



# Welcome to America Now Speak English

## Introduction

As the students in my undergraduate methods class, which focuses on the teaching of writing, prepared for their presentations at the end of a recent fall semester, I sat in the small audience and caught a glimpse of the words on the front of one student's t-shirt. Shaking my head in disbelief, I concluded that it was part of his costume and had to reveal something about the character that he was portraying. Once the performance began, I saw the t-shirt clearly, which confirmed my initial belief; it said: *Welcome to America, now speak English*. During the performance, I realized that this t-shirt was not part of his costume.

As a former bilingual and ESL teacher for both adult immigrants and children of immigrants, I cringe whenever I see this exact t-shirt hanging on carts in the mall or on tables at a county fair. I also feel disheartened by the idea that some members of our society consider bilingualism and multilingualism to be a threat and believe that our national security and unity could be strengthened by demanding that speakers of other languages only speak English.

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Now, a student whom I had spent a semester teaching in my language arts and writing methods course was sending a message loud and clear, which I felt contradicted not only the cultural and linguistic sensitivity that I tried to teach my preservice teachers, but also some of his own comments in his written assignments regarding working with English language learners (ELLs) in the writing classroom.

After the performance, which was a final project for another course in their teacher education program, I left the building wondering what to do. Should I address him about the conflict I see between the message on his shirt and the teaching philosophy that he is in the process of developing? What would I say? Should I say anything at all? What did I hope to accomplish by bringing it up with him? I struggled with these questions and my own confusion about the incident for a few days. Finally, I decided to bring my reaction to his attention in hopes that he would reflect on the message his shirt sends and what it reveals to others about his beliefs and values. In an email to him, I wrote the following:

There is something I wanted to mention to you because I've been thinking about it for a few days now. I was a bit shocked and confused when I read the writing on the black shirt that you wore the day of your performance (*Welcome to America, now speak English*). You mentioned being sensitive to English language learners in

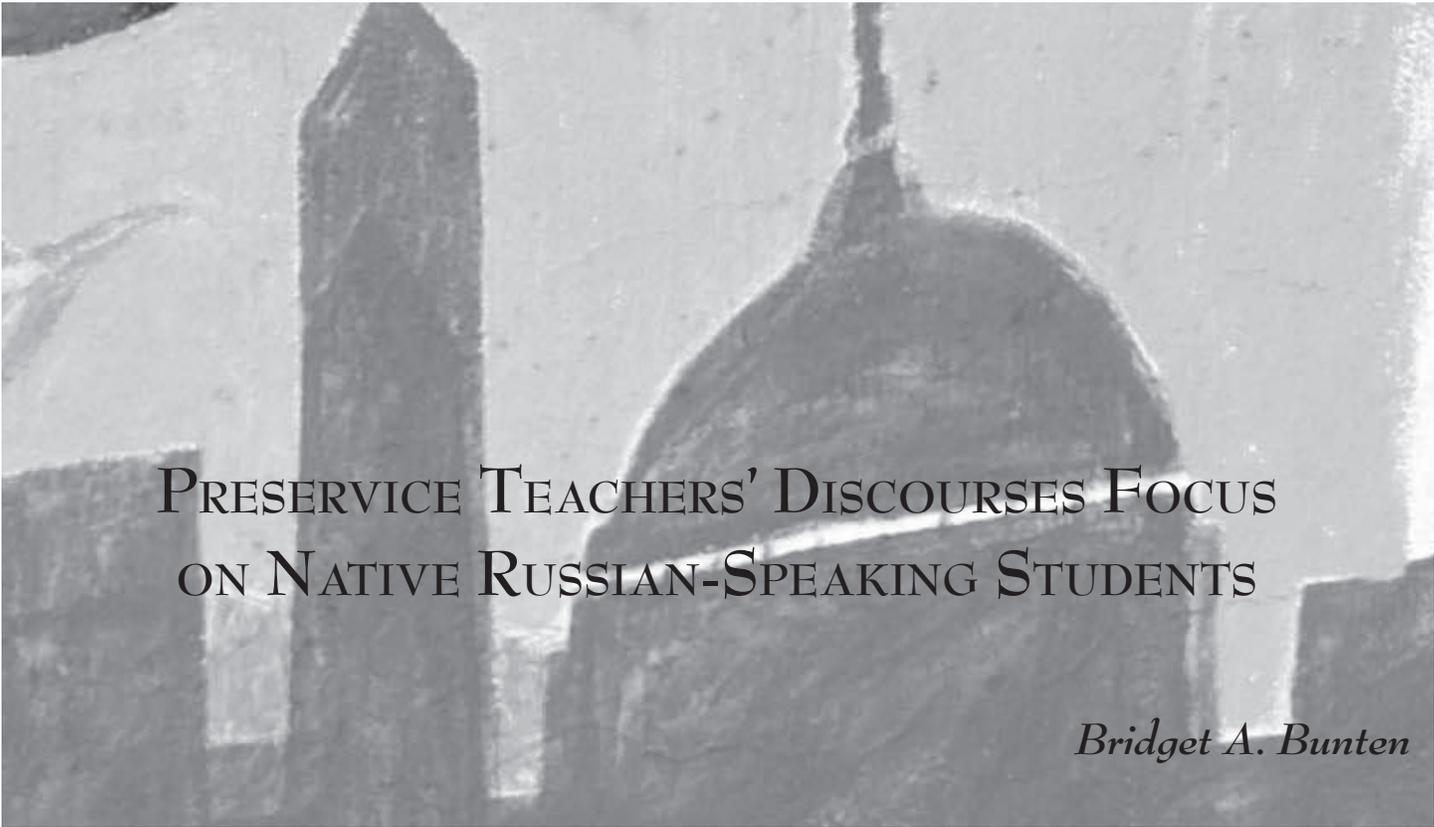
your teaching philosophy, your reading responses, and class discussions, so I was wondering if you see a contradiction between the message that is sent by the words on your shirt and what you have said about ELLs. (Personal communication, 12/13/07)

He responded to my email on the same day with the following message:

Thank you for your response and I didn't even think before putting on that T-shirt . . . I do realize how it might offend people and I am sorry if it offended you and it is not how I feel about English language learners. I do see the contradiction in it and I would not treat any of my students differently because they are not native English language speakers . . . I am sorry. (Personal communication, 12/13/07)

I suppose that I expected to feel better about the situation after writing to him and receiving his response, but I felt bewildered by the exchange and struggled with my own desire to somehow "fix" the situation. To me, it appeared as though he viewed my email as a scolding and failed to explain why he owns such a shirt or when he would consider it a good choice to wear it. He also did not say that he would get rid of the shirt, but rather framed the situation as an offense to me, thus placing my reaction at the center of the issue.

While reflecting on the semester as a whole, I considered the various readings and classroom discussions that had focused



# PRESERVICE TEACHERS' DISCOURSES FOCUS ON NATIVE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING STUDENTS

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on the literacy development of ELLs and the inequalities that can exist in schools about their language use. I found my undergraduate students to be very honest in expressing their concerns and anxieties surrounding the teaching of writing to a child who is learning English. Many of them had completed a writing analysis assignment using writing samples from ELLs and provided fair, caring, and sensitive assessments of the child's abilities, followed by insightful and well-informed instructional recommendations. So, how was it that being involved in a constant dialogue about providing linguistically and culturally appropriate writing instruction to ELLs had not made this student think twice when he chose to wear that shirt?

I continued to struggle with this issue as a new semester began in January, and I wondered if and how I should change class readings, discussions, and assignments. Then, one morning during class, I was passing out writing samples from a 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom in which we would be working on a reading and writing project throughout the semester. There were six native Russian speakers in the classroom we were going to visit. Thinking it might help me to deepen my understanding of the preservice teachers' learning processes, I decided to investigate the experience of the six preservice teachers who volunteered to work with these ELLs. For this project, the preservice teachers would meet with their

students to conduct one-on-one interviews about their reading and writing, hold conferences with them, and share their own writing as well.

Being a former elementary school teacher in both bilingual and sheltered English programs, I am personally and professionally invested in the education of ELLs. As a teacher educator at a large public university in the northeast, I am challenged to engage my students in readings, discussions, and experiences that energize their thinking and understanding about teaching reading and writing to the culturally and linguistically diverse children who will sit in their future classrooms. I believe that the opportunity that these six preservice teachers had to work on their project with ELLs was a chance to expose them directly to the rewards and challenges that lie ahead of them.

Thus, in this article I investigate the following questions: (1) How did preservice teachers describe their experience of working directly with an ELL? (2) To what extent did a direct experience with an ELL affect preservice teachers' thinking? (3) What can the preservice teachers' discussion contribute to our understanding of how students are influenced by discourses and what that influence means? Answering these questions will offer us insight into the evolving perspectives of preservice teachers and how they negotiate the challenges of addressing the needs of ELLs.

## **ELLs Speak through Their Numbers**

The students that sit in public school classrooms represent the astonishing increase in our nation's cultural and linguistic diversity. The PK-12 ELL population grew by 57.17% from the 1995-1996 school year to the 2005-2006 school year as compared to a 3.66% growth in the overall PK-12 population. During the 2005-2006 school year in particular, ELLs represented 10.3% of the total PK-12 enrollment (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2007a). In that same decade, the states that saw the highest percentage growth rates of ELLs in the nation were South Carolina (688.2%), Arkansas (361.3%), Indiana (349.7%), North Carolina (346.2%), and Tennessee (296.0%) (NCELA, 2007b).

However, in spite of these growing numbers, there are only four states that have specific ELL coursework or certification requirements for all teachers. The teacher certification standards for all teachers in 17 states contain reference to the special needs of ELLs and another eight states refer to "language" as an example of diversity. There are 15 states that do not require all teachers to have expertise or training in working with ELLs (NCELA, 2008). Both the student demographics and the limited state requirements for preservice teachers of ELLs clearly demonstrate

that more attention needs to be placed on the successful preparation of teachers in order to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and experience required to meet the needs of our nation's children.

### Teacher Education and ELLs

In response to these changing demographics and the struggles of schools and teachers to respond to them, researchers have sought out the voices of preservice teachers, current teachers, and teacher educators as a preliminary step to proposing a course of action. My review of the literature reveals four main areas that researchers address for working with preservice teachers in relation to ELL issues.

The first area focused on the necessity to consider and learn from the experiences and concerns of current ELL educators. Valuable insight can be gained from these educators as they share the challenges they faced, the solutions they devised, and the negotiations they made regarding ELLs, individual beliefs, school context and language policy. As a result, modifications in course offerings that reflect teachers' experiences and concerns are a necessary and proactive stance on the part of teacher education programs (Batt, 2008; Isenbarger & Willis, 2006; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005).

The second area further supplements the first through the work of Costa, et al. (2005) who argue that change in teacher education programs begins with the involvement of faculty. During a faculty institute on ELLs (held in Massachusetts), faculty members identified the following aspects that preservice teachers need to develop in order to be effective teachers of ELLs: "(a) deeper respect for the culture of ELLs and their families, (b) the ability to question their own assumptions, and (c) the ability to discuss issues of identity, privilege, and ethnocentricity" (Costa, et al., 2005, p. 109).

A third area in the literature addresses the importance of opportunities for preservice teachers to investigate their personal views and experiences with diversity by sharing their feelings about minorities, ELLs, and exposure to different races and cultures (Lee & Dallman, 2008). The beliefs and practical knowledge of the preservice teachers highlight the importance of teacher education programs to consider "various diversity issues from multiple perspectives...constructing knowledge and practical teaching of diversity...considering personal experience with diversity in teacher preparation...[and having] field experiences with culturally diverse children"

(Lee & Dallman, pp. 42-43). The above contributions demonstrate the necessity of including the ideas and perspectives of teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators while considering how to respond to the increasing diversity in the public schools.

A fourth area in the literature identifies the need for significant changes in teacher education programs due to an apparent mismatch between the cultural and linguistic background of the majority of teachers and their students. In the United States, the teaching force is relatively homogenous with a predominance of European/American teachers and preservice teachers (Commins & Miramontes, 2006; Costa et al., 2005; Giambo & Szecsi, 2005/06; Grant & Gillette, 2006; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, 2007) while the diversity of the student population is growing at an alarming rate.

Commins and Miramontes (2006) assert that preservice teachers need to be prepared to work with students that traverse this wide range of cultural and linguistic diversity. In order to do so successfully, teacher education programs need to incorporate coursework and field experiences that integrate the application of knowledge and skills that are effective when working with ELLs (Commins & Miramontes, 2006; Giambo & Szecsi, 2005/06; Lucas, et al., 2008; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005).

Finally, constant reflection and reexamination of one's own cultural beliefs and assumptions about people of different races, cultures, and languages is an integral part of the courses and field experiences that are being developed. For example, language shock classes (Washburn, 2008) and immersion experiences (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, 2007; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006) allow preservice teachers to develop empathy for ELLs, learn strategies for teaching ELLs, and construct a new reality for teaching in a multicultural classroom. Within these contexts, the preservice teachers modify their educational philosophies in light of their new experiences, but this change does not occur neatly overnight or even in the confines of one semester. Zygmunt-Fillwalk and Clark (2007) assert that "becoming multicultural thus emerges as a recursive process rather than a destination. A cyclical process emerges as individuals encounter, reflect, de-construct, and re-create worldviews. With novel experiences, individuals begin the process anew" (p. 292).

With these concerns in mind, I constructed opportunities for preservice teachers to work with ELLs while giving

them a chance to reflect and interpret their experiences. I investigated their discussions about those experiences and identify how it contributes to our understanding of their development as preservice teachers. Foucault (1978) and Bakhtin (1981) inform my understandings of discourse, which helps me to interpret my students' expressions in relation to ELLs.

### Two Ways of Thinking about Discourse

The work of Foucault (1978) and Bakhtin (1981) provide me with a theoretical lens through which I can view the discursive practices of preservice teachers as they combine with social relationships and lived experiences to formulate pedagogy. According to Foucault (1978), discourses are social constructions that display a "tactical polyvalence" with different power capabilities and functions depending on the context in which they are taken up (p. 100). Certain discourses, therefore, may be more powerful for some people than for others by both shaping and consequentially being shaped by individuals in their contexts.

For example, my student's t-shirt would be well received in some places; thus in some communities it would make him more popular with the powerful while also making the discourse it promotes more powerful. In this way, individuals can use discourses strategically and intentionally, and people can use multiple discourses to defend, support, and/or protect arguments or beliefs. For Foucault (1978), this use of varying discourses is a complex and often unstable process that involves a deliberate employment of diverse discursive elements. During this employment, it is enlightening to see how a discourse can function as enabling, limiting, or opening up possibilities to explore further. An individual thus uses discourse in various ways to position oneself in relation to a particular occurrence, experience, or issue.

Within a particular teaching and learning context, discourses are thus capable of positioning the teacher and the students in relation to one another through the arrangement, categorization, and mapping of their behaviors as *appropriate* or *inappropriate* within different situations (Luke, 1992). Therefore, the actions and minds of the teacher and the students are being shaped by the varying discourses that are evident both in and out of the classroom. As Luke (1992) asserts, I also believe that it is crucial for us to consider how the use of discourses have tangible

and political consequences for students and teachers.

What I found to be significant in understanding my research is Foucault's assertion that, "there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy" (1978, p. 102). This acknowledgement has opened the door for me to examine the possible contradictions among a preservice teacher's use of varying discourses and those that were presented in our course readings and discussions. In this light, discourse can be seen as "a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point" (p. 101) employed by a preservice teacher who is currently in between the multiple ways of being a college student, a future teacher, and a member of a particular family and community.

Interwoven throughout their contributions are references to their own lives and experiences in school, which clearly play a large role in determining which discourses they engage in and how. It is through this lens that I will investigate the discourses that are evident in their discussion, and how they position themselves and others, define limits, and articulate possibilities.

Bakhtin adds to Foucault's notion of discourse through his focus on the struggle and relationship between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. According to Bakhtin (1981), the act of becoming (in this case becoming a teacher) is a process of "assimilating the words of others" with our own and thus the discourses other's use in an attempt to make sense of our own experiences (p. 341). Involved in this process is *heteroglossia*, which is the occurrence of two or more contradicting voices (or discourses) at any given time in an individual's particular context. Our world is inherently *heteroglossic* due to the often-conflicting coexistence of different discourses (Bakhtin, 1981).

This *heteroglossic* process of meshing and partial reformation of others' discourses plays a significant role "in an individual's ideological becoming" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). Therefore, we take up the discourses of others and use them as a basis for our own interactions with people in particular contexts, thus influencing our behaviors, actions, and words. While taking up a discourse, we use it strategically to perform various functions, which may result in the positioning of people in particular categories, similar to how Foucault (1978) argued that discourses are employed.

Bakhtin (1981) discusses the antagonistic relationship that is evident between authoritative discourse and internally

persuasive discourse, which exist simultaneously and can to a certain extent determine one's ideological becoming. An authoritative discourse represents the "received and static knowledge" of others that functions as a particular way of thinking in a variety of social contexts, and is often based on a line of thinking that comes from a theoretical deduction as opposed to actual experience (Britzman, 2003, p. 42).

Therefore, an authoritative discourse could represent particular assumptions that one possesses about ELLs, their parents, or what is involved in learning English prior to having direct contact with ELLs or their real-life experiences. In addition, the alternative discourses that I present through class readings and

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discussions about ELLs can also be seen as authoritative discourses for the preservice teachers because they are the words, ideas, and beliefs of others, which they have not taken on as their own yet.

Similar to Foucault's view of discourse as capable of arranging and mapping our words and behaviors, an authoritative discourse also creates "normative categories that organize and disorganize our perceptions," which can result in a competition between these normativities (Britzman, 2003, p. 42). The extent to which an authoritative discourse aids in determining our perceptions of the world is related to the rigor with which we examine these categories and refuse to view them as displaying the natural order or truth about something or someone.

In contention with authoritative discourse is internally persuasive discourse, which acknowledges the existence of contradictory social practices that are often "in opposition to socially sanctioned views and normative meanings" (Britzman, 2003, p. 42). An internally persuasive discourse is an "everyday discourse" that reflects what one thinks for her- or himself and has the potential to change and evolve while interacting with others (Ball, 2006, pp. 66-67). One's own words, thoughts, ideas, and beliefs are present in an internally persuasive discourse and may not have its authority acknowledged by others. For Bakhtin (1981), an individual often experiences an

inner struggle between the authoritative and internally persuasive discourses that takes place at a "zone of contact" where these discourses both partially belong to the individual while partially belonging to the other (p. 345).

Therefore, the "internally persuasive discourse is a discourse of becoming" as we struggle to take what we already know and decide to expand it, abandon it, or keep it (Britzman, 2003, p. 42). The "zone of contact" resembles Foucault's (1978) assertion that one individual can simultaneously be employing the strategic use of different and often contradictory discourses in a process of "trying things on" to see how they fit (or don't fit) with one's actions, behaviors, and beliefs.

In many ways, the internally persua-

sive discourses of the preservice teachers mirrored the authoritative discourses of the dominant culture that they brought to the university, which are at odds with the academic and research discourses of ELLs that were presented in class. In the process of becoming a teacher, and in this case, a teacher who works with ELLs, both authoritative and internally persuasive discourses are evident and are often conflicting. Both Foucault and Bakhtin provide a framework within which to consider the point of conflict, or "contact zone," where authoritative and internally persuasive discourses collide, as capable of providing valuable pieces of information or insight into one's experience and use of particular discourses.

**Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

The preservice teachers (five European-Americans and one Asian-American) were juniors in their early twenties majoring in elementary education, and were enrolled in my writing and language arts methods course at a large, public university located in what is otherwise a rural area. They were partnered with ELLs who were native Russian speakers with varying degrees of time spent in the U.S. school system. The Russian speakers attend a local charter school (grades 5-8) that is organized around project-based learning and the incorporation of technology throughout

the curriculum, where the student-teacher relationship is more collaborative than authoritarian. The preservice teachers worked with the ELLs on two separate occasions for a total of three hours.

In order for the preservice teachers to share their experiences working with ELLs, I conducted a 60-minute semi-structured focus group interview (Glesne, 2006; Morgan, 1997) with five out of the six preservice teachers. One was unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. The interview was audio-recorded in order to accurately capture the responses of the interviewees and the interview was fully transcribed. The interview guide is included in Appendix A. All the data were scrutinized through content analysis to look for patterns and themes. First I used open coding to identify salient themes among the participants' comments. Upon further analysis, I began to see strands that for me represented different discourses used by at least three out of the five participants.

Drawing from both Foucault's and Bakhtin's notions of discourse, I identified authoritative and internally persuasive discourses that the preservice teachers used to talk about their experience with ELLs. In particular, I identified potential "contact zones" marked by the recognition of a change in thinking or introduction of new ideas. It is at these sites where their internally persuasive discourses were developing and either contradicted or aligned with previously held authoritative discourses.

### Findings:

#### Discourses in Three Contact Zones

In reviewing the transcript from the focus group interview with the preservice teachers, there were a variety of discourses and potential zones of contact that emerged. However, for the sake of this project, I decided to focus on three contact zones in particular because each was taken up by at least two (if not more) of the five participants in the interview and there was also evidence of the development of internally persuasive discourses that conflicted with alternative authoritative discourses.

The first, and most predominant, authoritative discourse that was evident in the transcript was the belief that *the proper classroom setting is similar to one's own experiences in school as a student*. Nearly all five of the preservice teachers made comments that compared their own school experiences to that of the school where the ELLs attended, such as:

When I was in school it was very regi-

mented, our subjects were divided. I thought it was really interesting, seeing all of the projects they did. I liked how everything . . . it seems like they had a lot of freedom to really look at things they were interested in. (Student 1's thoughts about the students' integrated projects)

I thought it was really weird that they had two different grades in one classroom" (Student 2, expressing her opinion about the multi-age 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom that the ELLs were in)

Most of the kids at her elementary school are just coming in for the first time . . . So when I walked into this classroom that's what I was expecting. (Student 3, comparing her mother's ESL students to the native Russian speaking ELLs who had been in the country for years)

I thought it was really laid back just the way that the kids talked to their teacher and the teacher talked back to them. I thought it was really interesting because usually in school it's not so much like talking to an equal I felt. But I think the kids definitely love their teachers a lot and love the school a lot. There's a lot of school pride, so I think that that's something that is good. (Student 4)

Sharing one's own prior experiences in schools and as a student is a way to connect to the current situation. Perhaps for these preservice teachers, this authoritative discourse presents a context that is familiar, comfortable, and unthreatening to them because it is what they knew to be true when they were in school and had previously taken up this discourse unquestioningly.

Three of the above contact zones show where the preservice teachers are beginning to consider internally persuasive discourses that were in direct conflict with the "proper classroom" under the authoritative discourse. As a result of their experience in the school and interacting with the students, the formation of an alternative internally persuasive discourse was evident in Student 1's positive thoughts about students' projects and individual freedom, Student 3's realization that some ELLs are not new arrivals to the country, and Eve's conclusion that the more informal relationship between the teachers and students was beneficial.

The second authoritative discourse that was evident in the discussion had to do with the time that the ELLs had been living in the U.S. and reinforced the idea that *learning English was contingent upon how much time one spends in an English speaking environment*. The child's environments were identified as being in school (English), at home (mostly Russian), or in an English speaking country (the U.S.). Most of the preservice teachers' comments

revealed this discourse and expressed their surprise at the apparent slow rate of English acquisition of the native speaking Russian students, thus blaming their academic struggles on their native language. Some of their comments included:

Then I learned that he grew up here his whole life, so for a 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grader I felt that he should have been a little more advanced than that because he has been in English schools since he was young. But then after meeting him, I learned that his parents only speak Russian at home and they don't read any English at all. (Student 5)

So at first I was a little confused because he was also born here . . . but then I realized his parents speak primarily Russian so I guess it made more sense to me once I met him. (Student 1)

My kid was born in Russia and then he moved here when he was one, so that really surprised me that he had been here for that long. (Student 4)

I thought he wasn't going to be able to speak very well English and he spoke it perfectly and he told me that he basically lived in America his whole life. So, I was really confused as to why his writing was so bad. (Student 2)

As evidenced by the above comments, the preservice teachers placed a higher value on the *quantity* of time that the ELLs spend in English speaking environments as opposed to the *quality* of instruction or interactions in English. However, one of the preservice teachers in particular began to explore other factors that would influence how one learns a language, other than the amount of time spent in situations where that language is predominantly used. Student 4 reflected on her own assumptions and mentioned the possible influence of prior school experiences and a student's intrinsic motivation as key factors affecting language acquisition, as shown below:

But I think that the fact that they've been here for so long really surprised me. It made me wonder about what their experience was like at school before [here] because I don't know if English as a Second Language or their being Russian was embraced or instead maybe they felt ashamed of it. So I'm not really sure about their background, but I think they've been in school for so long so it made me wonder why are they behind, or what I think is behind, in their writing? . . . At an early age I feel like if they've been in U.S. public schools for so long that their writing would have progressed further, but I guess their motivation is a lot.

In response to these statements, both Students 3 and 5 then agreed that they

were interested in knowing about the other elementary schools that the ELLs had attended and that knowing about their prior experiences in schools could provide them with valuable insight into the language proficiency of the students they worked with. For these three preservice teachers, Student 4's comment created a contact zone for the other participants to engage in, which allowed the internally persuasive discourse of time in an English-speaking environment not being a predetermining

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factor of the successful acquisition of the English language began to formulate.

The third and final authoritative discourse that was evident in the focus group discussion was the conviction that *an ELL is someone whose oral proficiency in English is lacking and whose writing ability should match her/his oral proficiency*. Overall, the preservice teachers expressed surprise upon meeting their students, having read their writing pieces prior, because they felt as though their students' oral proficiency was too advanced to produce written work with "so many errors." The following comments display the preservice teachers' use of this discourse:

I mean his writing was just so bad. When I first got him I thought he wasn't going to be able to speak very well English and he spoke it perfectly . . . so, I was really confused as to why his writing was so bad. (Student 2)

She just had so many ideas and none of them were making sense because none of them were connected. But when I met with her in person, I didn't even know that she was an ESL student, she spoke perfectly and I was just shocked that her writing was just not complete. (Student 3)

I was also shocked that he spoke perfect English, like perfectly. I was thinking about if his English speaking would be as poor as his writing and it wasn't, he doesn't even have the accent, I would have never know that he was Russian. (Student 2)

These are just a few samples of the comments that the preservice teachers made with regards to their reactions at the discrepancy that existed between the oral proficiency and writing ability of the ELLs that they worked with. Within this contact zone an opening is created where the preservice teachers acknowledge an

experience that challenged a discourse and forced them to search around for another explanation.

Perhaps a new explanation will emerge that comes from our class readings, from our class discussions, or from another origin completely and will result in an internally persuasive discourse. As the conversation continued, they started to uncover the differences between social language and academic language as well as the differences between oral skills and

literacy skills. The quotes below show evidence of this internally persuasive discourse that marked a change in their thinking:

But she had this amazing story that she didn't even write down . . . she didn't want to write, it's like a chore, a task for her. Even though she's interested in her story, she's really not interested in writing it down. (Student 3's student orally told her an elaborate story that she struggled to write down on paper)

Making sure that the questions I'm asking that he understands what I'm talking about, that might be the most challenging. (Student 1, in response to the fourth interview question)

Well I did reword a lot and I asked him as much as I . . . "Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you know what I mean?" (Student 2, when asked what she could do if she felt as though her student didn't understand her)

But I think the language thing was also difficult because he knew what he wanted to say. It was sort of like he knew what he wanted to say but he didn't really know how to make the right transitions and to show what he was thinking in his mind to like, be on the paper. (Student 4)

By working so intimately with one ELL, the pre-service teachers have begun to reformulate the authoritative discourse regarding oral proficiency and writing ability. At this point, they begin to search for a new way of understanding their experience in order to help explain what they see happening with the ELLs, which may be influenced by our class, our relationship, or any multitude of other facts.

Clearly they started to realize that the ELLs' oral proficiency differed when talking about themselves and their interests versus talking about their writing in an academic way. In addition, the preservice teachers recognized that there are differ-

ences that can exist between one's oral skills in English and one's literacy skills in English.

**Discussion, Reflections,  
and Concluding Thoughts**

Within the contact zones described above, there were four different categories of conflict that emerged. First and foremost, there was the conflict that existed between the authoritative and the internally persuasive discourses that were used, as evidenced by my discussion above.

A second type of intrapersonal conflict that existed was the potential for tension to materialize between discourses that were used by the same person. At this critical stage of becoming a teacher, these preservice teachers show evidence of working in a zone of contact and attempting to identify and appropriate their own internally persuasive discourses.

The third type of conflict was interpersonal in nature because it existed between the views of two or more the participants. There were moments when one of the participants was visibly bothered by the comments of another, but chose not to challenge each other in this potential site for friction. Perhaps this was due to the context of the focus group interview and would be better addressed in a classroom situation or activity.

However, Student 4 in particular shared thoughts that revealed both sensitivity and compassion toward her student's situation in response to other, less empathetic comments (usually by Student 2). As a teacher educator, I need to realize that each opportunity is only one piece of their infinite development as teachers and be thankful that an initial experience with ELLs has sparked them to think and respond to ELLs in a slightly different way.

Lastly, and of great interest to me as a teacher educator, was the fourth category of conflict that existed between some of the discourses that the preservice teachers used during the interview and those that were prevalent in the readings and discussions we had in class. Forcing them to take up my perspective about ELL education would equate to moving them from one authoritative discourse to another.

While I realize the discourses about ELLs that were presented by me through course readings and discussions can be viewed as authoritative by the preservice teachers, I ironically felt disappointed that they had not embraced them completely and unquestioningly. Therefore, I am forced to consider, why do I feel this way

and what is the consequence? I must take caution against labeling certain discourses as “bad” (ones I deem to be insensitive toward ELL issues) and others as “good” (discourses I consider to display empathy and sensitivity towards ELLs).

I realized that, as with the student’s shirt, simply introducing new authoritative discourses does not ensure that objectionable internally persuasive discourses will be integrated or transformed in any way, which is supported by Foucault’s (1978) assertion that one person holds conflicting discourses simultaneously. There are no guarantees as to what, how, or why my students take up particular discourses (specifically with regards to teaching ELLs) and not others or how what is presented in class or in the readings contends with their own internally persuasive or authoritative discourses. Additionally, I cannot be certain that they will take these into consideration during their future teaching and learning experiences.

I conducted this inquiry with the preservice teachers who worked with the ELLs because I desire to reach a better understanding of how my undergraduate students were engaging with the possibility of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students in their future classrooms. To a certain extent I would like to think that our class readings and discussions along with this experience has provided those six preservice teachers with a deeper understanding of and sensitivity toward the lives and learning processes of ELLs.

However, this experience comes with no guarantees as to how my interactions with them impact the current perspective and future teaching practices of the six preservice teachers. This inability to be certain is particularly evidenced by the excerpts from the interview that show changing perspectives and the development of internally persuasive discourses by the preservice teachers.

In fact, the process of ideologically becoming a teacher involves competing discourses that *require struggle and uncertainty*, which are part of the conditions of Bakhtin’s (1981) *heteroglossic* world. At this point, I can appreciate the fact that I provided students with a personal connection to a student who is both succeeding and struggling with learning English and finding a place in the American school system, which I can only hope will lead to an increased sense of empathy and compassion for ELLs.

In moving forward as a teacher educator and advocate for ELLs, I have identified three implications from this research that may lead to a richer understanding

of my teaching, of my students’ process of becoming, and of the realities that ELLs experience. First of all, I find that it would be beneficial to think about ways in which I can encourage preservice teachers to conduct an inquiry into their conflicting discourses. How can I provide them with opportunities that engage them in an interrogation of what these discourses are saying about themselves, ELLs, their teachers, their families, and learning English? An initial step will consist of encouraging preservice teachers not only to name these discourses, but also to point out the conflicts among them and within themselves.

Secondly, as their instructor I can reflect on what readings, discussions, and projects I can develop in order to assist the preservice teachers as they struggle within the discourse of becoming (teachers) in an attempt to make their thinking visible and open to interrogation. This would take place in the contact zones that are created in my classroom and other spaces where they are contemplating and applying new theories to their practice in an attempt to internalize discourses and make them their own (Bakhtin, 1981).

A third implication encourages me to discover ways in which I can continue to challenge and encourage them to move past the potential attractiveness of authoritative discourses while allowing them to take up and form their own internally persuasive discourses. While I recognize the challenge of going against the normative ways of being and thinking in the world, I hope that through their process of becoming they are able to formulate discourses that speak to their passions, concerns, and desires, as opposed to those of others. Success for my students and myself cannot lie in particular discourses being taken up wholeheartedly and unquestion-

ingly, but rather with the introduction and engagement of alternative ideas as well as experiences that provide preservice teachers with opportunities for reflection and self-interpretation.

As Zygmunt-Fillwalk and Clark (2007) pointed out:

Becoming multicultural thus emerges as a recursive process rather than a destination. A cyclical process emerges as individuals encounter, reflect, de-construct, and re-create worldviews. With novel experiences, individuals begin the process anew. (p. 292)

For the student with the t-shirt, this might happen through direct, authentic ELLs in a classroom that is followed up with opportunities to reflect and interpret his experiences. I do not wish to move preservice teachers from one authoritative discourse to another over the course of a semester, but rather to stimulate their thinking in a way that fights stagnancy and allows for the appearance of ideas that were previously absent so that they can develop internally persuasive discourses that serve their own intentions, purposes, and teaching.

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### Appendix

*During the focus group interview, the following questions were asked:*

1. What are some of your first impressions about the school that we are visiting?
2. When you first received your ELL’s writing sample, what did you think about the writing and the student?
3. After meeting and spending time with your student, what surprised you about working with an ELL?
4. While working with your student, what was the most challenging part?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you have not had the chance to share yet? Do you have any final thoughts, comments, or questions?

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