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"Textbooks Come Alive:" Engaging Teacher Candidates in Service-Learning to Enhance Their Learning about English Language Learners

Carla Amaro-Jiménez

Kim K. Winter

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Carla Amaro-Jiménez, University of Texas at Arlington
Kim K. Winter, Western Carolina University

Abstract

This article describes the results of a Service-Learning collaboration initiative between several community partners and two teacher preparation programs (i.e., bilingual education and middle level education) at a large, urban university in the Southwest. We draw on data collected from a total of 77 teacher candidates (38 in bilingual education and 39 in middle level education) who were enrolled in a course focusing on methods of literacy instruction for ELL. The manuscript focuses on the impact that participating in Service-Learning had on teacher candidates' personal, professional, and academic experiences as they worked with ELL as part of their teacher preparation coursework.

"Often I hear current teachers talk about the struggles the students are having, but I rarely get to hear about the progress they make. I once had a teacher tell me that we can't ever set the bar too high for our students… if we want them to really succeed we have to expect them to soar higher. I would say they that my goal as a teacher is to have my students want to do more. I know it is a lot to ask of them, but I know they can do it" (Layla, middle level teacher candidate).

Teacher candidates, like Layla quoted above, understand the importance of setting high expectations for all learners, but especially for English language learners (ELL) who are school-aged students for whom English is not their native language. These students currently comprise approximately 10% of the student body population nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Though this percentage may not seem as large when compared to other groups, their enrollment in public schools has grown at a faster pace than anticipated (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Because these students' performance is still not up to par to their mainstream counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003), all teacher preparation programs are now required to ensure their success in and out of the classroom. Preparing teacher candidates, like Layla, to work with ELL, to understand how to best meet their instructional needs, and to set high expectations for all their learners, including these students, is thus necessary (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

Although providing field experiences for teacher candidates is part of their required teacher preparation, additional field experiences (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005; Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2001) such as Service-Learning (SL) need to be available, as early on as possible, as these have proven to positively benefit all involved, including students, practitioners and communities (Billing, 2000). Interestingly, while the academic success of ELL is often

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relegated to teachers working within specific classroom contexts (e.g., teachers in sheltered classrooms), community programs that build on such academic skills are necessary, especially when students struggle academically and their parents lack the language skills in English which are required to support this school learning at home (Heath, 1983; Moll & González, 2004). As such, community programs that work in partnership with teacher preparation programs could potentially provide the additional support ELL need beyond the school classroom while at the same time ensuring that future teachers can have ample opportunities to work with their target teaching population (e.g., ELL, families) before they set have a classroom of their own.

In this manuscript we share the results of a SL collaboration initiative between several community partners and two teacher preparation programs (i.e., middle level and bilingual education) at a large, urban university in the Southwest. We draw on data collected from a total of 77 teacher candidates (38 in bilingual education and 39 in middle level education) who were enrolled in a course focusing on methods of literacy instruction for ELL. Community partners included a public library, a newcomers program, and local non-profit organizations such as Girls, Inc. These partners were chosen given that they had expressed a great need for practitioners that understood the needs of the diverse population being served in their community, as the programs were being run, for the most part, by personnel with little to no experience working with diverse learners. Also, because we wanted to provide teacher candidates with experiences with various Web 2.0 tools as part of their teacher preparation (NAEYC, 2002; Richardson, 2009; TESOL, 2007), participants were asked to reflect and blog about their experiences in their SL placement throughout the semester. The experiences they had at the SL placements and what they learned about working with ELL through SL is the focus of this manuscript.

Background to the Study

Our intent on becoming better educators of cultural and language diversity frames this study. We see learning and teaching as activities that allow for the co-construction of knowledge in Communities of Practice (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1962); these communities provide participants with opportunities to act as both the expert and the novice in a "context of shared practice" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 49). In this article we define SL as a teaching/learning approach used to facilitate the implementation of learning experiences that directly align a voiced community need (i.e., supporting ELL academic achievement outside their classrooms through direct experiences with teacher candidates) and the content that the teacher candidates were learning in the university classroom. We make emphasis on the importance of such merging of needs because reciprocity was sought as part of the experience; that is, all groups involved, from children to adults, needed to have the opportunity to co-construct knowledge as they put into practice what was being learned at the SL site (Godwin-Jones, 2003).

Many studies have already shed light on the impact of SL in the preparation of college students, and a growing body is beginning to emerge on its impact on teachers. Generally, results have shown that SL can aid student learning, increase participants' self-efficacy, empower participants to become agents of change in their communities, and hone their writing skills (see e.g., Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Strage, 2000; Wurr & Hamilton, 2012). One of the most important benefits pointed out in the teacher literature is that SL provides

future teachers with first-hand application of course content in authentic contexts and situations. As Spencer, Cox-Petersen, and Crawford (2005) have argued, SL allows teacher candidates to feel responsible for what is occurring at the SL placement as well as to make authentic programmatic and educational/teaching choices when working with students who need their assistance. Doing so is critical, as research has shown that teacher candidates conducting field experiences in other teachers' classrooms do tend to take on the role of being "visitors in someone else's" home and as a result they often take subordinate roles, being neither fully a student, nor fully a teacher. Thus, their voice in deciding curriculum and the methods used for instruction remains limited" (quotations in original, p. 120).

Studies have shown that another important benefit of SL is that teacher candidates discover the 'why's' of what they are learning as they are able to use the concepts, theories, research studies, etc. they have been learning about and make use of their own personal, professional, and academic experiences to ground their learning (Ramaley, 2000; Simons & Cleary, 2006). Likewise, while engaging in SL, teacher candidates can see the impact of their work beyond that of the confined university classroom (Gallini & Moely, 2003) – that is, teacher candidates are able to see themselves as an integral part of their communities as they have the opportunity to learn about the needs faced as well as identify ways in which they can further support the community with their efforts. Teacher candidates also become more attuned to their civic responsibilities (Billig, 2000) while developing strategies for helping in their community beyond the courses they are taking at the time.

It should be noted that research has also shown there are a variety of challenges when it comes to implementing SL. Some of these challenges, which were noted by Anderson (1998) over a decade ago, are still present today. Issues include those such as aligning the SL activities with what is being covered in the teacher preparation courses and creating a shared vision between SL programs/partners and universities to ensure that there are reciprocal benefits for all involved. Likewise, it is essential for teacher candidates to dig deep and reflect on their SL experiences if they are to make the fundamental connections between theory and practice (Butin, 2003). Thus, in order to truly comprehend the application of content being learned as well as the challenges present in the communities being served, teacher candidates ought to reflect on and about their experiences in SL contexts. It is through those reflections that SL participants are able to link their experiences and practices in the field with what is occurring in the classroom and vice versa.

Because previous studies have demonstrated that SL can be used to provide college students with hands-on practice while also meeting the needs present in their communities (see e.g., Gallini & Moely, 2003; Wurr, 2002; Wurr & Hamilton, 2012), we turned to SL to identify the ways in which a semester-long SL experience could help not only increase teacher candidates' awareness of the needs in a community where a large of percentage of ELL are being served by the schools, but also allow them to see and experience the academic content they were learning in a real-world context. In this paper, we thus identify ways in which SL experiences over the course of a semester allowed teacher candidates to not only learn more about the field and engage in hands-on work with ELL and families, but also what was gained from such SL experience as they blogged about it during a semester.

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Design of the Study

As mentioned earlier, this qualitative investigation aimed to identify what were teacher candidates' experiences with SL as they reflected on their experiences working with ELL in various community programs. A total of 77 participants took part in this study; 38 of them were bilingual education candidates and the remaining 39 were seeking certification in middle level education. As part of the study the teacher candidates in both groups were asked to reflect about their SL experience throughout the semester. Rather than promoting reflection as a one-way type of communication – that is, the teacher candidates writing for their respective professors only - we turned to blogging because we wanted: (1) to encourage and promote communication among future teachers in ways that are responsive to the 21st century needs present in their/our classrooms; (2) to deepen and strengthen their level of reflection when they were able to see how their contributions to the various SL sites were part of a larger effort; (3) to allow them to see themselves as part of a community of future teachers working towards benefiting the community, and (4) to give them opportunities to use blogging as one of the many Web 2.0 tools they would most likely use as part of their teaching.

To accomplish these goals, the teacher candidates documented their 16-week SL through blogging. The participants used the DEAL Model (Ash, Clayton & Moses, 2007) for their blog entries; in other words, participants were asked **d**escribe, **e**xamine and **a**rticulate their **l**earning. See Tables 1 and 2 for the DEAL reflection prompts that were used by the bilingual generalists and middle level candidates, respectively. Teacher candidates described their experience in the SL placement by responding to wh-questions (e.g., where, what, why). Next, they examined their reactions to the various events, activities, or tasks that took place or that they engaged in at their SL placement. See Table 3 for a sampling of activities they implemented depending on the topic being addressed in class. Finally, they articulated what they learned by making a direct connection between the course content and the SL experiences.

WEEK	Reflection Prompt
#1	Describe your field experience activity. (What? Where? Who? When? Why?) Reflect on your idea of service learning as of today and the instruction that you have received from your instructor, mentor, etc. Why is this field experience important?
#2	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (What strengths have I noticed in myself?) Civic (What am I trying to accomplish with this service learning project?) Academic (What concept from the class can I apply to the field today?) How did I learn it?
#3	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (Same as Week #2.) Civic (Same as Week #2.) Academic (Same as Week #2.) Why is it important?
#4	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (Same as Week #2.) Civic (Same as Week #2.)

Table 1. Prompts for Service Learning reflections (Bilingual Teacher Candidates)

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WEEK	Reflection Prompt
	Academic (Same as Week #2.) What will I do because of it?
#5	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (Same as Week #2.) Civic (Same as Week #2.) Academic (Same as Week #2.) Why it is important?
#6	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (What effect do I have on the protégé/mentor?) Civic (Describe my approach to appreciating differences in people.) Academic (What concept from class really resonates in these field experiences?) What did I learn?
#7	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (What changes have I made in my approach to improve this situation?) Civic (Do I see people who need mentoring/tutoring differently now?) Academic (How has this experience enhanced my understanding of specific course outcomes? Why is this important?
#8	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (What have I learned about myself through this service-learning experience?) Civic (How does my appreciation for others differ today as compared to before this experience?) Academic (What classroom outcomes are more relevant today as compared to before this experience?) What will I do because of this experience?
#9	Describe your experience. Include responses to What? Where? Who? When? Why? Personal (Same as Week #10.) Civic (Same as Week #10.) Academic (Same as Week #10.) Why is this important?
#10	Final Reflection. Synthesize reflections #1-14 focusing on the three essential areas of service learning: Personal, Academic, and Civic.

Table 2. Connect Course Content to the Real World through Service-Learning Critical Reflections

Reflection is the critical thread that holds service learning together. Each week students are encouraged to complete a structured reflection based on the very effective DEAL Model for Critical Reflection (Ash, Clayton & Moses, 2007). Many universities are utilizing the Deal Model for creating reflections during the service learning experience because there is evidence that this type of student reflection does increase academic achievement and civic responsibility. Note: Don't begin a reflection activity by asking "What did you learn?" The purpose of reflection is to *generate* learning. "What did you learn?" is a good last step for reflection, not a good first step. Reflection is not the same as *description* although description is good first step in reflection. Each time you reflect on the field experience, go through the sequence of the "DEAL" model as follows:

Describe		
	Describe the field experience. (What? Where? Who? When? Why?)	
	Reflect on your idea of service learning and the instruction that you have received in fair detail and as objectively as possible.	
Examine		
	Examine your reaction/response/feelings to the service experience.	
Articulate Learning		
	Connect what happened in the field to what you are learning as is stated in the syllabus of the course. Take a look at this 4-part structure for articulating learning: *What did I learn?(b) How did I learn it?(c) Why does it matter?(d) What will I do in the future, in light of it*	

Table 3. Sampling of Activities Implemented at SL Sites

Topic Covered in Class	*Example of Activities and Strategies Implemented at SL Sites*
Oral language development	Read-alouds (teacher candidate and student), "Canned Questions," Four Corners Vocabulary, interactive charts
Emergent literacy	Photo essays, KWL charts, board games, reading newspaper, grocery lists, creating print-rich environment, alpha books
Vocabulary development	Read-alouds, picture books, "Word Chips," Frayer Model, "Canned Questions," Four Corners Vocabulary
Process writing	Learning logs, journals, graphic organizers, Writer's Workshop, Writing Menu
Reading assessment	Graphs, collages, verbal responses, entries for their portfolios, KWL charts

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Data Collection and Analyses

Data collected for this study include weekly blog posts, bi-monthly replies to the blogs, and a variety of artifacts that showcased and documented the teacher candidates' learning experience with the course content, SL and blogging. The guidelines and expectations for blogging varied by the teacher candidates' certification area (i.e., each program's requirements). The bilingual candidates were asked to blog and respond to at least two others every week. The middle level candidates were asked to blog five times throughout the semester and to respond or comment on other people's blog entries at least five times in the 16-week period. The content of a total of 1,136 blog entries were analyzed for this study. The blog entries varied in length and format, though as mentioned earlier, all used the DEAL model when writing their entries. The average length of a blog entry was 600 words (equivalent to a page and a half) and the average length of the replies or comments was 75 words. The artifacts analyzed contained both written texts as well as audiovisual material (e.g., wikis, online multimedia, photos, videos and presentations with rich-media content). See Appendix A for a sample of these materials.

The Constant Comparative Analysis Method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to analyze all the qualitative data collected. We initially coded our data separately (open and axial coding) and each one of us identified themes, subthemes and patterns in the data. Some initial codes included, for example, "descriptions of tasks completed at SL sites," "description of individual student gains," "civic impact for teacher candidates," and "positive impact of SL in the community," among others. We then met to discuss our individual themes, to identify commonalities and differences in our coding, and to come up with shared themes across the blogs and other data sources such as the artifacts and triangulate our data. Participants' words are used whenever possible to share the overarching themes present in our data.

Findings: What We Have Learned So Far

Entry after blog entry spoke to the many benefits participants felt they had obtained as a result of their participation in their respective SL sites – from seeing themselves as teachers for the first time to finally realizing that teaching was not simply a career they chose to pursue but a calling, something coming from the heart, as shown in a visual representation of the reflection entries for week one.

Analyses demonstrated that there were four dominant themes across candidates' reflections regardless of the site where they were placed, the length of time they had been in the field (or not), and the program they were enrolled in. As it will be shown next, the data collected for this study showed that the SL experience gave these teacher candidates concrete ways to (1) see the challenges faced by ELL through their very own eyes, (2) step into a teacher's shoes and feel ownership of the learning taking (or not) place, (3) connect what was being learned about effective practices for ELL with research while also providing a much needed service to the community, and (4) develop greater awareness of their roles as future teachers of diverse and ELL students in U.S. public schools. Each one of these themes is elaborated next.

Figure 1. Visual Representation of First Entries

Theme One: "Textbooks come alive:" Seeing challenges faced by ELL through their very own eyes

Though about half of the teacher candidates had had the opportunity to work with ELL before they engaged in the SL experience, the semester-long SL initiative allowed them to experience, first-hand, the recurring challenges faced by ELL within a rigorous academic learning environment in their own communities (Ramaley, 2000; Simons & Cleary, 2006). Almost every blog entry spoke to their desire to meet the unique needs of the children served, many times challenging them to go beyond what they had learned in their textbooks or the knowledge that had been shared by the professors in class. Susana (pseudonym, the same is true of all other names used), one of the bilingual candidates, entitled her multimedia presentation summarizing her experience that semester, "Textbooks Come Alive." But she was not alone. One of her peers, Angelica, also stated it very eloquently:

> "Overall I loved my first experience with the Children's Public Library… [SL] is much needed because you will not really know exactly how to work with children just by reading from the books or just by being with children all the time. I believe that it requires having the knowledge that we get from our professors and books but also the experience is essential to know how to apply the skills that we learn… [SL] helps put into perspective what I am learning and it makes me more aware of many things that I would have not otherwise thought about without previous knowledge" (blog entry, week 1)

Because the participants met with the children for at least two hours every week, they had the opportunity to understand how unique each child was and how to best support all learners, including those who may be considered by some as uninterested in learning. As Mariana, another bilingual generalist commented,

> "I learned that children have different ways of learning and that kids like [name of student] are not just kids that dislike school but they have a good reasoning why they shy

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away from certain subjects whether it is the language or perception of the subject, as educators we should be mentors and anything else they might need to help them reach their goals. Doing SL has given me valuable experience that I can use in everyday scenarios in the classroom and this helps me think of ways that a lesson can be explained to meet the needs of the students" (blog entry, week 16).

Sustained interactions with the learners in the SL placements proved to be instrumental in allowing them to fully understand what needs the children with whom they worked had, how to best support them, and the ways in which the ELL were growing academically even if it was at a slower pace than they would have wished. As Joanna put it,

"These activities went well, although trying to get him to read is still a challenge! It has been a challenge ever since I began to work with him, but I think I can see some improvement. I do recognize that he is still struggling in reading but slowly I'm glad that there has been an improvement." (blog entry, week 7)

Moreover, such sustained interactions allowed them to develop rapport with the students, parents, and families, which they would not otherwise get to do if they were only occasionally doing field experiences, as explained by Javier and Lori,

"One of the things that I have learned during Newcomer Program of the South is that once you gained the students trust they kind of open up more and more to you until you start noticing that everything is working really well and they are improving" (Javier, blog entry week 4).

"Through this experience I have learned that every student comes from a different background. They have different ways of expressing themselves. They are all on different levels of learning skills. Some students come to the [name of program] and it is either an escape from a troubled home, a home where no one is able to help them with their homework, or just another place like 'school'. Whatever the situation we have to be able motivate and encourage the student while they are with us at [name of program]" (Lori, middle level candidate, blog entry week 7).

For many of the participants, being able to connect with the parents and families of ELL and understanding their needs and challenges was pivotal (Billings, 2000). Through their participation in SL, they were able to understand why some parents could not help their children, even if they wanted to. Tatiana spoke of a common misconception when she said,

"Like Dr. [Amaro-Jiménez] said we usually think that our Hispanic parents don't take part or involve themselves in their children's education and in instances those comments are made by our very own teachers. This program proves the opposite, maybe they can't personally guide their child step by step with their schoolwork but they trust us the mentors or tutors to do great by their children. This to me makes my volunteering a very serious job- I know if we volunteer it's really not a job because we don't get paid but I feel like we should take this experience very serious. We could be the ones to make a spark of a difference in these children's minds and heart and why wait until you get your own classroom full of 22 students; why not start now in our own community and make an impact with the one child we're working with?"

Despite the fact that the participants could easily identify some of the inherent challenges, such as having to devote extra time in the field ("even when we don't get paid"), they were able easily describe why SL was worth doing (Butin, 2003). They also had the opportunity to see, with their very own eyes, the uniqueness of each child and family they worked with – something that though they had read about it in textbooks, did not come to fruition until they worked with the children and families in the SL site one-on-one. This translation of research into practice proved to be key in their understanding of how to better serve the needs of the ELL they worked with (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005; Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2001).

Theme Two: Stepping into a teacher's shoes and feeling ownership of the learning taking place (or not)

Whereas teaching practicums allow teacher candidates to practice being teachers (e.g., creating a lesson plan and implementing it in someone else's classroom), the SL experience allowed them to actually step into the teacher's shoes and become responsible for these children's learning (Spencer, Cox-Petersen & Crawford, 2005). Leaving the 'I'm a student' and finally becoming the teacher was present in almost all blog entries, including the following one by Mary, a bilingual generalist:

> I have really found that this SL experience has really helped me to grow more as a mentor and educator. Therefore, I have to appreciate the learning experiences that have been provided by those that have set up the Children's Public Library. I think we all get something out of it. The students go there to learn and practice what they need more help on, and the mentors gain experience and knowledge teaching. Before this SL I wasn't really sure what to expect nor what to look forward to (final blog entry).

Not knowing "what to expect nor what to look forward to" was indicative of their transitioning from student to teacher - a step that was seen by many as an eye-opening experience. Interestingly, while they all felt prepared and had the background knowledge to work with diverse learners as a result of their coursework, the SL experience allowed them to see first-hand the different types of learning needs their students might have since the program served students from a variety of programs, backgrounds and academic needs.

> Academically I feel that every course I have taken has really helped me while doing this field experience. First of all, taking ESL and Bilingual classes has helped me understand and has given me different ideas as to how to approach various situations. I feel it is important to understand and have patience with the highly diverse population in schools. Most importantly I have learned that when we become teachers we too will be working with children like the ones we work with at [name of program]. It is more of an eye opener and it keeps us aware of the future and what is to be expected! (Lory, middle level candidate, final blog entry)

In the entries, the teacher candidates shared extensively how unique and different the needs of the children whom they served were, and how important it was for them to serve or work with more than one student at a time. As Rosario, a middle level candidate, stated,

> I too learned in the field that no two students are alike. Where I worked at I got to see how the students varied on their level of learning across the board. I liked having that

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experience because it will help me when I am planning my lessons to be conscious of this variation. I also learned some different strategies in the field that will help me to help the students work together while still getting all the help they individually need. I really liked being in the field because it gave me a chance to see all of the strategies and information in action.

Moreover, participants indicated that SL had given them the much-needed experience to work with all learners, including those who may not necessarily have these experiences as part of their teacher preparation program. As Yancy, a bilingual generalist, commented in one of the middle level candidates' posts:

By reading this blog I can tell that John is beginning to understand the needs of our immigrant population. I am not only happy for him, but also for the children he will be teaching since they will surely benefit from his experiences at this newcomer center. By observing and participating in this kind of environment he is taking a first-hand experience on the population that will be entering his classroom soon. I hope that all of the main stream and generalist future teachers get involved in programs like this so that they are more prepared and get to know the growing population of immigrants that will be coming into their future classrooms. Even though they may learn about immigrant children at the university, there is nothing better that observing and actually seeing it for themselves. I really hope that being involved in newcomer centers, bilingual classrooms and ESL programs becomes a requirement for all non-bilingual/ESL teachers because these children can also become part of their classrooms, and they can use all the help and experience they can get. By observations and prior preparation they will know what they need to prepare for, or at least have some knowledge of how to manage a classroom with children that have language needs and know how to help them.

Overall, the candidates felt that the SL opportunity allowed them to work with a broader population of students in a variety of contexts. Being out in the field also allowed them to experience the challenges faced by students in ways that resemble real classroom experiences. The sustained interactions between students and teacher candidates helped the latter group to build an understanding of what their needs were and develop rapport with students. All of these experiences, as they have been evidenced in the literature and in the excerpts above, have shown to equate to teacher efficacy, to better student outcomes, and to authentic connections with the community (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Moll & González, 2004) that may not be present when teacher candidates are seen as visitors in others' classrooms.

Theme Three: Connecting what was being learned about effective practices with research/actual practice while also providing a service to the community

Making connections between what teacher candidates were learning in the university classroom and at their SL site were as important as their work with the students. As was argued earlier, this is considered one of the many benefits of implementing SL as part of university instruction (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Gallini & Moely, 2003). Though one's hope for them is to make such connections effortlessly, doing so is not always achieved. As Louise, a middle level candidate, shared on one of her blog entries,

I think that we can read 100 books on how to teach a child or what we need to learn to be able to teach, but no one will ever know the meaning of teaching until they do it hands on and experience it. Teaching has to be done hands on and in an educational environment. So therefore, I believe that the outcome of going to the [program] is very positive after this experience.

For the participants, being able to see what they were learning in class applied in the SL placement made the experience more rewarding than they had thought, especially when they had spent numerous hours in the field, often times having to put personal responsibilities on the backburner to complete their required hours. As Javier stated in his final reflection,

"The experience at the Children's After School Program has provided me with the opportunity to spend time with real children who are struggling but who are trying really hard… The experience was great because I got to practice some of the things I was taught in my classes and you don't believe the results until you see them especially when you really put time into it."

Their application of content in their SL varied week by week, and some participants made more specific reference to such applications than others. For instance, one of the most important concepts teacher candidates seeking certification to teach ELL develop early on is the difference between conversational language (coined as 'Basic Interpersonal Conversational Skills or BICS) and academic language (known as 'Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency' or CALP) (see Cummins' (1979, 1981) body of work on this topic). Although developing an understanding of these two concepts is straightforward and rarely presents a challenge to teacher candidates, seeing these two concepts in action represents a critical step in their serving of ELL.

This past week in class we learned about language acquisition and proficiency. We also learned about linguistic competence. Well, being at the [program] I noticed very clearly the difference between BICS and CALPS. When I first started working with [name of student] he seemed very quiet and as if he didn't want to be there. When we began reading I watched him struggle to read. Reading for him is a challenge and I guess I can connect that to CALPS. He is learning to read academically and he doesn't quite have it yet. Then when we began playing the board game he really opened up and began to talk to me even more. Because it was fun and he didn't have to worry about anything academically, he was able to communicate with me. (I can connect this to BICS.) He had that social communication and that came natural to him. Learning the difference and how to differentiate this was learned in class and what is making this whole experience so, so worth it for me.

Furthermore, being able to model key concepts, processes, and strategies with the students themselves was a skill they also learned through their SL experience, and was one which they would need to know how to do before they began teaching in their own classroom. As both Roger and Amanda recall,

When Mariano and I were working on the vocabulary word search, I applied the "I do, we do, you do" strategy. First I would read the first word aloud and would repeat it. I would ask him if he knew what the word was. I had him watch me look for a word and

point to each letter first. Then I had him help me look for the word together. Finally I watched him look for the word on his own. I have to admit it went well! I really think this strategy is important because we need to model everything we teach to each student. As a teacher we need to make sure that they understand before we expect them to work and do it on their own and this experience helps me with this (Roger, blog entry 8).

I feel that going every week to Newcomer Program of the South is really helping me. I want to get more hands on practice with students and experience and this seems to be working out really good for me. I have learned that it is important to have visuals when teaching a student any concept. Teachers at school always tell us to remember to use many techniques to help children learn… I really tried using all of those strategies when I am at Newcomer Program of the South and they are working (Amanda, blog entry 6).

As has been shown, Teacher Candidates felt that they were able to move beyond what was learned in education classes and from textbooks. They were able to really see things as they occur in life – a teacher's life. Although these connections are made in the program and are seen in our face-to-face classes, often through rich examples, having a first-hand account of these concepts made the difference in these candidates' abilities to make connections (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Wurr & Hamilton, 2012). While some connections were more explicit than others (e.g., teacher candidate seeing the differences between academic and conversational language), candidates appreciated having had the opportunity to practice with methods, tools, and techniques with students. This 'practicing' helped many, like Amanda, to discern which strategies they needed to work on some more and which ones they felt comfortable with (Spencer, Cox-Petersen & Crawford, 2005).

Theme Four: Developing greater awareness of their roles as future teachers of diverse and ELL students in U.S. public schools.

Another prevalent theme in our data was how the SL experience had afforded them the opportunity to learn about themselves, about their future careers, and about their work (Ramaley, 2000; Simons & Cleary, 2006) with ELL, diverse students, and families.

Through the After School Program, I am learning a lot about myself and about children. I see myself in a classroom dealing with children of different capabilities and challenges and being able to help them and guide them through their learning makes me feel good, important, and they make me feel special (Yancy, bilingual generalist, fifth blog entry).

Interestingly, as the teacher candidates concluded their SL experience for the semester, they began to describe how participating in the SL initiative had allowed them to not only value what was provided in terms of instruction by their professors in their university classroom ("[SL experience] taught me that I need to really value the instruction my professors are providing me for they are strategies and concepts that are going to help me in my classroom."), but the contributions made by other educators in their own pathway to becoming teachers as well. Several provided examples of how they were able to learn about what "real teachers do in the classroom through seeing the work the children brought with them" (Tomas, bilingual generalist) and through working with the students, try to find ways in which they could either use or adapt such materials in their own classroom. Take, for instance, this blog exchange between two bilingual generalists, Maria and Jaime.

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…When we were helping Javier with his vocabulary words, we had so much time to expand his homework and do other things with these words. I think asking him to spell the words for us, and provide us examples of sentences using these words was not only helping him put words together but helped him understand the word meaning. Going to the Public Library Program is giving me ideas as to what teachers are teaching now and how they teach it to the students. For example I liked the vocabulary envelope that the teacher provided Javier with and I think I can use that idea in the future (Maria, original blog post).

Wow, sounds exciting!! I'm glad to hear that teachers are using great strategies as to sending vocabulary envelopes for homework. I really think that expanding the child's vocabulary will not only help him in the present but also in the future. Especially in in the upper grades where they will need to have a wider knowledge of vocabulary words because they will be expected to read to learn. Upper grades need more vocabulary, school becomes harder for students in the upper grades and that's because of the vocabulary. I'm really happy for you guys that went on a step further with this activity (Jaime, replying to Maria's post).

Their connecting 'old' with 'new' information in the context of the SL experience, such as their reference to the vocabulary envelopes mentioned above, validated what they had learned and seen at their SL site and what other teachers were doing already. Acknowledging also that they were not acting alone but rather as a team ("I'm really happy for you guys") proved to be another set of skills they learned, as they negotiated ways to support their SL site and the students even after the semester had ended.

I think that as a group of students we learned how to work as a team. We just started talking about how Newcomer Program of the South could keep going if the University students were the ones to create the lessons at least for the month of March. We all agreed to work in partners and create a lesson plan for each week. We talked about the lesson plan requirements; overall I learned that communication is the best in working as a group and in partners. This matters a lot as future teachers. We will have to work as groups. There will always be rules that we have to follow and there will be space for us to have opinions. I also enjoyed talking about what we needed to do. This helps us all to get along with others. I will also talk to my partner about my ideas and possible lesson plan possibilities. We will both come up with the best lesson plan for these precious toddlers. This is how we I will work, most likely, as a teacher and part of a grade team. (Thomas, middle level candidate, final reflection)

Throughout the semester, and especially the last weeks, the teacher candidates reflected on how the SL experience had given them a "leg-up" (Lorna, bilingual generalist) when it came to preparing them for their lives as teachers, as illustrated in the excerpt below written by Veronica,

I was very blessed to have worked with Miguel and grateful for this experience which has allowed me to grow as a person and has led me to understand who I am becoming as a teacher and what is left for me to do as I finally become a teacher on my own (Text in PowerPoint, slide #25, final project).

The process of "becoming a teacher" was indeed crucial. Candidate reflections centered on what was learned about themselves, their career, and their work (Ramaley, 2000; Simons & Cleary, 2006). As shown already, there was newfound value in what professors had said was important as evidenced in the examples they were able to see come to life when working with these students. Teacher candidates also got to see the worth in the contributions of others to their profession – including those that they, themselves, had made. Also, having the opportunity to collaborate and learn from their peers became so much more meaningful. Overall, candidates felt this experience gave them an edge when moving toward becoming a teacher.

Final Thoughts, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Our study adds to the benefits of incorporating SL for teacher candidates working in diverse communities, but especially those with large percentages of ELL and diverse families (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005; Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2001). The SL experiences proved to have given our teacher candidates not only with a meaningful and authentic experience in their communities, but they were able to see with their very own eyes how the learning taking place in the university classroom is important. Likewise, teacher candidates had the opportunity to work with other professionals to accomplish a shared a common goal– one that they would later found out was having an impact on their own path towards becoming future teachers (Gallini & Moely, 2003). As it was shown already, our data demonstrated that their weekly SL experience afforded them with opportunities to learn how to meet the needs of their future students by actually engaging in a variety of planned experiences. Teacher candidates were able to connect prior learning in their courses with what was happening in the field as they made use of their newly discovered skills (Farmer, Yue, & Brooks, 2008; Hungerford-Kresser, Wiggins & Amaro-Jiménez, 2011). Teacher candidates were also able to find meaning in what they were learning as they tried strategies among peers and with students before they had to do so in their own classrooms (Spencer, Cox-Petersen & Crawford, 2005). Teacher candidates were also given an unfiltered glimpse into what the needs of students in their communities were, and an opportunity to make changes to their instruction to be more accommodating to all of their needs.

Conducting this study has affirmed our belief on the importance of creating and fostering partnerships with community programs (Amaro-Jiménez, 2012). Because we see the positive changes that the SL experience provided to our soon-to-be teachers, we call on others to consider embedding SL experiences with ELL beyond that of the requirements that are already built into their coursework. This could be done gradually to ensure that rapport with community partners can be built while at the same time making sure that teacher candidates are having opportunities to apply what they learn in real contexts.

We also call for additional research projects to be conducted that can identify the impact that SL can have in a future teacher's trajectory, and the impact that such experiences can have as they move from being novices in the field to experts (Rogoff, 1990). These studies, regardless of methodology used, ought to take into consideration different kinds of settings (e.g., day program, after-school), programs (e.g., public program vs. private, organization), and frequency of visits/engagement to shed light on whether, for example, certain activities being implemented have more impact than others (e.g., student vs. instructor identified goals, closed- vs. open-ended

activities). Likewise, studies should take into consideration the varied personal and academic experiences teacher candidates bring with them as well as their standing in their path towards teacher certification. We also call on faculty to study the benefits/challenges and strengths/weaknesses related to them participating, engaging in, and planning for SL experiences (Wurr & Hamilton, 2012).

Ultimately, the goal should be to identify how these SL experiences can lead to better teachers, better student outcomes, and better programs that align not only research with practice but research and practice with what the needs in the community are. These studies as well as the work to be carried out at the SL sites can help ensure that teacher preparation programs are being responsive to the growing and ever changing needs in our communities. Likewise, this kind of work can also help inspire classroom teachers to incorporate aspects of SL into their own classroom teaching, as doing so will help build a cadre of 21st century citizens who not only understand the potential benefits that SL can provide to them, but to their communities as well.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Below we provide a set of lessons we have learned over the years about implementing SL with a variety of community partners and teacher candidates. These are not meant to be an all-inclusive list, but rather a set of starting points or recommendations that we believe may be helpful to those considering incorporating SL into their teacher preparation coursework.

Lesson #1: Identifying Community Partners. In our years doing SL work, we have discovered that one of the key components for the successful implementation of SL is to ensure that community partners are engaged in all aspects related to SL work - from assisting in the identification of needs (which we elaborate more on later) to the implementation and formative and summative evaluation of the projects. Equally important is to identify whom the key community partners will be, and making sure they have a role in the partnership. Some of these roles could include ensuring that the SL site always has the staffing needed, that the teacher candidates are clocking in and out when they are supposed to, and that additional connections to other programs could be made to leverage the supports or scaffolds available, among others. These community partners can also help to ensure that there is a commitment from those involved to implement the project or initiative from start to finish.

Lesson #2: Perceived needs vs. voiced needs. Once key partners are identified and roles are initially delineated (we say initially because they can change overtime), conversations need to take place to identify what the needs of the community partners as well as our teacher candidates are. These conversations are important as these needs may not necessarily be the same, and often times, different approaches can be taken to meet those needs. Those who are in the trenches often have a broader picture of what is needed and what resources (e.g., staffing, materials) can be used to accomplish whatever needs may be present.

Lesson #3: Set Small, Achievable Goals. Many needs will be identified during the conversations with community partners. Starting projects with small, measurable goals and objectives will ensure that these can come to fruition within the time allotted. For instance, while 'learning how to work with ELL' is a critical goal for all teacher candidates, this is one that will

require more than a semester worth of experiences and learning. However, setting a goal such as, 'implementing 3-5 student engagement strategies in the SL site,' is a goal that can be measured and observed. Goals/objectives set should be those that teacher candidates, community partners, and teacher preparation programs alike can plan for and see results during the time the project is being implemented.

Lesson #4: Mapping Activities. We believe that mapping activities in the SL site is crucial. Expecting teacher candidates to get to apply concepts at their SL site on their own will not likely occur unless there has been a careful mapping of what is to happen and when. A weekly calendar or map can provide direction about how time is organized at the SL sites and how activities are benefiting both students and teacher candidates. Doing this mapping has proven to also be helpful for us as professors, as one can see when concepts are expected to be introduced/reviewed and when these are also to be implemented by at the site. A course schedule can be used as a starting point. Likewise, should SL be implemented across courses and programs, mapping what courses offer SL as well as the scope of these projects can help with ensuring that all students have a variety of experiences before they are required to do so for certification purposes.

Lesson #5: Reflection. Having teacher candidates and those directly involved with the SL experience reflect on what has occurred as it is occurring is imperative. Regardless of the medium used to reflect (e.g., blog, interactive notebook) or the model of reflection being implemented (see e.g. DEAL model referenced earlier), teacher candidates and others need to have an opportunity to think about what they are seeing and what they are learning as events unfold and not just at the end of the course. Also, reflections need to be honest, descriptive, and reflective of what candidates think and feel as they engage in these activities. As one of our participants said, they need to feel comfortable to "wear our hearts on our sleeves" when describing their experiences. In fact, it is believed that SL without reflection is not SL, as argued by many (see e.g., Butin, 2003). Along these lines, we believe teacher candidates need to have the opportunity to talk about their reflections and what they have gained and get feedback – whether it be from their professor, peers or community partners. Reserving 5-10 minutes in class to share out loud or in small groups can help ensure that these experiences are being discussed on an ongoing basis.

Lesson #6: Connections. Faculty should take the time to not only read what students write in their reflections, but continuously make connections to what candidates are discussing (taking privacy issues in mind) in classroom conversations. Students need to also understand, like we showed earlier, that what they do matters and is making an impact regardless of how big that impact is. Many of our participants did not believe they were making an impact until someone thanked them for their work. Students' efforts in the SL site should thus be acknowledged and so should be their concerns, their struggles, and their gains.

Lesson #7: Be willing to make changes. We have learned of the importance of being open to making changes as the SL projects are underway, especially when there are so many moving parts to an effective SL experience. For instance, additional community partners or sites may be needed, additional activities may need to be planned, and materials which were once thought of as being available may not be there, and so on. Leaving room for these changes to occur, and being accepting of them, will demonstrate that the SL being provided is meant to accomplish

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three things: the betterment of the community as a whole, of our teacher candidates who enroll in our teacher preparation programs, and of the lives of those whom are being served through SL initiatives.

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About the Authors

Carla Amaro-Jiménez, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor of Bilingual/ESL Education at the University of Texas at Arlington. Her research has focused on identifying additive practices that can improve the educational outcomes of English learners and their families as well as practices that can create a K-16 pipeline for minority students, but especially Latina/o students.

Kim Winter, Ph.D., is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Education and Allied Professions at Western Carolina University. She is a former Associate Professor, Associate Chair, and Middle Level Program Director at the University of Texas at Arlington. Kim has taught elementary and middle school in both Texas and Indiana. Dr. Winter's research interests center around middle level education, teacher education, and the induction and retention of teachers.