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Exploring change in preservice teachers' beliefs about English language learning and teaching

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ABSTRACT

The beliefs a teacher carries into the classroom are a strong predictor of behaviour and, thus, have educational implications. With more English Language Learners (ELLs) worldwide, in mainstream classrooms in English speaking countries and in content-based classes in other countries around the globe than ever before, it is essential that preservice teachers' beliefs about these students are understood and, when possible, altered to ensure positive and productive educational experiences. This study examined the initial language learning beliefs and attitudes toward ELLs among 354 pre-service teachers in a large public university and compared it to their beliefs after their ESL related coursework. The findings demonstrate beliefs about ELLs can be changed, influencing preservice teachers' practices in future classrooms. Survey data collected before and after specific coursework revealed a significant shift in preservice teachers' beliefs, indicating more alignment with current research and sound educational practice. Semi-structured focus-group interviews provided supporting evidence. These findings suggest pre-service teachers need evidence-based coursework in language development and language learning processes to overcome misconceptions regarding ELLs.

Keywords: belief change; English language learners; preservice teachers

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Introduction

Mainstream teachers are challenged daily with teaching increased numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse English Language Learners (ELLs) (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll 2005; Gándara, & Santibañez, 2016; Osterling & Fox 2004; Suarez, 2003). Recent studies have explored teachers' beliefs about diversity (e.g. Brown, 2004; Karabenick & Noda, 2004) and particular attention has been devoted to the beliefs of preservice and in-service English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers (Angelova, 2002; Busch, 2010; Hakuta, 2011; Karathanos, 2009; MacDonald, Badger, & White 2001; Pray & Marx, 2010). Yet, the beliefs of mainstream teachers about ELLs and linguistic diversity in mainstream education classrooms have been largely ignored (Peter, Markham, & Fray, 2013; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013).

The current study addresses this gap in research by examining preservice teachers' beliefs about ESL students before and after engaging in coursework related to second language acquisition and assessment of English language learners. This study is valuable for the field because it informs teacher educators of their students' incoming beliefs so these beliefs may be effectively targeted, paving the way to better prepare teachers to promote educational success for their students.

Review of Literature

Teacher Beliefs

A teacher's beliefs impact his or her behaviour, thereby impacting student learning. Implicit and often subconscious beliefs manifest themselves in teachers' expectations and assumptions about learning and learners. This was evidenced in Terrill and Mark's (2000) study of preservice teachers which found significant differences in expectations for learners from economically, racially, and linguistically different schools and backgrounds.

Our definition of beliefs is based on the seminal work of Rokeach (1968) who proposed that beliefs are "inferences made by an observer about underlying states of expectancy" (p.2). As indicated in the definition, beliefs determine expectations, choices, actions, and serve an adaptive function that helps individuals establish a schema of their world (Lewis et al. 1999). Rokeach's (1968) definition has been widely utilized in teacher education research (e.g., Brown, 2004; Pajares, 1992). In contrast to knowledge, which is based on objective fact, beliefs are based primarily on evaluation and judgment (Pajares, 1992; Vartuli, 2005). Beliefs possess such importance because they are the strongest indicator of a person's decisions (Bandura, 1986; Atlan, 2006).

McAllister (2000) explains that effective instruction of diverse students begins with the teachers' awareness of their own worldviews, allowing them to better understand the worldview of their students. Vartuli (2005) echoed this call arguing that "Students and teachers have prior beliefs … based on their experiences, knowledge, and values. These beliefs are often unconsciously held assumptions about children, classrooms, and content to be taught. To become explicit, they must be the subject of reflection." (p.82). Without an understanding of the underlying beliefs of preservice teachers, it is difficult for teacher preparation programs to know how to influence those beliefs and, thus, teaching behaviours (Pajares, 1992).

Belief Change

The worldviews of preservice teachers are based upon their life experiences and observations. Generally, these views are subconscious, but can have an impact on an individual's beliefs about

their students. Research on information that contradicts preexisting theories (anomalous data), may be applied to explain how to successfully alter the belief systems of preservice teachers. According to Chin and Brewer (1993) when facing anomalous information, be it explicitly stated in a course or observed during field work, preservice teachers may make the unconscious decision to ignore, reject, exclude, or reinterpret the new idea to fit with their pre-existing theories. However, when well-presented, the anomalous data may alter original beliefs if the data is believable, explainable, and strong enough to convince the individual their original belief must be changed. Unfortunately, changing a belief takes time and is impacted by the individual's prior knowledge and experiences. While Chin and Brewer's (1993) work focused on anomalous data in science education, other research has demonstrated similar effects when attempting to alter the beliefs of educators

A three-year study of preservice physical education teachers' beliefs about good teaching conducted by Doolittle, Dodds, and Placek (1993) did not show any marked changes. The researchers' explanations of the teacher education program's failure echo the implications of anomalous data theory. First, inconsistent and misperceived program messages may have contributed to teachers not accepting the information as valid. Additionally, the cognitive disequilibrium (as defined by Hollingsworth, 1989) created by the education program may have been insufficient and, thus, the information was rejected by participants. Cognitive disequilibrium or dissonance is the discomfort experienced by a person who holds two or more contradictory beliefs or values at the same time and is challenged by new information that clashes with his/her existing beliefs and values. Doolittle et al. (1993) believe the most realistic explanation is that the teacher education program did not explicitly confront preservice teachers' belief systems.

This resistance to change presents an incredible challenge to teacher educators on both theoretical and practical levels since teacher educators aim to promote positive change in knowledge, belief, and practice of preservice teachers. However, as Darling-Hammond (2000) explains, a growing collection of empirical research evidences the influence of teacher education on teacher effectiveness. Several studies have also provided evidence praising teacher education for bringing about positive change in preservice teachers' belief about ELLs and language learning (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Nettle, 1998; Tillema, 1998; Wilkins & Brand, 2004). Wilkins and Brand (2004), for example, investigated the potential impact of an elementary mathematics methods course in promoting teacher beliefs and attitudes that are consistent with the current reforms in mathematics education. The participants in the course were involved in reading, discussing, and writing about the philosophical underpinnings of different approaches to teaching with a focus on the role of the teacher and student. The findings of their study revealed a shift in preservice teachers' beliefs toward a greater consistency with course instruction.

Many studies have demonstrated it is possible to observe belief change in some areas and belief stability in others. Olson and Jimenez-Silva (2008) explored the change in preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward ELLs after required ESL endorsement courses. They found that ESL courses had a positive result on preservice teachers' confidence and underlying ideological beliefs about teaching English language learners. MacDonald, et al. (2001) also found changes in preservice ESL teachers' beliefs about English language learning when taking second language acquisition (SLA) courses as opposed to no significant changes for the control group who did not take a SLA course.

Due to global increase in the number of English language learners and the role of English as a global language at this moment in history, examining teacher education programs and teachers' beliefs about ESL learning and teaching is pertinent. Adequate educator preparation depends on insights into the beliefs of mainstream preservice teachers before and after enrolling in ESL instructional methods courses. These beliefs are critical due to their impact on teacher behaviour and teacher expectations of ELLs.

The Study

Many researchers argue that a homogenous teaching force, combined with the increasingly diverse student population and demands of high-stakes testing, signify the importance of investigating mainstream teachers' beliefs about English language learning and learners (Busch, 2010; Hakuta, 2011; Karabenick & Noda 2004; Karathanos, 2009; Lee, 2004; Pray & Marx, 2010). The purpose of this study was to investigate mainstream preservice teachers' beliefs about ELLs, language learning, and the locus of responsibility for teaching ELLS, and how those beliefs are altered by a semester-long course focused on methods of teaching ESL, assessment of ELLs, and the process of learning and teaching a second language.

The research was guided by the following question: "How do preservice teachers' pre-existing beliefs about second language learning and teaching change following ESL coursework? "

Participants

Participants consisted of 354 PreK-8th grade preservice teachers in a college of education at a large university situated in a rural community of approximately 130,000. This study's participants were mostly 3rd year students and were enrolled either in Second Language Instruction course, focused on how to instruct ELLs in the mainstream classroom, or Assessment of English Language Learners courses, which teaches students how to assess ELLs and how to document ELLs' academic performance through alternative assessment methods. These participants were targeted for the present study because of their intent to teach in mainstream classrooms. There were seven course instructors, four of whom were non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs). These courses are required of all undergraduate students majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies, meaning a control group of preservice teachers not enrolled in the courses was unavailable. The vast majority of the participants is from an Anglo-American ethnic background and is female. The course titled Second Language Instruction and Assessment explores techniques and methods of intensive English instruction for ESL students: lesson planning and instructional modifications; use of instructional strategies and appropriate assessment practices. The course focuses on how to instruct ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Students learn ways to modify lessons to help the ELLs that they will teach. Some instructors pair their students with an ELL during the semester or partner the students with classes in local schools, and some do not. The prerequisite for taking the course is admission to teacher education program. The course titled Assessment of English Language Learners explores theoretical and practical aspects of ESL/EFL testing, including formal and informal assessment, procedure and instruments, assessments and referral, and processes of ESL with special needs and gifted ESL learners. The course builds on the Second Language Instruction course, focusing on documentation and assessment procedures in ELL instruction. They learn how to document growth of ELLs' academic performance by learning to design and use of rubrics, portfolios, and personal anecdotes

The vast majority of the participants were females (95%) from an Anglo-American ethnic background. This sample is fairly representative of PreK-12th grade public school teachers in the United States, 83.7% of whom are White and 75% are female (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2006).

Instrument Development

To design a survey that would accurately measure preservice teachers' beliefs, we first interviewed the course instructors and examined relevant coursework. Based on this information, we selected and adapted questions from Horwitz's (1985) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), Savignon's (1976) Foreign Language Attitude Survey (FLAS), and Lightbown and

Spada's (1999) survey of popular ideas about language learning.

The survey instruments were piloted with a small group of preservice teachers taking the ESL courses in the summer. Participants provided feedback and instruments were adapted appropriately. The resulting scale was a Second Language Learning Survey that included 20 Likert-scale items. Face and content validity were considered in retaining items. The Likert scale choices ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with some negatively worded questions. Based on the survey results seven interview questions were constructed to complement the quantitative data. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted at the end of the semester to look more deeply at concepts addressed in the survey.

Data Collection Procedures

One researcher administered the Second Language Learning Survey as well as a Background Questionnaire at the start of the first day of all ESL methods classes in the fall and spring semesters. Participants were informed that their confidentiality would be strictly observed, instructors would not have access to the data, and responses would in no way impact their grade in the class. During the 11th, 12th, or 13th week of the semester, depending upon course schedules, the Second Language Learning Survey was administered again.

Data collection among all of the ESL methods classes resulted in 480 surveys. However, only participants that completed both the pre and post surveys were included in the study. Some surveys were discarded because the preservice teachers did not provide their name or consent. Also, preservice teachers who completed the survey in the fall and then took the other ESL methods course in the spring were not allowed to complete the survey a second time. In total, 354 surveys met the inclusion criteria.

The qualitative data collection was conducted via semi-structured focus group interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to exemplify and provide external validation for the beliefs expressed in the surveys. Focus group approach was selected rather than individual interviews because through interaction with others, people often come to recognize their own beliefs and perceptions (Kleiber, 2004).

Participants were selected based on a comparison of the pre- and post- scores on the Second Language Learning Surveys administered at the beginning and end of the semesters. Based on those scores, the preservice teachers were categorized in three groups: those demonstrating positive change, negative change, and no change. This organization was chosen to encourage commonalities within groups to encourage participants' comfort to express their beliefs honestly among like-minded peers. However, the first set of interviews demonstrated that the 'no change' group was too heterogeneous to encourage collaborative dialogue. Therefore, this classification was not used during the second set of focus groups.

Instructors allowed the researcher to meet with the selected participants briefly during their class time to request and schedule focus group interviews. The group participants are summarized in table 1.

Table 1
Focus Groups and participants

	Direction of Survey Change	**Participants**	**Semester**
Focus Group #1	Positive	Two males and two females	Fall
Focus Group #2	No change	Five females	Fall
Focus Group #3	Negative	Two females and one male	Fall
Focus Group #4	Positive	Five females	Spring
Focus Group #5	Negative	Four females	Spring
Focus Group #6	Positive	Four females	Spring

Interviews were conducted by one of the researchers and held in a small, quiet, centrally located conference room with a round table conducive to discussion. As a female Anglo-American, the researcher (interviewer) comes from a background that is seemingly very similar to many of the participants. She completed her Bachelor's degree in order to teach, just as they are seeking to do. And like many of them plan to do, she taught primary students in public schools. The expectation was that they would be open in sharing with the researcher because she appears to be very much like them.

The fact that the researcher personally conducted the interviews has significant advantages. The researcher was able to interact with the participants personally, so she could gain a feel of the tone of the interviews and openness or reservation of the participants. She was able to take steps to make the participants feel comfortable and safe in sharing. She also had the freedom to follow the flow of the discussion rather than a regimented script and, thus, she was able to maximize her interaction with the participants.

At the same time, there are some disadvantages to personally conducting the interviews. The role as a researcher creates an unequal power structure. Participants could view the researcher as an outsider rather than an insider, which may limit their responses. This is compounded by the researcher's higher level of education. Furthermore, being somewhat older than them might inhibit the participants from sharing openly and fully. Care was taken by the researcher to clarify that consensus was not the goal and that a diversity of opinions was acceptable. All interviews were tape-recorded. The questions asked varied between the groups and depended upon the flow of the interviews. Questions that emerged during the participants' conversations were also added.

Data Analysis

To answer our research question (Do preservice teachers' pre-existing beliefs about second language learning and teaching change following ESL coursework?), we first needed to establish what beliefs students hold prior to ESL coursework. We achieved this goal through a descriptive analysis of the survey, which assessed the beliefs of the participants prior to the ESL courses. Paired sample *t-tes*ts were run for pre and post scores to indicate change in belief.

Qualitative data from focus group interviews was also integrated to support survey findings. Interviews were transcribed and we used the constant-comparative method to determine themes within the interviews (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003).

Findings

Factor analysis

We conducted a principal component factor analysis (PCA) to determine the different conceptual constructs included in the survey. The clustering of the 20 items was evaluated by means of PCA with a Varimax rotation using SPSS Version 14.0. The suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed before applying PCA. The correlation matrix evidenced a variety of coefficients of .3 and above, indicating the data's suitability for factor analysis.

The factor analysis yielded three unique components. Five items loaded onto component 1, five items on component 2, and three items loaded onto component 3. Component 1 items address respondents' beliefs regarding the utility of English in the home and in the classroom as well as how aptitude and the first language impact English language learning. Overall, this component, referred to as Language and Language Learning, measures the priority of English use opposed to the use of native language. The second component, referred to as Locus of Responsibility, explores preservice teachers' belief regarding the locus of responsibility for teaching ELLs. Component 3 addresses participants' beliefs about ELLs and is thus titled English Language Learners. Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimate for these three components was .640, .612 and .742, respectively.

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to describe participants' pre-existing beliefs about English language learning and teaching. Component means for the data on the Second Language Learning Survey items are presented in table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Component Scores Before and After ESL Coursework (n = 354)

			Pre-Course		Post-Course	
Components		Maximum	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Component 1: Language & Language Learning	Total Score	30	16.53	3.917	18.24	3.931
	Item Mean	6	3.31	0.55	3.65	0.49
Component 2: Locus of Responsibility	Total Score	30	22.77	3.711	24.25	3.617
	Item Mean	6	4.55	0.55	4.85	0.42
Component 3: English Language Learners Total	Total Score	18	11.40	3.379	13.95	2.229
	Item Mean	6	3.80	0.29	4.65	.09

Within the first component 'Language and Language Learning', preservice teachers indicate a belief that parents of ELLs as well as ELLs themselves should speak English at home (M = 2.88, SD = 1.164; M = 2.91, SD = 1.244). They also indicate agreement that English proficiency should be a prerequisite for entry into mainstream classrooms (M = 3.19, SD = 1.299) and that special aptitude

is involved in language learning (M= 3.32, SD = 1.145). The highest mean in the component comes from their slight disagreement with the statement: 'speaking a first language other than English interferes with learning English' (M = 4.23, SD = 1.261). Overall, the results reflect beliefs about the language learning process that are uninformed by research.

The second component 'Locus of responsibility' included the highest item-specific and overall component means. The preservice teachers expect to have ELLs in their classes (M = 5.14, SD = .883), agree that it is important for mainstream teachers to learn how to teach ELLs (M = 5.05, SD = 1.073) and believe it is their responsibility to teach ELLs (M = 4.57, M = 1.364). They slightly agree that they can effectively teach ELLs (M = 4.13, SD = 1.185). They slightly disagree with the idea that teaching ELLs is the ESL teacher's job rather than that of the mainstream teacher (M = 3.88, SD = 1.357). These means indicate expectations that parallel the current practice of mainstream ESL inclusion.

The third component 'English Language Learners' mean of 3.80 indicates that participants view ELLs and their differences in a slightly positive light. They slightly disagree with beliefs that ELLs have behaviour problems (M = 4.0, SD = 1.332) and that their accent impedes academic development (M = 3.93, SD = 1.318). However, they slightly agree that grammatical errors always require correction (M = 3.47, SD = 1.235).

Paired Sample t-tests

The paired sample *t-test* results (Table 2) demonstrate there was a statistically significant change in the Second Language Learning Survey scores for each of the three constructs from the pre-survey (M= 50.71 SD = 7.885) to the post-survey [M= 56.45, SD = 7.496, t(353) = 15.421, p<.0005]. In order to determine the magnitude of the effect, eta squared was calculated. The eta squared statistic indicated a large effect size for the first (.16), second (.15), and third component (.37) as well as the overall total (.29).

The first component shows an increase in mean from the pre (M = 3.31) to post (M = 3.65) survey scores. There was a statistically significant increase in survey scores from the pre-survey to the post-survey as shown in table 3.

Table 3
Paired Sample t-test for Pre and Post Instruction Survey Scores (N=354)

Variables	Mean	SD	*T*	Eta
Component 1: Language & Language Learning	1.706	3.878	8.276	.16
Component 2: Locus of Responsibility	1.477	3.566	7.794	.15
Component 3: English Language Learners	2.556	3.309	14.536	.37
Total change from all three components	4.898	7.588	12.146	.29

Note: p <.005 for all effect sizes

Component 3, measuring beliefs about ELLs, evidences the greatest shift between pre and post survey scores, indicating that outgoing students have considerably more positive beliefs about ELLs after ESL coursework. This component demonstrates the most drastic increase in mean from 3.80 to 4.65 which was also statistically significant (p<.005).

The range of possible scores was 13 to 78 and the overall mean score of post survey (56) showed a mean increase of 5.62 points. Participants (N=20) with extreme gain scores (3-4 points) were considered for focus group interview first. Then, participants who did not change from pre to post survey (no change group) were identified (7). The third group for interview included participants who showed negative change (N=10) in their gain scores (1-2 points). Interviewees were also

selected by convenience and availability of the participants in each group for interviews. Groups of students were identified that fit the three change categories and were all enrolled in the same classes. This allowed the researcher a greater opportunity to make contact with them and increased the likelihood that they would be available to participate at a common time.

Qualitative Analysis of Themes

Themes Relating to Component 1 – Language and Language Learning

Two themes relating to the first component emerged during focus group interviews – the important role of parents in English language learning and the value of the first language in English language learning and teaching. Two survey items also dealt with parents and the role of home language. The post-survey results indicate that some participants had not accepted the importance of the first language and the value of its use in ELLs' homes. The tension between old and new beliefs was exemplified when some participants expressed increased understanding of the value of the native language while other participants held parents responsible for English language learning. This finding is consistent with Chin and Brewer's (1993) research on anomalous data, demonstrating that information contrary to long-held beliefs will often be dismissed or ignored.

One interviewee believed 'it's all up to the parents' to determine the language used in the home (Eleanor).[1] Some interviewees attributed students' success or failure in learning English to the parents, blaming parents' use of L1 for the lack of students' English development. Megan, for example, said 'I think a lot of it depends on what side the parent is on—whether they're encouraging their student or whether they're trying to keep them from learning the language because they don't want them to assimilate.'

Other interviewees emphasized the importance of the first language in maintaining familial culture and avoiding assimilation. For example, Patricia recognized, 'Making them lose their home language could also be like, 'You need to get rid of your culture.' Julie also underscored the value of the first language in L2 acquisition but emphasized the teachers' role in encouraging L1 use at home. She explained: 'We learned that it [their first language] is the foundation for development and we should encourage them to read in their home language and talk to their family and we're supposed to encourage parents to do that.'

Themes Relating to Component 2 – Locus of Responsibility

The second component, which deals with change in beliefs about the locus of responsibility for English language teaching, shows a significant increase from the pre (M = 4.55) to post (M = 4.85) in survey scores ($p < .005$). These means indicate increasingly positive beliefs about the mainstream teachers' responsibility of teaching ELLs. Overall, the survey results were supported by the interview data and participants evidenced a positive change in beliefs about the locus of responsibility for teaching ELLs. The second component also included items that asked if preservice teachers felt equipped to teach ELLs. Two themes relating to these items surfaced during focus group interview analysis: Interviewees expressed ability, readiness and responsibility that they, as mainstream teachers, will have for teaching ELLs.

As interview participants discussed their beliefs about their abilities to teach ELLs, contradictions emerged from both within the group and individuals. Participants verbally grappled with their future role teaching both native and non-native English speakers. Sarah captured the internal tension in her comment:

> It's a little scary thinking about it. It's a lot of responsibility and there's a lot of pressure on the teachers because they want to make sure that all their students are learning all of the material that they need to. And it's hard enough to just plan a curriculum that will get everything in and make sure that the children are enjoying themselves and learning everything, and to throw children with special needs into the mix and then also children who don't know English at all just kind of creates a whole new dimension…. But I also do have confidence because I know we've been prepared here.

The coursework seemed to have enhanced some participants' self-confidence for teaching ELLs. Natalie verbalized this juxtaposition in her statement: 'Well I think …that it's really intimidating and it's something you can't really know until you put it into practice but…once you get thrown into that situation [teaching ELLs] you'll make it work and we'll use everything we learned.'

In contrast, coursework left some, like Thomas, feeling overwhelmed with a new awareness of responsibility and feelings of inadequacy to meet those demands: 'With these [ESL] classes I feel like I've learned a lot. But I feel like I come out asking a lot more questions instead of actually understanding what needs to be done.' In the case of Thomas, coursework increased awareness, which thereby increased concern. This concern with the upcoming responsibility of instructing ELLs, as Sue explained, was not negative. It was more of a concern that they might not be fully equipped to teach ELLs or be effective in that role:

> It's kind of scary ... I mean, I'm starting to wonder if I'm going to be prepared to do it or not. That's a lot of responsibility to teach the ELLs, and I don't want to deny them the same experience all the other students have.

In both the survey and interviews, participants generally agreed that they could effectively instruct ELLs (item 20; pre M = 4.13; post M = 4.44). The mid-range score on the survey was paralleled by the mild confidence that interview participants voiced regarding their abilities.

Another interview theme that gave insight into the second component was participants' expectations regarding ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The increased belief that they, as mainstream teachers, will be responsible for teaching ELLs and need to acquire relevant instructional practices emerged in surveys as well as interviews. Interviews indicated that the ESL coursework increased this belief. As Natalie said after a semester of ESL coursework, 'It was a huge culture shock … I had no clue that there was even such a thing, or how to teach it.' Kim agreed, 'I didn't realize how much… the primary [mainstream] teacher needs to know.'

Themes Relating to Component 3 – Beliefs about ELLs

The third component, which deals with change in beliefs about English language learners shows an increase in mean from 3.80 to 4.65. This mean change showed the most drastic difference among the three components. There was a statistically significant increase in survey scores from the pre (M = 11.398, SD = 3.38) to post-survey [M = 13.95, SD = 2.23, t (353) = 14.536, p<.0005]. Items in this component dealt with preservice teachers' beliefs about English Language Learners, specifically including views about ELLs' accents, behavior, and grammatical errors. The issue of correction and behavior problem emerged in the focus group interviews, paralleling survey items 15 and 18.

Interview participants addressed correction both in terms of discipline as well as in terms of grammatical errors. On the survey, participants expressed disagreement with the statement that "ELLs have behavior problems in the classroom" and disagreed much more strongly after coursework (item 18; pre M = 4.00; post M = 4.76). In the interviews, participants indicated a belief that ELLs are no more prone to be behavior problems than native English speakers. They believed

that behavior problems in ELLs could often stem from a lack of understanding based on cultural differences. As Sarah reported:

> I think the behavioral issues would most likely come from not understanding what the rules are and not understanding why that's the rule. Because…when you're coming from another country there's a different culture and there's a different view on how a classroom goes and how things are handled…. And so there could be problems with that, just not understanding the culture and not understanding how the teacher runs the classroom, just because in America we might do things differently than them.

In terms of language learning, before coursework participants slightly agreed that "grammatical errors always require correction," yet after coursework they disagreed (item 15; pre M = 3.47; post M = 4.36). On this survey item, the outgoing belief contradicted the incoming belief. Interview participants indicated that it is primarily errors inhibiting communication that require correction. As Kara explained, "what we've learned is if it hinders communication then that's what needs to be corrected. But if you can understand them and obviously they're learning, then that's what's most important."

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to explore if preservice teachers' beliefs can change through related coursework. Many of the preservice teachers expressed a heightened sense of awareness and acceptance of ELLs. Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicated a positive overall change in the alignment of preservice teacher beliefs with current research and course instruction.

The study found that after coursework, preservice teachers showed greater acceptance of parents' and children's use of native languages. This finding aligns with what researchers such as Wong-Fillmore (1991) have asserted about the value of native language proficiency to second language learning.

Findings related to the impact of ESL courses on beliefs regarding the locus of responsibility for teaching ELLs also showed a statistically significant change. Consistent with the conclusion of Darling-Hammond (2000) and Gándara et al. (2005), who underscored the value of teacher education in increasing instructor self-efficacy, participants reported increased confidence in their abilities to teach ELLs and in the ELLs' ability to learn.

Findings regarding beliefs about ELLs demonstrated the most dramatic increase in survey scores as well as the greatest magnitude of effect in the survey. This indicates a strong, positive shift in their acceptance of ELLs. Post-survey scores show more positive beliefs about ELLs' accents and behaviour aligned with current ESL research.

Discovering preservice teachers' beliefs about ELLs is critical in light of the impact of those beliefs on expectation and practice. Preservice teachers "often develop deficit thoughts and beliefs about diverse learners" (Milner 2005, p.771). Some preservice teachers entered courses viewing ELL instruction as an extra burden. In practice, this mindset can translate to teachers having lower academic expectations for ELLs. However, surveys and interviews indicated a marked difference in most participants' thinking about ELL students in mainstream classrooms. This finding supports the value of teacher preparation in moving preservice teachers beyond the societal myths embraced by the deficit perspective (Meskill & Chen, 2002).

Researchers often note the tenacity of beliefs (Atlan, 2006; Lewis et al, 1999). This is especially true for preservice teachers who have strong established expectations and entrenched beliefs (Chin & Brewer, 1993; Pajares, 1993). However, there is also a substantial collection of research that contrasts with these studies' findings of inflexibility (Dixon, Liew, Daraghmeh, &Smith, 2016; MacDonald et al., 2001; Meskill & Chen, 2002).

The present study joins the growing collection of empirical studies that evidences the influence of teacher education in belief change. Results of the present study are specifically consistent with the research related to ELL issues demonstrating that educational coursework can change beliefs (see MacDonald et al., 2001; Meskill & Chen, 2002).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As with any research, several limitations of this study must be considered. One is the usual limitation associated with self-report data. We must recognize that there is not always an exact correspondence between what participants say they believe and what they actually do in the classroom. This may be attributed to the desirability effect that is often encountered in research based on self-report data. The desirability effect results in means that may show a more positive perspective than the reality as it would be translated into practice.

We did not conduct an in-depth examination of the content, structure and instructional strategies used in these teacher education courses. Future researchers can carefully examine how the content of these courses are organized and facilitated by the instructors. As asserted by Olson and Jimenez-Silva (2008), an instructor's beliefs and background influence the way material is portrayed, thereby affecting what the teachers learn as well as their stance toward their new knowledge. An in-depth exploration of the practices of the instructors and course components would be a valuable study for informing teacher education programs.

Another limitation is related to long-term effects of belief change. It is possible that even though these preservice teachers have more positive views after the coursework, they may, however, fall back into older, more established patterns of behaviour after graduation. Therefore, we cannot claim that we have permanently changed participants' beliefs. Future studies should be longitudinal and follow preservice teachers into their classrooms in order to determine whether there are long-term effects.

Implications for Teacher Education

Understanding the beliefs of preservice teachers allows teacher educators to design targeted intervention coursework. As Joram and Gabriele (1998) have suggested, targeting beliefs is critical to impacting them. Making beliefs explicit is a necessary step in order to impact change (Kagan 1992). Minor et al. (2002) also emphasize the need for preservice teachers to identify their beliefs and examine how they align to the pedagogical and curricular dimensions of their intended disciplines. As Gándara and Santibañez (2016) discuss. the importance of highly qualified teachers for narrowing achievement gaps based on race and socioeconomic status are well discussed in the literature. However, what's less well known is that ELLs also suffer from achievement and teacher teacher-quality gap (Samson & Collins, 2012). The findings of a recent qualitative study by Sato and Hodge (2016) showed the teachers' positioning that teaching ELLs is difficult and complicated. These findings indicate the importance of professional development in implementing culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogies effectively

Our findings have clear implications for teacher education programs. With the dramatic increase in the number of ELLs worldwide and the shortage of prepared ELL and mainstream teachers to effectively teach language minority children, it is highly important to examine the misconceptions of preservice teachers and to bring about positive change in their knowledge, attitude, and beliefs. Our research shows that relevant coursework is a positive step towards preparing mainstream teachers to work with ELLs. We believe altering teachers' beliefs, and thus decision-making processes and instructional practices, is the first step in improving instruction and achievement for ELLs. By influencing the preservice teachers' basic notions about language learning and acquisition, ELLs, and appropriate instructional strategies, ESL teacher education courses have the potential to affect future mainstream teachers and work towards more positive future for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

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[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout.