

“I Don’t Know Why I’m Learning This”: Preservice English Teachers’ Engagement in a Language Development Course

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Despite the increase of English learners in the U.S. and of standards for linguistically responsive teaching practices, teacher education programs often fall short of preparing preservice teachers to teach diverse learners. In this case study, specifically designed to improve a pedagogical course on English language development, the researchers used qualitative methods to examine preservice English teachers’ perceptions of, and engagement in, instructional pedagogies that were designed to support their learning and apply to their current practicum experiences and teaching careers. Data were collected using observation, survey, and interview methods and were analyzed inductively. Findings indicate that preservice teachers were most engaged when course content was explicitly linked to their teaching experiences and least engaged when those connections were not made evident. The researchers argue that a lack of explicit connections between teacher preparation course content and K-12 classroom pedagogy influences preservice teachers’ perceptions of the value of course content to pedagogy and hinders their linguistically responsive preparedness to teach diverse learners. Implications for teacher preparation course design are proffered.

High-quality teacher preparation courses are essential to preparing preservice teachers to teach diverse K-12 learners (Jiménez & Rose, 2010), but preparedness for teaching is unlikely to develop in preservice teachers who perceive their teacher preparation courses to be irrelevant to their current teaching experiences or future careers as teachers. This was the problem we faced. By and large our preservice secondary English teachers believed the program’s English language development, acquisition, and pedagogy (ELDAP) course was unrelated to their practicum and student teaching experiences in local schools. Audrey, a second-year preservice English teacher, explained:

...I wasn’t engaged in [the readings and course] because I didn’t feel like they were necessarily gonna apply to me...I don’t know how [small group activities] applied to what we were doing. I understand we were learning, like, where language comes from, but I don’t know how me recognizing that is gonna be useful in the future.

Audrey’s perspective reflected what many of our students believed: the ELDAP course was not applicable to their current teaching experiences or future teaching careers. Consequently, the students were not engaged in the course and participated minimally.

Scholarship in the field of teacher education indicates that preservice teachers often cannot articulate the purpose of course content or the rationale for pedagogy (Whitney, Olan, & Fredricksen, 2013). They express discontent with complex course content and a perceived lack of application to their field experiences. In addition, preservice teachers indicate that they often do not feel prepared to work with diverse learners in the field

(Whitney et al., 2013). This is particularly troubling given the growing number of English learners (ELs; i.e., students for whom English is not their first or native language) that are being educated in U.S. schools. In academic year 2012-2013, 4.4 million students were ELs, compared to 4.1 million in 2002-2003, and 2.8 million in 1993 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Given these statistics, it is imperative that teacher preparation programs carefully design coursework to better prepare preservice teachers to meet the instructional needs of these diverse learners (Mayher, 2012).

Many in-service teachers who work with ELs do not feel well-prepared to teach them (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Research has not yet determined how best to prepare teachers to teach ELs (Sleeter, 2008), and, consequently, teacher education programs often fall short of preparing preservice teachers to work with diverse learners (He, Vetter & Fairbanks, 2014; Mayher, 2012). Jiménez and Rose (2010) suggest that many novice teachers begin their careers without the knowledge and skills they need to work with ELs, or they see ELs from a deficit perspective, underestimating these students’ knowledge, skills, and aptitude for learning. Linguistic differences prove to be particularly challenging for preservice teachers (Jiménez & Rose, 2010) because linguistic differences have both academic and social implications. For example, preservice teachers must scaffold ELs’ learning of complex academic content and help them to get involved in the social milieu of classroom activities while the students’ English language skills are still developing.

Because of the linguistic challenges preservice teachers face in K-12 teaching, Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) proposed that teacher education programs help preservice teachers become

linguistically responsive in order to address diverse students' needs. Linguistically responsive teaching involves an understanding of the social uses of language, as well as its linguistic forms (Lucas et al., 2008). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) also advocates for linguistically responsive teaching. In their Conference on English Education (CEE) Position Statement (2009), *Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education*, NCTE asserts that educators play an important role in perpetuating or preventing the inequities diverse students face. The position statement highlights eight principles for supporting diverse learners, which can be incorporated into teacher education programs. Of these eight principles, several directly address how teachers can develop linguistic responsiveness: recognizing students' "culturally defined identities"; actively learning sociolinguistics to develop awareness of language inequalities; being models of culturally and socially responsible practices; and recognizing, supporting, and valuing the linguistic validity of students' home languages (CEE, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The secondary English education teacher preparation program at our university has embraced a linguistically responsive teaching framework, which is particularly emphasized in the required 3-credit-hour ELDAP course. However, as mentioned previously, many of our preservice teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the course and were not engaged in course content or related activities. As teacher educators, we were faced with the challenge of preparing these future English teachers to teach the complex nuances of English to adolescents, both native English speakers and ELs. To do so effectively, we had to figure out a way to engage students in course content and motivate their participation in class activities and assignments.

Purpose of the Study

We designed a semester-long qualitative case study (Barone, 2011) to examine the nature of our preservice teachers' engagement and participation in the ELDAP course. Our research goals were practical in nature (see Maxwell, 2013): (1) to identify the instructional pedagogies that preservice teachers perceived to be most supportive of their professional development and applicable to their current and future teaching careers, and (2) to improve the ELDAP course curriculum and related instructional activities in light of the study's findings. In this article, we report the outcomes of our case study.

In the sections that follow, we first draw on the linguistically responsive teaching framework and national organizations' standards to provide a context for our case

study. Second, we explain the data collection and analysis procedures we used to examine preservice teachers' perceptions of, and engagement in, the ELDAP course. We then report our findings and interrogate those results in light of the linguistically responsive teaching framework. Finally, we consider the implications of our findings, particularly in terms of improving our ELDAP course and supporting our students' understandings of the connections between teacher preparation coursework and their future teaching careers.

Theoretical Framework and Related Literature

In the United States, there is an increasing need for preservice teachers to learn how to teach diverse students (Jiménez & Rose, 2010; Mayher, 2012). He and colleagues (2014) argue that beginning teachers can learn to teach all diverse students by learning about students' cultural lives and how to use multilingual strategies in the classroom. This learning should occur primarily through teacher preparation programs and related practicum experiences. As Mayher (2012) suggests, when we fail to focus on diverse pupils in teacher education courses, "we fail to provide our students with the knowledge and skills they need to deal with *all* the pupils they will encounter [emphasis in original]" (p. 183).

Linguistically responsive teaching is a pedagogical framework that positions teachers to address language differences in the classroom. This framework involves (1) understanding and responding appropriately to social uses of language (whether conversational or academic), (2) providing students a safe and welcoming environment, and (3) explicit attention to linguistic forms and conventions (Lucas et al., 2008, p. 363). Knowledge and understanding of language acquisition and development fosters teachers' sensitivity to language issues in the classroom (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005). Moreover, a linguistically responsive teaching framework posits that students' second language acquisition is rooted in participation and identity and that to support students' acquisition and development of English, teachers must build on students' background knowledge and experiences (see Faltis, Arias, & Ramírez-Marín, 2010, p. 315). With the increase of diverse students in K-12 classrooms in the U.S., it is more important than ever that preservice teachers learn to use culturally/linguistically responsive pedagogies. However, teacher education programs are not always making explicit the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (He et al., 2014; Jiménez & Rose, 2010; Mayher, 2012).

Importance of English Language Development and Acquisition Content Knowledge

In order to work with both ELs and native speakers, preservice teachers need an understanding of English language development and second language

acquisition. Giambo and Szecsi (2005) found that there is a positive correlation between teachers' professional sensitivity to language issues in the classroom and their exposure to diversity issues. Increased exposure to diversity training in teacher education is positively related to increased sensitivity to diverse learners. The *Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts* (NCTE, 2006), lists language development, language history, and language analysis as essential knowledge bases for effective instructional planning and pedagogy. For example, the *Guidelines* suggest that preservice teachers be able to:

Define and describe the implications for practice of diverse theories of language acquisition and development. For example, they should be able to describe and apply the fundamental principles and characteristics of human growth from infancy through adulthood (p. 23).

With regard to language history and analysis, the *Guidelines* suggest that preservice teachers be able to explain major developments in the history of English as well as the language systems (pragmatic, semantic, grammar, etc.) and dynamic nature of language.

Faltis, Arias, and Ramírez-Marín (2010) identified a variety of skill and knowledge competencies secondary education teachers need in order to effectively teach ELs, including: (a) understanding second language acquisition as participation and identity; (b) planning for and using theme-based content where concepts, genres, and specialized vocabulary are spiraled and used in multiple ways; (c) building on students' background knowledge and experiences; (d) knowing and advocating for legal rights of ELs; (e) adjusting instruction for variation in schooling experiences of ELs; and (f) mixing ELs with native English speakers to ensure social and academic integration (p. 315).

Importance of Coursework and Field Experiences

Teacher preparation coursework and field experiences play an important role in preparing preservice teachers for linguistically and culturally responsive teaching. The NCTE CEE Position Statement (2005), *What Do We Know and Believe about the Roles of Methods Courses and Field Experiences in English Education?*, argues that teacher preparation in the English language arts must "infuse core principles of content, pedagogy and professionalism" and offer students opportunities for "practice, reflection, and growth." Students should be invited to examine and question the content of their coursework and consider how it can be applied to contemporary instructional settings.

Whitney and colleagues (2013) argue that preservice teachers need to understand how to articulate "...pedagogical principles that carry across a range of specific classroom situations" (p. 190) and expand their perspective of experience. These researchers write, "[Preservice teachers] tend to use practicality as a filter for making decisions about what to pay attention to in their development as a teacher" (p. 185). In other words, preservice teachers primarily rely on teaching experience to inform their pedagogy rather than also drawing on teacher preparation coursework and their experience as students, readers, and lesson planners. Whitney and colleagues (2013) question whether teacher educators are encouraging preservice teachers to examine all of these experiences as influential to their teaching.

Scholarship in the field demonstrates that preservice English teachers are expected to be linguistically and culturally responsive as they teach diverse K-12 learners, develop a strong knowledge base in English language development and second language acquisition, and be able to articulate and apply their knowledge and skills to their teaching context. A lack of understanding about the connections among teacher preparation coursework, preservice field experiences, and K-12 classroom instruction may hinder preservice teachers' preparedness to teach diverse learners.

Method

Setting and Participants

We conducted a qualitative case study (Yin, 2014) within the context of a preservice teacher preparation course required of all secondary English education majors. The ELDAP course focused on characteristics of English language development in adolescents and addressed acquisition theories, language systems (semantics, pragmatics, phonology, etc.), and language variations. The course was designed to help preservice teachers understand adolescents' English language development, with a special focus on ELs. A primary objective of the course was for preservice teachers to appropriate course content and apply it to instructional pedagogies in the English/language arts program (see Appendix A for course description and objectives). The ELDAP course was one of several courses designed to prepare preservice teachers for linguistically and culturally responsive teaching; preservice teachers in the program also enrolled in two cultural studies courses (i.e., courses that examine culture's influence on everyday literacy), three English/language arts methods courses, and one course focused on teaching and learning in diverse classrooms. Advisors in the program typically recommended that students take the ELDAP course the semester before

graduation; however, students tended to take the course in the semester most convenient to their schedules.

The preservice teachers were in various stages of their program (from practicum experiences to student teaching), including four post-baccalaureate students. Preservice teachers in their first practicum at our university are responsible for completing 70 hours of classroom participation that includes (a) engagement in eight lesson segments (i.e., teaching small groups or mini-lessons), and (b) teaching two lessons designed in cooperation with the mentor teacher. Preservice teachers in their final student teaching experience take on full responsibility as the teacher in three bell periods and engage in all activities expected of teachers at their placement school. They are transitioned into this role through two semesters of gradual acquisition of teaching responsibilities. This final semester of student teaching is taken in conjunction with advanced methods courses and the state assessment for those applying for their first license. Considering the vast differences in experience between beginning practicum preservice teachers and student teachers, the ELDAP course instructor had the unique challenge of conveying content to students with varying knowledge about being a teacher.

The ELDAP course met once per week for approximately 3 hours across a 15-week semester. A majority of the 30 preservice teachers enrolled in the course were secondary English education majors; however, several students were in the middle-childhood education program. Most of the preservice teachers were white, female, and in their twenties. At our university, preservice teachers are grouped into cohorts and take core courses together. Several cohort groups were enrolled in the ELDAP course, and students tended to sit together in cohorts. During the semester of our study, an adjunct instructor taught the course. While she specialized in second language studies, she had no previous experience teaching the ELDAP course.

Research Questions

Our data collection and analysis procedures were guided by two primary research questions:

1. What content and instructional pedagogies do preservice teachers perceive to be most supportive of their learning?
2. What content and instructional pedagogies do preservice teachers perceive to be most applicable to their teaching (current and/or future)?

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

We collected three sources of data for this study: (a) online survey, (b) interview, and (c) field notes from in-class

observations. Selena, the doctoral student researcher and first author on this paper, collected all of the data.

Survey. The online survey, completed in week nine of the course, had four respondents. Two of these preservice teachers had approximately two years of field experience, and the other two had less than a year of field experience. Three of the four respondents indicated that they had no prior experience working with ELs. The survey consisted of 10 questions addressing preservice teachers' (a) experiences with ELs, (b) expectations for the course, (c) perceptions of the importance of learning about English language development, (d) perceptions of the importance of the course objectives, and (e) level of agreement with statements about course components (e.g., I read the assigned course text each week; The class lectures are helping me to learn course content; see Appendix B for full survey). The survey was built on Survey Monkey; a survey link was sent to preservice teachers via the Announcement feature on the Blackboard Learning Management System. An announcement also was made in the class session before the survey link was sent. Preservice teachers had two weeks to respond to the survey, during which two reminder emails were sent.

Interview. An interview was conducted in week thirteen of the course. Only one female student, Audrey (a pseudonym), agreed to participate in an interview. Audrey was a second-year undergraduate student in the secondary English education program with less than one year of practicum experience. The semi-structured interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) investigated Audrey's perceptions of the instructional pedagogies and activities that were most supportive of, or applicable to, her learning and teaching. The interview was conducted informally in a quiet student lounge in a university administrative building and lasted approximately 50 minutes. It was recorded on two password-protected devices and saved as files without identifying information. The interview was transcribed during data analysis.

Observations. During weeks 9-15 of the course, Selena completed seven in-class observations, approximately 3 hours each. For each observation, she wrote field notes on preservice teachers' engagement behaviors during each component of the class session (i.e., lecture, small group work, and video) in order to identify activities that appeared to engage preservice teachers and presumably support student learning. Engaged behaviors included paying attention, answering or asking questions, and participating in discussion and activities. Selena also documented the instructional pedagogy being used and the content being addressed during each session component. Selena observed Audrey, who had participated in the interview, and the entire group of students in consecutive 5-minute intervals.

Analysis Procedures. We analyzed the data at the end of the semester using qualitative content analysis (Hoffman, Wilson, Martinez, & Sailors, 2011). Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to interpret meaning from a variety of data sources using a systematic process of coding and categorizing textual data in order to identify patterns or themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Patton (2002) argues that important insights surface when more than one researcher examines the same set of data, so each of us analyzed the survey and interview data separately and then compared our analyses. First, we read the entire data corpus to get a sense of the whole, and then we re-read searching for key concepts, which we highlighted. For example, in both the survey and interview data, students indicated that “application” of course content to their field experiences was particularly important to them, so we highlighted application as a theme. Then, we searched the field notes from in-class observations for evidence to corroborate the themes we identified in the survey and interview data. The themes that emerged were grounded in evidence from all three data sources and reflected the preservice teachers’ perceptions of the instructional pedagogies used in the ELDAP course that were most supportive of their learning and applicable to their teaching. In the sections below, we discuss those themes and proffer implications for course design, pedagogy, and practice in similar preservice teacher education ELDAP courses.

Findings

The results of our analysis fell broadly into three major categories that addressed our research questions and revealed preservice teachers’ perspectives on, and engagement in, the ELDAP course: (a) course pedagogies, (b) course readings, and (c) connections to teaching. Specific findings for each category are reported in the sections that follow.

Course Pedagogies

Preservice teachers reported being most engaged and demonstrated the most engaged behaviors when the instructor used digital technologies, lectures, and group presentations to deliver course content. Class discussions around videos were particularly useful in helping preservice teachers to articulate their developing understandings of linguistically responsive teaching and what it means to respond with sensitivity to adolescents’ language use in all of its forms. For example, preservice teachers found McWhorter’s (2013) TED talk, *Txtng is killing language. JK!!!*, particularly engaging. In this video, McWhorter examines texting as a new language that adds to adolescents’ linguistic repertoires. After the video,

preservice teachers debated the legitimacy of texting as a language and possible uses of texting in the academic setting, such as “translating” text messages into academic language. Preservice teachers referenced specific experiences from their current teaching contexts to support their views. Preservice teachers also found engaging the videos that discussed particular strategies for accommodating ELs in the high school classroom; these videos were a direct connection to their teaching. The importance of the videos is highlighted in Audrey’s interview:

...[S]eeing it actually happening in the classroom to me is helpful ... because I don’t have a ton of familiarity with second language learning..., so I really liked seeing the different approaches they were taking and how they were teaching kids that were struggling with language. The differences.

The use of other digital technologies also increased students’ engagement in course content and related activities. For example, in a small-group presentation, one preservice teacher group used the interactive online tool, Nearpod (2015), to live-poll the class about aspects of teaching ELs. Preservice teachers anonymously responded to the poll questions on their phones and laptops, and the responses were displayed immediately on the projector at the front of the room. They then discussed linguistically responsive teaching practices, such as establishing a welcoming environment or understanding how to teach vocabulary to ELs, based on the responses in the live poll. Technology-mediated pedagogy and the group presentation setting engaged these preservice teachers in making pedagogical connections. Interestingly, Audrey indicated that she found the online discussion board prompts on the Blackboard Learning Management System to be engaging because she “enjoyed reading other people’s responses [outside of class] and seeing how they felt about things.”

Preservice teachers also reported that the instructor’s lectures were supportive of their learning, especially when the content directly connected to teaching or could easily be applied to teaching, and particularly when the instructor incorporated PowerPoint presentations. Observations revealed that preservice teachers were most engaged in lectures that examined (a) how to address common grammar mistakes in the classroom; (b) parts of speech, particularly the FANBOYS acronym for coordinating conjunctions (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So); and (c) language and social variations (e.g., formal, informal, accents, dialects). Preservice teachers were least engaged in lectures related to linguistics (e.g., morphology, phonology), the history of English, and differences between animal and human languages (which the instructor used to introduce the unique qualities of

human language). Audrey's interview is illustrative in this respect: she suggested that content about linguistics was pertinent for EL teachers but not for her, although she allowed that information about strategies that helped students "spell a word...could be useful."

Students in the course were required to do two group presentations: a content presentation and a teaching tip presentation. Both the survey and observation data demonstrated that group presentations were engaging to these preservice teachers; in fact, observation data revealed that students were consistently attentive during group presentations. Audrey described group presentations as "like putting what we learned into...an application." Students also participated in several small-group activities per class session, from worksheets (e.g., "Break Down the Morphemes" or "Translate This Sentence to Another Variation") to discussion questions (e.g., What happens to students when we tell them their language use is incorrect?). However, field notes documented both engaged and off-task behaviors during these small-group activities, often depending on the topic's connection to the students' teaching experiences. For example, preservice teachers were more engaged when discussing teaching experiences related to teaching adolescent writing. Although the students sometimes conversed socially during small-group activities, each small group's contribution during the whole group discussion helped students to articulate and share their understanding of both content and linguistically responsive teaching practices, especially when those connections were made explicit.

Course Readings

Our analysis indicated that preservice teachers perceived the assigned reading (e.g., journal articles, book chapters), and especially the required textbooks, to be unnecessary. Students reported that they did not read the texts because they believed the instructor's lectures were repetitive of the assigned reading. Students also believed that the required readings were unrelated to teaching. Audrey explained:

...[I]f [the instructor] puts [the textbook content] in her PowerPoint, then I'm not really getting anything from the readings. I don't see a point in reading if [the instructor is] just going to tell me everything... I wasn't engaged in [the readings and course] because I didn't feel like they were necessarily gonna apply to me.

Audrey also noted that she felt the textbooks were more appropriate for ESL teachers or linguists. The data we collected on course readings was limited, but it highlights how an instructor's choice of text, and how the text is

integrated into course assignments and activities, may impact how preservice teachers engage in content.

Connections to Teaching

Throughout our content analysis, the evidence demonstrated that preservice teachers expressed a need for the instructor to make explicit connections between ELDAP course content and classroom teaching. For example, on the survey, one preservice teacher wrote:

I have really struggled to see how this course will be applicable to my teaching in the classroom. I think the professor could do a much better job of bridging that gap...There seems to be a lot of theory, so far, and VERY little real world application of concepts.

Similarly, in her interview, Audrey said:

Teaching 'this is what a morpheme is'...then instead of just, like, emphasizing the linguistic part of it, which I feel like what [the instructor] is doing, [she could have been] saying 'Okay, we learned this, but this is what you can do in your classroom. This is...how you can help your students...When I found out that it was all education people in [the course], then I was like 'Oh, then I wonder why they're not making that connection more obvious?'

Students expressed particular interest in, and the need for, information related to teaching ELs. Several comments from survey data demonstrated this point. One student said, "I like how we've been learning about ELs and how to help them lately. I think this is most applicable to me." Another wrote, "Understanding English language development will help me teach my EL students by better understanding their backgrounds and needs educationally. This will help ensure that I have the available resources for them to be successful."

Our analysis also suggested that preservice teachers did not understand how the ELDAP course related to teaching English/language arts or why it was required in their program of study; they did not understand the overall purpose of the course. The ELDAP course was designed to help preservice teachers understand English language development in adolescents, with a special focus on ELs' language acquisition, and apply this understanding to pedagogical decisions. However, these goals were not clear to some of the preservice teachers. Only one of the four survey respondents mentioned that the course addressed language development in native speakers as well as ELs. Audrey thought the course was designed for ESL, elementary school, or inner city teachers. She

said repeatedly that she did not see how the course was relevant to her. When discussing the texts for the course, Audrey said:

I think [an education book] would be more helpful in like teaching me what to do when I have those kinds of students. I don't know if that's really like what this course is; the course is more how to learn language. I mean, a development class. I don't know.

This finding—that our students did not understand the overall purpose of the ELDAP course—provided a contextual understanding, a kind of “local casuality,” that shed light on the other outcomes of our study (see Maxwell, 2013, p. 88).

Each of the findings of our study holds important implications for pedagogy, most particularly in terms of improving the ELDAP course at our university. Although our results are not generalizable, these findings may also be useful to teacher educators who teach similar English language development, acquisition, and pedagogy courses or prepare preservice teachers for culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. We discuss the implications of our study in the final section of this paper.

Discussion and Implications

A lack of explicitness about the connection between the content, assigned reading, and related activities in the ELDAP course and English/language arts instruction in school settings contributed to our preservice teachers' misconceptions about the value of the ELDAP course for their professional development as teachers, and this may have hindered their growth toward culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. The findings of our case study support this argument. Preservice teachers in our study needed the instructor to clearly explicate the ways in which knowledge and understandings about language acquisition and development were relevant and applicable, not only to their current field experiences, but also to their future careers as middle school and high school English teachers and teachers who might have ELs in their classrooms. Further, preservice teachers needed differentiated instruction based on their levels of field experience. Perhaps they would have found value in the content if they understood specifically how it related to their current field experience. For example, some preservice teachers did not have any experience with ELs; their integration of content and teaching, then, might have been less than those who had the opportunity to apply what they learned immediately in their field experiences. Similarly, preservice teachers needed the instructor to make overt and unambiguous links between the content of this course and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (Lucas et al., 2008). Even as young

adults, these preservice teachers needed explicit instruction. This finding should not be surprising; for years, research has demonstrated the importance of explicit instruction to students' learning (e.g., De la Paz & Graham, 2002; James, Abbott, & Greenwood, 2001; Schorzman & Cheek, 2004; Smith, 2006).

Explicit instruction in this college classroom was often mediated by technology. The instructor typically used videos and PowerPoint presentations to deliver course content, and preservice teachers used various digital technologies in their group presentations (e.g., Nearpod). We would argue that the use of technology-mediated instruction supported students' engagement, participation, and, ultimately, their learning. At a time when some scholars argue that many adolescents and young adults can be considered “digital natives” (Hargittai, 2010; Prensky, 2009)—acquiring fluency with digital technologies in much the same way they acquire language—educators will want to build on preservice teachers' penchant for digital technologies and use them to communicate course content and curriculum. However, technology can only mediate learning if students are engaged in the learning process. For example, one of the course textbooks was offered in an online format, but students did not read it because they believed it was not relevant to their teaching experiences.

Explicit instruction about the overall purpose of the ELDAP course, its goals and objectives, and its importance within the students' teacher preparation program also was needed. Preservice teachers need to be able to explain why an ELDAP course is important to their professional development as teachers and how it supports their growth toward culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, an important reflection for preservice teachers to make as they plan lessons (NCTE, 2006; NCTE CEE, 2014). Moreover, academic advisors, mentors, and ELDAP course instructors must be explicit about the ways in which the ELDAP curriculum complements the methods courses and other diversity-oriented courses in the program of study. Furthermore, it may be informative for preservice teachers to understand the expectations of their field with regard to culturally and linguistically responsive instruction. Sharing with preservice teachers the CEE's (2006) *Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education*, Faltis and colleagues (2010) list of competencies secondary education teachers need to acquire to effectively teach ELs, as well as Lucas and colleagues' (2008) list of linguistically responsive teaching practices may serve to build preservice teachers' recognition of the importance of the ELDAP course.

The findings of our study must be viewed with caution, however, given the study's limitations. Only four students responded to the online survey, and only one student participated in the interview; the data corpus

was limited. Nevertheless, we believe our findings will help us to achieve our practical goal (see Maxwell, 2013) of improving our university's ELDAP course and, in particular, better support our students' preparedness for culturally and linguistically responsive teaching.

Next Steps

We concluded that a lack of explicitness about the connections between the ELDAP course and English/language arts instruction in school settings contributed to our preservice teachers' misconceptions about the value of the ELDAP course and may have hindered their linguistically responsive preparedness to work with diverse learners. To remedy that situation, in a subsequent section of this course, we engaged in the kinds of explicit instruction we advocate in this paper. We asked preservice teachers to keep a teaching journal in which they recorded questions, and answers to those questions, about ELDAP course content (including course readings) and related activities. In these weekly journals, we asked preservice teachers to reflect on their developing understandings of what it means to teach with cultural and linguistic sensitivity with students who are native English speakers and ELs (see Lysaker & Thompson, 2013). We also asked preservice teachers to articulate the connections they were making between ELDAP course content and their field experiences (Whitney et al., 2013). We invited preservice teachers to question content in class (i.e., asking, "So what?," about content) and to engage in varied group work in which students from varying levels of field experiences could discuss how content applied to them. We encouraged their emerging connections between ELDAP content and what they were learning in other courses. We asked them to go through standards in their field and explicitly discuss, for example, which instructional strategies could be realistically used in the classroom to meet those expectations. We asked preservice teachers to explicitly consider this: if they could not apply content to their present situation, how they might use the resources from this course to apply ELDAP content to their future teaching? We asked them to observe a classroom of ELs at our university and reflect on the activities observed, the learning environment, and the actions of the cooperating teacher that they could implement in their own teaching. We believe these efforts will serve to better prepare our preservice teachers to be culturally and linguistically responsive to their diverse learners, native English speakers and ELs alike.

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Appendix A

English Language Development, Acquisition, and Pedagogy Course Description

This course provides a comprehensive look at fundamental characteristics of language acquisition, use, and development, especially as related to adolescent development. Its foci include theories of language acquisition; various approaches to language analysis; major semantic, syntactic, and auditory systems of language; and the wide variation in language use based on historical, social, cognitive, linguistic, and contextual factors.

Course Objectives

As a result of taking this course, you will be able to:

1. Define and describe the pedagogical implications of diverse theories of language acquisition and development and explain how language usage varies as affected by linguistic, social, cultural, and economic diversity.
2. Describe how the broad knowledge of developmental theories and cognitive, linguistic, and social processes affects your instructional decision-making as a teacher.
3. Illustrate how the native language, home language, dialect, and a second language are acquired, developed, and used in the classroom.
4. Articulate the distinction between formal and informal linguistic structures and how prescriptive grammar and descriptive grammar are used in school and social settings.
5. Describe how to respond to, and build upon, the diverse linguistic patterns that K-12 students may bring to the classroom.
6. Provide your K-12 students with opportunities to consider their native languages in different real-world contexts and understand that they can draw on their past experiences with language or create new language possibilities.

Appendix B

Survey Questions

1. In what level of your program are you?
 - a. Post-baccalaureate
 - b. Undergraduate
 - c. Other
2. How many years of teaching experience (field placement, practicum, student teaching, substitute teaching) do you have?
 - a. None
 - b. Less than one year
 - c. About one year
 - d. 1.5 – 5 years
 - e. More than five years
3. How much experience do you have teaching English language learners?
 - a. None
 - b. Less than one year
 - c. About one year
 - d. 1.5 – 5 years
 - e. More than five years
4. If you answered NONE on Question 3, skip this question. PART 1: What has been your experience with English language learners (e.g. in a whole class experience; in a pull-out program; in tutoring)? PART 2: How do you feel about having English language learners in your class? Please explain below.
 - a. [short answer box]
5. How do you think understanding English language development will help you teach your native English speaking students (present or future)? Please explain below.
 - a. [short answer box]
6. How do you think understanding English language development will help you teach your English language learners (present or future)? Please explain below.
 - a. [short answer box]
7. Which course objectives are most important to you? (Check ALL that apply.)
 - a. [list of objectives from Appendix A]
8. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the course.
 - a. [Likert scale of 5]
 - b. I am interested in course content.
 - c. I read the assigned course text each week.
 - d. Reading the assigned course text before class is useful for my understanding in class sessions.
 - e. The class lectures are helping me to learn course content.
 - f. The videos are helping me to learn course content.
 - g. The pedagogy (i.e., the way the instructor teaches) is helping me to learn course content.
 - h. The group work during class is helping me to learn course content.
 - i. I have learned content in this course that I can apply to my teaching NOW.
 - j. I believe that I will learn content in this course that I can apply to my teaching in the FUTURE.
9. Below, please explain any of the course components in Question 8 for which you answered “disagree” or “strongly disagree”.
 - a. [short answer box]
10. What are you looking most forward to learning/getting out of this course? In other words, what are your goals in this course?
 - a. [short answer box]