UNCOVERING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY DISPOSITIONS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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UNCOVERING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY DISPOSITIONS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

Abstract

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The purpose of the studies presented in this paper is to examine the critical pedagogy dispositions demonstrated by teacher-learners in the education of English Language Learners (ELLs). Most coursework in teacher education for ELLs centers on sheltering academic content. Without examining the socio-political circumstances of ELLs’ lives, teachers and policy-makers may believe that English skills alone will result in improved life opportunities for these learners. K-12 teacher education should also examine teachers’ beliefs about meritocracy, language development, immigration, and assimilation.

Using Bartolomé’s (2004) “commonalities” of effective teachers of ELLs, a framework comprising six pedagogy dispositions was created: 1) an understanding of the inequities of the social order for culturally and linguistically diverse students; 2) a rejection of meritocracy as the reason for ELLs’ lack of upward mobility; 3) a rejection of the belief that ELLs’ cultures and languages are deficits; 4) an ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream, middle-class white culture; 5) an ability to empathize with the struggles of ELLs; 6) an ability to advocate and guide ELLs through the American educational system. An exploratory study was
conducted to uncover whether the six critical pedagogy dispositions were evident or lacking in teacher-learners in an online bilingual/ESL endorsement course. The participants demonstrated four of the dispositions; “a rejection of meritocracy” and “the ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream middle-class white culture” were not evident in the data.

A second study, with a larger number of teacher-learners, was conducted of an online course on the foundations of bilingual/ESL education. The data revealed the same pattern as the pilot study. The data also indicated that teacher-learners may not subscribe to the ideology of meritocracy as a predictor of success for ELLs; instead, they point to English proficiency as the primary predictor of success. Implications for teacher education were found in five areas: the need for more ELL coursework, the value of experiential learning in developing empathy, the inclusion of critical pedagogy readings and authentic materials, the need for examining ideologies of meritocracy and White middle-class culture, and the need for critical pedagogy in educational leadership curriculum.
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the two studies presented in this paper is to examine the critical pedagogy dispositions demonstrated by teacher-learners in the education of English Language Learners (ELLs). Typically, most coursework in teacher education for English Language Learners (ELLs) centers on sheltering academic content for ELLs. This often happens without examining the socio-political circumstances of ELLs’ lives. Without this examination, teachers, policy-makers, and stakeholders may believe that English skills alone will result in improved life opportunities for these learners. K-12 teacher education should also examine teachers’ beliefs about meritocracy, language development, immigration, assimilation, and acculturation. Teacher training informed by critical pedagogy would allow teachers to critically examine their own beliefs and apply a critical pedagogy approach to their work with ELLs.

Both of the studies presented here use Bartolomé’s (2004) “commonalities” of highly effective teachers of ELLs to produce a framework comprising six pedagogy dispositions: 1) an understanding of the inequities of the social order in which culturally and linguistically diverse students find themselves; 2) a rejection of meritocracy as the reason for students not advancing up the social ladder; 3) a rejection of the belief that students’ cultures and languages are deficits; 4) an ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream, middle-class white culture; 5) an ability to notice or witness students in a subordinate position and to empathize with them; 6) an ability to advocate for students and to help them understand the American educational system. The first study was an exploratory study designed to uncover whether the six critical pedagogy dispositions were evident or not in teacher-learners in an online bilingual/ESL endorsement course. The participants demonstrated four of the six dispositions; “a rejection of
meritocracy” and “the ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream middle-class white culture” were not evident in the data. The results of this study indicate that a critical pedagogical disposition framework identified a pattern in which some dispositions need more in-depth examination and the two that appeared to be lacking require explicit instruction and interrogation in teacher education curriculum.

Five of the eleven teacher-learners agreed to participate in the exploratory study. In order to study a greater number of teacher-learners, a second study was conducted of two sections of an online bilingual/ESL endorsement course on the foundations of bilingual/ESL education. The second study revealed the same pattern in the data as the pilot study. The data also indicated that the teacher-learners may not subscribe to the ideology of meritocracy as a predictor of success for ELLs; instead, they point to English proficiency as the primary predictor of success. The data demonstrated that the framework was successful in identifying a pattern in which some dispositions need development and the two that were not apparent, require explicit instruction in teacher education. Based on the findings of this study, implications for teacher education and educational leadership were found in five central areas: the need for more ELL education coursework, the value of experiential learning in developing the disposition of empathy, the need to include critical pedagogy readings and to develop authentic materials, the need for explicit examination of ideologies of meritocracy and White middle-class culture, and the need for critical pedagogy in educational leadership curriculum.
Uncovering Critical Dispositions in Teachers of ELLS: An Exploratory Study

Joanne Sellen

March 23, 2011
Abstract

Much of the focus in teacher education for English Language Learners (ELLs) may be on sheltering academic content for ELLs without deeply examining the socio-political circumstances of their lives. Without this examination, it is unlikely that English skills alone will bring about an improvement in these students’ life chances. K-12 teacher education should also examine teachers’ beliefs about meritocracy, language development, immigration, assimilation, and acculturation. Teacher training informed by critical pedagogy would allow teachers to critically examine their own beliefs and apply a critical pedagogy approach to their work with ELLs. Using Bartolomé’s (2004) study of the commonalities of highly effective teachers of ELLs, an exploratory study was conducted to uncover six critical pedagogical dispositions evident or lacking in teachers in an online bilingual/ESL endorsement course. The participants demonstrated four of the six dispositions; a rejection of meritocracy” and “the ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream middle-class white culture” were not evident in the data. The results of this study indicate that a critical pedagogical disposition framework identified a pattern in which some dispositions need more in-depth examination and the two that appeared to be lacking, require explicit instruction and interrogation in teacher education curriculum.
Introduction

“I don’t want you to look greñudas [uncombed]” … The real message of greñudas was conveyed through the use of the Spanish word—it was unspoken and subtextual. She [my mother] was teaching us that our world was divided, that They-Who-Don’t-Speak-Spanish would see us as different, would judge us, would find us lacking. Her lessons about combing, washing and doing homework frequently relayed a deeper message: be prepared, because you will be judged by your skin color, your names, your accents. They will see you as ugly, lazy, dumb and dirty.

As I put on my uniform and my mother braided my hair, I changed; I became my public self. My trenzas [braids] announced that I was clean and well-cared for at home. My trenzas and school uniform blurred the differences between my family’s economic and cultural circumstances and those of the more economically comfortable Anglo students (Montoya, 2004, p. 32).

Margaret Montoya’s second-grade memories in Las Vegas in 1955 describe a culture of racism toward immigrants that should have long been remedied by 2011. However, the lived realities of immigrant and school-aged English Language Learners (ELLs) have not changed much. According to The New Demography of America’s Schools (The Urban Institute, 2005) by 2000 the number of immigrant school-age children had increased to one in five. Half of these immigrant children come from low-income families, and two-thirds of ELLs come from low-income families. Half of the children who are designated as ELLs come from families whose parents do not have high school degrees. Most of these immigrant children were born in the U.S. --and are therefore U.S. citizens-- but have undocumented parents. Being undocumented affects the parents’ willingness to come forward to request special educational and health services (The Urban Institute, 2005).

Because schools were forced to disaggregate test scores among students who were Asian, Hispanic, ELLs and low-income by The No Child Left Behind Act, schools with higher numbers
of ELLs did not meet yearly targeted performance goals and therefore lost needed funding. This resulted in perpetuating a cycle of educational inequality (The Urban Institute, 2005). In addition, high school dropout statistics reveal an important trend. Dropout rates for first generation (foreign-born children of foreign-born parents) and third generation immigrants (U. S.-born children of U.S.-born immigrant parents) are higher than for second generation immigrants (U.S.-born children of foreign-born parents) (The Urban Institute, 2005). According to Crawford (2004), this difference in dropout rates “suggests that factors in addition to language play a significant role” (p. 21). Others have suggested that institutional forms of racism lead immigrants to realize that mastery of English or a high school diploma does not guarantee success in American society.

With the increase in the immigrant student population, most teachers will work with ELLs at some point in their careers. Teacher education programs are recognizing the need to prepare teachers for diverse learners and some are even requiring bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) education credits for certification. However, much of the focus is on teaching teachers how to shelter academic content for their students without a deeper examination of the socio-political implications of immigrants’ and LEP students’ lives. Without this examination, it is unlikely that improved English skills alone will bring about an improvement in these students’ lives. K-12 teacher education could also include training that examines the beliefs that teachers hold about meritocracy, language development, immigration, assimilation, and acculturation in order to truly help these students.

As a framework for this examination, some researchers have called for a critical pedagogy approach to teacher training (Bartolomé, 2004; Benesch, 2001; Pennycook, 2004). As a general definition, Pennycook (1994) describes critical pedagogy as being:
…fundamentally concerned with questions of schooling and inequality. In this sense, then, critical pedagogy research could be defined, first of all, by its focus on questions of social and cultural inequality in education… not merely descriptive; rather, it aims also to be transformative (cited in Cumming, et. al. 1994, p. 691).

Teacher training informed by critical pedagogy would allow teachers to critically examine their own beliefs and apply a critical pedagogy approach to their own classrooms and their work with ELLs.

Although there has been much theoretical writing about critical pedagogy (e.g., Auerbach, 1992; Friere, 1970; Kinchloe, 2004; Pennycook, 1994; McLaren, 1989), there are limited examples of either classroom application or pedagogical frameworks. Benesch (2001) proposes more classroom study on application of a critical approach since “without descriptions of classroom experiments, theory remains a static and hollow set of principles, untested in actual settings” (xix). Such practical research might focus on examining the beliefs that teachers hold about their ELLs and explore the ways that a critical pedagogy approach would enhance or alter these understandings. The over-reaching goals of such research is to unite critical theory and the knowledge of praxis in second language acquisition for a more comprehensive K-12 ESL methods curriculum for future teachers and for the construction of more applicable critical pedagogy ELL frameworks.

As scholars have noted, teaching English as a second language is often distanced from the social contexts of literacy, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and gender (Bartolomé 1994; Candlin, 1990; Pennycook, 1994). The focus in teacher training has been on the best methods of language acquisition. In fact, Bartolomé, (1994) argues that teachers often regard the teaching of linguistically diverse minority students in a technical way, searching for a particular
teaching method to magically address language-learning issues. Moreover, Bartolomé (1994) comments that many of her teacher-learners believe that “teaching approaches that work with one minority population should also fit another” (p.175). Crookes and Lehner (1998) also note the field’s emphasis on language over the social or ethical implications of teaching ELLs. They state that “Given the history of the field, with its strong attachment to language rather than to education, the moral and philosophical bases for teacher development have consequently not been strong” (p. 320).

With the growing numbers of low-income, non-white, linguistic minority children in American schools being taught mostly by white, middle-class female teachers, Bartolomé (2004) stresses that there is an urgent need for “infusing teacher education curricula with critical pedagogy principles in order to prepare educators to aggressively name and interrogate potentially harmful ideologies and practices in the schools and classrooms where they work” (p. 97). Swartz (2003) points out that many first-year, white teachers will be teaching in schools with the highest need for teachers, usually in integrated urban schools. She says:

When most White preservice teachers enter urban schools for fieldwork and later for jobs, they have little or no awareness of the history of racism and colonialism in America and no knowledge of the past and present strengths, accomplishments, and resources of the neocolonized cultural communities they are entering (p. 256).

In fact, they often enter the field with preconceived notions from the media that characterize these “problem” communities as having deficiencies that have to be accommodated in classrooms. These notions lead to a deficit framework of teaching, feeding into what Valenzuela

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1 In fact, according to the Schools and Staffing Survey for the school year 2003-2004, 83.1% of all public school teachers were white (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).
(1999) calls “subtractive schooling” for ELLs, who are encouraged to assimilate by giving up aspects of their native language and literacy by well-meaning teachers.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: 1) to highlight the importance of critical pedagogy in the preparation of teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse learners and 2) to present the results of an exploratory study in which the critical pedagogy dispositions of in-service and pre-service teachers were examined. A literature review focusing on critical pedagogy is presented, which is then followed by a description of the study design, the results, and implications for further research.

Literature Review

Since there can be many interpretations about the meaning of the words ‘critical pedagogy,’ and to understand their use in this paper in respect to English language learners, literature in two areas will be reviewed briefly: 1) critical pedagogy in general, and 2) critical pedagogy in ELL teacher learning.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical theory as it is applied to schooling stems from the work of Paolo Freire (1970) in his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire described most formal education as based on a banking framework in which teachers delivered content to students. He advocated an emancipatory pedagogy which employs a problem-posing approach in which students and teachers use dialogue to critically examine their own oppression. More recent critical scholars
include McLaren (1995) and Giroux (1988). McLaren (1998) explains that critical pedagogy views schools in two ways: “as sorting mechanisms in which select groups of students are favored on the basis of race, class, and gender; and as agencies for self and social empowerment” (p. 186). In defining critical pedagogy one has to view schooling as “an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life” (Ibid., p. 186). Critical theorists believe that schooling prepares students for the support of those who have power. They point out that it is not in the best interest of those in power to produce students who critically examine the systems of power and their place in it. McLaren, commenting on recent American educational ideology, states, “By defining academic success almost exclusively in terms of creating compliant, productive, and patriotic workers, the new conservative agenda for a ‘resurgent America’ dodges any concern for nurturing critical and committed citizens” (p. 187).

In fact, critical theorists argue that schools work in the interests of those with status and money, while at the same time, those that are most marginalized because of their race, gender, or lack of wealth are not effectively served (Ibid.). In other words, critical scholars see schooling as a political process that is decidedly not value-neutral. McLaren (1998) says:

In fact, to argue that schools are meritocratic institutions is a conceptual tautology: Successful learners are those whom schools reward. If you happen to be successful, it must be because of your individual merit. Missing from this logic is recognition that students from white, affluent backgrounds are privileged over other groups, not on the basis of merit but because of the advantage that comes with having money and increased social status (p. 189).
In summary, critical pedagogy is based on an educational vision of social justice and on the belief that all education is political in nature. Its purpose is to provide a foundation for the transformation of unjust social conditions and to prevent harm to students. Critical pedagogy practitioners encourage the nurturing of the intellect and are interested in hearing the voices of marginalized groups in society. Critical pedagogy critiques the idea that knowledge production is impartial and objective (Kincheloe, 2004).

**Critical Pedagogy and ELLs**

Critical pedagogy as it has been recently applied to ELLs has focused on the spread of English around the world and its use as social capital for citizens to access the global economy. Critical researchers have argued that the spread of English is equivalent to linguistic imperialism because the knowledge of English is perceived as a means of gaining prosperity (Phillipson 1992; Reagan & Osborn, 2002; Rogers, 1982). Furthermore, Phillipson (1992) believes that the teaching of English around the world has functioned as a legitimizing force in “unequal division of power and resources” (p. 27). He is concerned with what he calls “English linguistic hegemony,” which he defines as the hidden beliefs and practices of the English teaching profession that serve to maintain English as a global dominant language which in turn serves to benefit those in power. In fact, Hall (2004) questions whether the need for English language education is real or produced.

The disconnect between critical pedagogy theories and English language teaching focusing on linguistic theories has had a great impact on the perception of knowledge and education in the English teaching profession. For example, as Pennycook (1990) points out,
most English language teachers do not view knowledge as “constructed”; rather, they believe that the spread of knowledge is natural and therefore the acquisition of English is not problematic. On this topic Pennycook (1994) writes:

The view of the spread of English as natural, neutral, and beneficial is made possible by the dominance of positivism and structuralism in linguistics and applied linguistics, since these paradigms have allowed for the concentration only on a notion of abstract systems at the expense of social, cultural or political understandings of language (p. 141).

Without a foundation in educational theory such as critical pedagogy, educators working in English as a second language context may be unwittingly establishing English as a hegemonic language.

Although there have been a number of theoretical discussions of critical pedagogy and ELLs, there have been few applications for ELL teacher training. Most of the work that has been done addresses the use of critical pedagogy in ELL classrooms in higher education. For example, Benesch (1998) wrote about her experiences helping students advocate for themselves when they were faced with barriers in their joint English/Psychology university course. Likewise, Graman (1988) wrote about his experiences using critical pedagogy in adult ELL classes with farmers. He argued that critical pedagogy is especially empowering in ELL classes and asked for educators to consider it as an alternative approach to traditional language classes. The closest approximation to a framework for critical pedagogy in ELL teacher training comes from Brown (1997), who offered principles for dealing with controversial topics in ELL classrooms and reflexive questions for teachers attempting critical pedagogy such as, “Are you teaching the kind of communication skills that will help students to reach out peacefully and cooperatively across

In the context of language teacher education there are even fewer examples of critical pedagogy. For example, Crookes and Lehner (1998) wrote about their experience implementing a critical pedagogy approach in an ELL teacher education course. Since a framework is in itself prescriptive, and therefore counterintuitive to a critical pedagogy approach, they advocate that it be regarded as more of a process: “critical pedagogy should be seen as a social and educational process rather than just as a pedagogy method” (p. 327).

In ELL teacher education, Lin (2004) wrote about her attempt to incorporate a critical pedagogy curriculum in the MATESOL program at the City University of Hong Kong. Her work focused on problematizing her own pedagogy during the course and the institutional power relations that she was inadvertently reproducing in her own classroom. She also addressed the dangerous aspects of employing a critical pedagogy approach in a political environment in which teachers have been silenced. Although she did not generalize a potential framework, she interrogated the highly unequal gendered workloads of herself and her female students in their work settings and gave them a voice by encouraging them to write about their teaching situations for a local publication aimed at secondary teachers in Hong Kong.

Pennycook (2004) also does not advocate for a particular framework in writing about a critical pedagogy approach to the teaching practicum, but rather looks for what he calls the “seeking out of critical moments” in teaching (p. 342). He describes these moments as everyday situations that come up in the language classroom. These situations involve the day-to-day, spur-of-the-moment decisions teachers make to correct or not correct a non-standard form; decisions on what language varieties the students in a particular context may need or not need; or the
exposing of underlying issues of power that may exist in a particular language exchange. He encourages teachers to report their successes with critical pedagogy, but in doing so, not to miss “the way in which seeking to be critical is an ongoing, moment-by-moment process of slowly prodding for possibilities” (p. 341).

Teacher Learning in ELL Teacher Education

These discussions are the exception in ELL teacher education. Teachers in classrooms with ELLs may enter the profession after graduating from a teacher education program in which they have probably had little training in linguistics or language acquisition. In early discussions of teacher learning, scholars were interested in the technical knowledge base of teachers. In other words, they were looking for methods and behaviors that could provide desired student academic achievement. In TESOL teacher training, the focus has often been on a knowledge-base of second language acquisition, grammar, phonology, and phonetics. Language scholars were concerned about the fact that TESOL did not have a pedagogy framework on which to base teacher education (Freeman, 1989; Richards, 1987; Richards & Nunan, 1990). For example, Freeman (1989) argues that rather than placing value on the individual experiences of teachers, the traditional positivist approach to teacher learning in general education and adopted by ELL teacher educators creates a disconnected body of knowledge that does not take into account the human interaction that is central to teaching. He feels this oversimplifies the practice of teaching to a quantifiable set of effective teaching behaviors.

Scholars such as Freeman (1993, 1994), Richards & Nunan (1990), and Woods (1996) have begun to rethink language teacher education. They posit that the learning process for
language teachers, like content classroom teachers, occurs over a lifetime and involves more than a set of effective behaviors. Johnson (1996) explains the changing perception of teaching as a developmental process in which teachers come to the classroom with their ideas, beliefs, and experiences about education and, through the negotiation of meaning in their teaching contexts, develop their teaching skills. Freeman and Richards (1993) believe “it is critical that we shift the focus of discussions of teaching from behavior and activity to the thinking and reasoning which organize and motivate these external practices” (p. 213). As in general education teacher preparation, the teaching of classroom methods, concepts of language acquisition, reflection, observations, the use of case studies, and practica should be common strategies in the education of future language teachers. Among scholars who advocate for a bridge between general teacher education and ELL teacher education is Johnson (1996) who asks for teacher-learners to examine their belief systems and reasoning through the use of reflection. Richards (1987) also advocates the use of case studies to give students exposure to the issues that are likely to come up in their future classrooms and work environments. Snow (2005) would like teacher-learners to be exposed to authentic discourse of applied linguistics in their teacher training to assist future teachers in becoming actively involved in the profession. In other words, effective teacher education would purposefully integrate the bodies of knowledge of classroom methodologies and language acquisition.

Although progress is currently being made in combining knowledge gained from mainstream education with a knowledge base of first and second language acquisition, there still has not been enough focused research on language teacher preparation to understand whether preservice/inservice education in language teaching is effective in the development of language classroom teachers who understand the lived realities of English language learners. Neither has
there been substantial work in the language teacher education context in the application of a critical pedagogy approach. Such work could lead future teachers to develop the critical pedagogy dispositions needed to truly help their ELLs transform their lives.

Developing a Framework of Critical Pedagogy Dispositions

Using the work of Bartolomé (2004), a framework for exploring the critical pedagogy dispositions of teachers of ELLs can be developed. According to Bartolomé, in U.S. teacher education programs the focus is often on imparting the most effective strategies to ensure academic and language success for linguistically diverse learners. However, she points out that this approach often occurs without teachers reflecting on their own ideologies with regard to the nature of teaching or the political structure of the educational system in which they have been educated and in which they will work. She believes that this examination will help teachers understand “how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and thus maintain unequal and what should be unacceptable conditions that so many students experience on a daily basis” (p. 98).

Bartolomé (2004) studied four educators who were seen as exemplary by their administrators and colleagues in a culturally and linguistically diverse high school. Her study revealed that these teachers were alike in their understandings of their students’ social marginalization and their rejection of common ideologies that explain away their students’ poor academic performance and life chances. Bartolomé also found that they spurned commonly accepted notions of their students’ cultures and native languages as deficits to be overcome. Moreover, they did not participate in the “romanticizing” of white, middle-class, mainstream culture as a goal to aspire to in encouraging their students to succeed. In addition, they reported
that they had personally experienced themselves or had witnessed someone being forced into a subordinate position. Bartolomé also learned that these teachers saw themselves as cultural brokers or advocates for their students in navigating the American educational system. Although no causal relationship between ELLs’ success and critical pedagogy understandings has been established, strong anecdotal evidence warrants its investigation.

Bartolomé (2004) suggests that course assignments and requirements to develop these instructors’ understandings in prospective teachers can be integrated into existing teacher education curricula. She believes that “the majority of prospective teachers are not quite so perceptive or flexible in their thinking to consider alternative ideological explanations without the assistance from teacher education personnel” (p. 119). Although Bartolomé commends these teachers in her study for their critical pedagogy insights, she encourages teacher educators to go further in implementing a more rigorous critical pedagogy curriculum in teacher education. However, Bartolomé is making the assumption that most teachers are leaving their teacher preparation programs without having questioned their ideologies or without an understanding of the political nature of teaching. This may be true for some, but it is important to discover the understandings and beliefs that teachers may take with them to the classroom in order to uncover those dispositions that are in need of nurturing. This, in turn, could provide a starting point from which to develop more concrete, explicit critical pedagogy curriculum design for teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. The effectiveness of this approach cannot be advocated without investigating which critical pedagogy teachers’ dispositions are being developed. Building on Bartolomé’s (2004) study of the dispositions of highly effective teachers of ELLs, an exploratory study was conducted to uncover the dispositions already evident or lacking in in-service teachers in an online bilingual/ELL endorsement course.
The commonalities that Bartolomé found in her successful teachers can be used to create a framework that comprises critical pedagogy dispositions (CPD) for preservice/inservice teachers.

- CPD1- An understanding of the inequities of the social order in which culturally and linguistically diverse students find themselves
- CPD2- A rejection of meritocracy as the reason for students not advancing up the social ladder
- CPD3- A rejection of the belief that students’ cultures and languages are deficits
- CPD4- An ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream, middle-class white culture
- CPD5- An ability to notice or witness students in a subordinate position and to empathize with them
- CPD6- An ability to advocate for students and to help them understand the American educational system.

Some type of diagnostic tool with which to assess critical pedagogy understandings to more accurately focus and inform decisions in teacher-learner curriculum is needed. The development of a critical pedagogy dispositions framework led to a qualitative research study investigating the following research questions:

1. What critical pedagogy dispositions do teacher-learners demonstrate?
2. What critical pedagogy dispositions do teacher-learners need to develop?

This study explores whether the proposed framework is effective in identifying evidence of, or lack of, critical pedagogy dispositions. In addition, it provides data for future research in the application of critical pedagogy to teacher learning.

**Context and Participants**

In order to explore the research questions, data was compiled from a seven-week, online teacher education course on curriculum and assessment in an ELL endorsement program offered
by a school of education at a major university in the northwestern United States. The course consisted of eleven teacher-learners, five of whom agreed to participate in this study. Despite the small number of participants, a variety of grade levels, teaching experience, and school contexts were represented. The range of teaching experience among the teacher-learners included: a pre-service teacher, a first-year high school teacher, a second-year first grade teacher, a fifth-year elementary school teacher, and a twenty-two-year veteran K-3 teacher. Four of the students self-identified as white and middle class, one of whom was living in Mexico to learn Spanish at the time of the study. The other student came from a culturally diverse family and has a Korean mother and American father. All of the students were seeking an online Bilingual/ESL endorsement.

As part of the course assignments, the participants read four selections which were intended to provide a stimulus for discussions in which they could demonstrate the pedagogy dispositions. The students were asked, but not required, to respond to the readings in the focused online discussions. To introduce the students to the concepts of critical pedagogy, they read Brown (2004), who provides background and practical suggestions for the application of critical pedagogy in teaching. They also read Auerbach & Burgess (1985), who gave the students a lens through which to evaluate what might be missing in their own school curriculum for ELLs. To learn of practical ways to integrate the ideas of critical pedagogy into everyday teaching practice and reflection, they read Carr (2008). Finally, they read Anyon (1980) to examine ways that teaching methods used by teachers in school districts of varying socio-economic status serve to reproduce social classes in the United States. Some of Anyon’s key ideas are: teachers in working-class schools do not encourage critical thinking, but rather, seem to rely on memorization; students’ time and movement is more strictly controlled in working class schools
in contrast to the freedom of movement in upper class schools; and these approaches reproduce working-class laborers.

Data were compiled from weekly assignments that included a reflection on a classroom scenario at the start and end of the course (described below), a minimum of five postings to the online course discussions for each student each week that resulted in 80 pages of discussion comments, a total of 30 focus reflections, 30 weekly tasks, and 35 weekly activities. Participant names were coded to a list and a number was assigned to keep participants’ identities confidential.

A classroom scenario of a classroom with ELLs was presented for analysis at the start of the course (available from author). This scenario contained attributes that were intended to encourage the application and discussion of the critical pedagogy dispositions. The presence of the dispositions was noted and examined as students worked with selected readings focused on critical pedagogy, course assignments, and online discussions. Although causality cannot be established, the students were asked to respond to the classroom scenario a second time at the end of the course. This second response was used to provide another opportunity to bring any acquired critical pedagogy dispositions to the surface.

In this online pilot study, I took on multiple roles as the course instructor, facilitator, an employee of the university, and as researcher. In certain roles, I had a higher or lower status and had to work within varying constraints. Some students may have felt pressured by my position as their instructor and chose not to participate in the research while they were taking a required course. In an effort to address this concern, the participants were assured that their decision to participate would have no impact on their final grades. They also might have responded to the assignments more critically than what they actually might have felt inwardly. Therefore, as a
researcher I stayed out of the discussions of the critical pedagogy readings in order not to influence the participants’ thinking or responses. Moreover, my role as an instructor and researcher may have obscured my perceptions of some themes and topics while it may have made me overly-cognizant of others. With careful reflection and peer review, I was vigilant about allowing themes and topics into the analysis that may have been overlooked during preliminary analysis.

As suggested by Clark and Creswell (2010), the data were analyzed qualitatively using an open coding scheme. During a preliminary analysis, general patterns in the data were noted. Then, data that indicated general critical pedagogy principles were coded. Next the coded data were grouped into themes framed by, but not limited to, the critical pedagogy dispositions. Six themes emerged; four of which correlated with the critical pedagogy dispositions, and two which indicated other central patterns in data. Decisions about grouping the data into themes were based on the researcher’s understanding of the context and intent of the participants’ comments. For the purpose of this study, parsing the comments was not important. It was the content of the comments, not their linguistic or discursive attributes, that was relevant.

Results and Discussion

This analysis provided initial answers to the research questions posed in this study. All of the participants in this study demonstrated four of the six critical pedagogy dispositions (CPD 1, CPD 3, CPD 4, CPD, 5) to some extent. CPD 2 and CPD 6, (“a rejection of meritocracy” and “the ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream middle-class white culture”), were not evident in the data. These findings are discussed below.
Critical Pedagogy Disposition #1: An understanding of the inequities of the social order in which culturally and linguistically diverse students find themselves

The data showed that all of the participants were able to recognize to some degree the injustices in current practices of the educational system. This awareness was predominant in several areas: the educational system in general, the testing and labeling of ELLs, the attitudes of their colleagues toward ELLs, and difficulties for the parents of ELLs.

First, when discussing the educational system and the needs of their ELLs, one participant recognized that English language learners are missing from educational conversations among her colleagues. Participant 3 asks, “Why don’t we talk about ELL issues anymore? Why is it like a secret or not a big deal and that hopefully the students will figure it [English acquisition] out?” Not only does this participant recognize that the issues of the ELLs are missing as priorities among teachers and administrators, she also questions the underlying belief that language acquisition will somehow just magically occur without planning or forethought.

Participant 2 writes, “Schools are often impersonal and do not give enough information to parents of second language learners as they fill out forms listing home languages… Oftentimes there is no explanation of the programs available, the benefits for their child, or the answering of questions that parents might have.” Participant 2 demonstrates an understanding of a possible cultural difference in educational systems – that is that US schools may be intimidating to parents who do not speak English fluently. This comment also reflects the perception that schools, for whatever reason, may not be willing to take the extra time and effort to fully engage with non-native speakers.

Participant 4 went on to question the effectiveness of the programs the ELLs are participating in, such as a newcomer program. Participant 4 complains, “ELL students in our
newcomer centers are virtually never on grade level and many have been in ELL since kindergarten or at least the primary grades. I personally, feel like this is a sign that our system isn’t helping our ELL kids.”

Although these participants seem to recognize that there are problems relating to their specific schools or to the education system in general, without a more thorough investigation, there is no way of knowing if the teachers understand the deep-seated inequities of the social order beyond the classroom. They do not offer any tangible alternatives to righting the weaknesses in the systems. Rather, the data point to the teachers’ underlying belief that the problematic nature of transmission of information to ELLs and their families is undermining their success and that more effective communication might serve as a “quick fix” to a variety of problems. While that may be true to some extent, the findings suggest the lack of deeper thinking about economic factors, class status, discrimination, or the marginalization of ELLs as being significant factors in ELLs’ success.

All of the teachers noted how the systems of testing, placing, and labeling ELLs were unfair. For example, Participant 1 asks, “Why are ELLs still required to participate in standardized tests, even if they have only recently arrived to the United States?” This participant seems to understand that students who have recently arrived may have limited language skills, may be under stress and frightened and therefore may not be assessed accurately if they are tested upon arrival. Participant 2 acknowledges this problem as well in the classroom scenario: “Lilia was tested on her first day at school when she was scared and had not had time to get used to her surroundings.” However, this teacher does not explore ways to change or disrupt this practice in the school system.
Participant 3 also questions the fairness of using the standard DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) test with a first grade ELL:

I tested one of my students this week and she tries so hard and she is really working on sounding out the words, however with the DIBELS test it is all about doing the test in 1 minute and I feel bad. So instead of being Benchmark, she is going to be Strategic or Intensive because of her struggles with language. Is this fair?

This participant understands the inherent disadvantages of an ELL being evaluated using the same criteria that is used with native speakers, but does not question why adjustments are not being made or how he/she might influence changes in the testing and placement procedures. In addition, Participant 4 complained about the use of a multiple choice exam to test ELLs and the resulting lack of information about what students actually know. She questions, “I wonder why we don’t use a more effective assessment measure to progress our ELL students.” The participants also objected strongly to the treatment of the newly arrived ELL (in the classroom scenario) who was tested and labeled as learning disabled on her first day of school.

The participants also noted that the labeling of a student as an ELL is problematic to all the stakeholders: the parents, other teachers and to the ELLs themselves. Participant 2 writes, “The parents are really afraid of this being on the student’s permanent record and worry about the implications for their student if they receive the label. They do not want their child pulled out of regular classes to receive services.” The teacher-learners may be alluding to other special needs classes offered to students with learning disabilities who may be pulled out of their regular classrooms to receive services from educational specialists. The pairing of being a second language learner to native speakers with learning disabilities is problematic to this teacher-
learner, but again there is no discussion of how one might resist this type of comparison or how individual language support might be viewed more positively.

Participant 4 explains how some teachers view the ELL label as a handicap. “I do see that having the ELL label can have a negative impact on how teachers perceive them or how they are taught. Being ELL is almost like having a handicap. I’m not saying that all teachers are like this, but I have seen it enough that I, personally, wouldn’t want my child to be labeled ELL.” Participant 1 also agrees with this perception: “I’ve also had an ELL teacher say that teaching students who are ELL are just like teaching students with learning disabilities, ‘It’s pretty much the same thing,’ she said.” These teacher-learners should be commended on their awareness of these discriminatory and educationally unproductive attitudes. However, it might be more beneficial to their ELLS if they interrogated the school’s role as a socializing institution that may be serving to reproduce the stigmatization of ELLs in greater society. They might ask how the needs of these learners can be discussed without making them seem disadvantaged or how the perception of non-native speakers as being somehow deficient can be named.

Most of the teachers in this study were critical of other teachers’ perceptions of ELLs. Participant 3 asks, “Why do teachers single out their ELL students so much? Yes, they are different and yes they are struggling, but they are just like the rest of the students in the class…” Yet, Participant 3 labels the students as “struggling” and “different” while at the same time complaining that other teachers single out the ELLs. It seems that Participant 3 adopts the idea that the language used in describing the ELLs is separate from the perceptions that she knows she should have of the ELLs. Participant 4 also sees a negative perception of ELLs in her teaching context: “Some of the teachers at my school feel if an ELL student is struggling academically that there is something wrong with the student and that the student needs Special
Ed or needs to go back to a newcomer ELL classroom.” Participant 4 recognizes the injustice of this kind of thinking but falls short of analyzing what appears to be teachers not feeling responsible for these students or perhaps feeling ill-equipped to help them.

Even more overtly negative teacher beliefs are not more deeply examined by the participants. For example, Participant 1 writes about a teacher’s reaction in her school concerning giving additional help to an ELL, “I’ve had a smirking teacher say to me, ‘He probably won’t get it, but that’s not surprising.’” As disheartening as this type of comment may be, Participant 1 does not analyze the underlying causes of such teacher attitudes. These teacher-learners name this kind of behavior from their colleagues, but it is unclear whether they have explored in their teacher education how to manage this kind of unprofessional behavior with colleagues. For example, teacher-learners might need to explore how they might effect change tactfully in their future employment settings, and learn how to question the beliefs underlying such skepticism in their educational contexts.

Participant 5 makes a connection to teachers’ beliefs about ELLs to the ideas in the reading by Auerbach & Burgess (1985). The authors believe that most often the curriculum choices in many survival ELL courses present idealized situations in which non-native speakers are easily understood, problems are quickly solved, and life in America is smooth. They believe these scenarios in ELL texts may actually perpetuate the impression that somehow the problems ELLs face in American society are a result of their own deficiencies. Participant 5 writes:

I have heard many people describe these factors as the students’ or families’ fault, as if they are not good enough and it is what they deserve. It is really sad how prejudice[d] people still are, or more like completely ignorant to the real issues behind these factors.
Participant 4 also makes the point that teachers need to be aware of the link between socio-economic status, immigration, race and second language status and the resulting differences in the treatment of ELLs. She states, “I think that teachers in general do have different expectations for their students depending on their backgrounds--not so socio-economic, but language as well.” This participant does not delve deeply into what the “real issues” are for the ELLs but is demonstrating an awareness that issues beyond English language acquisition do exist. As Bartolomé (2004) pointed out in her study, teacher educators need to examine the “inextricable link” between race and social class (p. 106). Participant 4’s comments point to the need for critical pedagogy development in teacher education and specific preparation for confronting these kinds of ideologies.

Finally, the participants seem to understand the way in which parents struggle with marginalization as well. Participant 2 explains, “2nd language parents are often hesitant to come to the school because of not being able to communicate and feeling inadequate.” Participant 2 demonstrates an understanding of one of the most basic barriers to parent-school communication, language. However, there are many socio-economic factors that might be barriers to more parental interaction, such as work demands, childcare issues, and cross-cultural educational differences. Participant 5 also acknowledges the barriers to parental advocacy: “Many times ELLs do not have parents as advocates for them. This is largely due to the language barrier and differences in cultures…”

Participant 2 also writes about the American parent who tried to influence the curriculum in the classroom scenario by asking that French be taught by the only French-speaking student in the classroom. “When trying to influence the curriculum, they are advocating for their ideas and their child, while there is little parent advocating for the needs of the ELL student.” When
confronted with requests from parents, participant 2 suggests asking the critical questions, “Whose interests does the knowledge to be taught serve? Who is excluded as a result? And who is marginalized?” Participant 2 is demonstrating important critical thinking but falls short of questioning the underlying valorization of the French language over the other languages spoken by the students in the class. The reality of the students from Asia and Mexico is that in subtle ways their languages are deemed less desirable.

CPD 1 is a key disposition to be developed in order for teacher-learners to fully grasp the lived realities of their ELLs. More time in teacher education may be needed to investigate the economic demographics of the families of ELLs and immigrants and reading about the personal histories and struggles of these students to uncover the more subtle ways these students are being treated in schools and society.

Critical Pedagogy Disposition #3: A rejection of the belief that students’ cultures and languages are deficits

In addition to many indications of the presence of CPD 1, the participants noted the importance of the retention and growth of their students’ first languages and heritage cultures. For example, reflecting upon the classroom scenario in which a parent requests that all the students be taught French, Participant 1 writes, “French only would not give many of the ELLs the opportunity to validate the knowledge they already have, and the class should continue to discuss many languages/cultures.” Participant 2 also notes the value of the ELLs being asked to teach the English native speakers words from their heritage languages. She states:
I had not thought about the cultural comparisons and contributions that this allowed for in the classroom and the opportunities for helping children learn about the new culture while maintaining their own. It also allows opportunity for native speakers to learn about and gain an appreciation for new cultures which I believe can lead to less discrimination by them.

Participant 1 also supports the acquisition of a second language:

It is very upsetting to me that ELL would be sometimes be considered as having a learning disability when in fact, it is a huge advantage to know more than one language/culture. I would hope that more teachers would begin to consider English language learning as a positive and a benefit for the students!

She goes on further to make a connection to the value of ELLs in helping teachers expand their horizons. She describes an incident that occurred during a faculty in-service:

… just about a week ago at an in-service, we were discussing new curriculum documents and a few teachers behind me pointed out diverse names in the text. ‘What ever happened to just Dick and Jane? I can’t even pronounce these names.’ We are in a very low-diversity school district and so many of the teachers do not understand why texts are trying to be so much more inclusive. I think it is a good thing to add a variety of names and situations so that many more students can relate to the text, but also, so that students (and even teachers!) can have a better understanding of the multicultural world outside of their little neighborhoods.

Participant 1 clearly welcomes and values diversity in her classroom and especially recognizes the need for its inclusion in materials if the school’s demographics are not particularly diverse.
The participants also demonstrated CPD 3 in the online discussions when they objected to the English-only requirement of the classroom scenario: “Sometimes they need to say something but do not know how to say it in English so I feel it’s okay for them to speak in their first language. I don’t see a problem with it at all” (Participant 3). The participants rebuffed the belief that ELLs’ native languages are deficits to be overcome, and they moved beyond simply acknowledging the importance of heritage languages and cultures at the classroom level. One participant noticed how superficially heritage languages and cultures were treated at the school district’s curriculum level. Participant 5 focused on the weak language in a curriculum document that called for the “recognition of culture and background” of the students in the classroom. This participant suggested the more active verb “support.” “I think this should be rephrased to say the support of cultural background to go beyond just recognition.”

In a variety of ways, the participants demonstrated and expressed an understanding of the value of the ELLs’ heritage languages and cultures. The participants saw including students’ languages and cultures in their classrooms as ways to help build pride and self-esteem in the ELLs themselves, to grow an appreciation in the native English speakers for other cultures and languages, and as an aid in dispelling discriminatory beliefs beyond the classroom.
Critical Pedagogy Disposition 5: The ability to notice or witness students in a subordinate position and to empathize with them.

In addition to expressing CPD 1 and 3, all of the participants demonstrated empathy for their ELLs throughout the course. Bartolomé (2004) described this attribute in an experiential way because the teachers that she interviewed had themselves experienced being in subordinate positions or had firsthand knowledge of others being treated as inferior. For the purposes of the current study, the feeling or sensing definition of empathy that the psychologist, Carl Rogers (1975), proposed in his work was used. He describes empathy as a way of entering a subject’s world without judgment and trying to feel the subjects’ experiences in it. A feeling or sensing definition of empathy may be sufficient for the typical white, middle-class teachers who (other than instances of gender or class discrimination) tend to have a more privileged status in mainstream American culture. They may not ever experience firsthand the type of subordination that some of their ELLs might encounter, but might, through discussions of their ELLs’ stories of their lived realities, readings, other media portrayals, and their own experiences in learning a second language or living abroad, come to have an empathetic disposition toward these students.

In fact, teacher-learners who had studied a second language were very empathetic about the difficulty of learning English as a second language. Participant 1 states:

... I realized just how difficult learning a new language is … I have been trying to learn Spanish for almost eight years now, and I am still not confident at all in my speaking/listening abilities. My self-assessment showed that, and I began to think about some of the ELLs who are just in their second or third year and are expected to know so much (Participant 1).
In addition to noting the time it takes for language acquisition, the participants also empathized with the students about the difficulty of the English language itself. In discussing ELLs taking a standard assessment, Participant 1 points out that:

… [a fellow teacher] had a difficult time understanding why the math section would be difficult for ELLs. Not only are directions, word problems, and overall cultural context difficult, but also specific concepts and vocabulary may not be familiar to these students, especially when they are in English.

She also responds empathetically to a poem written by an ELL about conducting a self-assessment in English that was posted in the discussion:

This poem really makes me think about what ‘in my own words’ could mean. It seems like your own words would be personal to you, understandable and familiar to you, but this ELL highlights the foreignness of English to him. English is not personal or familiar to him, and he does not consider English words to be his words… (Participant 1).

This participant’s reflection on his/her own language-learning experience and the length of time it takes to become proficient led to the participant’s empathetic reaction to the sometimes unrealistic expectations that the school system places on ELLs and their rates of acquisition. This understanding and empathy may be an important step in developing CPD 6, the ability to advocate for students and broader educational change.

Another area that evoked an empathetic reaction was relating to the mental challenge of ELLs in an English-speaking classroom. The first-generation Korean teacher-learner, Participant 4, wrote about how tiring it was for her to listen to a church service in Korean: “We need to remember how exhausting it is for our ELLs to listen to a second language all day …” Another participant, who is living in Mexico, empathized with the parents of ELLs:
I really understand this feeling of inadequacy! Right now my own children are in school in Mexico and when I visit to ask the teacher a question or she needs to speak with me I feel sooo stupid because I can’t speak fluently, use the right tenses or even know enough academic language to communicate with her (Participant 2).

The participants also expressed empathy for the ELL who was tested on her first day of school in the classroom scenario. Participant 4 worries, “It sounded as if Lilia was tested on her first day of school and she obviously was uneasy.” Participant 5 objected to her testing as well and points out that the child was probably in the silent period of her language acquisition. “The ELL instructor should recognize this [the silent period] and assess her later in the year …”

The participants also showed empathy when they discussed the merits and disadvantages of assessing students for their effort as well as their achievement. Participant 2 confesses, “I too am guilty of giving a higher grade to lower achieving or ELL students because I see them trying so hard—especially on report cards. I wonder how fair that is to them and what I am teaching.” Participant 3 points out that because of the language learning process, achievement in other areas is sometimes overlooked. She says, “I sometimes feel that our ELL students are learning sooo much but we don’t even realize and know they are achieving different learning objectives.”

The participants in this study recognized many challenges that ELLs face and had written emotional reflections on the plight of these students, however, they often did not press forward with suggestions for change. It stands to reason that once a teacher-learner develops a sense of empathy for the injustices that their learners are facing, then the teacher-learners would more likely position herself as an advocate for these learners. The relationship between empathy and advocacy may be important for teacher educators to consider. In the cases of ELLs and other
students who may be underserved by the educational system, teachers as advocates are needed to bring about change.

*Critical Pedagogy Disposition 6: The ability to advocate for students and to help them understand the American educational system*

In the cases of the teacher-learners in this study, all of the participants who demonstrated empathy also demonstrated support for advocacy. The participants gave examples of trying to advocate for these learners when they felt other teachers or the educational system itself (e.g. in the case of high stakes testing) were unjust. For example, Participant 1 writes about the state-mandated yearly assessment: “Certain alternatives may be available, but overall this high stakes test is not very fair to English language learners.” However, the teachers’ ability to be effective in their attempts at advocacy seemed to often be thwarted by factors that the teachers felt were out of their control—standards, standardized testing, and in some cases, having to acquiesce due to lack of seniority and teaching experience. Participant 3 writes about her concern for a 2nd grade ELL who is being retained, “…all I can think about is really suggesting doing a self-assessment with her to see where she is at. However, I am not confident with this and not sure how to suggest to a teacher who has been teaching a whole lot longer than me …” This same participant writes with frustration about a more experienced teacher who suggested that an ELL be placed in special education:

I was explaining to her its language but she was talking about how [the student] does not know anything and that she needs to be in Sped. I was trying to explain it to her but I am
just a second year teacher and she apparently thought I didn’t know what I was talking about.

This new teacher demonstrates the inclination to advocate for her ELLs, but she has not yet developed the confidence to do so in the face of opposition from a more senior colleague.

As part of their advocacy, the participants also recommended improved curriculum and more teacher training. Participant 1 stresses, “Making the curriculum more relevant to our students’ lives is crucial. Not only does this serve to encourage interest and motivation, but I agree that it is very important in preparing our students for the real world.” Although this participant acknowledges a need for a more inclusive curriculum in terms of the needs of ELLs, there is no real demonstration of an understanding of what the “real world” is for the ELLs or concrete suggestion or action for advocating for such curriculum changes.

Beyond the school curriculum, Participant 4 advocates for continued training, “…all teachers are language teachers and need to have instructional tools to teach the whole child—including language.” Again, without being prodded to do so, this participant falls short of making these tools available through an action plan or through extended means of advocacy such as becoming involved in legislative measures, attending school board meetings, and becoming involved in curriculum committees.

Other participants did press for advocacy in more concrete ways, referring to ELL research and the use of the media. “If educators make more noise and provide the backing of research to change standardized testing to provide a more accurate assessment of student knowledge then someone will eventually hear us. We can make a difference and it doesn’t hurt to try” (Participant 5). There was also recognition by Participant 2 of the power of the press and the need for greater media attention:
I remember at least twice during the fall, [Public Radio] had shows dedicated to ELL students and the difficulties they face in school. I think that if we keep ELL issues ‘in the news’ in our own schools, we can start to make a difference. We can pass on research based articles to colleagues, and get them riled up about this as well.

As teachers confront negative attitudes and beliefs about ELLs and understand the injustices in the assessment and instruction of these learners, they need more than empathetic reactions. Faced with time constraints, increasing workloads, and the pressure of producing results on high stakes testing, teachers may not feel able to extend themselves into more active roles as advocates. However, without true investigation in teacher education in ways future teachers can be effective advocates for these learners along with the daily demands of teaching, it is unlikely that lasting change will take place.

The teacher-learners in this study demonstrated strong empathy for their ELLs and the belief that their students’ heritage cultures and languages were assets to be retained and developed. They did demonstrate an understanding of the injustices that their students face primarily in the classroom, but they did not indicate their understandings about the injustices present in their students’ lives outside of the school environment in this study.

*Unobserved Critical Dispositions*

In reference to the second research question concerning what critical pedagogy dispositions teachers need to develop, two critical pedagogy dispositions were not evident in this study. These are: Critical Pedagogy Disposition #2: A rejection of meritocracy (that is, hard work will result in success) as the reason for students not advancing up the social ladder; and
Critical Pedagogy Disposition # 6: An ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream, middle-class white culture.

The participants did not directly indicate whether they held beliefs regarding meritocracy, but they alluded to their ELLs’ beliefs in their own abilities, which may be an indirect way of expressing the notion that if an ELL learns English and works hard enough, he or she will succeed in the American educational system and then eventually in American society. For example, Participant 1 does not address the entrenched prejudices or institutional barriers that the ELLs may have to overcome when she says, “The important things are to consider the needs of your students as well as trying to prepare them for many options in their futures (and believing in their abilities to become anything.)” Nor did the participant question her ideas about what success in the future would mean for ELLs or what the “many options” might be through her predominantly white, middle-class perspective.

Because these dispositions were not directly observable in the discussion does not mean they do not exist. The nature of this particular course may not have brought these dispositions to the surface, or the fact that it was an online class may have confounded the discussions since the spontaneity of a face-to-face discussion in which an educator can push on a particular facet of a conversation may have been missing. In the online classroom, participants may not respond to a post because they have not read that particular post or may not perceive it as they would in a face-to-face conversation in which all the paralinguistic clues are present. Moreover, the content of the class was focused on curriculum and assessment, so when the teacher-learners discussed inequalities in their ELLs’ lives they tended to be centered on the unfairness of the types of testing required of their English language learners.
Conclusions and Implications

While the participants appear to have some understanding that there are inequities in their ELLs’ lives, the data in this study did not provide evidence that they are able to examine the lives of ELLs through a lens that is critical of white, middle class culture. This understanding calls for advocacy for ELLs in terms of schooling and curriculum in a general sense, but without directly naming or interrogating the lived realities of linguistically diverse students, it will not likely bring about a real transformation in the lives of ELLs. For example, the concept of preparing students for success in the real world came up frequently in the class discussions. Participant 1 writes:

I realize that we are preparing our students for success in the real world, and success often requires more than just content knowledge. If a child’s background, parents/home life do not include some of the assumed moral, social (including political/democratic), and personal values for success, teachers have the ability to supplement in their own ways …

From these comments it appears that this teacher-learner has an understanding of ELLs’ positions in the American social order, but upon closer examination of the language such as the “assumed moral, social and personal values for success,” one has to question if there is not an unexamined, underlying hegemonic ideology in place. A critical pedagogy approach would require a careful examination of what the assumed moral, social and personal values are and whether these are assumed from a white, middle class perspective. Moreover, there was no interrogation of the meaning of success for the ELLs, or what “the real world” may be for ELLs.
This is an example which warrants more direct interventions by teacher educators in helping teacher-learners consider alternative ideologies.

Other aspects of deeper understandings of American views of meritocracy and education could also have been explored with the Anyon (1980) article on the hidden curriculum of work. However, two participants dismissed the teaching methods in the article as being abandoned long ago, referenced the age of the study, and made no further comments. One participant did express her belief that there is a connection between social class and teachers’ attitudes toward students, but did not make further connections to the lower socio-economic status that is prevalent today among ELLs and immigrant students (The Urban Institute, 2005). The remaining participants did not comment on the article.

This study also revealed that some attributes in the classroom scenario were either treated superficially, such as the request for the teaching of French, or ignored completely, as was the case with requiring all the students to memorize the Pledge of Allegiance. In the linguistically diverse classroom scenario including eight students from France, Brazil, Korea, Guatemala, Mexico, China, and Iraq, one of the parents requested that the whole class be taught French. It was noted in the scenario that the teacher was considering this idea and the young French girl had already made a group of friends among her classmates. Despite all the participants having acknowledged the value of the heritage cultures and languages of their ELLs, none of the participants really questioned the valorization of the French language. Although two of the participants objected to the teaching of French for its potentially exclusionary effect on the other ELLs in the classroom, it would be important for teachers to critically theorize the reasons that French would be preferred over any of the other languages represented in the class and why the young French girl was so easily accepted by a group of American classmates.
It was also noted in the classroom scenario that the teacher did not know very much about the ELLs in the class and they were all taught to say the American Pledge of Allegiance. None of the participants questioned the appropriateness of this, considering they did not know if the ELLs in the class were born in the United States, were in the United States for the short-term, or if the students’ families were considering naturalization. In areas in which injustices to the ELLs were very apparent, the participants did suggest ways to be advocates for their students. However, in this case, important background information about the learners in the classroom scenario remained unknown to the teacher. To advocate for ELLs, teacher-learners might explore ways to learn more about them as individuals during teacher education.

Finally, teacher trainers need to be informed of their teacher-learners’ understandings so they are not emphasizing aspects of critical pedagogy already present. Teacher trainers may be over-emphasizing particular critical pedagogy understanding to teachers who are well on their way to becoming critical educators. Making assumptions about what the teacher-learners may or may not know may contribute to teacher-learner resistance because teacher trainers may in effect diminish the insights the teachers already have. More important is the second research question, in which we need to identify which critical pedagogy dispositions seem to be unapparent and in need of nurturing. The results of this study indicate that the use of Bartolomé’s (2004) work as a framework for identifying critical pedagogy dispositions in teachers, did identify a possible pattern in which some dispositions need more in-depth examination and others may require explicit instruction and interrogation in our teacher education curriculum. These understandings can lead to better ways to assist future classroom language teachers in developing the dispositions to foster greater changes in their ELLs’ lives simply beyond the acquisition of the English language.
This study fills a gap in the literature in that it employs the critical pedagogy dispositions as a theoretical framework for research. The evidence of the four critical pedagogy dispositions present in this study may provide some validation for current practice in teacher-learner education. However, it is still unclear how and when the dispositions developed: before, during, or after teacher education. Further research is needed to get an understanding of what critical pedagogy dispositions are generally present in pre-service teachers of ELLs when they emerge from their teacher education programs to better determine the areas that require more explicit support and discussion. It also calls for the exploration of how these dispositions develop in teachers and whether they develop in a situated teaching context. This study suggests a broader investigation into pre-service and in-service teachers’ knowledge base of critical pedagogy and its implications for classroom practice and educational advocacy. A qualitative study with a larger number of participants that includes interviews with the participants about their understandings of each CPD as it developed would help to inform the application of critical pedagogy to teacher education in ELL.
References


“ESL IS A TABOO THING:” A STUDY OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

DISPOSITIONS IN TEACHER-LEARNERS

BY

JOANNE SELLEN
ABSTRACT

Using Bartolomé’s (2004) commonalities of effective teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) as a framework, a qualitative study was conducted to uncover six critical pedagogical dispositions evident or lacking in teacher-learners in an online bilingual/ESL endorsement course. This work was the continuation of work done in a pilot study (Author, 2009). Revealing the same pattern as the pilot study, the participants demonstrated four of the six dispositions; “beliefs about meritocracy” and “the ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of middle-class White culture” were not evident in the data. In fact, the data indicated that an ideology of meritocracy was replaced by English proficiency as a predictor of success for ELLs. The data demonstrated that the framework was successful in identifying a pattern in which some dispositions need development and the two that were not apparent, require explicit instruction in teacher education. Based on the findings of this study, implications for teacher education and educational leadership were found in five central areas: the need for more ELL education coursework, the value of experiential learning in developing the disposition of empathy, the need to include critical pedagogical readings and to develop authentic materials, the need for explicit examination of ideologies of meritocracy and White middle-class culture, and the need for critical pedagogy in educational leadership curriculum.
Introduction

I was always aware of my status, even as a young boy my parents had told me about it... however it was only until junior year in high school that I really understood the gravity of our situation. And with that understanding came a downward spiral during which I practically gave up all efforts in school; my reasoning was, why bother with all this work if it’s not going to amount to anything...

It wasn’t until a year after graduation that hope finally came in the form of AB 540 [a California state law that permits undocumented students to pay in-state tuition]... in the winter of 2007 I graduated Cum Laude, with a degree in Industrial Engineering. Graduation was a bittersweet day. Having finished school and still being undocumented I had no prospects other than to stay in the underground economy and let my degree lose value as the time passes...

Being in my mid twenties I see all the time that has passed me by, and how a lot of it has been wasted by this constant worry that not having nine digits entails. I look at all the opportunities missed, the demeaning jobs, anger and despair and realize that I don’t want undocumented kids just graduating from high school to go through that. These are my reasons for fighting for the DREAM Act. (Gabe on www.dreamactivist.org/about/our-stories)

It is likely that other students like Gabe, whose drop in academic performance in secondary school might have been attributed to a lack of motivation by his teachers, came to the same realization that higher education and a professional career after graduation was closed off to them. On December 18, 2010, the U.S. Senate failed to pass The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (The DREAM Act; see the Library of Congress Website at http://thomas.loc.gov for the full text of the legislation). This legislation would have provided a pathway to conditional permanent residency status for undocumented students who graduate from a U.S. high school and meet other residency and character requirements. With most states requiring residency proof for in-state tuition and his ineligibility to apply for state scholarships, Gabe knew his chances of making it through university and working openly in his chosen profession was not a possibility without AB 540 and the Dream Act. Gabe’s struggle to become
educated in the United States is fraught with the fear and uncertainty that President Obama acknowledged in his State of the Union Address on January 25, 2011: “Today, there are hundreds of thousands of students excelling in our schools who are not American citizens. Some are the children of undocumented workers, who had nothing to do with the actions of their parents. They grew up as Americans and pledge allegiance to our flag, and yet they live every day with the threat of deportation.” (President Obama. State of the Union Address, 2011).

By 2008, there were 10.9 million school children in the US between the ages of 5-17 who spoke a language other than English at home (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Since federal law prohibits the denial of access to education to any child living in the United States, an unknown number of these English language learners (ELLs) were children of undocumented workers. These students are taught primarily by white, middle-class women who, while prepared in educational theories and methods, may not have ever examined the obstacles facing their ELLs outside the elementary or secondary classroom. As teachers prepare for an increasing number of ELLs and immigrant students, they must understand that proficiency in the English language alone is not a guarantee for access to higher education or for better life chances in American society. Teacher educators need to assist teacher-learners in critically examining how the educational practices occurring in their schools and the political decisions taking place outside their classrooms impact their students’ lives. Although it seems much to ask, the teachers of ELLs, who work with these students and parents every day and know that those who are not permanent residents do not have the power of the vote, must be their voices. Informed by the concepts of critical pedagogy in teacher education, teachers of ELLs could develop the dispositions to help transform the lives of their ELLs beyond the classroom. The purpose of this
paper is to apply a framework to identify critical pedagogy dispositions in teacher-learners of
ELLs.

Literature Review

According to Bartolomé (2007), in U.S. teacher education programs emphasis is placed on the practical aspects of teaching, such as effective strategies and methods to guarantee academic and language success for linguistically diverse learners. However, she points out that this approach often occurs without teachers examining their own “assumptions, values, and beliefs, and how this ideological posture informs, often unconsciously, their perceptions and actions when working with linguistic-minority and other politically, socially, and economically subordinated students” (p. 263). She believes that this examination would help teachers understand “how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and thus maintain unequal and what should be unacceptable conditions that so many students experience on a daily basis” (Bartolome, 2004, p.98).

To explore the dispositions of four educators who were identified as outstanding by their administrators and colleagues, Bartolomé (2004) conducted a study of a culturally and linguistically diverse high school that had a great number of students who went on to higher education. Her study indicated that these teachers were similar in recognizing their students’ social marginalization and that they rejected commonly-held beliefs that excused students’ poor academic performance and life chances. Bartolomé (2004) found that the teachers dismissed ideas that the students’ cultures and native languages were liabilities. Moreover, they did not “romanticize” entrance into white, middle-class, mainstream culture as the primary objective for their students. In addition, they reported that they had personally experienced injustices
themselves or had witnessed someone being unjustly treated. According to Bartolomé, these teachers viewed themselves as cultural brokers or advocates for their students in navigating the American educational system. Such strong anecdotal evidence of the dispositions of these teachers in relation to the high graduation rate and the pursuance of higher education in this school calls for more investigation into the critical pedagogical understandings of teacher-learners in general.

Bartolomé (2004) suggests that “the majority of prospective teachers are not quite so perceptive or flexible in their thinking to consider alternative ideological explanations without the assistance from teacher education personnel” (p. 119). Bartolome (2007) and other critical scholars (Brown 1997, Carr, 2008, Crooks and Lehner, 1998, Graman, 1988, Lin, 2004, Pennycook, 2004, Swartz, 2003) appeal for teacher educators to pursue a more demanding critical pedagogical curriculum in teacher education, so teacher-learners can “… expand, hold up to a critical light, and adjust their own ideological lens in ways that make the classroom more inclusive, exploratory, and transformative” (Bartolome, 2007, p. 282). Bartolomé’s assumption that many teachers leave their preparation programs not having deeply questioned their ideologies or without understanding the political nature of teaching may be true for some. However, it is necessary to discover what understandings and beliefs teachers carry into their classrooms in order to uncover those dispositions that are in need of cultivating. Using the work of Bartolomé (2004) as a framework, the critical pedagogy dispositions of teacher-learners can be explored. From this starting point, teacher educators could design more highly-targeted critical pedagogical curriculum for teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse learners.
Pilot Study

A qualitative exploratory research study into the critical pedagogical dispositions of teacher-learners in an online bilingual/ESL endorsement program was conducted (Author, 2009). The study investigated the following research questions: 1. What critical pedagogical dispositions do teacher-learners demonstrate? and 2. What critical pedagogical dispositions do teacher-learners need to develop? In this study, the commonalities that Bartolomé (2004) found in her successful teachers were broken down into six critical pedagogical dispositions (CPDs).

- **CPD1**: An understanding of the inequities of the social order in which culturally and linguistically diverse students find themselves
- **CPD2**: A rejection of meritocracy as the reason for students not advancing up the social ladder
- **CPD3**: A rejection of the belief that students’ cultures and languages are deficits
- **CPD4**: An ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream, middle-class white culture
- **CPD5**: An ability to notice or witness students in a subordinate position and to empathize with them
- **CPD6**: An ability to advocate for students and to help them understand the American educational system.

The six CPDs were used as a framework to identify CPDs that were undeveloped or developing in preservice/inservice teachers. The pilot study explored whether the proposed framework was effective in identifying evidence of, or lack of, critical pedagogical dispositions. Most of the participants demonstrated 4 of the 6 dispositions and the data pointed to the need for more direct instruction and interrogation into the unapparent CPDs 4 and 6. In addition to providing an effective framework for identification, the study also provided direction for future
research in the application of critical pedagogy to teacher learning. The study in this paper builds on the previous work of the pilot study. It should be noted that neither study was meant to be evaluative so it is not the researcher’s intent to determine how deeply the dispositions are developed in the teacher-learners.

Methodology

Context and Participants

In order to explore the research questions more deeply and with a larger number of participants, a second study was conducted in a seven-week, online teacher education course on the foundations of bilingual/ESL education. In the foundations course the students read *Educating English Language Learners* by James Crawford (2004), which covers the history of language policy in the US and legislative decisions concerning English language learners in the American public school system. Since Crawford provides a critical view of this history and interrogates underlying ideologies of language and educational policies aimed at language acquisition, assimilation and the education of immigrants, the course content provided a logical context for teacher-learners to discuss critical aspects of the education of ELLs and for the researcher to investigate what CPDs the teachers/learners demonstrate.

Two sections of the course were offered in the fall of 2010; section 2 was facilitated by the researcher. There were a total of 26 participants. The participants were made up of 12 preservice teachers and 14 inservice teachers, representing a variety of grade levels, teaching experience, and school contexts. Only two participants were male. International students in the course were not included in the data collection because the focus on the study is the teacher-
learners’ understandings of the inequities in the education of ELLs in the American public school system.

Participant names were coded to a list and a number was assigned to keep participants’ identities confidential. The presence or absence of the dispositions was noted and examined as students worked through course assignments and online discussions.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data was gathered from a total of 182 weekly reflections, 654 weekly assignments, and 1,327 discussion posts. As suggested by Clark and Creswell (2011), the data were analyzed qualitatively using an open coding scheme. General, patterns in the data were noted during a preliminary analysis. Then, data that indicated general critical pedagogical principles were coded. Next the coded data were grouped into themes framed by, but not limited to, the critical pedagogical dispositions. Six themes emerged; four of which correlated with the critical pedagogical dispositions, and two which indicated other central patterns in the data. To verify that CPD 2 and CDP 4 did not seem to emerge in these teacher-learners, the participants were sent follow up questions to answer. Decisions about grouping the data into themes were based on the researcher’s understanding of the context and intent of the participants’ comments. For the purpose of this study, parsing the comments was not important. It was the content of the comments, not their linguistic or discursive attributes, that was relevant. The teacher-learners’ comments included in this paper were edited for typographical and punctuation errors to facilitate comprehension of the teacher-learners’ ideas.
**Limitations**

Although the methodology was firmly grounded in qualitative research literature, the online nature of the course could have left some dispositions hidden. There is no way to ensure that the participants read every post in the discussions. Therefore, there may have been particular posts which might have sparked the participants to demonstrate the two dispositions that were not evidenced in the data. Moreover, the results in this study were limited to the interpretations and perspective of the researcher. The researcher chose not to check the interpretations of the data with the participants, for in the risk of doing so, the participants’ responses might have been influenced by the facilitator. However, the interpretations were peer-reviewed by colleagues. Following the same reasoning, the participants were not prompted by critical questions from the facilitator either since the purpose of this study was solely to identify what dispositions were apparent in the data without prompting.

**Findings and Discussion**

**CPD 1: An understanding of the inequities of the social order in which culturally and linguistically diverse students find themselves**

All of the participants demonstrated an understanding of the inequities of the American social order as it related to the education of ELLs. Their reflections centered more on policy decisions concerning the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), high stakes testing, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), Title I Funding, and the labeling of ELLs. They rarely mentioned life chances, higher educational opportunities and future employment of ELLs in American society.
The number of instances in the data which demonstrated recognition of these inequities was almost double in the inservice group over the pre-service teachers, indicating that teaching experience might deepen the development of this disposition.

The inservice group of teacher learners had a keen understanding of the social order as it pertains to the education of ELLs in the policy decisions made at their schools, and decisions made at the district, state, and federal levels. In order for schools to be allocated the resources they require from state and federal funding sources, it is important for schools to have accurate demographic information about the students in their districts. One of the initial activities of the course required the participants to investigate the ELL programming and demographics of a district they were interested in or were presently teaching in. Many of the participants found it difficult to find programming details or demographic information about their district’s ELL populations. While they often expressed frustration, they stopped short of deeply questioning why ELL demographics were not a priority for school districts:

I am going to say this was very difficult for me. I was not able to find all of the information that I wanted. There was not a good breakdown online about ELL students within [my] school district. I was very disappointed when looking at the [Superintendent’s Office] website. I did not think that the information was accurate. It was saying that there was a 0% migrant population. [My school] is in an agricultural based city. You cannot tell me there is a 0% migrant population. Also the information was not up to date. I feel that the [Superintendent’s Office] really dropped the ball with updated information. I also spent a great deal of time on [a district I am interested in]’s website. They did not have any of this information and the information that they did directed you to the [Superintendent’s Office] link with incorrect data. I feel a little let
down that the information was not easily accessible for parents who are looking for special programs. If I was a parent moving to the area I would greatly rely on [these] two websites to give me adequate information. Maybe...I am just being a little too hard because my frustration had set in. Was it easy to find information for everyone else? I am getting the feeling that ELL/ESL is a taboo thing. Hmmm....something to ponder about (Participant 7).

Participant 7 seems to be questioning an effect of an underlying ideology that does not place importance on identifying ELLs or the need to have up-to-date information about these students. She was not prompted to suggest what that ideology might be, and none of the other participants questioned it either.

Other participants could not find specific information for the school they were interested in so they had to resort to other means of finding the information, such as using district-wide information that included all the schools in the district or by making phone calls directly to ESL program coordinators or to school principals. In describing the difficulties they faced in satisfactorily completing this assignment, the participants, with the help of a critical pedagogy perspective, might delve into what this missing information says about the priorities and laxity of school districts involved, and might discuss ways they could bring about change in the districts they mentioned. Unless prompted to do so by critical teacher educators, it is unclear whether these participants feel they have agency in creating solutions.

Other participants pointed out that that there were times when they did find statistics, but they seemed to equate ethnicity with ELL status. Participant 8 explains the consequences of how inaccurate statistics can mislead the district’s administrative decision-making regarding perceived needs and services:
In my School District the changing demographics of an increasing white, non-Hispanic ELL population makes it difficult to account for or “see” an increasing ELL need. This is due to an increase in Russian, Ukrainian and Romanian students moving into the area. These students are recorded as “Caucasian” or “white” but still have a high need for ELL services. This system can make it difficult for schools and districts to track need … When we think of non-Hispanic white we often think of students from families who have been in the US for generations; but this is often not the case, and not just with Eastern Europeans but immigrants/refugees of other countries too. It is misleading; however I'm not sure what the solution should be (Participant 8).

Participant 8 recognizes the error that may be impacting necessary statistical data, and this is important. She understands that a solution is needed, but she does not offer a solution or state any plan to alert the district administration of this problem. The point is that most of the participants noted concerns but refrained from suggesting action to remedy them. Instead of questioning the underlying assumptions by those in the districts responsible for obtaining and recording demographic information, the teacher-learners noted the problem but do not position themselves as able to question these inaccuracies directly in the district or to have agency in their remedy.

Another unjust aspect of schooling for these teacher-learners was the use of standardized state-wide testing to measure ELLs’ academic achievement. Many of the participants’ objections centered on linguistically and culturally biased exams that they perceived favored White, native English-speaking students. Other participants critically question the logic of high stakes testing and the ultimate impact it has on ELLs. For example, Participant 24 notes:
The whole system is incredibly frustrating to me, and seems to hurt the schools who struggle and help the ones that do not need it. To me, it is a huge waste of funding and it is biased against schools with higher levels of diversity. White America succeeds on standardized testing such as the [State Exam], while it is biased against the students I am working with, who are mostly Hispanic. Something must be done to eliminate the bias. There has to be a better way to measure achievement than standardized testing. I recommend switching to a portfolio approach where students can be assessed on many different types of achievement, as opposed to the one-way approach of the high-stakes test. However, this would also require time and funding, which we do not have.

Like Participant 24, some of the participants in this study made suggestions for alternative assessments, indicating knowledge about exam bias. However, none of the participants address how to have a larger impact on the policy makers, and some appear to give up because the issue seems too large and financial and time constraints seem too overwhelming.

Another injustice recognized by these teacher-learners is the mandated testing requirements of NCLB and the often subsequent designation of not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The NCLB Act (now under reconsideration under the Obama administration) requires schools with this designation to inform parents that the school is “failing” and inform them of their choice to move their children to another school, which ultimately results in a loss of funding to the failing school. Participant 5 is able to see the social impact this has on both the quality of education and the ultimate class divisions it may cause. She writes:
As more and more students who qualify for ELL services come into our school and are expected to take the test in a year, even though research states that it takes 5 to 7 years to achieve academic language comparable to their English only peers, we as a school are less and less likely to have the percentage pass needed to make AYP. Since one of the consequences for not making AYP is giving parents the option of having their student attend another school in the district, many of the English only families are opting to transfer their students. This leaves the school not only with a higher percentage of ELL students, but also is serving to segregate the school. This leaves only poor families as the majority of our ELL students live at or below the poverty level. We have less money for special programs, as our PTA is less affluent than the schools further away from downtown. It is becoming a vicious circle (Participant 5).

Again, these problems as they relate to the education of ELLs and the ultimate segregation of students by social class are highly visible to the participants as teachers. A more critical approach might help the teacher-learners both question the law and the injustices, and move toward activism to bring about a solution.

In fact in this study, it appears that teacher-learners often use questioning to indicate that they are aware of a problem but they do not interrogate the reasons behind the problem or propose effective remedies. For example, Participant 3 describes AYP as a kind of punishment for students’ poor performance, but does not attempt to examine the ideologies behind AYP other than the seemingly illogical allocations of money:

I've also wondered about how schools can get out AYP jail while having their funds cut?

It seems a little backwards, as instituting new curriculum, training teachers, and paying
everyone for the time it takes to do this is expensive. ELL students and their peers can't possibly be well served by this (Participant 3).

Pushed to question the underlying ideologies by a critical approach, more than the obstacles of time and money may come into play as major factors in exploring alternatives.

Of concern to critical teacher educators in connecting K-12 education of ELLs to the greater social order is that teacher-learners understand that it is not merely biased testing practices or school policies that hinder future life chances for ELLs. It is important for teacher learners to understand that while fair testing practices and accommodations for diverse learners are important, equally important is an understanding of ideologies outside the classroom that perpetuate legislation that effectively cut off life opportunities such as higher education for many of their ELLs. Participant 24 sees the injustices that standardized testing designed for White, middle class students can cause in limiting ELLs life possibilities, and suggests that the solutions lie in asking questions about other schools’ accommodations. She points out:

As the background information states, over 70% of the population in schools will be non-white students. My concern is that most of the curricula, standardized tests, and even the college entrance examinations such as the SAT are geared toward white upper middle class students. This is going to create a lot of problems if we don't adapt our schools to meet the needs of our diverse students. What kinds of accommodations do they make at other schools for this change in school populations? Are they doing anything at all?

This teacher-learner demonstrates an understanding of the complexities surrounding the educational injustices of testing bias. For the immediacy of testing, accommodations for ELLs are valuable. However, a critical teacher educator might push this understanding further by
examining what beliefs test writers and policy makers might have concerning language acquisition and assimilation. Without this examination, teacher-learners may seek seemingly easy solutions. For example, Participant 13 asks: “How come the U.S. can't create a more solid piece of legislation to assist English Language Learners?” Developing critical pedagogy dispositions would help teacher-learners see that along with more supportive legislation, there is a great deal of ideological work to be done on issues of immigration, language policy and assimilation.

Other teacher-learners, aware of problems for ELLs, could be helped to examine the complexities involved in greater American society for ELLs rather than looking for what appear to be easy solutions; as in this comment by Participant 13:

The quote that truly grabbed my attention was, "We don't need flexibility. We need leadership. We don't know what to do with these kids. We need some guidance." I have been feeling this way throughout the class. It seems that money and politics have been overpowering clear policies surrounding ELL instruction. I hope that as a class we can come up with a clear and easy plan that can be implemented into today's classroom! The English language learners deserve the best instruction possible!

When faced with these larger policy decisions that impact their schools and classrooms, the teachers do not express a belief that they can have much of an influence on policy decisions, so they continue to place their focus on their individual classrooms, Participant 1 writes:

I, too, teach in a Title I school. I have seen the budget cuts take our funding as well…. I have had the same questions about non-Title schools and their ELL populations. How do they get the support that they need? If they are Title they
have some support but it is becoming less and less every year! I guess the only thing we can do as teachers is to educate ourselves as much as we can in the different strategies there are to help our ELL kiddoes.

While using effective research-based methods and strategies is important, equally important is for the teacher-learners to understand the larger ideological and immigration policy changes that might help ELLs beyond the classroom.

Another concern for teacher-learners is how money and competition for funding is influencing the public school system. Participant 8 implies that some districts may be using demographical data in order to obtain funding:

I've also seen schools that record someone as ELL so they can reap the financial benefit but then only "track" the student rather than provide services. "Tracking" may mean looking at their grades periodically and writing a summary. It is a shame because these students need more help or they wouldn't be in the program (Participant 8).

Participant 8 sees an injustice being played out in her educational context. Teacher educators can interrogate with teacher-learners what steps might be taken in these difficult circumstances. As part of critical pedagogy in teacher education, moral and ethical discussions have to take place with teacher-learners about how to handle questionable administrative practice.

Many of the teacher-learners focus on language as the reason for ELLs’ poor test performance and resulting loss of funding. Without considering a student’s residency status, higher education out-of-state tuition costs, or making a connection to the legal problems undocumented students have, teachers attribute English as the reason for students not having
access to higher education. Participant 20 uses a question to position the problem outside of the realm of her classroom:

Most districts don't have students repeat a grade anymore and some of these kids would be graduating before they are proficient. What options do they have if they can't score well on tests that get them into college and get them funding. Do colleges offer some sort of program for students who have lived in the US for a while but are still not fluent (Participant 20).

From the content of the course and reading the literature on what the most effective programs for ELLs are, the teacher-learners recognized the injustice surrounding the choice of programming for ELLs, in particular the use of the ‘pull out’ or the “ESL Center” framework and the resistance to bilingual instruction. For example, Participant 26 commented:

… Having students in a “center” classroom with so many different grade levels made students and staff feel like they were less than and/or the “others” of the school. Being isolated from their peers like this and having only the teacher as a framework of the English language created cliques, groups of students who would “fall back” on speaking their native language & a lack of confidence in academics, social situations and speaking English to native speakers; their peers.

Participant 4 also recognizes that despite research to the contrary, school districts are not always able to provide the best language instruction. “If the research shows that bilingual education has the most positive long-term outcomes, we should be proactive in our education of
ELL students to set them up for later success.” Although Participant 4 seems to be equating success for ELLs with language proficiency, she does demonstrate a critical understanding that politicians, in making legislative decisions, seem to be threatened by bilingualism. She adds:

To me, the bilingual programs seem to imply that the student is working on their native language and English; these have a positive sound and celebrate the fact that the student knows two languages. Although having the word “bilingual” in the title seems to scare politicians and conservative citizens away from funding them.

The teacher-learners in this study were aware of negative associations with bilingual education. This awareness is the first step to developing a more critical stance that would discuss greater society’s bias toward non-native speakers’ abilities and the connection to the resistance of policy makers to mandate a more rigorous bilingual educational agenda.

Participant 21 notes the negative association that exists between bilingual education and illegal immigration. Without being asked to do so, she does not explore the ways that this ideology might be supported and reproduced in the greater culture. She notes: “This also makes me think that people often link illegal immigration with bilingual education. I think this also causes a negative stereotype towards it.” Although she is showing some critical pedagogical insights, teacher educators could assist by questioning more deeply why and how these stereotypes develop and are transmitted in mainstream American society.

Often, the teacher-learners relied on questioning their peers rather than putting forth their own opinions. This was the case when Participant 16 brought up an “English Only” group online:
I was on Facebook this afternoon and noticed some of my "friends" joining or liking a group called "I should not have to press 1 for English, we are in the United States, learn the language!" Just wondering what people think knowing there are groups like that out there? What are your thoughts on it?

One might wonder if this participant had put forth her opinions against this type of English Only group, whether her peers would have expected her to take some kind of online stance, such as “defriending” those who agreed with the group. Perhaps the discomfort of having to take a public stand is an aspect of educational reform that needs to be brought to the forefront in teacher education. It is important for these teacher-learners to know that their opinions and interpretations of what is taking place in greater society, in this case online, are important to express openly in order to inform and influence policy makers and voters.

In other instances the teacher-learners seem to glide over uncomfortable thoughts about American society and policy-making on bilingual education. In the quote below Participant 22 seems to ignore ideologies underlying policy decisions and glosses over opposition to bilingual education as merely “generational.” In discussing Crawford’s (2004) account of the development of opposition to bilingual education, she notes with appreciation that he does not label resistors to bilingual education as ‘close-minded’:

I think [the chapter] presents a more real-life explanation of what caused the changes and why a wide spread acceptance and understanding of bilingual education has been slow to develop and is in fact still an area of new research and ever changing practices. I further appreciate how the sources of opposition are not targeted at areas or demographics but instead broadly address the "many
Americans, especially to those who came of age during times of limited immigration" (Crawford, 2004, p. xvii). I like how it doesn't paint everyone or even specific groups as closed minded, but instead simply educated in a different era, with different values which also must be respected and addressed as the norms change (Participant 22).

Within a critical pedagogical framework, this participant could examine more closely whether resistance to bilingual education has really changed much in recent history. Her perspective seems to dismiss the challenges that advocates for bilingual education still face. Growing up in a time of reduced immigration may be part of the reason, but critical educators could dig deeper into the ideologies and forces which pushed for reduced immigration in the first place.

Another clear disadvantage for ELLs recognized by the teacher-learners in this study was the lack of teacher preparation for this population of learners. The teacher-learners in this study often admitted that they did not really know much about the programs and support provided for ELLs in their districts or have much preparation in their teacher education programs. Participant 9 explains:

I know that when I went through undergraduate courses (only 2 years ago) we had one ELL course. I feel as though with the growing number of ESL students we should be preparing our teacher candidates more. I agree that the ELL course is necessary to adequately prepare teachers; I feel that there needs to be more than one though.

In response to the task of interviewing a teacher in her district, Participant 10 was surprised by the fact that content teachers did not know much about the ELL programming in their own schools:
While interviewing a teacher about ESL, she commented that the majority of the staff has very little knowledge about the ESL program. She says the district never educated or trained them about it. Only the ESL instructor knows about ESL. I was shocked to hear this and was curious if anyone else found this to be the case in the districts they are working with.

Other participants also noted that even when there is support provided in the district, it may not be supplied by the most trained personnel:

For example, in many school districts there is one ELL endorsed teacher, but there are many para-pros to help the ELL specialist. The problem I see is that while the ELL teacher is doing the required paperwork, the para-pros are the ones teaching the ELL students. The para-pros are not trained in language learning and the activities hardly promote SLA [second language acquisition]. Although the para-pros save the school districts money, ELL specialists are necessary for the sake of the kids' education (Participant 18).

Although these issues are recognized, with the guidance of a teacher educator and a critical perspective, the teacher-learners could investigate why these trends in ELL education exist or what might bring about a change other than an infusion of funding.

In summary, all of the teacher-learners in this study appear to be cognizant of many of the inequities in the education of English language learners. Reasonably these teachers are focused on questions of labeling, testing, and programming that arise daily in their classrooms. However, they may not be pressed either in their training or among themselves to actively name the forces at play in greater society that are making it difficult to address the needs of these
learners. The manner in which the teacher-learners stop short of naming these forces or confronting issues of racism, assimilation and nationalism as they are played out in policy making could be explicitly addressed in teacher preparation coursework and curriculum. Providing ways to interrogate beliefs and experiences and move them to reflection and action might help teacher-learners more clearly address the needs of ELLs.

Teacher educators can assist in the development of the CPDs by being more vigilant about teacher-learners’ use of questioning both as a means of demonstrating a critical disposition and at the same time as a way to possibly relieve themselves from the burden of educational reform because the issues seem too cumbersome to deal with. Besides the ELLs themselves, no one outside of schools can claim to truly understand the inequities in educating ELLs as the teachers who work with them. With help, teachers can learn to express their opinions openly and confidently with the understanding that by doing so, they are helping to direct their administrators and law makers in establishing policy that is equitable and effective in the education of English language learners.

**CPD 3: A rejection of the idea that ELLs’ heritage languages and cultures are liabilities**

Perhaps due to the increased emphasis on culturally-relevant education in schools of education and the research on the benefits of maintaining the first language presented in the course text (Crawford, 2004), all of the teacher-learners in this study demonstrated CPD 3. While they supported the use of ELLs’ first languages and the maintenance of their cultures, they tended to view English as the “answer” for these students’ future success. For example, Participant 2 commented:
I agree that we should celebrate the fact that a student in today's society is learning two languages (even if they are being forced to do so) because in the future, they are going to be a functional part of society that will have a better chance of life-long success and contributing to our society!!!! I say YAY!!!! for them!!! Thanks for being positive!!!!

Participant 2 demonstrates a great deal of exuberance and confidence that bilingual ability will guarantee an ELL’s future employment in the U.S. This stance does not acknowledge other forces at play, such as the fact that undocumented high school graduates, bilingual or not, may be forced to stay underground in American society in low paying jobs, or that students with perceived “non-English accents” might experience discrimination.

As Participant 1 offers her support for bilingualism and makes statements about Americans shifting to more support of bilingualism, she seems to ignore the previous online discussions her classmates had about the double-standards and negative stereotypes associated with bilingual education.

... Most American citizens feel that it is the right of all people to speak their native language and maintain their previous countries’ customs and ways of life. They also believe that it is the right of all people to have access to education in a language that they understand. This is not true of ALL Americans, but the majority, I believe, feel this way. ... I am not sure that this will ever happen, but I hope that it does. There are so many benefits to being bilingual (or trilingual, etc.) and we are better as a society when we are diverse and different.
Participant 1 is informed about the benefits of bilingualism but without questioning her belief that the majority of Americans are in support of bilingual education, the teacher learner may not be prepared when she comes face to face with opposition, such as an administrator or parent who objects to government funding dedicated to instruction in another language.

Other participants also saw the failure of ELLs to preserve their L1 as a great loss. For example Participant 14 states:

Does anyone else find this as sad as I do? I am ecstatic, of course, that immigrants are learning English, but it is really disappointing that they are forgetting their first language. As a Spanish major, I am very interested in culture, and language is a huge part of it. Do any of you think that there's anything we can do as educators to help our ELLs retain their native language as they learn English? Bilingualism is such a huge asset in today's increasingly global society and I hate to think that students are losing such an advantage as they assimilate into our culture.

This positive attitude toward the retention of heritage languages and cultures marks great progress in American education that, in the not-so-distant past, discouraged the use of languages other than English in the classroom. Greater exploration of conditions outside the classroom, however, may help teacher-learners understand the societal barriers which may not be surmounted by bilingualism alone. For example, one barrier that Participant 5 sees is the double standard associated with the acquisition of a second language for white children, but does not venture an analysis of how this double-standard was established or how it could be eradicated. She points out:
… White parents view the rudimentary skills of their children when studying a foreign language as contributing a great deal to making them well educated.

Children of immigrants who are fully bilingual are not viewed as well educated.

With a more critical view, more teacher-learners could name these double standards and begin to question how they have developed and are reproduced.

The participants rejected the belief that ELLs’ native languages are deficits to be overcome and recognized the important connection between culture and language. Throughout the discussions, in response to each other and the course readings, the participants demonstrated their beliefs in the value of the ELLs’ heritage languages and cultures. The participants saw the development and sharing of students’ languages and cultures in their classrooms as points of pride for their learners. With a more critical point of view, teacher-learners might explore how beyond informing parents and stakeholders of the research that shows the benefits of bilingualism; they might help to bring about a change in the resistance and double-standards that face their ELLs in the world.

**CPD 5: An ability to notice or witness students in a subordinate position and to empathize with them**

Carl Rogers (1975) describes empathy as a way of entering a subject’s world and trying to feel the subjects’ experiences in it. The teacher-learners in this study, primarily White women, might not have ever directly experienced the type of discrimination that some of their ELLs might encounter in school, but they did recognize the ways in which ELLs were treated in an
inferior way, and they submitted emotional comments to the online discussions. They expressed empathy in the form of sadness, guilt, and frustration. The participants’ discussions often centered on the very same inequities that they noticed in CDP 1, namely the disadvantages that their ELLs were faced with in their classrooms, primarily in their testing, labeling and placement. For example, one participant was very saddened by the fact that a boy, recently arrived to the U.S. with little previous schooling, was placed in a classroom based on his birth date:

Since the child's birth date is very near the cutoff mark for registration, the school decided to place him in 5th grade. This will allow the child more time in a structured and nurturing elementary classroom before heading off to middle school. My heart aches for this child who can barely read, write, or do arithmetic (Participant 2).

Critical teacher educators might explore with this participant ways she might intervene in the school’s protocol or how she might advocate for this child.

Empathetic responses also surfaced when the participants understood, that at times, their ELLs were disadvantaged due to a lack of training or support from their own teaching colleagues. Participant 6 writes about a student that she felt was neglected in her school.

I had the pleasure of working with such a student that broke my heart to see how he was looked over as if he would either get by on his own or not at all. I watched him barely skim by in 1st and 2nd by watching what his peers did or wrote. He essentially copied his way in his early years of elementary.
Noticing areas of needed improvement can put knowledgeable teacher-learners in a difficult position with senior colleagues or teacher practicum supervisors. These situations warrant tact and careful and deliberate communication skills. Perhaps in dealing with students who are marginalized, curriculum in dealing with soft-skills in the teaching profession might be an area to develop in teacher education to allow teachers to feel comfortable taking a critical stance.

Beyond sadness, at times, the participants often felt complicit in the demanding preparation of ELLS for high stakes testing conducted in English. Participant 13 writes about her guilt:

As a fourth-grade teacher, I have prepared many English learners for state testing. I feel incredibly guilty with putting so much pressure on these nine and ten-year-olds that are trying to learn English, understand daily lessons, and make friends. I witness the stress that these mandated-tests cause.

Having studied a second language appeared to make the teacher learners in this study highly empathetic to the frustrations their learners face in the classroom. Participant 5 relates her own emotional struggle with learning a second language:

I agree with you that we need more bilingual teachers. Bilingual teachers can do two things for students. One is the obvious of speaking to the child in his/her L1 and the other is having empathy. There is an added element to my position as an ELL teacher because I can understand the difficulty the students are having. For example, after living in Ecuador for roughly one month and having received one month of intensive Spanish instruction in the US, I experienced an internal revolt.
I hated Spanish. I never wanted to hear it again. I felt I would never learn it and I just wanted someone--anyone--to speak to me in English. Now if I went through that emotional conflict at age 22, I can certainly understand when my students begin to misbehave and act up while learning English at age 5 and 6. Having experienced acquiring a new language has helped me to relate to them more closely.

While the majority of empathetic responses in this study came in recognition of the injustices that students face in the classroom, some teacher-learners did notice ways that students struggled outside the classroom. This realization was primarily in terms of helping their parents and having different kinds of pressure placed on them that their native English-speaking peers do not. Participant 26 points out:

Your comment/questions also made me think about kids who end up having to grow up even faster than usual to help their families. How many times have you seen little kids translating for their families in shopping, banking and school?

The teacher-learners in this study were empathetic toward the situations and barriers confronted by their ELLs’ inside of schools, but to truly help them and advocate for them, teacher-learners need to know the stories of their lived realities outside of the classroom as well. Critical pedagogy readings, media portrayals, an awareness of policy and legal decisions, and having their own experiences in learning a second language or living abroad are other ways that teacher-learners can come to have a more complete empathetic disposition toward these students.

**CPD 6: An ability to advocate for students and to help them understand the American educational system**
As with CPD 1 (noticing injustices in educational practices) and corresponding empathetic reactions in CPD 5, the teacher-learners called for advocacy in the same areas: high stakes testing in English, labeling of ELLs, and programming choices. Many of the participants in this study reported actions that their districts were taking in regard to these areas, but mostly they posted questions asking for advice in changing unjust educational practices and policies affecting their ELLs. While they made suggestions for assisting their ELLs, at the same time they hinted at some potentially problematic underlying ideologies. For example, Participant 23 asks for suggestions in dealing with a perceived need to unite the Hispanic and Anglo populations in the U.S. She does not seem to recognize that she may be inadvertently portraying the rise of the Hispanic population as a divisive element in American society when she comments:

… I feel that due to the fact there is a rapidly growing Hispanic population we have to come to the realization that not all native Spanish speakers are going to learn English. Should we instead require Spanish to be taught in our schools to non-Spanish speaking students? Something needs to be done because there is a gap growing in our country between Spanish speaking populations and English speaking populations. What else could be done to blend these two groups of people so we become more united as a nation?

Her ideas about being united as a nation are honorable, and she seems to suggest that native speakers should extend themselves too in reaction to this perceived language divide, but she may also be unaware of how her statements might reflect some deeper beliefs about the importance of
English over a heritage language. A critical examination of these deeper beliefs is very important for a teacher of ELLs who might pick up on them.

Participant 23 goes on to suggest that all students be required to learn another language, a positive step, but couches this call within some seemingly confusing beliefs about racism, assimilation and nationalism:

I believe that people who say things like “all those foreigners need to go back where they came from” tend to be the most uneducated people in the United States. Don’t get me wrong, there are intelligent, successful individuals who are racist, but it was how a lot of them were brought up as children. I am part Native American, but I also have a strong European ancestry, and I believe that America has been the shining light in most people’s hearts that are oppressed. Many people are saying that Whites in America are no longer going to be the majority in 2042, Hispanics will be. We need to be more educated as a nation in realizing that Spanish is a growing language that needs to be learned by more people. Our education system needs to require that students take some form of foreign language and become proficient in it, not just get through two years in high school and call it quits. I’m sure like many of you I took two years of Spanish in high school and remember almost nothing of it now. I would love to be Bilingual, and plan on learning Spanish in the next few years. What does everyone feel about requiring students to take at least 4 years of another language in high school? Is it even feasible?

This participant sees the value of a second language, but there are some conceivable underlying ideologies that might need to be sorted through and examined. A teacher educator versed in a
critical pedagogical approach could assist this participant in working through both hidden and explicit beliefs and clarifying them in order to become cognizant of ways that she might be inadvertently disseminating them.

Another participant advocates for educating families in English and sees the use of the native language outside of class as problematic for her learners:

… I have witnessed groups of students who speak the same language, spend time together and speak their native language. What I wonder is if it would be possible to offer the parents assistance in learning English, with their children, if that would help families in the long run. It could be an after school program or weekend program to help families better understand or learn the language. Just some simple phrases or words to make being in America, not easier, but make the transition easier. Has anyone seen anything like this or have any thoughts on it?

(Participant 16)

This participant’s suggestion of assisting the families of ELLs in their language acquisition demonstrates a desire to help in some way; however, examining the underlying implication that the use of the first language is somehow detrimental to language acquisition could provide essential understanding for future advocacy. The literature on the use of first language and code switching in the classroom shows that it is beneficial in second language acquisition (Cummins, 1989, di Pietro, 1977, Huerta-Macías, A. & Quintero, E. 1992).

Teacher-learners in this study did recognize the harmful impact that not meeting AYP has on the socio-economic status of the school and the greater impact on society by not having high quality education available to marginalized learners. The advocacy they suggest, though, tends
to focus on the local rather than on the global nature of the federal legislation that mandated it in the first place. Participant 24 writes:

My school is nearing the final stages of the No Child Left Behind Act, so they have been implementing some changes with the hope of boosting test scores and student achievement. One thing that I think is a fantastic idea goes along with what Crawford discusses above. On Saturdays, my school is opening up the library for free tutoring and homework help from 10:00am to 2:00pm. There will be bilingual teachers there as well as some of the mainstream classroom teachers. They are hoping this will be a good start to closing the gap between the higher and lower SES students in the school. I think it is a great idea and I am really hoping the students take full advantage of this tremendous opportunity.

This effort is logical but probably insufficient to make any long-term difference in these students’ lives. Although research supports mitigating factors of classroom micro-environment on macro environment variables (Fraser, 1986, Egbert, 1996) expanding advocacy efforts through a more critical investigation beyond K-12 classrooms may be more important for learners who do not have a political presence in American society.

Overall, the teacher-learners all know that advocacy is needed in response to the injustices in the education of ELLs. They often express a need for direction and leadership and wonder if change is possible. Participant 16 asks:
Do you think it is too late to change this? Have we come too far -- that now to change something--we have to get approval from someone we don't even know? Is this something we as future teachers can change, or is it too late?

With an understanding of critical pedagogy, teacher-learners might begin to see educational challenges in a hopeful light, as Freire (1970) intended.

_Unobserved Critical Dispositions_

As in the pilot study, CPD 2 (a rejection of meritocracy as the reason for students not advancing in American education and society) and CPD 6 (an ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of middle-class, White culture) were not observable in the data. The absence of these dispositions does not mean they do not exist, but rather points to the need for direct interrogation by a teacher educator. The teacher-learners in this study were not prodded to discuss the ideology of meritocracy or to critically examine aspects of White, middle-class culture. They often brought up the fact that they were operating from a White, middle-class upbringing or perspective, but they were not asked to expand on how that perspective impacted their interactions with their ELLs or their beliefs about them.

In an attempt to ascertain whether these unobserved dispositions were present in the participants but simply not surfacing during the course discussions, the researcher developed a follow up interview for the participants. Since most of the participants were located in various schools around the state, they were given the option of being interviewed by phone, in an online synchronous chat, or by email. Ten participants agreed to answer follow-up questions by email. The teacher-learners were asked to respond to the following questions:
1. How do you define success for an ELL?

2. If an ELL does not succeed in school (either has low grades or does not graduate) what would you attribute that to?

In asking the participants to define success for ELLs, the researcher expected to bring forth participants’ underlying ideologies attributing success to hard work and merit. Expected responses relating success with hard work and merit were not evident; instead, responses centered on English as the key to success for ELLs. These responses came after having read a critical account of English language policies and legislation in the U.S. in the Crawford (2004) text which should have provided a foundation for more diverse responses.

Most of the participants related their ideas of success to the immediate environment of the school setting. Without mention of long-term success beyond the classroom and the local environment, all the participants pointed to mastery of English as a marker of success. Participant 10 writes that success for an ELL is the “ability to adapt to new culture, feeling included in the classroom and community, ability to comprehend and speak English, showing progress in written English.” Even when considering the world outside the classroom, Participant 14 emphasizes the mastery of English as key to success. She writes:

Success for ELLs means two things to me—improving their English speaking and listening skills, but also feeling comfortable and welcome in a classroom...making friends and establishing relationships with them. Academic progress and learning how to communicate in English is a must for ELL students to be successful in school and in America.
Participant 3 does acknowledge that the ultimate goal for an ELL is to move beyond high school, but does not mention that a truly successful ELL may have to navigate legal, institutional, and racist barriers that might not be overcome by an English-speaking ability alone. She describes success as “making progress in their language skills (English and their own) towards graduation and a successful life here in America-- post high school.” A substantially more critical exploration of American society can help bring to the forefront a more heightened awareness about the issues that ELLs are likely to encounter after graduation and hopefully, help prepare them to participate in activism and reform to bring about a transformation in greater society.

When the participants described what they saw as reasons for low grades and poor graduation rates, all the participants pointed to a lack of English proficiency. They also named family issues, a lack of resources, cultural differences, testing conducted in English and a lack of support and training for teachers of ELLs as factors in ELLs’ success in school. Participant 3 writes:

It depends on the student, their background, home life, and of course their teachers and school. I think in this sense, they are like any other student. I don't think there is a single answer to this. Schools can only do so much, even with the best approach and teachers.

This participant demonstrates an understanding that there are both school and external factors at play, but has yet to identify what the actual forces might be. Using critical pedagogy in ELL teacher education could assist teachers in naming the forces outside the classroom and in considering other explanations for failure in school. For example, teacher-learners might make connections to legislation, reflect on how having an undocumented immigration status might
influence motivation (as was the case with the student, Gabe, in the introduction) or be able to discuss institutional racism and other concerns. Critical pedagogy would also be useful in developing a deeper scrutiny of the beliefs teachers hold, such as Participant 3’s belief that ELLs “are like any other student.”

In sum, as in the exploratory study, all of the participants demonstrated four of the six critical pedagogical dispositions (CPD 1, CPD 3, CPD 5, CPD 6) to some extent. Following the pattern in the pilot study, CPD 2 (a rejection of meritocracy as the reason ELLs do not succeed), and CPD 4 (the ability to question the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream middle-class white culture) were not evident in the data. The data also revealed that the teacher-learners seemed to use questions to distance themselves from uncomfortable conclusions concerning ELLs and immigration or ways they could change unjust educational practices impacting their students’ lives. In forming the questions, the teacher-learners are demonstrating powerful insights, but may be stopping short of examining underlying forces at work in society and therefore, short-circuiting their power to bring about solutions.

Overall, there was a marked elevation in the number of pieces of data evidencing CPD 1, and CPD 6 from inservice teachers in comparison to preservice teachers (2 to 1), which might indicate the importance of practical experience in an educational setting to develop these dispositions. There were also a number of examples in the data pointing to the value of experiential learning tasks included in the course that developed self-awareness and empathy toward ELLs and to the value of courses such as the online one that the teacher-learners participated in. The data also demonstrated that the teacher-learners are asking for help in
advocating for change in school systems which might justify further teacher-learner curriculum development in advocacy.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, implications for teacher education and educational leadership were found in five central areas: the need for ELL teacher education, experiential learning, critical readings and authentic materials, the explicit examination of ideologies of meritocracy and White middle-class culture and the need for critical pedagogy in educational leadership.

The need for ELL teacher education

As teacher-learners progressed through the course, one of the other themes that emerged; is the teacher-learners’ call for further ELL teacher training and the effectiveness of experiential and reflective learning in developing teacher-learner self-awareness. Within this theme, patterns from the CPDs were repeated, but these repetitions underscore implications in the data for teacher education. Namely, more coursework in the field of second language acquisition and ESL/bilingual methods is needed. Participants recognized their lack of knowledge. For example, Participant 23 points out how limited the ELL education requirements are for teachers: “Before I got to college I had no idea that ESL classes even existed, and now that I know they do I see how few and far between they are.” Participant 20 acknowledges the gaps in her knowledge. She points out: “the deeper we delve into this class, the more I realize how limited my knowledge of ELD programs in my district and building are.” Participant 15 admits her previous lack of interest in ELL issues: “I don’t have a lot of information because I have never really paid
attention to the programs or policies within my school district. I guess it is because I have never found an interest for them until now.” These teacher-learners openly express the need for teacher education programs to provide more courses on English language learners and language acquisition. Therefore, the implication of the data is that teacher education curriculum could include more study of ELL issues.

The value of experiential learning

The data indicated that there was a great deal of self-awareness and transformation gained through the experiential nature of the course assignments. As evidenced in the data, throughout the course there was a shift in the participants’ understandings of their ELLs that occurred through the experiential nature of the course assignments. For example, early on in the course the teacher-learners were asked to interview ELLs about their experiences in school and the labels that were attached to them. In a post titled How glad I am for this experience, Participant 20 describes her experience:

What an interesting conversation I was able to have with each student. At first, I was only going to interview two of my students, but I found what everyone had to say to be so interesting that I couldn't stop. This was a good reminder to me of how important it is to stop and take the time to really get to know your students. I had each one of these students in class last year, … and I never knew their stories in this depth. … Was anyone else shocked by the stories that their students told? I found myself wondering if the teachers that they had in early elementary spent
time with them to make sure that they understood or if they were left to sit and wonder. I have had classes before in which I fear I didn't always stop and make sure that everyone got the help and attention that they deserved so I am not trying to blame these teachers for things they did or didn't do. Has anyone else felt like that? …

This teacher-learner’s response to this exercise, demonstrates the value of experiential teacher education. In this case, the experience may result in bringing about a critical transformation in her future classroom practice.

Another experiential assignment that proved to be very enlightening for the teacher-learners in the course was an assignment in which the participants had to be an observer in a situation in which they did not speak the language. As a result, the teacher-learners expressed a deeper understanding and empathy for ELLs. Participant 15 explains: “As a tool for professional development this experience has helped me want to make sure that no students ever feel uncomfortable because they do not understand what someone else is saying.” Likewise, Participant 11 talk about her discomfort visiting a Vietnamese nail salon and the advocacy it inspired in her:

As they were talking about me and my “white lady” nails I realize that this is how students feel all the time when English is not their first language. It gave me a whole new light in which to look at the situation. As they were going on and on talking about me I began to think about a student I have in my class who must be so lost all the time. He only speaks about 5 words of English and must be so lost all the time. This gave me a new motivation to go into my classroom and really make him and his learning a focused goal of mine! There are so many things with
his situation that need to really be looked at and reevaluated. I set up a meeting with an instructional group to talk about his learning needs so that we can really work on making sure that he is getting what he needs. Advocating for this child became a passion of mine as I was sitting in that chair at the nail salon. This is something that I will carry around with me for the rest of my life. I would have never guessed that simply walking into that salon for a pampering after taking this class would have changed my perspective forever. … This experience was a motivation of change for me in 3 ways; getting my student the education and services he deserves, my perception of the nail technicians as I left the salon, and the ability to have a greater understanding for ELLs in the community.

This teacher-learner was deeply changed by the experience. She not only changed her understandings of the lived-realities of ELLs in her community, the experience seemed to move her into taking the role of an advocate for changing the unjust educational conditions that face her ELLs.

From her immersion experience, Participant 16 develops empathy for hard-working immigrants at a nail salon, but at the same time demonstrates the need for further critical pedagogy exploration:

This showed me again just how hard working people can be. In some cases, I am not sure with this particular salon, the staff has left everything behind to come here and work. It would be interesting to see just why they chose this path and what made them think to choose it. Is it what they think are the only options for them in America? Working at an “authentic” food restaurant or working at a nail salon? Is there a way that, we, as American’s can change that view in other
countries? Did they have “better” jobs where they were but did not think they could do that here? It would be interesting to ask them some more questions without prying too much into their personal lives.

This participant appears to recognize that the life chances for non-native speakers of English seem to be centered on service jobs but may need to more deeply examine her questioning that frames those life chances as ‘choices’ or ‘abilities.’

With the help of critical teacher educators, these learners could start to investigate how immigration laws, speaking with an accent, and the color of skin could factor into the life opportunities for ELLs. The implication from the data is that experiential assignments framed in critical pedagogy could help teacher-learners experience potentially limiting factors in their ELLs’ lives for themselves.

*The need for critical pedagogy readings*

Certain passages in the critical course text resonated with the teacher-learners and after reflecting deeply on them, they transformed some of their beliefs. They were particularly responsive to the research supporting bilingual education. For example, Participant 13 points out:

> Before beginning this course, I had never considered bilingual education as necessary for my students. However, the readings have shown that if students can become fluent and educated in their native language, then it’s much easier for them to acquire the English language. … I feel like we are doing our ELLs a
disservice by not looking at valid research regarding English language instruction and making decisions based on the needs of these learners!

In this example, the teacher-learner is showing us how critical readings can bring about realizations and empathy about a topic they had most likely heard about, but had never deeply thought about.

Similarly, the readings brought about a change in the classroom practice of Participant 1:

When I read that "many immigrant and refugee children have suffered psychological traumas before or during their journey to this country" (Crawford, 2004, p. 17) I made the connection to several students that I have had in my class who have suffered other traumas. Many of our students come into our classrooms not having had breakfast, having slept in a car the night before, having witness (or been victim of) physical or emotional abuse, or some other horrible trauma. It caused me to pause and reflect on the actions that I take to help these students cope and feel safe and welcome while they are at school. I have thought about the trauma that ELL students may come to school with, but I don't think I ever really probed the topic and tried to understand more of what they were feeling. …

Reading this sentence really caused me to think more of my students and to make sure that they are taken care of as a whole person instead of just as a student for the entire year. This will be one of my goals this year with my students!
From this teacher-learner’s reflection, teacher educators can see the valuable impact that reading about the lived realities of students can have. This particular passage created empathy and provided a catalyst for change in this participant’s classroom teaching.

For example, Participant 9 questions her own actions regarding the double-standard that White America seems to hold about bilingualism:

This was something that I have never really thought about, but find so true - our society really does tend to separate the two - business people, celebrities, etc. are praised for being able to speak two languages, but the groups that come naturally or could be naturally bilingual, we want to only speak English? It seems backwards to me - bilingualism should be encouraged. This also made me think on how I view ESL students in classes. Do I look at them as "bad" or "non-American"? Or do I look at them as bilinguals and encourage the students to keep being proficient in their native tongue? I hope that I have always taught them positively, encouraging bilingualism...

Participant 9’s self-reflection may be an important stepping-stone in promoting change in school environments and among her peers. She has the courage to question her own beliefs and actions openly which may provide an impetus for other teachers to do so as well. Similarly, Participant 4 admits to having held uniformed beliefs about language acquisition:

When reading Chapter 3 Crawford [2004] discusses language ideologies, or ideas popularized through repetition and everyday practices. Some of these I had heard before such as "ELL students are better off if they come earlier, because young
children can easily pick up a second language" or "My great grandfather came to this country without a word of English and he succeeded without bilingual education." I have to admit, I am embarrassed to say that I have said and thought some of these things. This is my first ever ELL class, and I am realizing how little information teachers are given around ELL students and the history of ELD programs and the research behind the theories. I think many teachers are in this same situation: they have ELL students in their classroom and believe the language ideologies that they have heard, but may not necessarily be true. (4)

Participant 4’s admission, although it may not always be apparent to teacher educators, is confirmation for how influential and transformative the choice of texts and materials. Likewise, Participant 7, as a result of the course and reading actually apologizes for her previous acceptance of stereotype of immigrant groups and ELLs:

This is going to sound awful...I guess I think I believed in a lot of the stereotypes. I felt we bent over backwards for families to help with their education but really most people struggle not to lose their identity. I know that is awful but I guess I am unaware of the struggles that ELLs really truly have. I am uneducated and go off of what others say and not researching and understanding the real meaning behind the policies, the needs and the expectations upon students, families, and teachers. I guess I was having a bad taste in my mouth because I am a monolingual person in an area with bi-lingual people. I am definitely seeing things in a new light. I'm intrigued to know more and I think this will truly benefit me and my students in more than one way! I'm excited! I have already used some of my
knowledge in conversations and stopped people from thinking those stereotypes and the stereotyping that I wasn't aware I was doing.

Participant 7’s self-awareness and her behavior in trying to transform others’ belief is truly the mission of critical pedagogy. This implies that in teacher education, critical pedagogical materials are needed to address teachers’ beliefs, stereotypes, and class and social perspectives. Materials could consist of readings, biographies, memoirs, media representations, interviews, and critical and close readings of the arguments and implications of present and future legislation regarding immigrants, education, and residency. In that way, teacher-learners can make the ideological links to potentially harmful educational beliefs, practices and laws that are being debated in the halls of state legislatures around the country today.

The need to explicitly target the exploration of ideologies surrounding meritocracy and the hidden privileges and perspectives of members of White, middle class culture

As stated previously, the purpose of this study was not meant to evaluate the depth of the dispositions developed by the teacher-learners. In the future, the development of the dispositions might be assessed by looking for teacher-learner responses which include: elaborating on reflections, understandings and experiences with ELLs; suggesting reasons for educational and social injustices; making connections to past, present and future ELL education policies and practices; and offering possibilities for rectifying injustices for these learners.

In teacher education, teacher educators could specifically target those dispositions that did not seem apparent in the data, namely, ideologies surrounding meritocracy and an examination of the strengths and weakness of White middle-class culture. Teacher-learners can
discuss the ways, beyond proficient English acquisition and hard work, other forces at play that may be discouraging their ELLs from completing their educations and moving onto universities. They can interrogate the lived realities of their ELLs and their families such as, their working lives, access to healthcare, whether they can vote, obtain a drivers’ license, have access to health care insurance – in other words, most of the day-to-day aspects of life that most White, teachers-learners do not have to think about. From exploring how White, middle-class is privileged and the ways that those who are part of it may be incognizant of the struggles of peoples on the outside, teacher-learners could leave their teacher education programs better equipped to grapple with the complexities of effectively advocating for their ELLs.

*The need for critical pedagogy in educational leadership*

As the data show, throughout the online course, the participants repeatedly asked for suggestions to bring about change, to implement improved policy, and to better serve their ELLs. They recognize the issues that most immediately impact the ELLs in their classrooms. They ask for direction and leadership and at times, seem overwhelmed by the barriers of time and money. They wonder if as individuals, they can have any effect in bringing about change. Participant 24 asks:

> If you have an ESL program at your school that you already know is ineffective, what is the procedure for going about trying to change that program to a more effective one? Can one person really get that process started, or does it require a bunch of people to get the ball rolling? What does that process even look like, or is it possible at all?
Examining the process of change is often relegated to the education of future administrators, but the needs are recognized most often in classrooms. Teachers cannot shoulder the burden of reform on top of all the energy they must expend daily in educating the diverse learners in their classrooms. They can, however, be the voices of ELLs to their administrators and communities. If well-informed about the ideological foundations of policy and legislation holding these learners back, teachers can articulate needed changes in their educational contexts and in greater society. To understand the realities of ELLs and their families, the legalities surrounding their presence in the United States, and the diverse views that Americans have towards ELLs and their accents, a body of critical pedagogy educational materials needs to be developed, piloted and studied with teachers. The role of administrators in the work involved in advocacy and political reform is of the utmost concern because their work centers on the greater educational issues of the learners they serve. The implication in the data is that teachers need support in recognizing the ways educational policy is limiting their ELLs and help in articulating their needs to administrators. Administrators need training in critical pedagogy in relation to ELLs to articulate their needs to legislatures and policy makers.

Implications for Future Research

This study suggests a broader investigation into preservice and in-service teachers’ knowledge base of critical pedagogy and its implications for classroom practice and educational advocacy. Further research is needed to determine if this framework is effective in identifying the six critical dispositions in other teacher-learning contexts and to determine if there are others yet to be uncovered. There is a need to develop critical pedagogy materials for teacher and administrator education and to pilot and evaluate their effectiveness with diverse learners. Most
important is the transfer of these dispositions into classroom teaching. Further study and action research is needed to follow these teachers as they develop the dispositions and to determine what factors help support or detract from their implementation. A qualitative study with a larger number of participants that includes interviews with the participants about their understandings of each disposition as it develops would help to inform the application of critical pedagogy to teacher education in ESL.

Advocacy needs are dire at this time in American history. According to a National Public Radio report, Texas now has almost 100 bills written concerning immigration reform, which includes legislation requiring elementary school children to show proof of their citizenship when they enroll and another, which mandates English as the state language (Goodwyn, 2011). With an economic recession and funding cuts at all levels of public education, the ELL, immigrant, and refugee students’ right to an education has never been in more need of vigilance and protection.
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