

CSOTTE 2013 – San Antonio, Texas  
*A Practitioner Research Exploration of Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Literacy and  
Biliteracy Development: Lessons Learned.*

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### **Background of the Problem**

- Our university prepares most of the bilingual teachers who will eventually teach in South Texas school districts, most of whom come from low-income families, with parents with less than 8 years of schooling.
- Improving teaching approaches to better prepare our bilingual pre-service teachers well in academic Spanish as well as literacy is a needed.
- There is a need of empirical research that explores the relationships between ethnic identity, teacher identity and teacher learning.

### **Research Goals**

- To identify preservice teachers' beliefs about literacy and biliteracy in the context of an undergraduate class focused on learning about emergent literacy teaching in the bilingual classroom.
- To identify strategies that provide challenging opportunities for candidates to explore and critically reflect on their cultural identity and beliefs to promote a situated understanding of their teaching role in developing early literacy and biliteracy.

### **Research Questions**

- What visions of literacy and biliteracy teaching are articulated by prospective teachers during a methods course?
- What types of learning experiences favor their understanding of literacy and biliteracy development?

### **Literature Review**

- Clark, Jackson & Prieto (2011) explain “the challenge of effective schooling for bilingual learners is not simply an issue of quantity of Latin@ teachers but about the quality of teachers' identities, pedagogies, philosophies, and sensibilities” (p.27).
- Research has confirmed the benefits of using and developing native language for conceptual, social and academic growth and the need to use it as a pedagogical resource (Cummins, 2007; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Thomas & Collier, 2012).
- However, preparing prospective teachers to work effectively with bilingual students remains an ongoing challenge for teacher educators.

### **Theoretical Framework**

- This study draws from a sociocultural approach to literacy and biliteracy development and teacher learning.
- Preservice teachers engage in literacy and biliteracy discursive practices positioned in sociocultural contexts. (Gee, 2008).
- Preservice teachers' identity is a product of their internalization (active interpretation and appropriation) of their own relationship and experience with the context in which they act and live (Smagorinsky et al., 2004).
- The social construction of identity is at the core of preservice teachers' beliefs about bilingual education, literacy instruction, and the role of culture in learning (Clark, et al., 2011).

## **Context**

- The University of Texas at Brownsville is located on the Texas-Mexico border and serves a predominantly Latino population of Mexican descent.
- UTB prepares most of the teachers who will teach elementary education and early childhood with teaching specializations in bilingual education and ESL in surrounding school districts.
- Most of UTB students define themselves as bilingual or second language learners of English.
- Students pursuing the baccalaureate degree program EC-6 Bilingual Generalist are required to take 9 credit hours corresponding to three courses taught in Spanish

## **Participants**

- Candidates for the EC-6 Bilingual Generalist Program
- Candidates who volunteered to participate in the study and were taking BILS 3310: Emergent Literacy in the Bilingual Classroom
- Preliminary results are drawn from data collected during Summer 2013 (N=23)

## **Methodology**

- Practitioner research design (Cochran- Smith & Lytle, 1999).
- Practitioner inquiry makes the work of teaching and learning public and open to the critique of a larger community.” (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman, & Pine, 2009, p. 9)
- Data Collected: a) Literacy autobiographies, b) Survey about literacy experiences and practices, c) Field placement observations reports and reflection, d) Final Reflective Questions

## **Preliminary Findings**

- Autobiographies and questionnaires indicate that preservice teachers believe they did not have meaningful learning opportunities to develop reading and writing skills in Spanish.
- Their schooling experience reinforced the idea of English as the dominant language of instruction which might relate to the fact that only three students chose Spanish as the language they prefer when a professor is explaining content.
- The belief system that supports their understanding of literacy and biliteracy development strongly rooted in their lived experiences. For instance, several students indicated that they learned to read through drilling exercises. Very few shared experiences of enjoying reading aloud times in the classroom.

Implications of preliminary findings indicate:

- a) The need to conceptualize learning within teacher education programs as shaped by belief systems and cultural and linguistic identities, through practices such as
  - a. Providing preservice teachers with tool for beliefs and identity exploration
  - b. Expanding preservice teachers multiple identities to augment their perspectives about others and themselves
  - c. Using life stories to understand self, context and decision-making.
- b) The relevance of integrating practices that foster the acquisition of academic dual language expertise so our teacher candidates develop the ability to learn and teach in both languages, such as:
  - a. Implementing practices that value students’ language background, its characteristics, and provide tools to create knowledge in both Spanish and English.
  - b. Avoiding a monoglossic ideology that treats each students’ language as separate and embracing dynamic bilingualism and a translanguaging pedagogy (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010).

- c) The characteristics and practices involved in creating a literacy and biliteracy discourse community (Gee, 2008) within a preservice teacher preparation program to foster academic achievement and teacher quality in South Texas.
  - a. Providing multiple opportunities for candidates to engage in meaningful conversations about literacy and biliteracy teaching and learning
  - b. Engaging in collective and reflective reading and writing practices to recognize the importance of theory and its role in the process of shaping identities and practices.

### References

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