

Preservice Teachers' Perceived Beliefs towards English Language Learners: Can a Single Course Change Attitudes?

Lan Quach Kolano
Elena T. King

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Recent immigration trends at the national and local levels indicate that schools are receiving the largest influx of immigrant students since the beginning of the 20th century (Wright, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), English language learners (ELLs) accounted for nearly 4.4 million students during the 2011-2012 school year. These students often enter schools and classrooms with teachers who feel underprepared to meet their complex needs (Walker, Shafer, & Liams, 2004; Webster & Valeo, 2011). In examining teacher demographic data, the National Center for Education Information (Feistritz, 2011) indicates that teacher education programs have typically recruited predominantly White females in their early twenties who share similar profiles as beginning teachers.

The literature suggests that preservice teachers' backgrounds often affect the degree to which prospective teachers support multicultural education and the degree to which they wish to explore social inequalities (Levine-Rasky, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Many preservice teachers embrace the idea of meritocracy, attribute the low achievement in minority students to cultural deficit models, and describe themselves as

Lan Quach Kolano is a professor of language education and Elena T. King is a clinical instructor, both in the Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education of the College of Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina. Lan.Kolano@uncc.edu & eltosky@uncc.edu

colorblind in an effort to cope with their fear and ignorance in teaching culturally diverse students (Barnes, 2006; Lewis, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2012). In addition, students often enter teacher education courses with varying levels of resistance to conversations of race (Brown, 2004; Gay & Howard, 2010).

Given the need to better prepare preservice teachers for the diverse classroom, the purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of undergraduate teacher education candidates after one required multicultural course that focused on the educational experiences of ELLs. Qualitative data were collected in the form of student narratives in order to explore the ways that these undergraduate students' beliefs evolved over one semester. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions: (1) which course activities contributed most to the perceived changes of undergraduate preservice teacher beliefs towards English Language Learners? and (2) how did teacher education candidates' perceived beliefs towards ELLs evolve?

Literature Review

Preparing teachers for the classroom has become the focus of much attention within educational research. Those arguing for a multicultural approach and critical pedagogy continue to stress the importance of teachers' attitudes toward diversity both in their personal and professional lives (Akiba, 2011; Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Nieto & Bode, 2012). As cultural mismatch increases in public school, teachers play an integral role in the school success or failure of immigrant and minority students. Thus higher education is tasked with the challenge of moving beyond pedagogy and methodology to mediating belief systems. Colleges of education across the country have recognized the need to include diversity statements in their teacher education programs as well as require additional diversity courses amidst already heavy course loads (Akiba, Cockrel, Simmons, Hann, & Agarwal, 2010). These courses are intended to be spaces for teachers to discuss and tackle issues of culture and diversity before they step foot in the classroom.

Within colleges of education, many researchers have found that significant changes in beliefs are not often made in a single semester and that teacher self-analysis remains superficial with little deconstruction or reconstruction of ideas (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Reiter & Davis, 2011). Kyles and Olafson (2008) caution that often education courses produce, "teachers who can recite the politically correct tenets of multicultural education without having the personal beliefs to ensure that all students learn in a democratic and equitable classroom environment" (p.

515). Teacher candidates often simply reiterate theories or summarize ideas about multiculturalism and view teaching as an objectifiable craft rather than as a contextualized art. Instead of reevaluating their beliefs about societal structures, preservice teachers obscure the subject of race by focusing on socioeconomic status, while they continue to commit to ideas of colorblindness and mistakenly equate lowering standards with multicultural teaching (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). However, when courses encourage reflective-intensive work, often through contact with diverse populations and subsequent time for reflection, changes can be observed (Ball, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

Theoretical Framework: Generative Change

Ball and Freedman (2004) explain the opportunity of changing ideologies through Bakhtin's "contact zone" or a struggle against authority. In this context authority would be the prevailing idea of a dominant culture that has been adopted by the teacher. With an emphasis on self-reflection and analysis, teachers are able to develop new notions of literacy and teaching based on a dialogic and reflective education course (Ball & Freedman, 2004).

However, often preservice teachers expressed desires for "foolproof" methods of teaching diverse populations and insisted on gaining content knowledge, not "cultural training" (Asher, 2007; Barnes, 2006). While these preservice teachers had difficulty recognizing the need to analyze their own attitudes and consider learners' backgrounds, college courses eventually allowed them space to reflect on their behaviors in the classroom and enabled them to come to the understanding that schools lie within a complex social and cultural network (Asher, 2007; Barnes, 2006; Smith, 2013). Research indicates that when teacher educators use methods, including field experience with diverse populations, multiple discussion sessions, action research opportunities, role play, ethnic others projects, reflective narratives, and poetry preservice teachers report perceived changes in their understanding of multicultural beliefs (Akiba, 2011; Ball, 2009; Ball & Freedman, 2004; Waddell, 2011).

Thus far the literature has opened the debate on the ability of teacher education programs to effectively produce teachers who have deconstructed and reconstructed their belief systems about teaching diverse learners. In her seminal framework outlining a theory of generative change, Ball (2009) writes,

I propose that to address the cycle of student underachievement, we must increase teachers' knowledge of theory and best practices and their knowledge of students' cultural practices and values. In addition, we

must assist teachers in replacing their feelings of insecurity, discomfort, and inadequacy with feelings of agency, advocacy, and efficacy. (p. 46)

In response to this recommendation, we embarked on a pilot study to explore whether one course that was designed to support teachers in working with ELLs could help teachers build what Ball (2009) defines as generativity:

the teacher's ability to continually add to their understanding by connecting their personal and professional knowledge with the knowledge that they gain from their students to produce or originate knowledge that is useful to them in pedagogical problem solving and in meeting the educational needs of their students. (p. 47)

Using data collected from 43 undergraduate teacher education candidates' narratives, this study documents the emerging development of their generativity as they were exposed to different pedagogical strategies and clinical experiences over one semester. In essence, students in this course were encouraged to see (through specifically designed simulations and activities) the value in integrating the knowledge gained from class about their diverse students with their existing knowledge base. When they showed evidence of this through their narratives, we were able to identify the places where their knowledge was generative. The data collected through their narratives revealed an awakening of their need to develop a more in-depth understanding of diverse immigrant communities.

Methodology

This specific course was designed with special attention to the use of narrative as a tool to engage teacher education candidates in the process of critical self-reflection and meaning making in an attempt to increase teacher generativity (Ball, 2009). Through this type of writing, students were encouraged to express themselves freely and to attempt to make sense of their experiences through focused writing which can act as a critical artifact that serves as a way to communicate actions, thoughts and feelings to "others" (Said, 1978). The narratives were then used as a tool of communication in exploring the two research questions: (1) which course activities contributed most to the perceived changes of undergraduate preservice teacher beliefs towards English Language Learners? and (2) how did teacher education candidates' perceived beliefs towards ELLs evolve?

Participants

The demographic makeup of this sample of 43 undergraduate stu-

dents is consistent with the teaching force profile. With the exception of three male students, two Asian students, one African-American, and three Latino, all of the participants were White females. Specifically, all undergraduate students in the study were either Elementary Education or Special Education preservice teachers who were required to take a course designed to help them work with ELLs. This course was newly designed after a state-wide mandate required universities to revise all academic programs to better address the needs of diverse populations. Because this was a required course rather than an elective, this course was met with some resistance from students who questioned its relevance in their program.

Data Collection

Student work samples were collected at strategic points in the semester. All of their reactions and responses to these course activities were documented in different forms of narratives. In shorter narratives we describe as the “i-essay,” students wrote responses immediately after a class discussion, experience, or viewing of documentaries. Students also wrote a reflective case study based on the clinical experiences they had working with newly arrived immigrant students. Other forms of narratives and work products were collected throughout the course of the semester with most of the data collected from the final narrative essay. Additionally, the researchers used participant observation and field notes to document student interactions and reactions during the class.

Course Content

This course was the first, and for many, the only course in their education sequence that focused on the specific needs of immigrant students. Course requirements included active participation in class in the form of activities and small group discussions, a clinical experience working with ELLs, reflective narrative writing in the form of i-essays, a case study that was written based on their clinical field experience, and a final narrative essay based on their course experiences. The required readings included a foundations text focused on strategies and teaching ELLs, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), several supplemental books that included *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* and *Enrique’s Journey*, and other articles and book chapters from authors that included Sonia Nieto, Lisa Delpit, Guadalupe Valdés, Gregory Michie, and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Examples of course activities included language simulations, debates, and the viewing of three documentaries, *Which Way Home*, *The New Americans*, and *La Cosecha*, which document the journeys of differ-

ent immigrant groups as they attempt to enter the U.S. and negotiate American life and schools.

In the course, students were required to complete a 25-hour field clinical in a highly diverse urban setting. For most of the class, this was the first time working with ELLs. Candidates were assigned to this school where over 60% of the student population is identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Each teacher education candidate was assigned three different ELLs to work with for the duration of the semester. The goals of this project were to expose candidates to the needs of ELLs and to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they face in school. After each experience in the school, candidates wrote field notes which they developed into a case study at the end of the semester.

In their final narrative for the course, students were asked to reflect on the evolution of their understanding of immigrant communities: "How has your understanding of ELLs and teaching diverse immigrant communities evolved over the course of the semester?" From the data, we explored whether one course that was specifically designed to help prepare teacher education candidates to work with ELLs could also support candidates' development of generativity, as defined by Ball (2009).

Data Analysis

This course was designed to use narrative as a tool to encourage introspection on personal beliefs about teaching immigrant students. Data was analyzed multiple times with different goals. First to explore the research question: which activities in the course did students indicate as most influential on their perceived change? In this analysis, the final reflective narratives were read and re-read for indicators of specific activities in the course that students stated as most influential in their evolution of beliefs about ELLs. The second analysis was done to explore the research question: what perceived changes were made in students' beliefs towards ELLs? To answer this question, narrative data from participants were analyzed by categorizing, exploring, and interrogating data (Hatch, 2002). Data was categorized to yield several emergent themes throughout the students' reflections over the course of the semester.

Results

Influential Elements of the Course

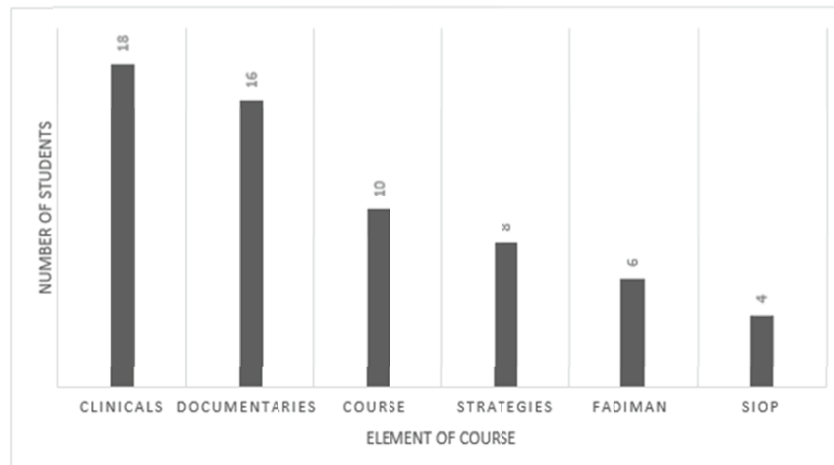
In their final reflective narrative for the course, students were asked to write to the following prompt: "How has your understanding of ELLs and teaching diverse immigrant communities evolved over the course of the semester?" These narratives were analyzed to look specifically

for which experiences in the course students identified as having the most influence on their perceived shift in beliefs about ELLs. Through this analysis, six elements of the course emerged as being influential: clinical experiences working with an ELL, the documentaries watched, the class lectures and discussions, the teaching of specific strategies to work with ELLs, the text *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman, and practice working with SIOP. Table 1 indicates the number of students who perceived each element as most influential in their changing perceptions of ELLs. Students who expressed that more than one element of the course greatly impacted their understanding of teaching ELLs were counted in each category that they highlighted. For example, Student 3 indicated that she was greatly influenced by the documentaries, the Fadiman text, and learning strategies specific to SIOP, and so she was counted in all three categories in Table 1.

Students 4, 5, 26, 32, 35, and 38 indicated that the clinicals alone were the most influential in changing their perceptions of teaching ELLs. Students 1, 6, 15, and 29 included both clinicals and documentaries; Students 11, 36, and 37 included the clinical hours, documentaries, and the Fadiman text. Students 9, 12, 19, 30, 31, and 41 each included a combination of clinical hours and either strategies, SIOP, or the course lecture.

Students 8, 22, and 40 indicated that the documentaries changed their perceived views. Students 3, 25, 27, and 33 included the documentaries and one other element of the course as the most influential. Students

Table 1
Influential Course Assignments



13 and 18 indicated the course lectures, while student 21 indicated the course lectures and the specific strategies taught in the course. Students 34 and 42 described the influence of the course as well as the Fadiman text. Students 7, 16, 17, 20, and 23 described the specific strategies learned as being most influential. Student 24 included the Fadiman text as the single most influential element of the course. Incidentally, there were no students who indicated the SIOP strategies alone as being most influential in changing their views on ELLs. Students 2, 10, 14, 28, 39, and 43 included only vague references to the course and were not included in the chart.

Clinical Field Experiences

Eighteen students indicated that the clinical experiences were extremely influential in their understanding of ELLs as is evident in such comments as, "I have developed a relationship with a student who has taught me just how hard it is to be a minority student in a mostly-American classroom" (Student 32). Another student articulated her clinical experience as such:

This class has really opened my eyes and broadened my understanding of teaching ELLs because it has allowed me to work one on one with a student and become aware of the different types of diverse learners, while also giving me the opportunity to watch a student succeed. (Student 6)

These eighteen students suggested that they were able to use the hands-on experience of working with an ELL to change their beliefs about their abilities to serve ELLs in the mainstream classroom in their future careers.

Documentaries

Sixteen students wrote specifically about gaining a greater understanding of immigration in the United States and ELLs through the documentaries: *La Cosecha*, *Which Way Home*, and *The New Americans*. Student 12 stated:

The videos really changed my feelings about immigration and how and why people from other countries are trying to make a life in the U.S. I had no idea what it took to legally come over to the United States and support a family at the same time. (Student 12)

The insights gained from the documentaries suggest that these were another course tool that demonstrated impact in perceived beliefs about immigrants and allowed students to renegotiate their cultural beliefs about immigrants as indicative in Student 27's statement, "Viewing

the three documentaries in class made me take a step back and really think about what these children are going through at home and how hard their life is compared to mine.”

Course Lectures & Discussions

Ten students wrote directly about the class lectures, discussions, or the class as a whole, progressive learning experience as indicative of Student 22's statement, “Overall, this class was a phenomenal learning experience for me. I can honestly say it was one of the best classes I have taken.”

General Strategies for Teaching ELLs and SIOP

Eight students described the benefit from learning specific teaching strategies, “I learned how to effectively instruct students who's [sic] language is not English, which programs are available for them, and how to individualize my instruction.” (Student 17) and four students specifically named SIOP strategies as beneficial in shifting their beliefs to become teachers of ELLs:

The strategies in SIOP modeled along with my new understanding of the struggles that many ELLs face, I have sustained a humble confidence that has enabled me to have the tools that will make a difference in teaching students in need. (Student 9)

By statements such as these, it is evident that students developed a feeling of confidence in using the resources from the class to improve their teaching of ELLs.

Cultural Texts

Several cultural texts were included in the course as optional readings. However, one additional book was required for all students. Six students expressed the benefit of reading Fadiman's text about the cultural and linguistic implications of treating a Hmong child with Epilepsy. Students used language such as “it opened my eyes to another culture and showed me how much I do not know” (Student 24) and “Lia Lee's story gave me perspective. . . [that] not only do language barriers need to be considered in working with people who do not speak English, but their culture as well” (Student 25).

Overall, the students in this course were able to articulate the elements within the course that they believed influenced them the most throughout the semester increasing their personal and professional awareness and building generativity. In addition to analyzing the elements of the course that influenced student thinking, analysis was conducted to understand the ways in which students perceived their changes in beliefs throughout the semester.

Students Expression of Change

Overall, students reported that their perceptions and beliefs changed to reflect the following gained understanding. The themes that emerged were: limited prior knowledge; new understanding of diversity in the classroom; gained confidence in the acquisition of skills; newly informed understandings of immigration and language maintenance; and new desire and motivation to work with ELLs. Participants also reported feeling more confidence and more equipped in teaching diverse student populations. Analyses of the data also provided insight into how new misunderstandings were shaped and stereotypes reinforced for two students.

Limited Prior Knowledge

The majority of the students (41 out of 43) admitted in their final narratives to having had limited knowledge of and interaction with ELLs prior to this course. In this narrative, many expressed the misconception that they thought all immigrants were Spanish speakers, and had no idea of the number of ELLs or languages spoken in the school systems surrounding the university as evident through such statements as, "Before this course, when I heard the term ELL or ESL, I immediately thought Hispanic. I always pictured a sad, little Hispanic boy, sitting in a classroom, confused as he could be" (Student 1). Student 6 stated, "At the beginning of the semester, I remember thinking I would have to go into a classroom and teach a student English, when I did not know any Spanish."

Before this class, many students indicated in their narratives that they did not realize the extent to which ELLs would factor into their mainstream classrooms and expressed anxiety about working with ELLs through statements such as, "The ELL experience was new and very scary to me because growing up in a small suburban town, I never had experienced diversity like my other classmates may have" (Student 26) and "I feared teaching ELL students and avoided any situations with them" (Student 17). Others expressed a more tempered view simply stating that they had never given much thought to the ELLs that would soon be in their classrooms. Statements such as, "It was not that I had a negative perception before, or did not care; I had just never put much thought into ELLs." (Student 25) Student 39 stated that, "Before this semester, I was vaguely aware that I might come in contact with many diverse learners from different backgrounds." Through phrases such as "never put much thought" and "vaguely aware," these preservice teachers were able to articulate their lack of prior knowledge of the demographics of the urban center surrounding this university and what their roles would be in serving those students. As indicated, this pattern of limited knowledge of working with ELLs was expressed by 41 of 43 students in the class.

New Understandings of Diversity in the Classroom

One of the most profound changes seemed to occur with students' awakening awareness of how to address diversity in the classroom. We coded this perceived change in belief as "new understanding" through language such as: "this course changed me"; "after this course, I realized"; and "one thing I never thought about before." Thirty-three students expressed a "new understanding" of multicultural education and in their narratives expressed a new desire and necessity to value the culture and language of ELLs. Many wrote specifically about their evolving understanding that much of the struggle for ELLs includes issues of culture, not just language. Statements that were indicative of this new knowledge include the following:

This course has taught me that I will need to go beyond writing lesson plans to meet the needs of my students by also researching different ethnicities and cultures. (Student 3)

A third idea that changed for me through this semester was that there is much more to an ELL student than another language. Thankfully this semester taught me that each of the students I come across has a story, a[n] educational background, a family, a culture, a set of beliefs and the list goes on. (Student 17)

Quotations such as these suggest that the students had not previously considered the intersections of language, culture, and schooling in contemporary education. Through the use of narrative, students were able to articulate their changes in beliefs throughout the course, providing a "new understanding" of diversity, or more specifically a new understanding of their role as a teacher in working with diverse populations.

Gained Confidence in the Acquisition of Skills

Twenty-eight students wrote extensively about the strategies learned in the course, including SIOP as well as additional practices that aid ELLs. Throughout the course, as students became more aware of cultural and linguistic differences and how to approach those in the classroom, they were able to express more confidence in their ability to work with ELLs. Student 10 wrote, "When an ELL arrives to the class, I will no longer feel uneasy and insecure about my abilities to communicate with and educate the student." Other statements that indicated students' newfound confidence in teaching ELLs included:

Before I took this class I was not confident to go out in a school and work [with] students that are learning English. I was afraid that my teaching would not be effective and I would not know how to interact with students that could not speak the same language that I knew. (Student 16)

One of the specific insecurities that students faced as they began to work with ELLs was that they did not speak the students' native language. They entered the class with beliefs that teachers had to be fluent in the student's first language to teach effectively. As students learned strategies to teach ELLs without the use of the student's native language, this misconception was corrected. Student 9 wrote, "I used to believe that I would need to know a student's primary language in order to effectively teach them." Student 36 said that she began the semester "believing that a language barrier was a huge drawback." Students such as this, were able to renegotiate their role to include an understanding of strategies, theories, and practices that would support ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

Newly Informed Understandings of Immigration and Language Maintenance

The idea of immigration among students ranged from informed to relying heavily on stereotypes when developing cultural beliefs. The course, which was designed within a social justice-generative framework sought to encourage students to examine and potentially deconstruct and reconstruct notions of immigration and language maintenance in society and schools. Only twenty-eight students wrote explicitly about changed understandings of immigration and language maintenance, but these students expressed specific changes in their belief structures about their understanding of immigration in the U.S. and the implications of language identity and maintenance. Student 40 was able to not only express her previous negative understanding of immigrants, but was also able to articulate where her bias developed:

My perception of 'illegal immigrants' came from the news. These people in the United States were portrayed as being thieves, murderers and disreputable people who were taking jobs away from Americans. All of this constant bombardment on the news really affected the way that I thought . . . I now understand much more than I did before. (Student 40)

Student 29 described how she was misinformed about the process of immigration to the U.S., stating that she thought that the United States had an open border, but she, "now understands how difficult, time consuming, and expensive it is to complete the necessary paper work involved to gain legal access to this country." Student 25 also indicated that she originally thought that the U.S. was both easier to access and more supportive. She concluded her narrative by stating that, "I have now realized that the U.S. has not always been prepared to support these immigrants."

Within this same theme, we also identified students who expressed a new understanding of the importance of maintaining and supporting ELL's first language. Student 10 indicated that, before taking this course, he believed that the only way for students to learn English was to only allow English in the classroom. In his final narrative he wrote about his change in belief:

Requiring students to abandon their native language to "make room" for another language does nothing to nurture emergent speaking or literacy. I've learned that providing students with opportunities for reading and writing in their primary language helps boost success in second language reading and writing. (Student 10)

Other comments that asserted newly formed consciousness of first language literacy and second language acquisition included the following excerpts from student narratives:

Another aspect that I have learned about teaching ELLs that I did not know before is to let the ELL students keep their first language. I have learned that it is actually better for a student to keep their first language and use their first language to help learn the second. (Student 18)

New Desire and Motivation to Work with ELLs

Nine students expressed a great desire to work more closely with ELLs. Of these, Student 37 and Student 4 expressed the desire to further their education in Teaching English as a Second Language in the form of a potential Master's degree and minor respectively. Student 4 wrote:

Over the semester, I have developed a deep love for these ELL students and was truly excited about seeing them every week... As the semester comes to a close, with the help of this course, I have discovered that I have a desire to potentially get a Master's degree in TESL. (Student 4)

The reaction of these two students, indicates that their experiences were so influential that they were able to write about not just a perceived change, but about their plans to work more closely with ELLs in the future.

Extremes

Twelve students emerged with more exaggerated changes in attitude which we coded as extreme through such language as "completely new perspective" and "life-changing experience." A small minority of students had very negative images of immigrants and ELLs before taking the course and expressed their newly acquired sensitivity in their reflective narratives. One student wrote of her thinking early in the course, "When starting this class, I sort of felt that ELL's did not have a lot of motivation to learn English and it was sort of a lost cause" (Student 28). The

student continued to say that she now feels more prepared and excited to teach ELLs. Student 36 expressed that:

Overall, my understanding of teaching ELLs has evolved this semester from believing that ELL students may not have as high of a learning content knowledge capacity, to realizing that their lack of understanding content has nothing to do with their capacity to learn, but rather outside factors, such as language, lack of English support at home, and lack of multiple means of assessment given by their teachers. (Student 36)

This student's change was marked extreme because she essentially transitioned her thinking from that of a truly deficit perspective to a place of understanding that as a new teacher, her role is to support all students and understand that all students have the capacity to learn.

Student 12 indicated that she grew up in a community "with no compassion or patience for people that are struggling to learn American culture and language." Her reported change in beliefs were evident in her narrative:

Because of this class I now have a totally different opinion and outlook on ELL students and immigrants. . . This TESL class has come to be a life changing class in how I view the world around me and the people in it from the perspective of a foreign person in a new land. (Student 12)

Through the writing of these narratives, students were able to indicate what mediated their beliefs (family, community, schools, media, etc.) as well as express how these beliefs changed over the course of a semester. Students 1, who had already written about the "sad Hispanic boy" also described a more extreme change. She wrote:

Before taking this class, I really thought nothing special about ELLs and their families. A part of me kinda had a disdain for them because I felt they come here illegally and then use our tax dollars and take up our space. (Student 1)

She then expressed that the activities and materials provided in the course created a change in her thinking about ELLs. This student moved beyond "disdain" for ELLs, to admitting that, "I learned the importance of appreciating the diversity these ELL students bring to the classroom instead of being upset that I have an ELL in my class." Within this theme of "extremes" we also included a student who felt that after working in an urban school with high diversity and participating in the discussions and activities of the course he decided that teaching was not for him. Student 43, wrote:

I have also realized that I don't think I will be a successful teacher so have decided to change majors. I don't want to put any of the children

at a disadvantage and don't feel I am fully able to comprehend all the material well enough to be a successful teacher.

While the intention of this course was not to encourage students to reconsider their careers in teaching, this student could not position himself as a successful teacher of all students, and instead chose to leave the field completely.

New Misunderstandings

While it is evident that many misunderstandings and myths were debunked through the coursework, unfortunately two students seemed to still not have developed equitable views of ELLs. Student 5 wrote:

These students typically struggle academically. I think this is due in large part to the parents of these immigrant students teaching their children that they need to learn to speak English to get a job. These students are capable of going to college and becoming successful individuals but due to their parents' lack of support and motivation for success, they are content with mediocrity...

While it is often true that ELLs struggle in school, this student appears to feel comfortable assigning blame to the families without examining the underlying structures of inequity in schools and society. In addition, the student concludes by making the blanket statement, "I better understand the Hispanic culture. The dynamics of the family are men-lead/supported" which also leads to a deficit view of Mexican and Latin American cultures. Similarly Student 11 viewed the class materials in a way that was also unintended in her analysis, "With all of the documentaries we watched I saw a pattern of brokenness in the Hispanic society that I didn't know existed before I took this class." The language used by these students indicate that they replaced some misunderstandings with new misconceptions about Latinos and education.

Discussion

The findings in this study indicate that as teacher candidates began to work with ELLs and participated in the reflective-nature of the coursework, many of them experienced generative change as they were able to begin connecting their personal and professional knowledge through course assignments. Candidates were able to gain insight into a population that many had self-admittedly never thought about at any length. Because of the diverse nature of the classrooms that many students will now enter as teachers, there is a necessity to redefine the formed beliefs of teachers. It is important that before teachers enter

the classroom they have explored their beliefs about how to successfully support minority students in the mainstream classroom. The data from this study indicate that the majority of students who successfully completed this course now feel that they have the ability to thoughtfully adapt their curriculum to the needs of ELLs.

While the data indicate that the majority of students achieved positive shifts in thinking about ELLs, two of the students amplified or fossilized their cultural folklore statements and maintained deficit views of ELLs. Over-generalized beliefs about “lack of parental support” and “patterns of brokenness” were clearly not the intended outcomes of the coursework; however, these are the constructs that students entered with and exited the course with. For these teachers the course failed to mediate beliefs in thinking about immigrant students which may lead to inconsistencies in their teaching practices or deficit-thinking in their interactions with ELLs in their future classrooms.

The vast majority of students in this study indicated that more than one component of the course helped shape their perspectives on ELLs. However, slightly fewer than half the participants included the clinical experience of working with an ELL one-on-one as one of the most influential elements of the course in understanding this particular population. The second most influential element was watching course documentaries. This aligns with much of the research that highlights how learning about and interacting with those from another culture can influence one's thinking. Using the data from this study, we recommend that education courses include both a clinical component as well as a components such as documentaries and biographies or autobiographies to give students a clearer understanding of the challenges that immigrant students face in public schools.

While many of the preservice teachers ended the course reflecting on their gained knowledge of ELLs, it is unclear as to how this will manifest itself in the classroom. Additional research should be collected in the student teaching semester and in the first years of teaching to suggest if teacher education courses impact teacher practices and student achievement which is the ultimate goal of courses such as this. Without this additional research, it is unclear as to the effectiveness generative change will have in the classroom.

Conclusion

As education in the United States moves toward the Common Core and further standardization, colleges of education are being asked to develop teachers who have the ability to relate this commonality to

uncommon groups of students. Our results suggest that although the student population in area schools reflects linguistic and cultural diversity, teacher education programs only have to provide rhetorical support concerning their commitment to multicultural education. The common model used to prepare preservice teachers is through the addition of one course embedded within a program. Subsequently, the particular course under investigation became the piece that was added to reflect commitment from different programs at the college level. This study explored the potential impact that one multicultural course had on the perceived beliefs towards English Language Learners on 43 undergraduate students in one short semester.

This course was designed from a multicultural perspective in order to mitigate stereotypes and cultural misbeliefs about diverse populations and encourage generative change. This study indicated that most of the teachers in this course were able to narrate their perceived shifts in thinking about ELLs through a thoughtful course design including a semester-long clinical experience working with ELLs. This research adds to the larger discourse on exactly what can be done to develop teachers' beliefs and to what extent a single semester of reflective coursework can be successful. Further research and conversations should be conducted within this dialogue to determine the influence of education on teachers' perceived beliefs about working with diverse populations and how this affects K-12 student achievement.

References

- Akiba, M. (2011). Identifying program characteristics for preparing pre-service teachers for diversity. *Teachers College Record, 113*(3), 658-697.
- Akiba, M., Cockrell, K., Simmons, J., Han, S., & Agarwal, G. (2010). Preparing teachers for diversity: Examination of teacher certification and program accreditation standards in the 50 states and Washington, DC. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 43*(4), 446-462. doi: 10.1080/10665684.2010.510048
- Asher, N. (2007). Made in the (multicultural) U.S.A.: Unpacking tensions of race, culture, gender and sexuality in education. *Educational Researcher, 36*(2), 65-73. doi: 10.3102/0013189X07299188.
- Ball, A. (2009). Toward a theory of generative change in culturally and linguistically complex classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal, 46*(1), 45-72. doi: 10.3102/0002831208323277.
- Ball, A. F., & Freedman, S. W. (2004). *Bakhtinian perspectives on language, literacy, and learning*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnes, C. (2006). Preparing preservice teachers to teach in a culturally responsive way. *The Negro Educational Review, 57*(1-2), 85-100.
- Brown, E. (2004). What precipitates change in cultural diversity awareness during a multicultural course? The message or the method? *Journal of Teacher*

- Education*, 55(4), 325-340.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflicts in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Fadiman, A. (1997). *The spirit catches you and you fall down: A Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of two cultures*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Feistritz, C. E. (2011). *Profile of teachers in the U.S. 2011*. Washington, DC: The National Center for Education Information.
- Garmon M. A. (2004). Changing preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity: What are the critical factors? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(3), 201-213.
- Gay, G., & Howard, T.C. (2001). Multicultural education for the 21st century. *The Teacher Educator*, 36(1), 1-16.
- Gay, G., & Kirkland, K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory into Practice*, 42(3), 181-87.
- Hatch, J. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing and seeing*. New York: Routledge.
- Kyles, C. R., & Olafson, L. (2008). Uncovering preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity through reflective writing. *Urban Education*, 43(5), 500-518. doi:10.7788/0042085907304963
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2011). "Yes, but how do we do it?" Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. In J. Landsman & C. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers, diverse classrooms* (pp. 33-46). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishers.
- Levine-Rasky, C. (2001). Identifying the prospective multicultural educator: Three signposts, three portraits. *Urban Review*, 33, 291-319.
- Lewis, A. (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all white school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 781-811. doi:10.3102/00028312038004781
- Nazario, S. (2006). *Enrique's journey: The story of a boy's dangerous Odyssey to reunite with his mother*. New York: Random House.
- Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2012). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Reiter, A. B., & Davis, S. N. (2011). Factors influencing pre-service teachers' beliefs about student achievement: Evaluation of a pre-service teacher diversity awareness program. *Multicultural Education*, 19(3), 41-46.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Seidl, B., & Friend, G. (2002). Leaving authority at the door: Equal-status community-based experiences and the preparation of teachers for diverse classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(4), 421-433.
- Smith, R. (2000). The influence of teacher background on the inclusion of multicultural education: A case study of two cohorts. *The Urban Review*, 32(2), 155-176.

- Smith, H. J. (2013). Emotional responses to documentary viewing and the potential for transformative teaching. *Teaching Education* 25(2), 217-238. doi: 10.1080/10476210.2012.762351
- U.S. Department of Education. (2014). The condition of education 2014. (NCES 2014-08).
- Valli, L. (1995). The dilemma of race: Learning to be color blind and color conscious. *The Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(2), 120-129.
- Waddell, J. (2011). Crossing borders without leaving town: The impact of cultural immersion on the perceptions of teacher education candidates. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 20(2), 23-36.
- Walker, A., Shafer, J., & Liam, M. (2004) "Not in my classroom": Teacher attitudes towards English language learners in the mainstream classroom. *National Association for Bilingual Education Journal of Research and Practice*, 2(1), 130-160.
- Webster, N. L., & Valeo, A. (2011). Teacher preparedness for a changing demographic of language learners. *TESL Canada Journal*, 28(2), 105-128.
- Wright, W. E. (2010). *Foundations for teaching English language learners: Research, theory, policy, and practice*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Publishing.