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Educating Early Childhood Preservice Teachers about Dual Language Theory and Practices

Ana Solano-Campos, Maria Acevedo, and Patricia Paugh

Although the number of students classified as English language learners (ELLs) is the highest it's been in over a century (Wright, Boun, & García, 2015), most educators across the country lack the appropriate preparation to address ELLs' needs (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2016). As a result, many teachers are fearful or unsure about how to include literacy instruction in their curricula to affirm their students' multiple languages. In Massachusetts legislation, Dual Language Education (DLE) is increasingly visible in addressing the promise of rich literacy development for our youngest students. DLE is "an approach to developing language proficiency and literacy in English and a partner language" (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2019, para 2). DLE programs promote *additive bilingualism*, or "the opportunity [for students] to acquire a second language at no cost to their home language" (Hamayan, Genesee, & Cloud, 2013 as cited in Howard et al., 2018). Below we present the authors' efforts to introduce undergraduate and graduate early childhood education majors to the theories, practices, and opportunities available to children through DLE in order to challenge dominant deficit discourses and open new thinking about implementing additive bilingualism into school contexts.

Teaching Dual Language Learners

Historically, the public school system in the United States has sponsored a monoglossic orientation towards language, one that "assumes that legitimate linguistic practices are only those enacted by monolinguals" (García, 2009, p. 115). This has resulted in education policies and school spaces that typically require educators to teach only in English, discounting students' various linguistic repertoires as valid tools for learning. The pervasiveness of English-only ideolo-

gies is also present in most teacher preparation programs, where preservice educators seldom reflect the linguistic diversity of their students (Kibler & Roman, 2013) and are rarely required to take courses about how to nurture the bilingual and biliterate development of their students in mainstream, general education classrooms (Solano-Campos, Hopkins, & Quaynor, 2018).

The state of Massachusetts is an example of this. In stark contrast with its widespread reputation as a socially progressive and liberal state, until recently, Massachusetts had been one of the few states in the country that had eliminated, or highly restricted, bilingual education by law (Capetillo-Ponce, 2003). Since 2002, English-only legislation permeated education efforts across the state, with Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) being the state-mandated method¹ to educate emergent bilingual students in general education classrooms. The premise of SEI is that dual language learners, typically designated as English Language Learners (ELLs) must receive instruction in English that integrates both content and language instruction. Although SEI addressed issues of linguistic inequity in general education classrooms, where students would not have access to the curriculum otherwise, its focus on English alone also promotes subtractive bilingualism (Cummins, 1994), the process of home language loss that takes place when the dominant language is emphasized in school. As a result, even though teachers in Massachusetts are required to take a course that prepares them to implement SEI in their classrooms, over the years there has been widespread misinterpretation of the law and uncertainty about whether educators can use languages other than English in their classrooms to support their bilingual learners (they can), and to what extent.

In November 2017, after 15 years of English-only legislation and upon grassroots organizing and advocacy

by the Language Opportunity Coalition, the governor of Massachusetts signed into law the LOOK Act, which gives school communities the flexibility to use approaches other than SEI, including transitional bilingual education, one-way bilingual education, and two-way dual language education models. The law also supports adoption of the Seal of Biliteracy, a nationwide initiative that recognizes students who demonstrate proficiency in two languages by awarding a seal on their high school diploma. This renewed interest and support for bilingual education in Massachusetts echoes nationwide trends (Howard et al., 2018) and has important implications for the preparation of early childhood educators.

Teacher Preparation that Recognizes Children as Biliterate Beings

Expanding on Souto-Manning and Soon's (2018) description of young children as *literate beings*, we grounded our work on the understanding that young children from bilingual backgrounds are also *biliterate beings*. It is important at this point to make a distinction between the related terms *bilingual* and *biliterate*. We draw from Valdes's (n.d.) broad definition of bilingualism as "a common human condition that makes it possible for an individual to function, at some level, in more than one language" (para. 4). This definition positions bilingualism as a proficiency continuum across language domains (e.g. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) rather than as a degree of language proficiency in any one domain. The term *biliteracy* is used to refer specifically to "competencies in two **written** languages, developed to varying degrees, either simultaneously or successively" (our emphasis, Dworin, 2003, as cited in Reyes, 2006, p. 269). For Gort and Bauer (2012), "biliteracy must be understood as a special form of literacy that is distinct from the literacy experiences and processes of monolinguals" (p. 2). One important difference between the two is that young emergent bilinguals use bidirectionality: They draw from and across *all* their linguistic and cultural resources to construct understandings and practices about reading and writing (e.g., they use cross-linguistic spellings).

Unfortunately, even though additive bilingual models such as DLE are reported to significantly improve the academic performance of students typically identified as ELLs (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Diez & Karp, 2013), emergent bilingual children continue to experience and internalize linguisticism in schools. Linguicism refers to "a

process by which an unequal division of power is produced and maintained according to a division between groups on the basis of the language that they speak" (Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2003, p. 61). Because of this, we believe that preservice educators need opportunities to develop what Bartolomé (1994) calls political and ideological clarity, that is, an awareness of (a) the sociopolitical and economic realities shaping the education of bilingual learners, (b) the ways in which one's beliefs reflect and maintain oppressive conditions and linguistic dominant narratives in schools, and, finally, (c) one's capacity to transform those realities.

Teachers have a crucial role in building additive learning spaces to affirm their students' emergent biliteracy (Moll, Saez, & Dworin, 2001; Reyes, 2006). As such, preservice educators preparing to teach in early childhood and elementary settings need specialized knowledge about the unique yet multiple contexts and paths of early biliteracy development of emergent bilingual students. They also need opportunities to explore the out-of-school literacy experiences and funds of knowledge of dual language learners and their communities (Moll et al., 2001). Teacher preparation programs particularly have the vital task of cultivating spaces in which preservice educators can acquire knowledge and tools necessary to nurture and explicitly support young children's biliteracy journeys.

Drawing from principles of Linguistically Responsive Teaching (LRT; Lucas & Villegas, 2013), this article focuses on the role of teacher preparation in sustaining the biliterate identities and practices of young children. LRT outlines the areas and dimensions necessary to prepare teachers of dual language learners. The first area, *orientations*, includes three dimensions: sociolinguistic consciousness, value for language diversity, and inclination to advocate for dual language learners. The second area, *pedagogical knowledge*

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and skills, emphasizes four dimensions: strategies for learning about students' backgrounds, an understanding/ability to apply principles of second language acquisition, the ability to identify the language demands of classrooms tasks, and a repertoire of strategies for scaffolding instruction for students. We highlight the importance of preparing educators who can apply knowledge and skills across these areas to teach and advocate for emergent biliterate learners.

Creating Spaces to Explore Dual Language Education

Our public university's commitment and ongoing mission to support educational access and equity is widely recognized. The undergraduate student body is one of the most ethnically diverse in an area with many higher education institutions. A college fact website ranks the diversity of our students as 88 out of 2,718 campuses nationwide,¹ and a recent report sponsored by the Ford Foundation commended it as one of the top public four-year universities in serving Black students (Harper & Simmons, 2019). Students in the courses taught by the three faculty authors demonstrate a range of ages and life stories. A great proportion of our students work part- or full-time while completing their degrees. Some are parents themselves. Some are graduates of the urban school district that surrounds the campus. A few of our students identify as biracial. Some are bilingual or come from families where the primary language is not English. Primary languages found among our students include Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Farsi, Haitian-Creole, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Japanese. Other students identify as White, English-dominant, fitting the dominant demographic for teacher candidates nationally (Taie & Goldring, 2018).

Over the years, we have noticed that many prospective educators in our teacher preparation programs, despite their backgrounds, are unaware or unclear about the benefits of bilingual and biliteracy development. Students entering our language and literacy courses typically have not examined the arguments for English-dominant or English-only education. With this in mind, in Fall 2017, we designed a workshop titled "The Promise of Dual Language Education in our Public Schools" for our preservice early childhood and elementary educators. The 52 preservice teachers who attended the workshop were our undergraduate and graduate students in three different language and literacy methods courses. The three authors, all women, were instructors in these classes. The first two authors are Latinx Spanish-

English bilinguals, one Costa Rican and the other Puerto Rican. The third author is a White English speaker raised in the US Northeast.

The Promise of Dual Language Education: The Workshop

Linguistically Responsive Teaching holds that teachers' orientations towards bilingualism and biliteracy are as necessary as their pedagogical repertoires. Based on our observations about students' unfamiliarity with the realities, opportunities, and benefits of dual language education, the workshop had two main components: a panel and a literature-based engagement activity. To introduce our students to dual language education on a local level, we invited five guest speakers: a policy activist from the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, who discussed current legislation about bilingual education, and four teachers from two K-8 dual language schools, two of whom had graduated from our university teacher education program. We created a few questions for the panelists, such as: How did you get involved in dual language education? What is your role currently? Why does this work matter to you, to us, to children and families, to society? We also invited students to ask their own questions. Through personal narrative, the panelists addressed issues around politics and law, advocacy, and teaching. Their voices created a bridge between theory and practice, as well as between the university and the school context.

The second component of the workshop was an investigative discussion to deconstruct a picture book focused on the value of multilingualism, with the goal of kindling ideas among the preservice teachers about supporting dual language development amongst their own current and future students. We chose a multicultural children's book as a means for inquiring about different perspectives or stories that have been historically silenced, disregarded, and misrepresented by the dominant European American culture (Short et al., Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2018).

We selected *My Name Is Yoon*, by Helen Recorvits. Originally published in 2003, this story describes the experiences of a young Korean child, who recently moved to the United States with her family. This is one of the few children's books that explicitly addresses the experience of learning a new language as part of an immigration journey, and while it has been around for over a decade, and has received some critique (Fahmi, 2016), it offered a platform for considering the classroom contexts in which

our candidates are preparing to teach. Specifically, the story provided a window through which to examine and challenge processes of linguistic assimilation and linguisticism that students experience in schools. The story allowed the teacher candidates to address and reflect on: (1) multiple perspectives regarding Yoon’s experience, (2) orientations toward linguistically responsive teaching, and (3) the creation of classrooms that might deepen and build on young children’s knowledge about languages.

After listening to a read-aloud of *My Name Is Yoon*, the preservice teachers reflected on the following questions: What does the story make you think of? What does the story make you feel? In order to move from personal connections to in-depth conversations fostering critical thinking, they also considered the following questions: Why are names important in a child’s life? How do the different characters respond to Yoon’s move to the US? How could a dual language classroom welcome the linguistic experiences of Yoon and her family? If Yoon was in your classroom, what would you do?

Following the in-depth conversations, the participants considered how they might revise their classroom context from one of the perspectives in the story: Yoon, mother, father, teacher, and the classmate (a female character with no name in the narrative). Each group was asked to take up a specific character’s perspective and create a Haiku poem³ and read their poem to the whole audience. We closed the workshop by sharing resources from the National Education Association with steps to advocate for English language learners.

Preservice Teachers’ Orientations before and after Workshop

In a class prior to the workshop, we asked students to brainstorm and submit questions for the panel. We then asked them to complete a pre- and post-workshop questionnaire. The pre-workshop questions prompted participants to reflect on what they knew or thought they knew about Dual Language Education. After the workshop, we asked them to share their takeaways.

Keeping the criteria for LRT in mind, we noted patterns in both the questions and the questionnaire responses. We sorted the responses based on respondents’ self-identification as monolingual, multilingual, and/or monolingual with multilingual family backgrounds. Following the workshop, we also anecdotally recorded any

repercussions from the workshop experience that appeared in class sessions and assignments.

Before the Workshop

In their comments before the workshop, preservice teachers indicated (1) limited awareness about dual language, (2) tensions around DL education, and (3) views on the role of the teacher. We describe each of these below.

LIMITED AWARENESS ABOUT DUAL LANGUAGE

The comments in this first category confirmed our expectations about preservice teachers’ limited knowledge and experiences with settings where instruction in dual language is the goal (as opposed to teaching English to non-English speakers). For example, one preservice teacher noted, “I’ve never observed a DLL classroom. I actually learned about it [DL education] for the first time this year.” Another student shared, “I am bilingual, but I don’t know much about dual language education in a school setting.” This student knew what it meant to be bilingual from personal experience, but she was unfamiliar with the concept of dual language education as a teaching tool in formal school contexts. It is important to note that teachers in Massachusetts

are not required to take courses on bilingualism or biliteracy, only on SEI, an issue that is also widespread nationwide and that has resulted in a shortage of teachers qualified to teach bilingual learners (Eaton, 2012; Liebttag & Haugen, 2015; Rivera, 2002). As prospective teachers come into teacher preparation programs that continue to neglect issues of bilingualism/biliteracy, they in turn continue to replicate the existing dominant view of monolingualism as the norm because of their lack of knowledge about alternatives to monolingualism.

TENSIONS AROUND DUAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Even though participants may have been unfamiliar with dual language settings, they were aware of tensions between deficit- and asset-based views about bilinguals. In their

How could a dual language classroom welcome the linguistic experiences of Yoon and her family? If Yoon was in your classroom, what would you do?

comments, they pointed out common assumptions about dual language learners while at the same time interrogating those assumptions. For example, participants highlighted that even though bilingual children are perceived as “lagging behind” or being “developmentally delayed,” home language is the foundation for second language and helps their brain/cognitive development. One participant mentioned that dual language education is “fair” while another shared, “DL is more than just teaching language, it teaches the importance of other cultures.” Participants also noted the risk of language loss that dual language students experience in monolingual settings. Overall, comments showed preservice teachers’ awareness of tensions around DL, especially those that might directly affect their future students by creating or maintaining labels or language disconnection at home. Their comments however focused on the student level and did not explicitly address how the labeling of bilingual learners as “deficient” is manufactured by the same educational structures that created barriers to their linguistic access and participation in the first place.

VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Participants showed an awareness of the centrality of teachers in providing instruction, resources, and parental engagement to support the biliteracy of their students. Some argued for the importance of “intentionality” in implementing dual language education. Others described specific curricular strategies to support dual and multilingual learners, such as teachers’ “need to incorporate books and materials in more than one language.” One participant highlighted the role of teachers in educating families about the benefits and strengths of knowing more than one language: “Parents who want their children to learn English are afraid of DL education, [so it is] important for teachers and schools to encourage these parents.” This comment speaks strongly about the

systemic changes that need to take place to truly support dual language learners, a collective effort that teachers and families can support and lead.

After the Workshop

We identified three categories in participants’ comments after the workshop: (1) the promise of many languages, (2) intention to advocate for bilingualism, and (3) tensions between home and dominant linguistic capital. Below, we discuss each of these categories in detail.

THE PROMISE OF MANY LANGUAGES

This category showed participants’ awareness about the role that knowing more than one language plays in the real interconnected world that children inhabit. Participants’ comments concentrated on children’s futures and cultural pride: “[DLL] creates new windows for their [children’s] futures as bilingual adults” and “encourages children to use their language and feel proud of their language.” Other participants moved from the benefits to the individual child in considering the opportunities to the broader society, highlighting that languages can “encourage children to connect with more people in the community. Connection makes people content.” While some participants looked broadly at connections, others deepened this line of thinking by arguing that dual language education can “expand children’s minds and hearts to accept and integrate. . . . people in our country. . . . To think that our country does not rely on other cultures . . . is ignorance” and “to integrate more dual language development would benefit more acceptance.” These comments bring together the importance of knowing languages as ways to connect to people, but also to better understand self, and self in relationship to the world. For instance, one preservice teacher noted, “having a child learn more than one language should be ideal. Even if the parent isn’t bilingual, society is!” The comments strongly suggest an asset perspective toward children as language users and members of linguistic communities, rather than just children as students learning language as a content area.

INTENTION TO ADVOCATE FOR BILINGUALISM

With an increased awareness of the promise of many languages, participants in our seminar referred to their roles as advocates for bilingual development for themselves and for those they care deeply about. Participants in our seminar referred to being and/or becoming bilingual as something

they have come to really value for themselves and for those they care about. One participant described the value of bilingualism for herself and her son: “The idea that children can be educated is more important than I thought! I have a son who speaks Spanish and some words in English. After this workshop, I am very sure to continue to talk with my son at all times . . . this time I’m glad to speak more than one language and can help children and families.” This participant had underestimated the potential of her own bilingual identity. The workshop supported her in seeing the promises of being bilingual for herself, her son, and her future students. Participants whose prior experiences were shaped by subtractive bilingualism planned to advocate for a bilingual/multilingual future for their students:

I wish my father taught me Spanish when I was younger and continued to do it as I grew up. My mother would speak to me in Spanish based off how much she knew, and I can understand what she used on a regular basis. . . . Once I have children I plan on them learning a few languages.

In a similar vein, another participant explained that truly valuing bilingualism and multilingualism in our society will require changes in our thought collective (Fleck, 1935), not just at the individual level:

Those who are fortunate enough to learn multiple languages at a young age have been given a great gift. . . . There needs to be a shift in our collective mindset so that dual language learning is seen as a valuable asset to learning in general rather than an obstacle to be surmounted.

Valuing something is seen as conducive to action. The preservice teachers’ comments reflect reconsideration that includes past experiences, as well as new understandings, leading to increased urgency in promoting multilingual education.

TENSIONS BETWEEN HOME AND DOMINANT LINGUISTIC CAPITAL

Participants recognized that students’ home languages are not obstacles to academic success. For example, one preservice teacher mentioned, “you don’t have to lose your language to learn.” However, they pointed out the dilemma of affirming students’ home languages while also providing them with the linguistic tools to be able to participate in society. In this regard, one participant remarked, “English is the universal

language.” Other preservice teachers took the opportunity to reflect upon their roles as teachers in addressing challenges when partnering with families to support children in becoming bilingual/multilingual:

I would be interested in teaching Spanish, sign language (after I learn myself), and English to my students. But how would parents react? I know I would be content for my children to learn more languages than I, but how would other parents take that? That is why we need to show how important learning a language really is.

Another participant echoed this concern when she shared that “parents often don’t want the educators of the child teaching them a new language because they think it will confuse them, but it doesn’t. This is where misunderstandings come. Children all have the ability to learn a new language.” These comments show that teacher candidates processed previously unexamined beliefs with new information in ways that they considered their challenges as advocates for the child *and* for the family. They see the importance of supporting families in broadening and deepening their understandings about the development and acquisition of more than one language in order to truly support bilingual and multilingual learners in their classrooms. Broadening the scope to include families suggests that in supporting our teacher candidates’ orientations toward multilingual and multiliteracy instruction, we must provide tools grounded in a broader “collective mindset” (beyond the classroom) that understands, values, and acts upon multiple languages as the norm, rather than the barrier.

Teaching Implications and Final Thoughts

This article described a workshop that was created to support teacher candidates in early childhood education as they explored the theory, practices, and opportunities of dual language education. Our main purpose for this workshop was to develop teacher candidates’ orientations for Linguistically Responsive Teaching (Lucas & Villegas, 2013) and ideological/political clarity (Bartolome, 1994). The workshop consisted of a panel with experts on dual language education, followed by a literature-based experience.

The teacher candidates’ responses before and after the workshop showed the development of new awareness around the concept of dual language education, as well as reflections that led to plans for action in the home and school contexts. Participants communicated a desire to advocate

for bilingualism and multilingualism for all children, and for society in general, rather than only for the child or family identified as part of the bilingual/multilingual community. The responses also indicated a need for spaces in which preservice teachers can learn strategies to negotiate local and global demands for English, while affirming students' home languages.

As instructors, we expanded these orientations with a series of classroom engagements to continue supporting preservice teachers' inquiries:

1. Bilingual Children's Literature: Students browsed bilingual books in Spanish/English, Haitian Creole/English, Korean/English, Vietnamese/English, and Portuguese/English. The browsing encouraged conversations around linguistic dialects in Haitian Creole and pragmatics for Haitian Creole speakers.
2. Storying around experiences with multiple languages. These conversations explored compelling narratives around coming to the United States and learning English as a second language, which for some resulted in losing their first language.
3. Exploring Farsi to challenge single stories around concepts of print for multilingual learners. This initial exploration was facilitated by an Iranian preservice teacher who shared commonalities and differences between Farsi and English.
4. Exploring classroom strategies to support dual language learners during read-aloud sessions. The strategies included picture walk, reading the English and the Spanish version of the book, dramatization, selecting repetitive phrases, and exploring the ideas of the story through multiple learning centers in the classroom, among others (Gillanders & Castro, 2011).

Because the study of dual language and bilingualism is not typically prioritized in the preparation of general education teachers, teacher educators, like ourselves, are tasked to find alternative avenues to bridge these topics with prospective educators. This workshop, and expanded classroom activities, put multiple resources such as policy information, viewpoints from local activists and Dual Language educators, and multilingual children's literature into relationship with preservice teachers' experiences toward that end.

Notes

1. Two-Way Immersion programs were exempted from those restrictions in response to a waiver request from bilingual education advocates (Diez & Karp, 2013).
2. The university website lists ethnicity demographics at: 34.1% White, 15.9% African American, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 12.4% Asian, 12.2% Non-resident alien, and 11.1% Other.
3. Haiku is an ancient form of Japanese poetry with a three-line, 5-7-5 syllable structure. Workshop leaders chose this as an instructional device through which the small groups would reflect and summarize one perspective. Haikus are not Korean and do not match Yoon's background. Our intent was not to conflate Korean and Japanese cultures but to provide a linguistic device that draws from the economy of words to evoke the essence of an issue or experience. ●

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