course every fall semester on-site at the elementary school. The elementary school was selected because of its best practices with differentiated instruction and high ELL population. The course utilizes a *Teach, Apply, Reflect* model of instruction. Under this three-hour model of instruction, students study theory, hypotheses, and strategies with me once a week for one hour in a classroom provided by the elementary school. During the second hour of class, students observe a highly qualified classroom teacher. This allows students to see and hear the application of theory and strategies “in action.” Students and I meet during the final hour of class to reflect on new skills and knowledge obtained during class.

Photovoice was selected as the methodology of this study because it provides a partnership between what researchers traditionally consider “subjects” of a study and the researcher(s). Photovoice allowed time for ELLs to gather and reflect on their experiences as “insiders” and invite “outsiders” into their world. Traditional forms of data collection may not have produced the same outcome as this study.

### *Participants*

The *English Language Learners* (ELLs) in this article are individuals enrolled in an urban, elementary school in the Southwest where the undergraduate second language acquisition course was taught. The term *students* used in this article refers to preservice teachers enrolled in an undergraduate second language acquisition course. Students were considered co-researchers of this study. As highlighted below, not only did students interact weekly with ELLs of this study, they also gathered and analyzed data.

During the fall 2008 semester, 16 students and 16 ELLs participated in this study. Of the 16 students, 11 were female and five were male. Four of the students were secondary education majors and 12 were elementary education majors. Six of the students were bilingual (Spanish/English). Eight of the students were White, six were Hispanic, and two were African American.

Of the 16 ELLs, seven were female and nine were male. All of the ELLs were Hispanic. Twelve of the ELLs were in first, second, and third grade (four

ELLs per grade). Three of the ELLs were in fifth grade and one ELL was in Kindergarten. During the time of this study, there were 193 ELLs at the elementary school who were classified as having Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and 427 of the 591 total school population qualified for free/reduced lunch.

### ***Procedure***

The following research question guided this study: What are the educational realities of English Language Learners at an urban, elementary school in the Southwest?

Students in the course identified, in consultation with the classroom teacher they observed, an ELL from the elementary school. Each ELL was tested and classified with the school as an ELL, had a signed parent consent form on file with the school, and was available for the entire 16-week study.

During the first week of the semester, I taught a unit on photovoice. Students were provided with multiple photovoice resources, including published articles, websites, PowerPoint presentations, and photovoice projects completed by former students. Students identified and introduced themselves to their ELL during the first three weeks of the semester. At that time, they discussed photovoice in general and, more specifically, the photovoice assignment and research question. They also provided the ELL with a camera and basic training on how to use the camera. ELLs were encouraged to photograph images on campus and off campus at home and in their community. Several students borrowed a digital camera from the college's Teaching and Learning Center. Other students voluntarily purchased disposal cameras for their ELL. Two ELLs completed the assignment with drawings and paintings rather than photography.

Students met weekly with their ELL to monitor his or her progress and occasionally walk the campus together to photograph images. This occurred before and after class and in some instances during class in a pull-out or small group setting. Students provided me with weekly updates on the project.

During the 14<sup>th</sup> week of the semester, students collected the cameras and either developed the film at a local photo shop or downloaded the photographs onto a CD. Students then met with their ELL to view and discuss the photographs. ELLs selected no more than two photographs to capture their response to the research question and told their story for each photograph. The storytelling component of this study involved the following questions from the PHOTO acronym (Wang & Burris, 1997): Describe your *Picture*. What is *Happening* in your picture? Why did you take a picture *Of* this? What does this picture *Tell* us about you or your life as an English Language Learner? How can this picture provide *Opportunities* for us to improve life with regard to English Language Learners?

Students asked their ELL the same questions for each photograph and documented their responses in a journal. ELLs reviewed students' journals for

accuracy and provided revisions, as needed. If the ELLs were too young to read the journal, students read aloud their responses to the questions that guided the storytelling.

On the last day of class, all photographs were displayed in a public photo exhibit at the college. Parents, administrators, students, teachers, professors, and community members attended the exhibit. ELLs and students extracted captions from the journals to accompany the enlarged and matted photographs in the exhibit. The photo exhibit later became a traveling exhibit. All photographs were displayed for one month at the college and one month in the lobby of the elementary school.

### ***Data Analysis***

During the 15<sup>th</sup> week of semester, students and I met in class to share their journal entries and identify common themes from the stories and photographs taken by the ELLs. Journal entries varied in length from a few sentences to several paragraphs. Data were analyzed through constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) often referred to as coding (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). With coding, the analyst chunks the data into smaller segments and then attaches a descriptor or “code” for each segment (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Coding allowed us to indicate recurring patterns in the data by categorically marking units of text with codes.

### **Results**

The original research question was broadly defined and left open for the ELLs to define their own realities, perspectives, and experiences at school. During the first few weeks of the semester, students discovered that ELLs did not understand the question. Students and I discussed alternative ways of asking ELLs about their educational experiences. In the end, students asked ELLs to capture experiences that helped or hindered their English development in school. Students compiled a list of questions to assist them with the original research question and shared these questions with their ELL. What is your life like at school as an ELL? What makes you happy at school as an ELL? What do you dislike at school as an ELL and feel should be changed?

This section will discuss three themes that emerged from the photographs and stories captured by the ELLs. These themes include: (a) meaningful and fun instruction; (b) struggles and joys with literature; and (c) a sense of determination to excel and support others. Data below come from interviews with ELLs as documented in students' journals. This section will also discuss students' views and reflections on photovoice.

## ***English Language Learners' Experiences***

### ***Meaningful and Fun Instruction***

Through their own explorations with photovoice, ELLs not only described their awareness of meaningful and fun classroom activities but also discussed the importance of such meaningful interaction. Several ELLs photographed technology either inside the school or at home and reflected on their experiences using the technology to learn English. For example, a third grade ELL photographed a stack of CDs and explained:

These are CDs we hear in the car. I took the picture because this is what helps me listen and practice English in the car with my dad. We then have to listen and watch the movie to learn and repeat words. This is important because it can help you learn how to speak and understand English.

Another ELL stated he is very happy when he is able to use the literacy software applications available at his school. He stated:

I get to practice my letters. Some of the programs are hard...I'm only on level one...I want to move up but the games are hard. I also struggle with big words and sometimes find it hard to understand what the teacher is talking about...I never know what to write about in my journals. I think about it, but I just don't know. Practicing the games will help me improve my English.

Similarly, a first grade ELL photographed computers in her classroom and argued, "Computers helped me learn English. Technology makes learning English easy and fun." "It helps us learn English when teachers find computers games that we [students] like," another ELL concluded.

More than half of the ELLs photographed images that suggest that realia and visuals assisted them in the development of new vocabulary and school procedures. Four ELLs photographed and discussed a koi pond with turtles and fish in the courtyard of the school. A third grade ELL explained, "This is a picture of the turtle home. The turtle is trying to go into the water. I remember learning about turtles. It helped me to learn how to spell turtle. Students can learn by watching how it [the turtle] moves."

Another ELL photographed baskets of lunchboxes in the cafeteria and stated:

Our lunch basket is brought to the lunchroom after morning announcements. This picture tells about my life as an English student because the lunch basket helped me find my lunch by looking at the number or picture of the teacher on the basket. This picture of a lunch basket shows how English students' lives can be improved because it gives students a job to do.

While some ELLs identified value in computers and being assigned tasks, one ELL found value in homework. She juxtaposed a picture of her homework in Spanish and English and said:

My homework is in the picture. I have to do my homework after school before I play. I like my homework. Look, it's in English and Spanish. Ms. "T." [my teacher] gave it to me. My teacher gives me homework in English and in Spanish to help me learn. She doesn't give it to anyone else. If kids who don't know English like me had two homeworks, they'd learn more English.

### ***Struggles and Joys with Literature***

Eight of the ELLs photographed literature books or related images such as the library to discuss the role of literature in their lives. A fifth grade ELL reported:

In the library, there's a lot of books that helped me learn. Last year, I only got Spanish books but this year I am choosing English because I want to learn English better. The Spanish books made my English worse. I am happy to have a library because there are books that help me to read and learn English. I have never visited a library before this school. It was hard for me to find books to read in the library because I have to read the spine of the books but didn't know what it says.

Reflecting back on the experiences in her native country of Cuba, a third grade ELL commented:

I love to read now. I didn't in Cuba because we didn't have any books. The books I read were the ones my mama bought me, *pero* [but] they weren't a lot. There wasn't a public library where I lived. If you want to read, you need to buy your own books. They cost a lot so no one has a lot of books. I took a picture of the library because now I have the opportunity to read. I want to read without worrying about money. I wanted to learn English so that I could read the letters in the books.

Several ELLs were proud of their interest in literacy and suggested that individuals donate books to their school library. A third grade ELL stated, "I love coming here [the library] and reading books. My library is small and doesn't have that many books. Reading books helps me learn different ways to say things but I'm running out of books to read."

A second grade ELL was aware of the library and its purpose but seemed discouraged with his progress in reading. He spoke about a photograph of the library and said:

This is where the books are. Books sit here on the shelf. I do not like reading. When I read, I don't pay attention and I get sleepy. If the book is up, sometimes I go to sleep. If the book is down, I really don't pay attention because I don't know some of the words.

Another second grade ELL preferred to discuss the conditions at his house that discouraged him from completing homework and reading at home. He photographed the leather cots in the nurse's office at school and wrote, "In the summer, it isn't cool in my house...it's very hot. I took a picture of this because I like the cool air in the office."

### ***Sense of Determination to Excel and Support Others***

Several ELLs photographed images and shared stories about their strong desire to learn English, their struggles and obstacles inside and outside the classroom, and their genuine interest to assist others who study English. A fifth grade ELL photographed a Dr. Seuss mural on the wall at school and stated:

Reading is fun. I have to read. I like to read but I can't read English or Spanish. I wish I could read. We sit knees touching and I say "pass" or "no"... I go slow and they [the other students] say "somebody else." That will happen to me. I'm shy and embarrassed...and cannot read but I want to.

A third grade ELL echoed his sentiments and spoke about her frustrations trying to comprehend the teacher with no bilingual students in her class. She said:

I used to have friends in my class that know how to speak in English and Spanish and I used to sit down right next to them. I did not understand what my second grade teacher would say. Sometimes it is hard because I don't know the right words to say when I have to say what the picture is about. I want to learn English so that I could use the computer just like the other kids in class.

Other ELLs photographed art and decorations in their classroom and offered suggestions on how to improve literacy skills. It appears as if they were aware of strategies necessary to improve reading and writing. They may struggle at times with the process but wanted to remind other ELLs of the routine and skills necessary to read and write. For example, a first grade ELL photographed a word wall with birds made out of construction paper posted to a bulletin board and explained:

These are some fake birds and the teacher puts words up here. Some words I know how to sound out but don't know what they mean. Words are cool to use and I like writing words. I like to use words like *cat, bat, that, mat, brat, rat, top, plop, mop, bug, plug, hug, man, pan, pin, spin, then, stop*. I don't understand some of them...I can sound them out but I can't sound out all of them. If I can work on something then they [other students] can learn. If they don't know how to spell a word, they can practice on a piece of paper.

Using a photograph of a children's literature book cover, another first grade ELL offered words of encouragement to ELLs on collaborating with others in class. She explained:

I read about scary stories. It reminds me of Halloween and somebody reading together. It is a book that has parts that you read one and someone else reads some and then you read together. I picked it because I can work together with two people...we take turns and help each other. Sometimes we need to practice with someone else...take turns and practice reading will help us learn English.

Several ELLs said they wish to learn English so they can help others acquire the language. A second grade ELL said:

Reading is sometimes hard but it helps me with my English. I really like books and learning. I like listening to the stories and reading them. It will help me when I'm older to speak both English and Spanish.

### ***Students' Reflections***

At the end of the study, students wrote reflection papers on their experiences using photovoice. The majority of students discussed the learning environment and the model of instruction used during the course. Students appreciated the real-world application of the course and ability to bridge theory to practice. One student commented:

It is important for us as future teachers to have hands-on experience with students. In many classes, you only make assumptions as to how your students will be. Because we could go into a classroom with children during every lesson, we were able to get a first-hand look at what being a teacher is really like.

Another student shared, "Being on an elementary school campus and being able to observe and participate in the school culture every week helped fuel my desire to become an effective teacher who can meet the needs of diverse learners." A student who took the course the semester before her student teaching noted, I was able to visualize what I was learning and how it can be applied in an actual classroom. It was an empowering experience. Projects such as photovoice take that empowerment and help the collegiate student pass it on to young students.

Several students reported their teaching skills and abilities were enhanced as a result of the photovoice experience and felt more confident in teaching ELLs. A student noted:

I discovered through my experience in class that ELLs yearn to learn and share their experiences with others. They are waiting for someone to talk with them and spend time with them so they can start to understand English. They just want to know that someone cares. I learned a lot about language, diversity, and teaching from this experience and feel prepared to work with ELL because I now understand their needs.

Another student shared similar thoughts and said:

The school's diversity has been a great help in my studies as a teacher. There is so much diversity at the school, which has taught me that you need to be open-minded and understanding to a child's language and culture. I was allowed to take a deeper look at culture, community, and language and how they have an enormous influence on education and how students actually learn and teachers actually teach.

As the study unfolded, there was a stimulated interest in creativity. Students were fascinated with photovoice and inquired during and after class on how it could be utilized as a teaching strategy. Students were also aware of similar inquiry based assignments observed at the elementary school and often times wanted to discuss them during our class. Since there has been limited or no interaction with students who completed the second language acquisition course, it is unknown whether they have been able to apply their newly acquired skills and abilities in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom.

### Discussion

The photographs and stories of realia and visuals such as the koi pond and murals on school walls shared by ELLs of this study support learning theories by Cummins (1981) and Krashen (1981), who argue students learn best when abstract concepts are contextualized and when the learner is actively engaged and involved. When students are encouraged to manipulate the concepts and use realia, a foundation is created for cognitive academic language that is often lacking in the school experience of ELLs (Cline & Necochea, 2003). While verbal development is a major goal, in which the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are often combined or specifically integrated, visual support is crucial to illustrate language and concepts and can provide a platform for language expression and a means to develop key study skills (Cortazzi & Jin, 2007). As seen in this study, visuals, pictures, realia, and photographs can be important to the success of an ELL in the classroom (LeClaire, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009; Townsend, 2009). They have the potential to make a lesson come alive (Cline & Necochea, 2003), assist ELLs make comparisons, sequence events, identify cause and effect (Barton, 2001), and derive meaning from literature (Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

Data from this study reveal that ELLs enjoyed using technology to study English. This finding confirms Tapscott's (1999) claim that when digital content is integrated into curriculum, a change in the learning process occurs that is characterized as being problem- or project-oriented, student-centered, relevant, and productive. Technology can offer a motivating and student-controlled way to learn and an increase in ELLs' self-esteem (Patten & Valcarcel-Craig, 2007), lead to deeper understanding and improvement of individual learning (Molenda & Pershing, 2008), offer more independence and flexibility for learners to work at their own pace and to access information in different ways (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006), and encourage reading and use of language for authentic purposes (Cummins, 2000). An implication of this finding is that educational technology

may lead to increased levels of motivation among ELLs and suggests that teachers and teacher educators should stay current on the latest software and hardware available for literacy development.

The use of photovoice in this study provided opportunities for ELLs to develop not only verbal and written language skills but also language skills of reading and listening. Further photovoice research with ELLs should explore various forms of digital storytelling: the use of images, sounds, music, text, video clips, and/or recorded-audio and photo narrations. Digital storytelling and photo narrations can provide ELLs with the cultural background, literacy skills, and language development needed to access challenging academic text (Rance-Roney, 2010) and provide opportunities to initiate interaction themselves and engage in sustained speech (Cortazzi & Jin, 2007). Stricklan, Keat, and Marinak, (2010) believe photo narrations may facilitate at-risk learners' entrances and relationships into new schools and classrooms and allow teachers to become aware of the assumptions or storylines that they bring into their interactions with children from backgrounds different from their own.

Data also reveal that ELLs of this study have a strong desire to learn English, read literature, and acquire books in English. Children's curiosity and interest are a prerequisite to their response to literature (Fan, 2009). Fan argues that the key for ELLs to enter the world of literature is their interests; their active responses to literature are effective ways to maximize their language learning experiences. When ELLs find joy in literature, they are not far from achieving success. We know from research, however, that the presence of children's books in the home, the frequency of reading with adults, and the quality of parent-child language interactions in the home differ between low-income children and their peers from families of another socioeconomic status (U.S. Department of Education, as cited in Bowman-Perrott, Herrera, & Murry, 2010). It may be that the abundance of books at the elementary school and the enthusiasm for literature expressed by ELLs of this study compensated for the lack of literature and excitement for literature at home. This desire to learn English, read literature, and acquire books in English underscores the importance of using literature for language development. Haneda (2006) reminds us that a variety of literacy practices with others at home and in the community is critically important in the language development of young ELLs.

The finding of this study on ELLs' determination to excel and support others may be attributed to the supportive school and classroom environment and highly qualified teachers at the elementary school. Although ELLs of this study were not familiar with the term *sheltered instruction*, they indirectly discussed components of sheltered instruction such as repetition, routine, practice, and collaboration with others. The self-regulatory characteristics found to be important to school success for non-ELLs, such as self-determination and academic efficacy, have been less well-studied among ELLs (LeClaire, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009). This finding on self-determination among ELLs requires more research at elementary and secondary levels.

The issue of helping ELLs become capable and engaged readers is one of the greatest challenges facing urban educators today (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). The supply of certified ESL and bilingual teachers is too small for the demand. There is a mismatch between student needs and teacher preparation (Echevarria, Powers, & Short, 2006). To compensate for the lack of training and professional development needed to work with diverse students, principals hire less qualified teachers, use substitute teachers, cancel classes, bus students elsewhere, require reading specialists to fill the void, increase class size, or ask teachers to teach outside their field of preparation (Vogt & Shearer, 2003). The use of photovoice in this study with preservice teachers allowed them to experiment with a new methodology in working with language learners and a new practice for teacher training. With more time and experience using and studying photovoice, preservice teachers may help combat the mismatch between student needs and teacher preparation.

Finally, this study created a safe environment that allowed ELLs to work one on one with an adult learner from college, visit a college campus for the first time, and share their voices and reflections as ELLs. Students and ELLs “mentored” each other throughout the project. ELLs provided students with a glimpse of their reality as an ELL and mentored them with helpful information to meet the needs of ELLs. The students mentored the ELLs by listening and providing words of encouragement and motivation. As Jurkowski (2008) reminds us, photovoice not only allows for reflection and sharing perspectives but also instills pride and confidence in participants. Many of the ELLs of this study conveyed pride and ownership of their work as a result of the photovoice experience.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations of this study. First, students enrolled in the second language acquisition course could not decline participation in the photovoice project. The project was a required course item. Although students were informed of the college’s procedure to drop a course and enroll in another section, some may not have been aware of the course expectations during the first week of the semester and may not have been completely committed to the study.

Additionally, ELLs were instructed not to photograph other people as a way to document their response to the research question. This would have involved an additional consent form that the ELLs were not prepared to obtain. Knowing this information, ELLs may have excluded stories or experiences that involved a family member, neighbor, sibling, or friend. This could be viewed as a limitation of this study.

A third limitation of this study was that ELLs were not involved in the identification of themes from the data. Time did not allow for students and the ELLs to meet. A final limitation of this study was the sample size. The results of

this study should not be generalized. Further research using photovoice or similar methods of data inquiry is needed with a larger sample size.

### Conclusion

Photovoice may be a valuable tool for teachers in learning more about ELLs. By experiencing photovoice first-hand, teachers see the methodology in action and are encouraged to think outside the box and create or seek other interactive, meaningful, and fun activities, assignments, and instructional strategies. Photovoice can provide opportunities for ELLs to have input in the collection and dissemination of data and gain pride and ownership of their work. As the number of ELLs in our nation's schools increases, teachers are encouraged to invite ELLs into the teaching and learning process and view them as heroes, authors, and co-developers of the curriculum, as wells as generators of text who see themselves as researchers and teachers with knowledge that can be shared with others (Ada, Beutel, & Petersen, 1990).

In addition to the photovoice studies listed in this article, photovoice can be used with an array of participants regardless of location. Additional groups may include migrant workers, prison inmates, individuals with special needs, international exchange students, and gays and lesbians. Faculty are encouraged to discuss photovoice in courses on teaching, learning, technology, research methods, the digital divide, and social justice (Graziano & Litton, 2007).

Perry, Dalton, and Edwards (2009) offer a list of unanswered questions for ongoing research in the area of photovoice in the classroom: Is there a relationship between photovoice and teacher style? How does learning style influence the student's experience with photovoice? Is the potential value of photovoice related to the nature of the course content? Are some topics/courses more suitable to photovoice? Additionally, what impact does photovoice have on assessment and retention? Answers to these critical questions will shed light on the use of photovoice with multicultural populations and diverse course content.

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