Examining Pre-Service Teachers Emerging Understandings of Biliteracy Pedagogies
Carmen L. Medina & Maria P. Ghiso

Overview:
The demographics of Indiana have changed drastically in the last 20 years; with a 27% increase in the Latino population as compared to a 2% increase in the overall state population. This common settling trend in the Midwest of the country – as opposed to areas like New York or California, which have traditionally been home to immigrant communities – reflects a national development in immigration patterns (Census 2000). As a result, classrooms are now host to students who speak languages other than English, possess literacy skills in their native languages, and bring with them an array of cultural resources and community histories. One of the considerations for the university context is how to best support pre-service teachers in their familiarity with issues of bilingualism and biliteracy, the strengths and needs of multilingual student populations, and the implications for classroom practices and effective pedagogies. This study seeks to better understand what pre-service teachers know, want to know, and need to know about bilingualism and biliteracy, and gain insights about their learning processes through participation in curricular experiences related to biliteracy and bilingualism in a course in the Department of Literacy, Culture and Language Education. The findings of this study will inform how the elementary literacy program at IU specifically, and university education contexts more generally, can restructure curricula to address issues of language learning and biliteracy development and better prepare teachers for the rich diversity of 21st century schools.

Theoretical Background:
There is consensus in the educational literature about the need to better serve the growing English Language Learner (ELL) population across the nation (García, 2001; Darder, 1995; Gutierrez et al. 2000; Cummins, 1986; Flores, Tefft-Cousin & Diaz, 1991; Moll, 1988; Jimenez, 2004). Most pre-service teacher preparation programs which address the area of language and literacy acquisition approach the development of literacy skills with a focus on students whose first language is English. While we believe this is an important perspective, the reality of current demographics demands a more expansive view of literacy in teacher preparation that responds to the needs of a multilingual society.

In the educational research on teacher preparation and the development of effective pedagogical practices to work with students who come to elementary schools from backgrounds where English is not the dominant language, most research and teaching methods available focus on the preparation of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. A common perception has been that working with students who speak a language other than English is the responsibility of ESL teachers, but in recent years, perhaps driven by disaggregated student assessment data, there has been an increased effort to include mainstream teachers in developing inclusive language arts pedagogies for all students (Wright, 2006). There is a body of emerging research in the area of biliteracy development in elementary classrooms that provides windows into effective language arts practices that aim to develop more linguistically inclusive pedagogies (Franquiz, & de la Luz Reyes, 1998; Martínez-Roldán, 2003; McCarthey, 1997; Medina 2006; Medina & Campano, 2006). Organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education have taken active positions towards the need to better prepare elementary Language Arts teachers to work on multilingual contexts and the research literature points to the immediate and urgent need to include pedagogies that effectively prepare teachers on biliteracy development (García, 1991; Gomez, 1994; Halcón 2001). In a field where most teacher candidates are from European American monolingual backgrounds with little exposure to

1 We use the term “pre-service teachers” to make reference to IU students enrolled in the School of Education Teacher Preparation Program. The term will be used throughout the proposal to avoid confusion between “students” (children in schools) and “IU students” (pre-service teachers).
linguistic diversity, it is a major challenge to address this type of teacher preparation. Despite calls for more attention to this area, the field lacks studies that systematically document the process of preparing elementary pre-service teachers on biliteracy practices and the challenges embedded on this work. Furthermore, there is limited research that documents pre-service teachers’ beliefs and understandings of biliteracy pedagogies and their process of engagement in courses or curricula that address this area. Understanding pre-service teachers’ perspectives is crucial to supporting them in creating responsive classrooms for linguistically and culturally diverse student populations.

Currently, we have been involved in revising course curricula and leading faculty efforts in the department to include multilingual frameworks in the language arts cluster of courses, but additional data is needed to guide and document this process. Through this grant we aim to provide a unique perspective that can shape our own teacher preparation program and inform likeminded initiatives at other universities.

**Research Questions and Goals**

This proposed exploratory qualitative study (Erickson, 1986) aims to systematically document the process of preparing elementary teachers in the area of biliteracy and multilingual language arts in the Reading Methods II/Assessment course (E341) through a focus on their initial understandings and their engagement in curricular experiences that address linguistic diversity and biliteracy. We have designated three research phases (further detailed in the section that follows) which are grounded in the following questions:

- What are pre-service teachers’ understandings about biliteracy practices before entering their language arts methods courses?
- What are their perceptions and beliefs about the teaching linguistically diverse students?
- What challenges and areas of need do pre-service teachers identify with regards to biliteracy and linguistic diversity?
- What are their wishes for professional preparation in this area?
- How do pre-service teachers make sense of curricular experiences that address linguistic diversity through discussions, assignments, and interviews?
- What approaches do they perceive as effective or limited and why?
- What are the affordances and limitations of the curricular experiences?

**Methodology**

**Design:** This research is designed as a qualitative exploratory study (Erickson, 1986), a methodology which will allow us to document particular ongoing processes: pre-service teachers’ notions of biliteracy pedagogies – their emic perspectives – and the ways in which they grapple with curriculum content.

**Participants:** Participants will be pre-service students enrolled in the literacy cluster in the teacher preparation program at Indiana University. All students beginning the literacy cluster will be invited to respond to a survey that documents their initial understandings and beliefs about bilingualism and biliteracy. A subset of these respondents who are enrolled in the Reading Methods II/Assessment course (E341) will engage with multilingual language arts curricula.

**Data collection:** Grounded in a qualitative methods tradition and aiming for methodological and data triangulation (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), we will use a various data sources through out the three phases of this study.

---

2 The literacy cluster refers to the set of language arts methods courses arranged in sequences. This cluster is a requirement for education students.
Phase 1: Pre-service teachers’ initial understandings and beliefs (Aug. 2009 & Jan. 2010)
Research demonstrates the importance of considering teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about biliteracy in teaching multilingual and multicultural student populations (Nieto, 1999; Darder, 1997; Clark & Medina, 2000). Such research documents important qualities in teachers who honor biliteracy practices and those inform our study. On this inquiry, we seek to gain an emic perspective on the issues of bilingualism and biliteracy as understood by pre-service teachers enrolled in the IU Elementary Teacher Education program. Our initial activity consists of an open ended survey focusing on the pre-service beliefs and knowledge on the area of biliteracy and multilingual pedagogies. A survey will be administered to all students (#100+) at the beginning of the literacy cluster. In addition, using a purposeful random sampling, an open ended focus group interview will be conducted with a sample of 15 students to obtain an in-depth perspective of the questions proposed on the survey.

The second phase of the study involves documenting the process of implementing a curriculum that addresses the needs of linguistically diverse students. We chose the Advanced Reading Methods/Assessment course as a rich site for unpacking issues of language diversity because pre-service teachers have already had a background in language arts methods and have the opportunity to deepen their understandings, with a direct focus on ways of understanding and documenting elementary students’ progress in reading. This theme allows for direct attention to how language diversity – typically evaluated from deficit perspectives – can instead be a source of knowledge in the classroom.

This curriculum we will implement in the E341 course focuses on three areas that research has identified as significant in working with children whose first language is other than English: (1) the relationship between language development, identity, and culture (Barrera, 1992; Campano, 2007); pedagogical practices that support multilingualism and biliteracy; and (3) assessment of linguistically diverse students. We will engage the pre-service teachers in grappling with the connections of language to culture and identity through a series of curricular experiences that include: professional readings on linguistic diversity and biliteracy, multicultural and multilingual children’s literature and autobiographies of language learners, presentations, hands-on activities, and analyses of case studies of children whose speak a first language other than English and/or claim multiple languages, literacies, and identities. The case studies will provide openings for pre-service teachers to look closely at how children make sense of their experiences in learning language across cultural contexts and educational settings and the implications of these experiences to school participation and literacy development.

Our activities will model effective biliteracy pedagogies that honor students’ diversity and support additive learning rather than acquisition of English at the expense of the native language. We will include educational research and reflective activities that unpack classroom practices, and support pre-service teachers in concretely envisioning how they would structure language arts invitations for multilingual students. We will also share and explore assessment strategies that document bilingual students’ literacy development in the areas of reading, writing, and speaking, with attention to biliteracy and language diversity as a strength rather than a hindrance to acquisition of English. These tools will serve as opportunities for pre-service teachers to learn how to identify students’ language and literacy needs and devise curriculum that attends to them and also builds on students’ strengths.

The following data collection will allow us to document the students’ engagement with and responses to the multilingual and biliteracy curricular experiences:

Field notes: Written descriptions of classroom observations for the duration of the study will serve to develop a “picture” of what happens in the course, assist in identifying early themes, and pinpoint generative aspects further analysis.
Participants’ reflective journals: Pre-service teachers will be asked to keep written reflections on curriculum experiences, where they will note responses to activities, respond to prompts about their learning, and record ongoing questions and feedback.

Researcher reflective journals: These will record the researchers’ ongoing thinking, including emerging themes, notes for surveys and interviews, feedback from faculty, and curriculum adaptations for the course.

In order to capture the students’ responses and their participation within the course we will take photographs, videotape, and audiotape of all sessions.


We will administer an exit survey to those pre-service teachers who participated on the E341 course and its component on biliteracy curriculum development. The survey will enable us to gather the participants’ perceptions of what they learned and their insights on the effectiveness of the course content regarding biliteracy language arts pedagogies. Using a purposeful random sampling, an open ended focus group interview will be conducted with a sample of students (15 students). The purpose of the interviews will be to obtain an in-depth perspective of the questions proposed on the survey. This interview will also serve as a form of “member checking” for initial findings based on preliminary data analysis.

Data analysis

Our analysis process will entail open coding of themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to examine pre-service teachers’ responses across surveys, interviews and curriculum implementation. We will use axial coding to make connections between different data sources and check the integrity of emergent themes across the data; this will ensure internal validity and confirm connections and departures among the most relevant themes. We will examine emergent themes in relation to the participants’ initial understandings, responses to curriculum implementation, and content knowledge acquired throughout the activities.

Impact of the proposed study:

This work is well-positioned to impact the learning experiences of pre-service teachers in the teacher education program and the literacy cluster more specifically. Our findings will directly inform course revision, as the elementary literacy and language arts programs are currently in the midst of conversations regarding goals for infusing multilingualism and biliteracy throughout course offerings. We plan to share the results of this study with the instructors as part of a departmental workshop, including participant perspectives on biliteracy/multilingualism and specific pedagogical activities that proved fruitful for exploring these concepts. Our goals are also to disseminate the findings of this study at presentations for national conferences (NRC & NCTE). Fundamentally, this work seeks to support pre-service teachers at the local level in the important work of creating rich language and literacy learning opportunities for students that honor their histories and experiences. We hope that sharing the outcomes of this work may inspire others to do the same.

References:


Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In Merlin C. Wittrock (Eds.), Handbook of research on teaching (pp. 119-161). New York, Macmillan.


Exchanging Pre-Service Teachers' Emerging Understandings of Biliteracy Pedagogies
Carmen L. Medina & Maria P. Ghiso

Budget Statement
Following is a description of the budget to support the proposed study activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>A graduate student will assist in the process of conducting interviews, data management and analysis.</td>
<td>Hourly paid $8.00 X 5hrs a week = $40 a week X 25 weeks = $1,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Support Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage Materials</td>
<td>Cd’s, pen drives to store data</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription Services</td>
<td>To help in the process of transcribing audio recordings from interviews.</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Presentation</td>
<td>This will cover partial cost for a conference presentation at a national literacy conference such as National Council of Teachers of English or National Reading Conference</td>
<td>$900.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$2,500.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 We use the term “pre-service teachers” to make reference to IU students enrolled in the School of Education Teacher Preparation Program. The term will be used throughout the proposal to avoid confusion between “students” (children in schools) and “IU students” (pre-service teachers).