Examining My Assessment Literacy Instruction Practices with Teacher Candidates

Mary Rice

Brigham Young University

Abstract

In this self-study, the author examines her teacher education practices in preparing teacher candidates to assess the literacy of English learners (ELs). According to Lee (2007), disciplinary literacy is essential to supporting students in becoming active in democratic pursuits. Conceptualizing literacy in this broader way for teacher candidates and then promoting the exclusive use of tools like fluency exercises and comprehension inventories for their classroom practice seems like a mixed message. The author identified three concepts from the course materials that she determined were important for teacher candidates to consider in assessing literacy development in ELs. These were (a) notions of ELs preexisting literacy in their native languages, in particularly in content area subject matter for curriculum-making, (b) fundamental understandings about second language acquisition, and (c) knowledge of measurement practices as an avenue for advocacy. These three ideas framed the literature reviewed for this study and positioned the author to use narrative accounts of her teaching as data which yielded findings.

Keywords: English learners, English learner literacy, assessment of English learners, language acquisition, ESL endorsement, ESL teacher preparation, advocacy

Mary Rice is a TELL faculty member at Brigham Young University. She has presented and published both nationally and internationally about improving the educational experiences of English learners, developing adolescent literate identities, and narrating teacher identities.

Email: mary.rice@nebo.edu

Introduction

English learners benefit from teachers who understand the importance of content knowledge in addition to pedagogical skills in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). To this end, many universities in countries with increasing immigrant populations are striving to provide programs for teacher candidates that develop these skills for working with immigrant children who speak a different language from the country's language of instruction. The university where I work is one such institution working to meet the demand for teachers who can work with language learning students effectively. My university offers an English as a Second Language endorsement to both elementary and secondary teacher candidates. This endorsement consists of six courses with both embedded and separate practica. One of the courses in this endorsement is called Assessment for Diverse Learners. In this course, teacher candidates frame knowledge about assessing students, particularly English learners (ELs) on a conceptual tool that proposes that effective assessments are useful for stakeholders, meaningful for purposes, and equitable for all. Another of the courses is called Developing Second Language Literacy. This course proposes curriculum guidelines for teachers that if followed are likely to result in the increased literacy skills of English learners. These guidelines are (a) teach to the text, (b) focus on academic vocabulary, (c) provide for broad and extensive reading, (d) support narrow reading of academic texts, and (e) use and produce both narrative and expository texts.

As I engaged in teaching these two courses, I realized that I had questions about how I merge the assessment principles with the curriculum guidelines to assist teacher candidates in coming to understandings about assessing the various literacy skills of the ELs that the teacher candidates eventually will work with when they enter classrooms to teach. These understandings are partly framed by my formal training in linguistics, assessment, literacy, and multicultural education. However, these understandings are also influenced by my personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) of the ELs that I work with as a classroom teacher in a public school junior high setting. Some of the teacher candidates come to work in my district and even my school, which makes my teaching of ELs and my preparation of teacher candidates highly public in a profession already characterized by publicity (Doyle, 1986).

My straddled positioning at both a university and public school causes me to have particular concern for attending to the literacy skills that are valued in school, although I am aware that there exists considerable literacies outside of it and can be brought in effectively through the careful work of both students and teachers. The purpose of this self-study was to use story to uncover my beliefs and the tensions surrounding those beliefs about preparing teacher candidates to assess the literacy of future ELs based on what I know as a scholar about ELs in general and my personal practical knowledge of ELs in my own classroom.

Extant Literature on Assessing English Learner Literacy

My initial search for literature describing *processes* for assessing the literacies of ELs did not result in published, peer-reviewed studies. Most of what I was able to uncover were practitioner pieces that did not differ much beyond the prevailing wisdom about literacy assessment in general. In looking at general literacy assessment, McKenna and Stahl (2008) compiled a book for practicing teachers that contains many validated assessments for reading instruction. There are also some tests, such as the Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey-Revised Letter-Word Identification test for Spanish (Woodcock, Muñoz-Sandoval, Ruef, & Alvarado (2005). There

are also tests of comprehension that have been translated into various languages, particularly Spanish (e.g., Cooter, Flynt, & Cooter, 2007). There are far fewer resources for languages other than Spanish available in the US. Overall, my search for literature did not yield results that focused on the unique literacy issues those children who are learning English in US schools will face and their teachers will have to grapple with while working with children who are learning the language of instruction and the subject matter while also moving the children's literacy forward. In addition, the types of assessments that are often available to teachers and from which teachers are granted credibility in asserting that the students have learned are often standardized, rather than authentic and individualized in nature, and therefore, have a generally narrow definition of both literacy and text. When I work with teacher candidates, I am explicit about the existence of broader definitions of literacy. According to Lee (2007), disciplinary literacy is essential to supporting students in becoming active in democratic pursuits. Young people should also have the opportunity to learn things they do not already know, but would like to, and to critique their own knowledge (Moje, 2008). Conceptualizing literacy in this broader way for teacher candidates and then promoting the exclusive use of tools like fluency exercises and comprehension inventories for their classroom practice seems like a mixed message. While I make teacher candidates aware of these tools and how they work, my desire is to focus more on how teachers can foster students' disciplinary literacy whether they are ELs or not.

With the constraint of disciplinary literacy in mind, my next strategy for uncovering professional literature about assessing ELs literacy brought me back to the course materials that I use when I instruct at my university. From looking at these materials and thinking about the typical ecological structures that operate in my classes, I identified three concepts from the course materials that I determined were important for teacher candidates to consider in assessing literacy development in ELs. These were (a) notions of ELs preexisting literacy in their native languages, in particularly in content area subject matter for curriculum-making, (b) fundamental understandings about second language acquisition, and (c) knowledge of measurement practices as an avenue for advocacy. These three ideas also frame the literature I reviewed for this study.

Content Knowledge and Curriculum Making

Content knowledge is not merely the ability to pass a content test (Berliner, 2005). Knowledge of content or subject is insufficient to qualify a teacher as effective (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Moreover, instructional skills are important for motivating students, which is a major issue in learning language (Mora & Grisham, 2001). Thus, teachers who understand both content and pedagogy may be better positioned to involve the students directly in the construction of a curriculum that attends to their Funds of Knowledge, which is essential for the success of multicultural students (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001), some of whom may be ELs. Student participation in the curriculum has been identified as a motivational factor in student learning, especially in tandem with other elements, like technology (Stornaiuolo, Hull, & Nelson, 2009).

One major expectation of the courses that I teach is that teacher candidates will develop a concept of themselves as curriculum makers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) who engage in a cycle of planning, teaching, and assessing the literacies of their students. Crossing the cultural and linguistic boundaries facing students and teachers in today's school climate is unlikely to occur when curriculum is not interrogated (Lue, 2003). The course that I teach was designed to open and re-open issues of instructional design as a basis for effective assessment of literacy, but

also as a place where ELs and teachers can engage in the identity-making processes that will be sustaining to them both (Yoon, 2007).

Second Language Acquisition Processes

Teachers who work with English learners need understandings about the process of second language acquisition (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Teachers with such knowledge can maximize their time with students in helping them to acquire forms of language on a trajectory that has been determined to be beneficial. Teachers with training in second language acquisition should also understand how long it takes to learn a language, the difference between academic and social language, and the link between language, culture, and identity (Antunez, 2002; Faltis, Arias, & Ramirez-Farin, 2010). All of these understandings help teachers manage motivation for students. These understandings also provide motivation for teachers to prioritize opportunities to use language in the social contexts that are their classrooms (Toohey, 2007).

The courses in the endorsement program that I teach all offer insights into language development processes, but there is one course, that was not the focus of this study, that exclusively lays out language acquisition as a cognitive, linguistic, and social-affective process. In both the assessment and literacy courses, I rely on the fact that students have already taken this course since the courses are to be taken in a recommended sequence and I often refer to the concepts from this course while working with the teacher candidates. These courses also stress the value of bilingualism, focusing on the research that suggests bilingualism promotes biliteracy through metalinguistic awareness (Hakuta & Diaz, 1985) and improves overall literacy outcomes (Snow, 1990).

Measurement Knowledge as a Tool of Advocacy

Teachers of ELs benefit from engaging in critical discourse around the theory behind assessments of literacy (Bruna, 2009). By understanding the power structures that lay alongside measurement in schools, teachers are positioned to be stronger advocates of fair assessment and performance reporting practices (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Practical knowledge of advocacy for diverse children is difficult to instill in teacher preparation programs in general because there is no site of practice or time commitment in teacher preparation sufficient to see growth (Buendia, 2000). Most research on advocacy in teacher education programs focuses on the study of programs and practices that help beginning teachers develop relationships with children and encourages them to start after school programs and clubs that appeal to ELs and diverse students in general (e.g. de Oliveira, Athanases, 2007). Through such practices, advocacy beyond the school day and in what Clandinin, et al., (2006) label *out of classroom space* opens. Preparing teacher candidates to be advocates is also made difficult by the fact that most candidates take an apolitical stance and seldom recognize either their opportunities to or responsibility for advocacy (LaRocco & Bruns, 2005).

The assessment course in the endorsement program that I teach speaks specifically to measurement knowledge and suggests that it is a tool of advocacy for teachers of ELs. The teacher candidates do not do heavy work in statistics, but the course does address issues of reliability and validity as well as confounding variables in second language acquisition that render many types of assessment inappropriate for ELs. The course also contains material about non-traditional, informal, and authentic assessment as alternatives to or in addition to traditional,

formal ones. Advocacy is a transcendent principle in this sequence of courses that lead to an English as a Second Language Endorsement. The authentic assessment information is framed specifically as a tool of advocacy. As I conducted this study, I was surprised by how many shifting beliefs I had about assessing the literacy of ELs as related to measurement as advocacy. These shifting beliefs revealed a tension between my desire for teacher candidates to take up an agenda of authentic literacy practice and my understanding that prescriptive practices are more highly valued when making placement and funding decisions in schools. In addition, teacher candidates are seldom aware that they will be required to recommend placement for students, some of whom are ELs and some of whom are not, based on assessment that is usually formal and standardized.

Methods Employed for Studying this Phenomenon

In collecting data for this study, I recorded incidences from my class that related to my research question across one semester of teaching the assessment course and one semester of the literacy course. I then compared these to previously recorded recollections from the amalgam of my previous experiences teaching both the assessment and literacy development courses. Many of these incidences were recognizable as stories to me because they fit a narrative model of character, narrator, and actor (Bal, 1997). Within the stories I collected, I was able to extract the beliefs that I was either directly stating or conveying indirectly about the assessment of the literacy skills of ELs. Besides collecting the stories, I also wrote memos of my personal reactions to the narratives as I was analyzing them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Three times during the semester I visited with the director of the endorsement program I teach in at the university for sessions of reliving and retelling the stories.

As I relived and retold the original stories, they began to move from field texts to research texts. It is from the process of reliving and retelling and evaluating that the emblematic narratives (Mishler, 1990) appear. To uncover the emblematic narratives, I began by listing and grouping the stories chronologically. Once the stories were arranged chronologically, I looked for pairs of narratives that represented my learning and the learning of the prospective teachers across temporal boundaries. I also matched the narratives around key ideas that I identified at the beginning of the semester.

Grouping and analyzing the narratives in this manner allowed me to answer my research question by allowing me to see the trajectory of my learning and that of the prospective teachers. While I was interested in what the teacher candidates in my class were producing in terms of assignments and discussion, I was more focused during this study on what the stories were revealing about how my beliefs emerged during the course of the semester.

I was also able to access my stories using a structure in a manner that revealed shifts in stories that could be seen across the zone of maximal contact (Bahktin, 1981) as the stories across the chronology came into contact with each other. The zone of maximal contact allows a multiple narratives to assemble, disassemble, and reassemble. Since both the beginnings and the endings of stories in general have a tendency to shift towards middles as narrative develops, the chronology was vital in arranging the stories to have a semblance of bounded-ness so that analysis could occur.

Findings from this Study

The findings of this study are unveiled by interfacing several narratives that emerged during the inquiry with an ad hoc review of the professional literature about preparing teachers to assess the literacy of English learners that I generated using the topics I extracted from the course materials. In this section, I return to the categories I first developed in my review of literature and then expound upon what I found myself saying to teacher candidates about these topics and how I revealed my beliefs to them narratively.

Content Knowledge and Curriculum Making

In a disciplinary literacy perspective, content knowledge is vital for helping students come into the literacy of the subject matter. One belief about content knowledge and curriculum making that I realized I had was that teachers with content knowledge and teacher training may be less likely to introduce misconceptions of content to students. During the classes that I teach, I have said that a student with stores of cultural capital may be more likely to overcome the effects of teacher-induced misconceptions because he or she has access to more arenas where the misconception will be corrected on multiple occasions. ELs, by contrast, may not have access to the same number of arenas or sources that would help them to reframe knowledge by holding what they have been told up against new or alternate information or making good judgments about what is more accurate. Therefore, I reasoned, that a misconception introduced to ELs may not have the same chance for that misconception to be mitigated.

As I introspected on this issue, I came to reason that I believe this about misconceptions because I think that those who are experts in subject matter care about their content to the point where they become very protective of it. As an English teacher by trade, I am fiercely protective of ideas about grammatical correctness and the importance of literary analysis. For some reason, I assume that others who have done university work in particular subjects would be equally as protective. In the end, this belief may not be entirely rational. One story told to substantiate this belief is a second hand account of a disagreement between scholars Jere Brophy and Walter Doyle. In this disagreement, which was collegial and lighthearted, Brophy was asserting that a teacher who taught her students that spiders were insects was not teaching at all. Doyle contested that she was teaching them; she was just teaching them wrong information. This narrative is not directly connected to the benefits of having expertise in subject matter. Rather, it is a story about the lack of expertise in subject matter, not pedagogical skill. Further, this story does not describe or even insinuate that students were ever hurt or that their literacy development was damaged when they were taught that spiders were insects. Maybe this misinformation never bore any relevance at all for any of these students. Even so, when I am advocating for subject matter expertise I often tell this story.

In my practice, I spent significant amounts of time trying to figure out ways to use the curriculum of lives (Clandinin, et. al., 2006) already operating in the class in designing activities. I find that I am constantly trying to interface my training in linguistics, English literature, geography, and reading and writing processes with what students seemed to be interested in. As I learn more about my areas of expertise, I find that I can link more closely to what the students reveal to me through their storied lives. For example, I work with ELs in my class on English phonemic awareness. I find that I can use the names of children in the class to generate examples for most (and sometimes all) of the sounds I need. I was unable to come up with this idea until I

learned more about phonology in my reading endorsement after I had been teaching for several years and after I had already had extensive coursework in linguistics. It was not teaching longer that brought me to the idea, nor was I ever told explicitly to use the children's names to build phonemic awareness. I merely thought of doing this after I had learned more about phonology and I had a disposition to try to use what the students bring with them to school. When the students learn to say everyone's names correctly, then they seem to acquire the ability to sort English sounds with greater facility than when I was using randomly generated words from practitioner workbooks. The students are also positioned socially to work with others in the class because they know each other's names. Although I tell this story often, it is not directly about content knowledge that I am try to foster in the teacher candidates in my classes. The students are learning phonemic awareness; they are not learning about phonemic awareness. In terms of being a classroom teacher to ELs, I was forced to think more carefully about the opportunities to develop disciplinary literacy as well as other types of literacy skills. If I am going to continue to tell stories in my work with teacher candidates, I need to find a story that more directly addresses subject matter knowledge as literacy and discover how to assess that knowledge within a disciplinary literacy agenda. Other stories that I have about subject matter knowledge tend to focus on missteps of other teachers who taught the children before me or who are currently teaching them in other subjects, which positions me against my colleagues. For these reasons, I avoid telling them. It is difficult to tell a story about myself because I am not aware of the gaps in my subject matter knowledge or I would attend to them. While I am certain that I have led students to misconceive concepts, I cannot recall any specific instances. Schultz (2010) noted this in her journalistic exploration of "wrongness," that is, that people often realize that they are wrong, but they cannot be specific about the circumstances of when, how, or why.

Second Language Acquisition Processes

During the semester that I conducted this study, I also found myself discussing the issue of topic knowledge in selecting text for ELs in particular ways. I believe that ELs are rarely presented with texts to read about which they have topic knowledge, and this is especially true when literacy skills are being assessed. To illustrate this gap, I often tell a story from one of my professors who was working to assess reading skills in children in New York. She found that many of the students had missed a question on the assessment in a text about a flag on a mailbox because, she explained, children in New York do not have large, separate mailboxes with flags; rather, since they live in multi-family housing units, their mail comes in small boxes that are placed in panels. The point of her story is that the reading assessment was not a valid measure of the skills of these children—who were not exclusively ELs—because it relied too heavily on them having conceptions of objects that they did not have.

In tandem with this belief about ELs' lack of certain topic knowledge is a belief that ELs' topic knowledge varies from their native English-speaking peers. This belief conflicts with one that I have about adolescents in general, and that is, by the time they are entering the teenage years, even if they live in the same community, their experiences vary to the extent that there is likely to be a broad spectrum of diverse topic knowledge within a class. Although I believe in the broad diversity of topic knowledge among adolescents, I believe that EL topic knowledge is both diverse and overlapping with their peers. Certainly when I have asked my own English learners to select topics they wish to learn about, they offer suggestions that look similar to what their native English speaking peers might generate (animals, money, Europe, disasters). Even so,

there seems to be a difference in what students want to know about and what their actual topic knowledge is for the subjects they show interest in. Indeed, I often story English learners who want to know about many things that they lack topic knowledge of. Is this a true narrative? Is this a deficit perspective? If I have ideas about the topics that ELs want to know more and I believe that they have topic knowledge that is merely different, why can I not seem to come up with topics about which I think they do or do not possess topic knowledge? In processing this question, I realized that I might believe that ELs come from such broad backgrounds since they are from so many different countries that such a list would be difficult to generate. I am unsettled by the realization that I believe that assessing English skills requires grammar and vocabulary as well as topic knowledge, but I am lost when it comes to really discussing topic knowledge—as important as I believe that it is to correctly assessing literacy.

Despite my inability to be specific about academic topic knowledge, I am often surprised by what ELs in my classes have general topic knowledge of and what they do not. For instance, in 2009 an English learner was humming a song in my class. When I listened closer to the tune, I recognized the song as “Remember the Time” by Michael Jackson, which is from his 1992 album *Dangerous*. I looked at this student and said, “Michael Jackson?” He shook his head and started singing the lyrics in English. Michael died in 2009 after this incident in my class, so the student knowing the song was not connected to the hype around Jackson’s death. When this student was in Mexico as a young boy, he and his family were listening to *Dangerous*—an album that came out before this boy was born. The student could tell me a good deal about who Michael Jackson was and what controversies he had been involved in as well as sign other songs that Jackson wrote. At the same time, this student did not know what *American Idol* was, which was a popular television show at that time in the geographical area in which I teach. Experiences like these around topic knowledge fascinate me. I have all kinds of questions about how to leverage knowledge about Michael Jackson and other such topics for the benefit of disciplinary literacy.

In my work with teacher candidates, I realized that they often rely on ELs to have greater topic knowledge about a wider range of subjects than they really do. This expectation gap causes them to design activities for ELs that hinge on under developed topic knowledge and fail in their practical experiences with students. The result of this failure is often discouragement for both the ELs and the teacher candidates. However, the time it takes to learn what topic knowledge children may have and then acquire sufficient knowledge, as a teacher to design educative lessons is often not available for practicum students due to the scheduling system at the university and the difficulties of maintaining partnerships with schools.

Measurement as a Tool of Advocacy

I wanted my course for teacher candidates to instill a desire to advocate for students, but I also wanted them to have information about assessment that would position them as competent professionals as they advocate. I also wanted them to see the advocacy opportunities in using their own assessments as evidence of student learning so that centralized high stakes tests would not be the only type of assessments on the school landscape (Whitehead, 2007).

The story that I often relate to the teacher candidates is about a school where a colleague of mine taught where they used a reading vocabulary test as a measure of when ELs should be released from direct English development services. This particular reading test was not validated as an exit assessment from EL services. Indeed, it was not even valid as a reading assessment of

EL literacy. I tell this story in order to talk about the importance of using assessment to make decisions, but test result data that are used for purposes other than those for which they are intended can disenfranchise children. It also speaks to the need to use multiple assessments and involve multiple stakeholders in placement decisions. For me, placement is an area where advocacy and assessment interface to produce either equity or inequity. In the case of the school using the reading vocabulary tests as the sole EL exit criteria, inequity resulted for ELs, as it is likely that some were released from direct English development services too soon and others too late. In addition, none of the children were assessed in ways that offered guidance for their continued improvement since the assessment was invalid.

From my own teaching experiences, I have also come to believe that although ELs are assessed frequently mostly in standardized ways, assessment results are often not reported to ELs, and this lack of reporting impairs their ability to advocate for themselves. In one instance, a boy moved into our school boundaries and he was placed in direct English services as per the advice he and his parents received when they enrolled him in our school. In conducting an initial reading inventory with this boy, I discovered that he read comparable to a student in grade 11, although he was in grade 9. He also did better than pass several other tests of English skill, yet he had been identified as a long-term ELs and had been placed in direct English development classes in every school that he had attended in the United States and his other classes were nearly all remedial in nature. When I showed him his scores, he was shocked. He had no idea that he could perform that well. I placed him in classes that were, based on my assessments, more commensurate with his abilities. Later in the year, the student moved again. I tried to give him materials that I thought he should personally have so that he could show his next school so that he could be further assessed by their staff or placed in classes that reflect what I determined were his exceptional academic abilities. I do not know what happened to him. I am left only with the hope that this boy went to a school where there is a teacher who has the knowledge, disposition, and skills to consider placement carefully using valid data and not preconceived notions of what highly mobile children are like as learners. While I have this hope, I also have the hope that his future teachers are able to assess this student and other children in ways that allow the children themselves to feel like they are learners who have literacy skills that go beyond standardized scores. Although I had conducted authentic assessments of this boy's learning, I chose to send the standardized data believing it would do the advocacy work that needed to be done efficiently since the boy had scored very high on the test. If he had not had such a high score, perhaps multiple lines of evidence would be needed to convince his new school of his competence.

The preceding story is not about disciplinary literacy directly, but it does illustrate that even when ELs have strong literacy skills, as measured by standardized tests, they do not always have access to chances to improve their disciplinary literacy in courses that meet their needs and capitalize on their strengths. In such cases, the school culture is often ready to blame the students' mobility or other student/family factors on these types of inappropriate placements. In an era touted as being data-driven and oriented around results (Schmoker, 1999) data does not always drive placement and it does not always lead to improved opportunities for students who have traditionally been marginalized. However, even school officials like myself who believe that a broader notion of literacy and assessment is necessary do not convey that belief in circumstances of uncertainty as students move and change schools.

Discussing the Significance of this Study

Many teacher educators, researchers, and practitioners are trying to design curriculum for school officials that attend to assessing the literacy needs of ELs in ways that can be supported by and reported with data while also collecting and using artifacts that are more authentic to make classroom level decisions about learning. I am one of those people. In conducting this study, I learned several things about the process that I engage in when I plan curriculum for teacher candidates. However, I was also positioned to reflect more critically on the sources of my own beliefs about assessing the literacy of English learners and then using what is learned from those assessments. Others with similar responsibilities to prepare teacher candidates to work with English learners may also find it necessary to consider the ideals of authentic assessment weighed against the realities of what is considered valid data for making decisions in schools. The question becomes one of constructing curriculum that takes both sides of this tension in account in explicit ways for the teacher candidates.

Learnings about Process

I learned two things about my curriculum making process for these courses. The first thing I learned is that I make great efforts to use the course materials I have been provided, but I also do a lot reading about the topics covered in a particular course based on my own scholarly interests. These interests often grow out of questions that I have as a still practicing teacher who is responsible for the ELs at my school.

I also learned that, while I believe everything to be accurate and valuable in my materials, I also have a sense that some information is more important for the teacher candidates to know before they start to work in schools and some information is better for teachers who are already practicing and therefore, have an immediate context of use. In deliberating about and determining the three areas that I focused on for this paper (content knowledge and curriculum making, second language acquisition processes, and measurement as a tool of advocacy), I realized that all three of these are topics that I believe are foundational ideas that should be addressed before teacher candidates spend significant, sustained time in schools. What I wonder about is whether other teacher educators in other ESL endorsement programs would agree with me. This wondering seems connected to a larger tension between what schools want new teachers to be able to know and do and how the academy thinks novices should be prepared. As colleges of education are taking increasing amounts of political heat for under-preparing teacher candidates, how will teacher educators manage the reality that their authority is limited after their students find jobs in schools working with children?

Learnings about Beliefs

My main learning about my beliefs about preparing teacher candidates to assess the literacy of English learners is that I come to these beliefs based not only on my academic preparation, but also on my own practice. While I am sure that it is common to derive beliefs about teaching from practice, my situation is unique in that since I am still teaching ELs in a public school, my beliefs are shifting in ways that are different from teacher educators who either never taught or who are no longer teaching children.

The various spaces in which I work with teacher candidates and English learners merge in various ways as I carry out my duties on both landscapes. Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) discussed space, place, and time using the metaphor of professional knowledge landscapes centering on school. Experiences on both of these landscapes can be conceived as plotlines that are influenced by many factors. Plotlines emerge around significant experiences that come to define beliefs about an event or phenomena. Although I work on two physically separate landscapes, emotionally and intellectually, these landscapes merge in ways that produce a plotline that revealed my beliefs to me about the assessment of ELs. To me, the two landscapes are rarely conceived of as separate spaces.

The concept of multiple learning and living spaces exists outside Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) work in narrative inquiry. Bhabha (1994), an influential post-colonial theorist, proposed the notion of multiple spaces in which societal interactions occur. Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo (2004) discuss Bhabha's notion in terms of literacy. They propose that there is place where literacies of home and community combine; this is called the first space. This first space merges with the literacies of school, which are the second space. The overlap of first space and second space is called the third space. Using this framework, there are always three spaces. In my study, it would be difficult to tell which space would receive which numerical designation. Whether using the notion of professional knowledge landscapes or third space, it is still difficult to disentangle entirely the spaces in which I enact my teaching practice for various populations of learners.

Since teacher educators come from a variety of backgrounds, with varying amounts and types of teaching experiences (Ducharme, 1993), it may make sense that they interpret those experiences differently, have different ideas about whether they should report their experiences to teacher candidates and when they do share, they relate these experiences in a variety of ways. What is now interesting to me is how the teacher candidates interface their own experiences and beliefs with that of their teacher educators to either reinforce or amend existing beliefs they bring to their teacher preparation (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995) along with their identities as being teachers already (Lay, Pinnegar, Reed, Wheeler, & Wilkes, 2005). As I come to understand the interactions between these beliefs, I wonder what my colleagues and I can do in terms of curriculum in order to account for or leverage them to improve their learning.

Finally, my beliefs about teaching ELs are heavily grounded in moral considerations. What I wonder is whether what I consider to be just moral beliefs are as self-evident as I previously considered them to be given the ways in which I problematized content, language, and measurement in this study. As I consider what may be absent in my self-proclaimed moral considerations about content knowledge, language acquisition, and assessment for advocacy, I wonder what other beliefs might I find out I have? How will these affect my own disciplinary literacy skills in teacher education? What other stories are there to tell?

References

- Antunez, B. (2002). *The preparation and professional development of teachers of English language learners*. Eric Digest Washington, DC: Eric Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education (ED477724).
- Bahktin, M. M. (1981). Epic and novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.) *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bahktin*. (pp. 3-40). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bal, M. (1997). *On narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative*, (2nd ed.). Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Berliner, D. C. (2005) The near impossibility of testing for teacher quality. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(3), 205–213.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bruna, K. (2009). Observing the cultural dialogue of English learner literacy: A standpoint perspective on an educational evaluation. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 32(2), 136-152.
- Buendia, D. (2000). Power and possibility: The construction of a pedagogical practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(4), 147-163.
- Bullough, B., & Gitlin, A. (1995). *Becoming a student of teaching: Methodology for exploring self and school context*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1995). *Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Clandinin, D. J., Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, M.S., Murray-Orr, A., Pearce, M., & Steeves, P. (2006). *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the interwoven lives of children and teachers*. London, England: Routledge.
- Cooter, R. B., Flynt, E. S., & Cooter, K.S. (2007). *Comprehensive reading inventory*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, Merrill, and Prentice-Hall.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000) Teacher quality and student achievement: a review of state policy evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1). Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1>.
- de Jong, E., & Harper, C. (2005). Preparing mainstream teachers for English-language learners: Is being a good teacher good enough? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(2), 101-124.

- de Oliveira, L.C., & Athanases, S. Z. (2007). Graduates' reports of advocating for English learners. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58 (3), 202-215.
- Doyle, W. (1986). Classroom organization and management. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 392-431). New York, NY: MacMillan.
- Ducharme, E.R. (1993). *The lives of teacher educators*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Faltis, C., Arias, M. B., Ramirez-Farin, F. (2010). Identifying relevant competencies for secondary teachers of English learners. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 33(3), 307-328.
- Hakuta, K., & Diaz, R. (1985). The relationship between bilingualism and cognitive ability: A critical discussion and some new longitudinal data. In K.E. Nelson (Ed.). *Childrens language* (Vol. 5, pp. 319-344). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- LaRocco, D. & Bruns, D. (2005). Advocacy is only a phone call away: Strategies to make a difference in behalf of children and their families, *Young Exceptional Children*, 8(4), 11-18.
- Lay, C. D., Pinnegar, S., Reed, M., Wheeler, E.Y., & Wilkes, C. (2005). The positioning of pre-service teacher candidates entering teacher education. In J. Brophy & S. Pinnegar, (Eds.), *Learning from research on teaching: Perspective, methodology, and representation* (pp. 235-252). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier.
- Lee, C. D. (2007). *Culture, literacy, and learning: Blooming in the midst of the whirlwind*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.
- Lue, M. (2003). A coat of many colors: Preparing teachers to meet the needs of learners in inclusive settings. Eric Document. Washington, DC: Eric Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education (ED476161).
- McKenna, M.C. & Stahl, K. A. (2008). *Assessment for reading instruction*, (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Mishler, E. (1990). Validation in inquiry-guided research: The role of exemplars in narrative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60, 415-442.
- Moje, E. B. (2008). Foregrounding the disciplines in secondary literacy teaching and learning: A call for change. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 52(2), 96-107.
- Moje, E. B., Ciechanowski, K. M., Kramer, K. E., Ellis, L., Carrillo, R., & Collazo, T. (2004). Working towards third space in content area literacy: An examination of everyday funds of knowledge and discourse. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39, 38-70.

- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D. and Gonzalez, N. (2001). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31 (2), 132-141.
- Mora, J., & Grisham, D. (2001). !What Deliches Tortillas!: Preparing Teachers for Literacy Instruction in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 28(4), 51-70.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pinnegar, S. & Hamilton, M.L. (2009). *Self-study of practice as a genre of qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice*. Springer: London, England.
- Schmoker, M. (1999). *Results: The key to continuous improvement*, (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schultz, K. (2010). *On being wrong: Adventures in the margin of error*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins.
- Snow, C. E. (1990). The development of definitional skill. *Journal of Child Language*, 17, 697-710.
- Stornaiuolo, A., Hull, G., & Nelson, M. (2009). Mobile texts and migrant audiences: rethinking literacy and assessment in a new media age. *Language Arts*, 86(5), 382-392.
- Toohey, K. (2007). Are the lights coming on? How can we tell? English language learners and literacy assessment. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 64(2), 249-268.
- Villegas, A., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally pesponsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1) 20-32.
- Whitehead, D. (2007). Literacy assessment practices: Moving from standardised to ecologically valid assessments in secondary schools. *Language and Education*, 21(5), 434-452.
- Woodcock, R.W., Muñoz-Sandoval, A.F., Ruef, M., & Alvarado, C. F. (2005).
- Yoon, B. (2007). Classroom teachers' understanding of the needs of English-language learners and the influence on the students' identities. *New Educator*, 3(3), 221-240.