

8-2013

# Exploring the emotions and needs of English Language Learners: Facilitating pre-service and in-service teachers' recognition of the tasks facing language learners

Jie Zhang

*The College at Brockport*, [jzhang@brockport.edu](mailto:jzhang@brockport.edu)

Carole Pelttari

*The College at Brockport*, [cpelttar@brockport.edu](mailto:cpelttar@brockport.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd\\_facpub](https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_facpub)



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

---

## Repository Citation

Zhang, Jie and Pelttari, Carole, "Exploring the emotions and needs of English Language Learners: Facilitating pre-service and in-service teachers' recognition of the tasks facing language learners" (2013). *Education and Human Development Faculty Publications*. 12. [https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd\\_facpub/12](https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_facpub/12)

### Citation/Publisher Attribution:

Zhang, J., & Pelttari, C. (2013). Exploring the emotions and needs of English Language Learners: Facilitating pre-service and in-service teachers' recognition of the tasks facing language learners. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(7), 1-16.  
**DOI:** 10.1080/01434632.2013.822505.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education and Human Development at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education and Human Development Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact [kmyers@brockport.edu](mailto:kmyers@brockport.edu).

**Exploring the Emotions and Needs of English Language Learners: Facilitating Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers' Recognition of the Tasks Facing Language Learners**

**Abstract**

The population in the United States has become more diverse, but the number of teachers in public schools who are fluent in another language is limited. Furthermore, statistics attest that few teachers have adequate training to work with English language learners (ELLs). Teachers who lack training and have not struggled to learn another language may not realize the complexity faced daily by ELLs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to apply instructional methods, which mirror experiences faced by real children in real classrooms, in order to allow pre-service and/or in-service teachers to be subjected to the mixed emotions experienced by English language learners in their class. In six different classes, the researchers immersed a total number of 155 undergraduate and graduate students in a 15-minute oral presentation in Dutch. Data from a post-survey indicated that teacher candidates developed empathy and extrapolated the message that ELL students in classrooms in the United States face serious but surmountable challenges that take time to overcome. As a result of the findings, we recommend teacher preparation programs include language requirements and interactions between teacher candidates and language learners.

***Key Words:*** *Language Learners, Education, Emotions, Teacher Preparation*

‘In a moment, I am going to change before your very eyes. I will no longer be English-speaking Professor Smith but *Vrouw Schmitt*, who speaks only Dutch. You have recently immigrated to the Netherlands and this is your very first day of class.’ With that simple introduction, one of us regularly executes two about-faces. The students are then greeted with, ‘*Goede morgen. Hoe gaat het met je?*’

The purpose of this study was to apply instructional methods, which mirror experiences faced by real children in real classrooms, in order to allow pre-service and/or in-service teachers to be subjected to the mixed emotions experienced by English language learners in their class. Three research questions were asked: (1) What are the emotions the teacher candidates experienced through the 15-minute mini-lesson in Dutch? (2) What strategies did the teacher candidates notice the professor using during the mini-lesson to help better understand the content of the lesson? (3) What did the teacher candidates conclude as the most critical needs for ELLs in the classroom settings?

### **Language Diversity in American Schools: Students vs. Teachers**

The population in the United States has become more diverse. In New York State alone, the number of English language learners (ELLs) rose 23.2% from 1991 to 2004 (New York State Education Department 2009). Nationwide, 4,693,818 students, or 9.8% of the students attending public school, received ELL services (National Center for Educational Statistics 2012a). In addition, the number of school-age children who come from a home where English is not the primary language across the country reached 11.2 million, or 21% of the population ranging from five to seventeen years of age (National Center for Education Statistics 2012b). These students bring more than 400 languages to their U.S. schools (Brisk et al. 2002). Current projections indicate that the numbers of school-aged ELL children will constitute 40 percent of

the K-12 population in the United States by 2030; and by 2050 that number will have increased to 50% (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Compared to their monolingual, English-speaking peers, ELL students do not come to school with the same English language skills (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998; Steifel, Schwartz, and Congel 2003). For them, learning English language in addition to concurrent academic demands can cause difficulties and eventually prevent them from success in inclusive classrooms (Baca and Cervantes 1998; Cummins 2001; Krashen 2000).

Many pre-service and in-service teachers believe that they understand the language learners in the classrooms. However, if we have not struggled to learn another language ourselves, we may not realize the complexity of the task (Kouritzin, Piquemal, and Nakagawa 2007). Contrary to the increasingly diverse society and the dramatically growing number of ELL students enrolled in K-12 schools, the majority of educators in public schools remain White, female and middle-class suburbanites (Sleeter and Thao 2007). The National Center for Education Statistics (2012c) states that in 2008, 83.1 percent of teachers in public schools were White and non-Hispanic. In 2008, less than 2% of public school teachers were second language learners (ESL) or bilingual teachers: 1.39% at elementary level and 1.25% at secondary level (National Center for Education Statistics 2012c).

As the percentages illustrate, the majority of ELL students in the United States receive most of their instruction in regular classroom settings with monolingual teachers (Brisk et al. 2002). Therefore, regular education teachers need to understand how language impacts teaching and learning (Fillmore and Snow 2002). Unfortunately, however, most teachers in regular classrooms have little or no training in the learning needs of ELL students (Brisk et al. 2002). Only twelve percent of public school teachers across the nation who have ELL students in their

classrooms have had as many as eight hours or more of professional development specific to the needs of this student population (National Center for Education Statistics 2002).

### **Literature Review**

Past and current literature reveals the critical need for educators to be sensitive to and understand the diverse sociocultural backgrounds and related academic needs of children (Brisk et al. 2002; Cruz 1997; Delpit 1988, 2006; Ladson-Billings 1994; Peregoy and Boyle 2005). Language learners, in particular, face complex tasks that may promote feelings of alienation (Lee, Butler, and Tippins 2007), fear of speaking (Wassell, Hawrylak, and LaVan 2010), and ambivalence toward learning the new language (Kouritzin, Piquemal, and Nakagawa 2007). Nonetheless, academic achievement and self-respect are attainable for all students when teachers act with empathy, respecting students and their cultures (Delpit 2006), and using a funds-of-knowledge rather than a deficit model of instruction (Moll et al. 1992; Wassell et al. 2010).

Empathy has been identified as a necessary emotion, enabling teachers of language learners to gain cultural understanding (Washburn 2008; Wassell et al. 2010). Empathy allows people to feel and begin to understand the emotions of another person (Dewaele and Wei 2012). Empathy differs from sympathy because sympathy results from negative situations whereas empathy opens the heart to new situations without connotations that the new situations are negative (Gladkova 2010). Teachers are expected to develop empathy for students, leading the teachers to understand and respect cultures different from their own (Cruz 1997), to see and hear through our hearts, minds, and beliefs (Delpit 1988).

Pre-service and in-service teachers often need to interrogate their own beliefs in order to understand students' needs and develop empathy (Delpit 1988; Ladson-Billings 1994; Kouritzin et al. 2007; Romano 2005). Such cultural empathy is essential if teachers are to provide a safe,

challenging, and nurturing learning environment for students from multicultural backgrounds to learn (Delpit 1988, 2006; Lee, Butler, and Tippins 2007; Peregoy and Boyle 2005). Once teachers understand and respect the different cultures of their students, teachers are able to create an environment in the classroom that supports students' cultural backgrounds and academic needs (Delpit 1988, 2006; Kouritzin 2012; New York State Education Department 2008). So, although empathy and cultural sensitivity are essential to language learners, teachers must move beyond the emotional level, producing culturally-rich quality instruction (Delpit 1988, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally supportive classroom strategies can lessen frustration and reduce language barriers for ELLs (Delpit 2006; Lee, Butler, and Tippins 2007; New York State Education Department 2008; Peregoy and Boyle 2005).

### ***Positionality***

Both researchers teach in a university-level teacher preparation program in the United States. In this paper, the terms *researcher* and *professor/researcher* identify the same people. The first term is more common; the latter term is used when the classroom research is described. One researcher teaches special education courses while the other teaches literacy courses. Both researchers are second language learners. One uses the second language fluently orally and in written form while the other has reached an advanced beginning level of the second language and is able to communicate in social contexts. One of the researchers is mother to two children being raised in a home where English is not the primary language, and the other researcher is grandmother to two children being raised in a multilingual home. Both researchers recognize the multiple benefits associated with multi-language learning.

## Method

The purpose of this study was to apply instructional methods, which mirror experiences faced by real children in real K-12 classrooms, in order to allow pre-service and/or in-service teachers to be subjected to the mixed emotions experienced by English language learners in their class. More than 150 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in a teacher preparation program were immersed in basic instruction in a language they had never learned. Three research questions were asked: (1) What are the emotions the teacher candidates experienced through the 15-minute mini-lesson in Dutch? (2) What strategies did the teacher candidates notice the professor using during the mini-lesson to help better understand the content of the lesson? (3) What did the teacher candidates conclude as the most critical needs for ELLs in the classroom settings? Data was collected from the participants through voluntary, anonymous questionnaires. Data analysis involved an inductive thematic analysis to identify common themes, quantitative analyses to report participants' demographic information, a bivariate correlation to determine any correlation between the variables, and a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to measure relationships between participants' demographics and narratives.

### *Development of the Survey Instrument*

The survey instrument was composed of twelve questions (as indicated in Table 1). The first researcher developed a draft of the survey instrument, discussed the draft with the second researcher, and revised accordingly. The instrument was designed to meet four goals: (1) The first nine questions were designed to obtain a better understanding of the participants' background information, including demographics, teaching experiences, language abilities, and the language backgrounds of their students in K-12 classroom settings either in their own classes for in-service teachers or in their field experience practicum placements for pre-service teachers.

(2) The 10th question was devised to investigate the participants' feelings during the research treatment, a mini Dutch lesson. (3) The 11<sup>th</sup> question was prepared to investigate the participants' recognition of instructional strategies used during the treatment. (4) The 12<sup>th</sup> question required the participants to reflect on the needs of ELLs based on their background knowledge and experience during the treatment.

### ***Setting and Contextual Information of the Research Site***

This study was conducted in a teacher preparation program, which offers content area and special education dual certificates at both childhood and adolescence levels, in a mid-sized state university. This teacher preparation program offers two initial dual certifications. With dual certifications in Childhood Education and Students with Disabilities Grades 1-6, pre-service teacher candidates are preparing to be qualified to teach in general and special education/inclusive classrooms in Grades 1-6. With dual certifications in Adolescence Inclusive Generalist Education with Middle Childhood Extension Grades 5-12, teacher candidates are preparing to be qualified to teach in a content area such as English, social studies/history, mathematics, science (e.g., Biology, Earth Science, Physics, or Chemistry), or Foreign Language (e.g., French or Spanish) and in special education/inclusive classrooms in Grades 5-12. Before student teaching practicum, all candidates in this program are required to engage in three field experiences, including experience with English Language Learners in at least one of the four 50-hour field placements.

Most students enrolled in the courses offered by this program are pre-service teacher candidates who pursue their initial teacher certifications. However, a small number of in-service teachers and/or graduate students have already obtained their initial certifications but take the courses in the program to qualify for certification to teach students with disabilities. The

participants of this study included both populations: those pre-service teachers who sought initial certifications and those in-service teachers and/or graduate students who sought certification to teach students with disabilities.

Through this teacher preparation program, due to the unique nature of dual certifications, students consider issues related to diversity, including teaching English Language Learners, in every course. In addition, master's level students enroll in one three-credit course, *Diversity in Education*, specifically designed to explicate diversity related issues in education. However, , the research treatment described in this research was the first time that these mostly monolingual teacher candidates needed to attempt to understand a foreign language in an education course in this teacher preparation program.

### ***Sampling Method and Participants***

The two researchers implemented a convenience sampling method to distribute the consent form and survey to the potential participants in six literacy and special education classes they taught throughout one school year at the research site. In each class, before distributing the survey, the researchers introduced the study, emphasized its voluntary and anonymous features, and gave the students 15 minutes in class to complete the survey. The researchers left the classroom and waited in the hallway while students completed the survey forms. Students were free to choose not to participate in the survey or stop participating at any time without penalty, even after the study had begun.

One hundred and fifty-two out of one hundred and fifty-five (98.1%) college students who took special education courses and literacy courses with the researchers participated in this study. The participants were predominantly English-only speakers while none of them spoke the Dutch language. Most of them (at least 71.7% -- See Table 2) were pre-service teachers who

were seeking dual certifications, while the rest were in-service teachers who had their initial certifications and were seeking special education certifications at the research site.

### ***Research Procedure/Data Collection***

Each time before the research data was collected, one of the researchers immersed the participants in a 15-minute oral presentation in Dutch, using simple sentences any language learner might face on the first day of class. All group members were required to participate during the mini-lesson because the professor utilized cold calls, interacting with individuals, directing questions without waiting for volunteers to answer, and practicing wait-time and support for responses. Modeled throughout the lesson is advice given by Peregoy and Boyle (2005), who state that as teachers welcome language learners into their classrooms, the teachers need to provide for students' basic needs for safety and security as well as a sense of belonging. Immediately after the mini-lesson, the survey instrument with 12 questions was distributed to learn the participants' characteristics, and to investigate their emotions, their knowledge of strategies, and their recognition of K-12 English language learners' needs. The researchers left the classroom to allow participants to complete the survey voluntarily and anonymously without the professor/researchers being present in the classroom. A student volunteer collected the survey sheets after 15 minutes and returned the forms to the professor/researchers when they reentered the classroom. Then the professor/researcher who had conducted the lesson debriefed the lesson in class to provoke further thoughts and deliver instruction regarding multilingual learners (Peregoy and Boyle 2005).

### ***Data Analyses***

Descriptive data were analyzed by calculating both the frequency and percentage of the participants' demographic characteristics: (1) pre-/in-service teacher; (2) (potential) teaching

grade level; (3) current teaching license status; (4) years of teaching; (5) content area(s) of teaching; (6) number of students, including students with special needs in their classroom; (7) language(s) their students spoke; (8) language(s) the participant spoke; and (9) whether or not the participant spoke the same language(s) as their students.

In addition to coding and analyzing responses to the nine demographic questions, the researchers conducted a critical inductive thematic analysis of the asked three short essay questions to explore using instructional methods that mirror experiences faced by real children in real K-12 classrooms to facilitate pre- and in-service teachers' understanding of ELLs: (1) What emotions did you experience through the mini-lesson? Please use at least three words to identify them. (2) What strategies did the professors use during the mini-lesson to help you better understand the content? Please identify at least two strategies. (3) From your experience with the mini-lesson, what are the most critical needs for ELLs in the classroom settings? The researchers completed an inductive thematic analysis to identify common themes that ran across the answers to these three questions by coding and assigning meaningful labels to the data. Additionally, the researchers conducted a bivariate correlation to learn if any correlation existed between the variables and a one-way ANOVA to determine whether any significant difference appeared between the participants' answers and their demographic characteristics.

### ***Inter-Rater Reliability and Trustworthiness***

Because this research was exploratory, the instrument used in this research was not validated against other instruments. The researchers found no similar instruments but invite additional researchers to test this instrument through comparable research.

The first nine questions in the research instrument asked about participants' background information. The first researcher, Assistant Professor of Special Education, and a trained

undergraduate research assistant double-coded all the answers to the first nine questions. Inter-rater reliability was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements and disagreements and multiplied by 100%. The inter-rater reliability was 100% for the coding procedure of the first nine questions.

The answers to the last three questions were entered by the trained undergraduate research assistant. The first researcher double-checked the database entries, comparing to the original survey forms. Then the two researchers participated in thematic data analysis independently to identify the key words and themes. Finally, the two researchers discussed and agreed upon key words and themes resulting from the data analysis of the participants' answers to the last three survey questions.

## **Results**

### ***Participants' Demographic Characteristics***

Of the total 152 participants, 109 were pre-service teachers (71.7%), 35 in-service teachers (23%), while eight people did not identify their roles (5.3%). Participants reported teaching at all K-12 levels, and they listed the following content areas/specialties: elementary generalists (labeled childhood in this program) and middle/high school mathematics, English language arts, history/social studies, science, early childhood, Spanish, and Reading. Forty-seven participants taught or planned to teach at elementary school level (30.9%), 16 at middle school level (10.5%), 31 at high school level (20.4%), one at elementary school with middle school extension (0.7%), 18 at high school with middle school extension (11.8%), four K-12 (2.6%), and 35 participants did not answer this question (23.1%). Fifty participants taught or planned to teach at childhood level (32.9%), 16 adolescent mathematics (10.5%), 21 adolescent English/Language Arts (13.8%), 21 adolescent History/Social Studies (13.8%), 10 adolescent

Science (6.6%). Five participants labeled their content other, including early childhood education (N = 2, 1.3%), Spanish (N = 2, 1.3%), and Reading Specialist (N = 1, 0.7%), while the remaining participants did not identify a particular content area. The number of students with special needs varied K-12 from 0 to 100% in the participants' K-12 classrooms, and the types of disabilities covered all thirteen categories of disabilities defined by Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEiA, 2004).

Since pre-service teachers accounted for the majority of participants, a minority of participants had already obtained teacher certification. Among 35 in-service teachers whose teaching experience varied from five months to 20 years, 20 held childhood education certificates (57.1%), three held adolescent education certificates in content areas (8.6%), three held early childhood and childhood education certificates (8.6%), four held K-12 education certificates (11.4%). One held a combination early childhood and K-12 education certificates (2.9%), and two held early childhood education (N = 2, 5.7%) and two teacher assistant (N = 2, 5.7%) certificates. Table 2 contains the frequency and percentage of participants by their demographic characteristics.

*Insert Table 2 about here*

### ***Language Diversity: Pre-/In-Service Teachers vs. Students***

Among 66 participants who identified the language(s) spoken by their students in K-12 classroom settings, 25 indicated English as the only language spoken by their students (37.9%). More than half of the participants taught or were engaged in a practicum where students spoke 19 other languages (N = 41, 62.1%), reported as Spanish (n = 29), Polish (n = 3), Indian (n = 2), Italian (n = 2), Arabic (n = 2), Russian (n = 2), American Sign Language (ASL) (n = 1), Bosnian (n = 1), Burmese (n = 1), Chinese (n = 1), German (n = 1), Hungarian (n = 1), Japanese (n = 1),

Korean (n = 1), Romanian (n = 1), Thai (n = 1), Ukrainian (n = 1), Valpak (n = 1), and Vietnamese (n = 1).

Contrary to the report of diverse languages among their K-12 students, the survey participants reported little personal experience with language learning. Only 54 identified themselves as being able to speak the same language(s) as their students (35.5%). One hundred and two pre-/in-service teacher participants reported speaking English only (67.1%). Other than English, the pre- and in-service teachers stated experience with seven languages: Spanish (N = 39), French (N = 11), ASL (N = 9), German (N = 5), Italian (N = 3), Danish (N = 1), and Romanian (N = 1). Further contrast between students' and pre-/in-service teachers' languages became evident when most participants described their language ability as 'some Spanish,' 'very little Spanish,' 'learning Russian,' 'a little bit of Danish,' 'tiny bit of German,' or 'marginal ASL.' Among those 50 participants who reported speaking more than one language (32.9%), only one person (2%) indicated as fluent in the second language (French). These numbers corroborate earlier research (Brisk et al. 2002; Sleeter and Thao 2007). Table 3 contains the frequency and percentage of participants' and their students' language status.

*Insert Table 3 about here*

### ***Reported Emotions, Strategy-Learning, and K-12 Students' Needs***

Basic qualitative data is reported in this section while thematic analysis is reported with further critical analysis in the section entitled 'Qualitative Thematic Analysis.' When answering the question of 'What emotions did you experience through the mini-lessons?' the two most frequently used words were confusion/confused (N = 99, 65.1%) and frustration/frustrated (N = 71, 46.7%). A minority of students reported positive emotions.

When answering the question of ‘What strategies did the professors use during the mini-lessons to help you better understand the content?’ gestures, repetition, board, hand, facial, writing, and body language were the words which were identified most frequently. When answering the question of ‘From your experience with the mini-lesson, what are the most critical needs for ELLs in the classroom settings?’ patience, repetition, understanding, and help were the words which were identified most frequently. Participants also noted the importance of creating a positive and supportive environment to help ELLs learn: ‘ELLs need to be in friendly space, relate to their own experience, and repetition.’ ‘They need to be comfortable to try and learn.’ ‘ELLs need a variety of presentation methods to learn a language.’ ‘Check for understanding by acknowledging students’ efforts.’ ‘Teachers need to be open to ELLs’ language and incorporate their needs within the classroom and check for comprehension.’ ‘for them to feel success;’ ‘positive feedback and encouragement;’ ‘strong support from teachers and peers.’

### ***Inferential Statistics***

When conducting bivariate correlations, the number of languages spoken by the K-12 students correlated positively with whether the participant was a pre- or in-service teacher ( $r = .346^{**}, p < .01$ ). In-service teachers reported more languages spoken by their K-12 students, perhaps indicating in-service teachers knew their students better, including the students’ language abilities, than did pre-service teachers. In addition, the number of languages spoken by the K-12 students was correlated negatively with whether the participants spoke the same language(s) as their students ( $r = -.434^{**}, p = .000$ ). The more languages K-12 students in one classroom spoke, the fewer chances that pre- and in-service teachers were able to speak the same language(s) as their students.

When running a one-way ANOVA, no significant difference was found between the participants' emotions towards the mini-lesson and their pre- or in-service teacher status ( $p > .05$ ). In-service teachers were as likely to be confused or frustrated as the pre-service teachers. A significant difference was found between the participants' emotions toward the mini-lesson and the language status of their K-12 students ( $F = 7.2, p < .01$ ). A significant difference was found between the participants' emotions toward the mini-lesson and their second language abilities ( $F = 6.7, p < .01$ ). And a significant difference was found between the participants' emotions toward the mini-lesson and whether the participants could speak the language of their students ( $F = 8.5, p < .01$ ). In conclusion, no differences were found between the emotions recorded by pre-service or in-service teachers as a result of the mini-lesson. However, if the participants had previous experiences of learning a second language or working with ELLs whose language was different from their own, the experienced participants showed more empathy toward ELL students in classrooms.

### ***Qualitative Thematic Analysis***

Three themes became apparent as we coded the data. First, mostly monolingual pre-service and in-service teachers recognized effort inherent in language learning. Second, through recognition of the complexity of language learning, the participants developed empathy, understanding of another's situation, for language learners. Third, the participants' levels of empathy correlated with their levels of experience with language learners.

*Theme one: Participants' most commonly-reported emotions highlighted the effort required for language learning.*

Participants noted on the surveys that the 15-minute treatment of being immersed in a language they had never learned was unnerving and fraught with exertion. As reported earlier,

the participants' most commonly reported emotions were confusion and frustration. Language learners also face confusion and frustration when they sit in classrooms without understanding the language of instruction (Wassell et al. 2010). When describing the experience as confusion, participants stated, 'Confused, felt stupid, restless, lost focus as the lesson went on, and intimidated;' 'confusion and embarrassment that I did not pick up on the cues;' 'confusion, and I became bored because I could not understand, I began to tune out.' 'Confusion, panic, lack of confidence;' and 'confusion-when I couldn't understand any of the language, intimidation-when I thought I might be asked to say something, excitement-when I got a word correct and I started to understand.' When describing the experience as frustration, participants stated, 'Frustration. It took a lot of effort and energy to comprehend and make it through.' 'First it was kind of fun to try to figure out what was being said—like a game, then it got a little frustrating and exhausting. I used what I knew from Spanish and what sounded right.' 'Frustrated and bored. After a while I gave up trying to understand what the teacher was saying.' 'Frustration, lost, confused, wanting to escape, needing help-translator!' 'Confusion and frustration. The frustration then led to impatience and anger.... Once I began to catch on, I felt proud.' 'Frustration-other students got more than I did. Boredom-I stopped trying.' 'I felt confused, then overwhelmed, finally frustrated because I could barely piece things together.' 'I felt unsure, nervous and worried, frustrated. I even felt angry at times. I felt that others were getting it and I was falling behind.'

One participant's report of pride when he/she began to understand during the treatment should not be overlooked. A minority of students reported positive emotions: 'During the mini lessons I felt confused but not frustrated. I knew if I couldn't figure out what the teacher was saying, someone else in the class could. I felt calm and comfortable because the teachers were so encouraging and friendly.' 'Excitement of words I recognized from German;' 'intrigued,

excited, curious.’ Language learners also report mixed feelings as they work toward understanding of the new language (Wassell et al. 2010). Even the positive emotions point to the need for effort during the learning process (Wassell et al. 2010).

*Theme two: Participants developed empathy for language learners.*

Data from this study indicates that participants developed empathy and extrapolated the message that ELL students in classrooms in the United States face serious but surmountable challenges that take time to overcome (Peregoy and Boyle 2005; Washburn 2008). As one participant wrote, ‘I feel empathy for ESL learners. I feel frustration from not understanding. I feel fatigued mentally from concentrating so hard.’ This comment shows the participant had begun to feel and understand the emotions of another person (Dewaele and Wei 2012). Other examples of participants’ expressions of empathy include the following: ‘I can understand how difficult it would be when someone is not adjusting their speech/teaching to include my processing time and lack of vocabulary.’ ‘I felt lost, confused, and intrigued, it was interesting and different.’ ‘I was very intrigued --I enjoyed the challenge.’ As Kouritzin et al. (2007, 221) state, activities like the one in this treatment develop empathy by shaping ‘learners’ beliefs about the learning of foreign languages, and learners’ consequent attitudes toward, and motivations for, learning them.’

*Theme three: Participants’ levels of empathy correlated with their levels of experience with language learners.*

This finding attests to the importance of the demographic and experiential items on our instrument. Without that statistical information, we would not have learned of the significant correlations between participants’ levels of experience with language learners and the degree to which the participants reported empathy for language learners. This research affirms Cruz’s

(1997) finding that direct experiences far outweigh classroom and textbook encounters. As we have reported, most participants in our 15-minute treatment related to the lesson on an emotional level. However, our inferential statistics reveal that, regardless of their status as pre-service or in-service teachers, participants were more open to the needs of ELLs in their classrooms when they had previous experiences working with ELLs or learning a second language. One in-service teacher with ten years' experience and who worked with language learners stated students need 'to feel safe, comfortable, to know it's okay to make mistakes.' Pre-service teachers who had experience working with language learners reported, 'ELLs need a teacher who is patient and willing to approach lessons in varying ways to meet the learners' needs.'

Nevertheless, according to Romano (2005), teachers need disconcerting incidents like this 15-minute language-immersion class in education courses in order to recognize the value of the courses and apply researched methods to classroom practices. The bumpy moments may not replace direct experience, but the bumpy moments open the mind and heart in ways that may lead to student-oriented practices (Delpit 1988, 2006).

### **Implications**

Though our exploratory research does not lead to firm conclusions, we would suggest three implications for educators preparing K-12 teachers. First, monolingual teacher candidates may benefit from being thrust into a language learning opportunity that allows the candidates to experience, even briefly the work and emotions of language learners. Second, through short classroom exercises, teacher candidates may begin to develop empathy, leading to high-level, culturally appropriate curriculum and instruction. Third, participants who have learned a second language or worked with ELLs are likely to benefit most from a short language-immersion exercise.

Monolingual teacher candidates may benefit from being thrust into a language learning opportunity that allows the candidates to experience, even briefly, the realities that face language learners. Brisk et al. (2002) stress that teacher preparation must include opportunities for teacher candidates to experience the difficulties and benefits of language learning in an academic setting. The participants in this research gained a few minutes of experience with language learning in a manner that may allow them to begin to consider the value of language learning for themselves and their students. The results of this study leads us to believe these pre- and in-service teachers have begun to understand the critical nature of language learning for children who speak more than one language (Brisk et al. 2002).

Through short classroom exercises, teacher candidates may begin to develop empathy, leading to high-level, culturally appropriate curriculum and instruction. Most participants in this study indicated that they developed a higher degree of empathy than they felt earlier. Recognizing the fallibility of self-reports and the lack of pre-testing, we as researchers nevertheless report this implication due to our interactions with our students before and after the mini-lesson and survey. The participants invariably recognized that ELLs need time, assistance from many people, and clear instruction in order to learn the language and other academic content. The participants were also able to list ways to provide for ELLs' basic needs for safety and security and for a sense of belonging, essential elements according to Peregoy and Boyle (2005). In the words of one pre-service teacher who experienced the mini-lesson described here, '(The Dutch lesson) was a great way to put us in that situation and get a feel for what an ELL student goes through.'

Finally, as the results of the inferential statistics showed, participants who had learned a second language or worked with ELLs are likely to benefit most from a short language-immersion exercise. In our study, participants with language-learning experiences reported more empathy than participants who had no prior language learning or experience with ELLs. Monolingual teachers who have no first-hand experience interacting with language learners are prone to discount both the value of and the necessity for language learning unless that learning brings speakers into conformity with the dominant language (Kouritzin et al. 2007; Kouritzin 2012).

### **Limitations**

Some limitations exist in this study. First, the majority of the participants were pre-service teachers enrolled in one teacher certification program, while a limited number of participants came from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse populations. Participation from different programs and a more diverse demographic background would permit the results of future studies to be generalized to a broader population. Second, a pre-test containing the same short-essay questions as those asked on the survey after the mini-lesson would have provided comparative data. Without that data, we base our findings only on participants' self-reports and our own interactions with the participants.

### **Recommendations**

Though our findings are tentative, we offer three important recommendations as a result of this study. First, more research needs to be conducted to learn strategies that will lead not only to empathy, but also to improved classroom practices. Second, educators need to rethink removing requirements for language learning from teacher education programs. And where such requirements have already been removed, educators should work to reinstate such prerequisites.

Even modest struggles to earn academic credit in a language class may open eyes and hearts to the needs of language learners. Finally, pre- and in-service teachers need contact with language learners as well as university classroom experiences that demand recognition of difficulties and benefits of language learning. Culturally rich field-based experiences are necessary requisites for teacher training.

### **Summary**

The mini-lesson conducted in this study provided one opportunity for pre- and in-service teachers to experience negotiating with basic communication in another language. One hundred and fifty-five college students in a teacher preparation program shared the mini-lesson, and one hundred and fifty-two participants completed the survey that yielded the data for this study. We found the participants perceived difficulties of language learning, reported increased empathy for language learners, and participants who had more experience with language learning and language learners reported more empathy than participants who had no prior language learning or experience with ELLs. However, for a growing percentage of students in the United States and other nations where English or another language is dominant, questions need to be raised about the efficacy of continuing to privilege only one language when cognitive and social benefits of learning multiple languages are clear (Brisk et al. 2002). We recommend that teacher preparation programs continue or reinstate language learning requirements and that such programs provide interactions with language learners as well as classroom experiences that highlight the realities of language learning.

### References

- Baca, L. M., and H. T. Cervantes. eds. 1998. *The bilingual special education interface* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Brisk, M. E., R. Barnhardt, S. Herrera, and R. Rochon. 2002. "Educators' preparation for cultural and linguistic diversity: A call to action." *American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education* 1307: 2-11.
- Cruz, B. 1997. "Walking the talk: The importance of community involvement in preservice urban teacher education." *Urban Education* 11: 12-23.
- Cummins, J. 2001. "Bilingual children's mother tongue: Why is it important for education?" *Sprogforum* 19: 15-20. <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/mother.html>.
- Delpit, L. 1988. "The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children." *Harvard Educational Review* 58 (3): 280-298.
- Delpit, L. 2006. "Lessons from teachers." *Journal of Teacher Education* 57 (3): 220-231.
- Dewaele, J., and L. Wei. 2012. "Multilingualism, empathy, and multicompetence." *International Journal of Multilingualism* 9 (4): 352-366.
- Fillmore, L. W., and C. Snow. 2002. "What teachers need to know about language." In *What teachers need to know about language*, edited by Adger, C. T., C. Snow, and D. Christian, 7-53. McHenry, IL: Datla Systems Inc. and the Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Gladkova, A. 2010. "Sympathy, compassion, and empathy in English and Russian: A linguistic and cultural analysis." *Culture and Psychology* 16 (2): 267-285. DOI: 10.1177/1354067X10361396.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. (IDEiA), 2004. P.L. 108-446, 20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq.

- Krashen, S. 2000. "Why bilingual education?" <http://englishfirst.org/eff/krashen.html>.
- Kouritzin, S. G. 2012. "Is knowing another language as important as knowing 'core' subjects like mathematics or science." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 33 (5): 465-480.
- Kouritzin, S. G., N. A. C. Piquemal, and S. Nakagawa. 2007. "Pre-service teacher beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 28 (3): 220-237.
- Ladson-Billings, G. 1994. "What we can learn from multicultural education research." *Educational Leadership* 51 (8): 22-26.
- Lee, S., M. B. Butler, and D. J. Tippins. 2007. "A case study of an early childhood teacher's perspective on working with English language learners." *Multicultural Education* 15: 43-49.
- Moll, L. C., C. Amanti, D. Neff, and N. Gonzalez. 1992. "Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms." *Theory into Practice* 31 (2): 132-141.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. 2002. *Table 10. Number and percentage of public school students participating in selected programs, by state: School year 2001-02.* [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/Overview03/tables/table\\_10.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/Overview03/tables/table_10.asp).

National Center for Educational Statistics. 2012a. *Table 45.5. Number and percentage of public school students participating in programs for English language learners, by state: School year 2002–03 through 2010-11.*

[http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12\\_00n.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_00n.asp).

National Center for Educational Statistics. 2012b. *The Condition of Education 2011 (NCES 2011-045), Indicator 6.* <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=96>.

National Center for Education Statistics. 2012c. *Table 73. Number, highest degree, and years of full-time teaching experience of teachers in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by selected teacher characteristics: 1999-2000, 2003-04, and 2007-08.*

[http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12\\_073.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_073.asp).

New York State Education Department. 2008. *Contract for excellence allowable programs and activities new category: Updated – July 2008.*

[http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/C4E/ModelPrograms for LEP-ELLs-Rev7-28-08.htm](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/C4E/ModelPrograms%20for%20LEP-ELLs-Rev7-28-08.htm).

New York State Education Department. 2009. *Changes—Demographics.*

[http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/Parents/pfpp\\_files/textonly/slide7.html](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/Parents/pfpp_files/textonly/slide7.html).

Peregoy, S. F., and O. F. Boyle. 2005. *Reading, writing, and learning in ESL: A resource book for K-12 teachers.* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Romano, M. E. 2005. “Preservice teachers’ reflections on observed ‘bumpy moment’ in teaching: Implications for teacher education.” *The Teacher Educator* 40 (4): 257-277.

Sleeter, C., and Y. Thao. 2007. “Diversifying the teaching force.” *Teacher Education Quarterly* 34 (4): 3-8.

Snow, C. E., M. S. Burns, and P. Griffin. eds. 1998. *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Steifel, L., A. E. Schwartz, and D. Congel, 2003. *Language proficiency and home languages of students in New York elementary and middle schools*.

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/1a/d8/5c.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/d8/5c.pdf).

United States Census Bureau. 2000. *American fact finder, [Tables and charts]*. Retrieved February 28, 2009 from <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet>.

Washburn, G. N. 2008. "Alone, confused, and frustrated: Developing empathy and strategies for working with English Language Learners." *Clearing House* 81 (6): 247-250.

Wassell, B. A., M. F. Hawrylak, and S.-K. LaVan. 2010. "Examining the structures that impact English Language Learners' agency in urban high schools: Resources and roadblocks in the classroom." *Education and Urban Society* 42 (5): 599-619.

**TABLE 1**  
**Survey Instrument**

---

Are you a pre-service or in-service teacher?

---

What type of school do you work in?

Kindergarten – Elementary (please specify the grades)

Middle School (please specify the grades)

High School (please specify the grades)

---

Do you currently hold any of the following licenses?

Childhood

Adolescence (please specify the content area)

Special Education

Other (please specify)

---

How long have you been teaching?

---

What subject do you teach?

---

How many students do you have in your class?

Please specify the students' needs:

---

What languages do your students speak?

Please specify:

---

What languages do you speak?

Please specify:

---

Do you speak the language of your students?

No, not at all.

Yes, for some of the students.

Yes, for most of the students.

Yes, for all of the students.

---

What are your feelings through the mini-lesson? Please use at least three words to identify them.

---



---

What strategies did the professors use during the mini-lesson to help you understand better?

---



---

What are the most critical needs for ELLs in the classroom settings?

---

**TABLE 2**  
**Participants' Demographic Characteristics**

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
<b>Teaching Status</b>		
Pre-Service	109	71.7
In-Service	35	23.0
Unidentified	8	5.3
<b>SUM</b>	152	100
<b>Teaching Level</b>		
Elementary School	47	30.9
Middle School	16	10.5
High School	31	20.4
Elementary with Middle School Extension	1	0.7
High with Middle School Extension	18	11.8
K-12	4	2.6
Unidentified	35	23.1
<b>SUM</b>	152	100
<b>Content Area</b>		
Childhood	50	32.9
Adolescent Mathematics	16	10.5
Adolescent English/Language Arts	21	13.8
Adolescent History/Social Studies	21	13.8
Adolescent Science	10	6.6
Other	5	3.3
Unidentified	29	19.1
<b>SUM</b>	152	100
<b>Certification Status*</b>		
Childhood Education	20	57.1
Adolescent Education	3	8.6
Early Childhood and Childhood Education	3	8.6
K-12	4	11.4
Early Childhood and K-12	1	2.9
Other	4	11.4
<b>SUM</b>	35*	100

**Note:** \* Certification data came from 35 in-service teachers who participated in the study.

**TABLE 3**  
**Language Diversity: Pre-/In-Service Teachers vs. Students**

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
<b>Languages K-12 Students Speak</b>		
English Only	25	37.9
Spanish	29	43.9
Polish	3	4.5
Indian	2	3.0
Italian	2	3.0
Arabic	2	3.0
Russian	2	3.0
ASL	1	1.5
Bosnian	1	1.5
Burmese	1	1.5
Chinese	1	1.5
German	1	1.5
Hungarian	1	1.5
Japanese	1	1.5
Korean	1	1.5
Romanian	1	1.5
Thai	1	1.5
Ukrainian	1	1.5
Valpak	1	1.5
Vietnamese	1	1.5
<b>Languages pre-/In-Service Teachers Speak</b>		
English Only	102	67.1
Spanish	39	25.7
French	11	7.2
ASL	9	5.9
German	5	3.3
Italian	3	2.0
Danish	1	0.7
Romanian	1	0.7