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“The Soccer Field, It Has Dirt”: A Critical Analysis of Teacher Learners in Contact With Emergent Multilingual Students

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Abstract

In today’s globalized world, superdiversity and global migration have led to an increased focus on emergent multilingual students and how schools can best serve them. The authors explore how teacher learners in an undergraduate course on emergent multilinguals in a mid-sized university in the Midwest critically reflect on their learning in a practicum experience. Utilizing tools and perspectives from critical discourse studies (CDS), the researchers/teacher educators examine ideologies that surface in teacher learner reflections on their practicum experiences to find out how they renegotiate (or withhold) their beliefs while connecting to critical readings, coursework, and their experiences working with emergent multilingual students. Findings reveal ethnocentrism, gaps in understanding of language practices, continued misconceptions about language learning, and ideologies that view languages other than English as a privilege. However, findings also show some areas of growth resulting from their participation in the teacher education program. The authors then provide suggestions for further improvement of teacher education courses focused on emergent multilinguals.

In today’s globalized world, increased migration that began in the early 1990s has led to superdiversity, which is characterized by an increase in different types of migrants that vary in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, reasons, and patterns of migration (Vertovec, 2007). Because of such considerable demographic changes, those in the educational realm have recently begun to realize that most teachers will at some point in their careers work with emergent multilingual students. As such, most teacher preparation programs now have some type of focus on culturally and linguistically diverse learners. However, although focus on teacher preparation for teaching with emergent multilinguals is laudable, and the university program described in
this article has been recently developed and revised to accommodate for new ways of thinking about these learners, we three teacher educators in this field see a need to step back and examine student experiences and teacher education program outcomes in the hopes of informing not only ourselves, but also other teacher educators, researchers, and scholars in the field.

Within the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages, recent critical work is known for challenging conventional conceptions of language teaching, which include perceptions of languages as separate, fixed, and monolithic entities (Kubota & Lehner, 2004) and the idea that languages other than English are an obstacle to learning rather than a resource that students should be encouraged to utilize. However, as noted by Hawkins and Norton (2009), it is difficult to find accounts of “critical language teacher education practices” (as cited in Nuske, 2015, p. 285) that actually counter prevailing language ideologies and outcomes of these efforts. Hence, the present article aligns with Nuske’s call for more studies that examine critical work regarding teacher learners and emergent multilingual students. To do so, we explore reflective assignments from undergraduate teacher learners in a midsize Midwestern university in the United States who were enrolled in a course with a practicum component that was designed to put them in contact with emergent multilinguals. Through a critical analysis of their reflective assignments, we describe teacher learners’ perceptions of emergent multilinguals and the way in which they learn through their experiences with these students. In addition, by utilizing tools and perspectives from the field of CDS (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), we identify the ideologies about language and emergent multilinguals that still prevail in teacher learners due to dominant language ideologies and the political climate in the region of study, despite critical work to counter them.

Theoretical framework

Teacher learner ideologies or misconceptions of emergent multilinguals

According to Palmer (2011), ideologies are “beliefs held as truths, most often unconsciously” (p. 104). These ideologies can be directly stated as beliefs or revealed in practices and because they are generally linked to people in power they often distort reality in their favor (Palmer, 2011). Palmer defined language ideologies as people’s “unconscious beliefs about language” (p. 105), which are closely tied to cultural identities as well as group and national politics (Anzaldúa, 1987; Irvine & Gal, 2000). When teacher learners, such as those in the present study, engage in reflection about their practice related to emergent multilinguals, they simultaneously display “their beliefs about the nature, function, and purpose of language” and “index ideologies of learning (including language learning) and student identity” (Razar, 2012, p. 63). Taking a language ideology perspective when examining teacher learner reflections (cf. Razar, 2012), we
assume the link between language use of the teacher learners and broader institutional or historical practices and values (Kroskrity, 2010).

Much research in the field has identified teacher (and teacher learner) beliefs about emergent multilinguals. Findings from this research reveal that beliefs about teaching and language come from the cultural worlds in which teacher learners were embedded and are co-constructed through interactions in a dialogic relation that is reflected in their teaching practices (Bakhtin, 1998; Varghese, 2008). Moreover, teachers’ unconscious ideologies about language can influence the kinds of learning they make available for their emergent multilingual students (Palmer, 2011) as well as their perceptions and judgments, which affect student behavior (Rueda & Garcia, 1996). Similarly, teachers’ attitudes toward emergent multilinguals affect classroom interactions, which then affects their academic achievement (Mantero & McVicker, 2006), and teacher confidence in their ability to work with ELLs can affect student motivation and performance (Karabenick & Noda, 2004).

We have now established that teacher (learner) beliefs such as language ideologies play an important role in educational practice, but what are these beliefs or misconceptions? According to Harper and Jong (2004), teachers often believe that exposure to English will immediately result in additional language learning, all English language learners (ELLs) learn the same way at the same rate, teaching strategies for ELLs is just good teaching, good teaching for native speakers is good for ELLs, and effective instruction means only nonverbal support. Reeves (2006) found that teachers mistakenly believed that use of a native language in the classroom interferes with acquisition of English and students should be able to acquire English within two years of coming to the United States. In comparison, research shows it takes from five to eight years to acquire academic English, and from one to three years to acquire conversational language. In addition, teachers mistakenly believed that use of a first language at home interferes with learning a second language (Reeves, 2006) and that teachers need to make curriculum easier (Pettit, 2011) instead of figuring out ways to make the content comprehensible. Pettit also found that teachers who spoke languages other than English or had more training in working with ELLs had more positive attitudes toward these students and more direct contact with ELLs resulted in teachers having more positive beliefs about them. Byrnes, Kiger, and Manning (1997) found that teacher beliefs were affected by the region of the country they lived or worked in. However, the most consistent factor (according to Pettit, 2011) in influencing teacher beliefs was teacher training.

Given these findings, it is important to understand how teacher beliefs can be changed in teacher education programs. Kagan (1992) argued that good programs require teacher learners to make their pre-existing personal beliefs explicit, challenge the adequacy of those beliefs, and give novices “extended opportunities to examine, elaborate, and integrate new information into their existing belief systems” (p. 77). Similarly, teachers should be given opportunities for reflection, as well as top-down
support from administration (Pettit, 2011). Other suggestions for helping to change teacher beliefs in teacher education programs include countering common beliefs by proposing high expectations for learners, encouraging native language use at home, raising awareness as to the time it takes to learn academic English, and creating a desire for professional development in this area (Pettit, 2011).

**Changing paradigms of emergent multilinguals**

Now that we have provided a brief overview of the ideologies that inform teacher (learners), it is important to understand some of the more recent changes in the theoretical framework that inform the field, and that may or may not be seen in the data produced by the teacher learners in this study. In the past, school processes and some studies have been found to construct multilinguals (including emergent multilinguals) as abnormal (Palfreyman, 2005), situating them in “negative frames” (Harklau, 2000, p. 60). However, the contrary is true, as throughout history bi- or multilingualism has been the norm (Canagarajah & Liyanage, 2012) and it is only recently that monolingualism has been promoted along with the nation-state (Penneycook, 2010). More recently, scholars in the field view bi- or multilingualism as a natural and normal phenomenon. Brain research has changed what we now know about the way languages are stored in the brain (e.g., linguistic resources are both shared and discrete; cf. MacSwan, 2017) and how languages are learned (Arabski & Wojtaszek, 2016) and thus educational researchers have “developed language pedagogies that fit these new conceptualizations of language and multilingualism” (Catalano & Hamann, 2016, p. 267). One such pedagogy is translanguaging (García & Kleyn, 2016). Translanguaging pedagogies intentionally use bi- or multilingual language practices of students and teachers (e.g., switching back and forth to explain concepts in both languages) with the goals of “achieve[ing] optimal communication” (Lau, Juby-Smith, & Desbiens, 2017, pp. 3–4) and greater equity (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), creating spaces for students to (re)construct their identities that counter dominant ideologies and policies (Wei, 2011).

This new way of thinking about multilingualism endorses translanguaging and all pedagogies that treat the multilinguality of each child in the classroom as a resource and use it for “ongoing linguistic and cognitive growth” (Agnihotri, 2014, p. 365). In alignment with these new ways of thinking, we adopt the terms *emergent multilinguals* or *emergent multilingual students*. The term *emergent bilinguals* has been used in recent years by proponents of this theoretical framework to describe children whose home language is different from the school language and who are engaged in the process of developing language competencies with the support from their families, schools, and communities (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017).
However, we prefer the term *emergent multilingual* because this recognizes the increasingly multilingual biographies of many students who “come with standard and nonstandard varieties of their home languages or have studied other languages in school or fluidly move among different languages at home” (Catalano & Hamann, 2016, p. 265). In addition, we purposefully do not use an acronym because we believe that acronyms lead to a metonymical process (which we explain in the Findings section) that leads to negative connotations. Thus, encouraging people to say and read the entire expression *emergent multilingual students* is a more positive way of framing these students because *multilingual* focuses on their ability to use all their languages whereas *English language learner* focuses only on the language they are supposed to be learning.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Participants for this study were 29 teacher learners (2 men and 27 women) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) who were engaged in regular class activities associated with their teacher education course which focused on emergent multilingual students. In the Findings section we provide examples of comments from these teacher learners (referred to as Learner A, Learner B, and so on) from their assignments. Names of students of teacher learners are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. The teacher learners were enrolled in three different sections of the course taught by doctoral students in UNL’s program with extensive experience teaching emergent multilinguals. The Internal Review Board at UNL approved research in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education that utilizes the work of elementary majors provided they give consent. Twenty-nine teacher learners (all elementary education majors) gave consent to use their coursework for the purposes of this study.

**Context**

To understand the context in which the teacher learners in this study are located, it is necessary to provide some history of UNL’s program and some brief information about the political and social climate of the region. Prior to 2008, UNL had no model for preparing general education teachers for teaching with emergent multilinguals at all, but in late 2007, as a response to teacher learners encountering more and more students from increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the elementary education faculty universally acknowledged the need to prepare teacher learners
better and to address multilingual and multicultural education in a systematic way. Gradually, faculty developed a course designed to meet the goals of better preparing undergraduate preservice teachers to work with these students and an infusion model in which there was a practicum component to accompany the designated course as well as a focus on teaching with emergent multilingual students that continued through the rest of teacher learners’ preparation program.

Four primary goals formed the core of the syllabus for the course and practicum. The aim was to develop in teacher learners (a) an understanding of how school-age children learned additional languages (e.g., multilinguality and the development of multilingual literacy), (b) basic linguistic analysis skills to recognize the linguistic demands of schooling, (c) pedagogical knowledge for adapting instruction to emergent multilinguals’ unique needs, and (d) cultural sensitivity and a sense of interculturality, “an openness to seeing the world through the eyes of others, while being aware of one’s own cultural assumptions” (Menard-Warwick, 2014, p. 121). Readings, coursework, and the practicum were fitted to advancing these goals.

In the past, the practicum experience (15 hours, usually done on three Fridays) for this program has been in the city where UNL is located, and because there are no bilingual programs in Lincoln (yet!) teacher learners were only able to see monolingual programs. The problem with this is that in these programs, teacher learners do not see what it looks like when students’ home languages are utilized and developed along with English. To remedy this, recently, some of the participants were placed in two-way Spanish dual language programs to observe emergent multilinguals from prekindergarten to Grade 5. Those who did not worked with students in monolingual programs in the same district. A final component that was added to the program is a 3-plus-2 course in which teacher learners first take the course mentioned above, which focuses on emergent multilinguals, and then earn 2 credits studying abroad. This program focuses on the education of emergent multilingual students in three different countries in Europe with increased migration (e.g., Netherlands, Italy, England). Except for England, all programs now have a language learning component to the course so the teacher learners have the opportunity to be emergent multilinguals themselves, even if for only a brief period. Although teacher learners who have participated in these programs have had very positive and fruitful experiences, only a very small number of teacher learners can participate (due largely to lack of funding), and the number of them who study abroad in general in the elementary education program is still very low.

In the past, faculty has used Egbert and Ernst-Slavit’s (2010) Access to Academics: Planning Instruction for K-12 Classrooms with ELLs (2010) and Echevarria, Volt, and Short’s (2004) Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model, which provide students with basic information about the language of school and strategies for making input comprehensible along with other books that answer
questions teachers have about working with emergent multilinguals (e.g., Cary, 2008). However, we noticed that while teacher learners seemed to emerge from classes with ample knowledge of strategies, it was harder to change their unconscious orientations and attitudes toward emergent multilinguals, particularly in terms of developing a sense of interculturality, one of the primary goals of the program. We therefore added a new text from the spring 2016 semester, *Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants* (Suárez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, 2015), which all the teacher learners in this study read. The book reports on the lives of immigrant children, the kinds of challenges (family separations, physical and mental health issues, legal issues) but also the resources (multilingualism, multicultural competence) that newcomers bring with them in their transition to life and school in the United States. Teacher learners read about these issues and were invited, in class discussion and coursework, to critically evaluate how immigration could affect learners and to consider how schools (and their future classrooms) could be sites of welcome for immigrant children. The course—including its readings and practicum—were designed to encourage teacher learners to take a resource view of emergent multilinguals, but a resource view that was informed by research on both current schooling practices and immigrant family backgrounds.

Besides describing the context of the course, it is also important to point out ideologies circulating in the state about immigration and migrants since we have shown earlier how these ideologies affect and shape teacher perceptions of their emergent multilingual students. The Midwest “red” state in which UNL is located has a Republican governor who has publicly supported the immigration policies and statements of President Donald Trump. In addition, the governor has made public statements against Syrian refugees (Pluhacek, 2015) and previous governors (e.g., Dave Heineman) have called for unaccompanied minors from Central America to be sent back as well as identified publicly (Stoddard, 2014). More recently, a bill has been introduced to track refugee resettlement and its costs to the state (Young, 2017). Despite this hostile political environment in which refugees and migrants have been dehumanized for political gains, it is also worth mentioning that Lincoln is a designated refugee resettlement site where authors such as Mary Pipher (2002) live and write and in which many nonprofit organizations exist and organize to support refugees and migrants, such as the annual vigil for refugees (Huddle, 2017). Moreover, the local superintendent has spoken up on behalf of undocumented students and against anti-immigration sentiment in the past (Reist, 2014). Hence, it is reasonable to hypothesize that teacher learners will be influenced by both monolingual and multilingual discourses in local public discourse as well as anti- and pro-immigration or refugee ideologies.
Data collection

Data for this study consisted of two assignments the participants completed as part of their course requirements. The first assignment was the case study in which teacher learners had to select one student in their practicum and observe them in the classroom setting, analyzing their language proficiency and academic needs. In the reflective essay, teacher learners were tasked to critically reflect on their course plus practicum experiences and tie these to their class readings and discussions. In particular, teacher learners were encouraged to make observations of their own learning over the duration of the course plus practicum experience in an effort to “make their pre-existing personal beliefs explicit, challenge the adequacy of those beliefs” and “examine, elaborate, and integrate new information into their existing belief systems” (Kagan, 1992, p. 77).

Data analysis

Analysis of the data was guided by the field of CDS but also qualitative strategies including reading the data for a sense of the whole, writing analytic memos, documenting reflections, focused coding of data, and developing themes and patterns from the data and codes (Creswell, 2008; Saldaña 2013). As the analysis began, we compiled a data file of all the case studies and reflections and uploaded this to MAXQDA (qualitative research software; Version 11, Distribution by VERBI GmbH, Berlin, Germany) using a combination of topic and open coding (Morse & Richards, 2007). We used open coding to ensure that we were open to other ideas and concepts that emerged from the data. As the analysis progressed, we employed the analytic strategy of constant-comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which helped us to examine the data, topics, and emergent categories that gradually modified to represent the data. Using CDS perspectives and tools, we supplemented our analysis with a corpus analysis of the data (Baker & McEnery, 2005) to examine in more detail lexical choices (in terms of quantity and collocation), and we also gave special attention to metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and metonymy (Littlemore, 2015), which we explain in the Findings section.

Findings

Ethnocentrism and the theory–practice gap

One of the first elements that surfaced in the initial analysis was the way in which teacher learners viewed their students in practicum through the lens of their own
worldview (e.g., ethnocentrism). Although many statements were found that showed that teacher learners were aware they needed to consider the cultural perspectives of their students, and to value the languages their students bring with them, analysis reveals that in practice this is not always the case. When discussing a reading quiz she worked on in her case study, Learner A noted “For this quiz she had to fill out a Venn diagram comparing soccer and baseball. She wrote, ‘The soccer field, it has dirt’; which we know is incorrect because the baseball field has dirt.” In this short excerpt, Learner A points out a supposed mistake that the student made, and provides what she imagines as the correct answer. However, what she fails to recognize is that in many places in the world (including this student’s) soccer fields are sometimes dirt fields, not necessarily green grassy areas. In this case, Learner A reveals the way in which her worldview, which is mostly limited to her observations living in the Midwest, did not allow her to see that the student was making comparisons based on her own experiences. What is also interesting is that in the sentence, “The soccer field, it has dirt,” there actually is a grammatical error in that the subject (soccer field; it) is repeated twice. In Spanish, an utterance of this sort would be possible because pronouns are encoded in verbs and Spanish is a pro-drop language. However, instead of helping the student to understand this error, possibly because she didn’t see it, she concentrates on the cultural element that is correct.

In the following, Learner B observes bilingual practices noticing that students easily move among languages throughout the day but perceives their mixing of languages as subtle mistakes.

While he was talking, I noticed that he spoke some Spanish mixed in with his English, such as pero once instead of but and y instead of and. I found it interesting that he made these subtle mistakes in speech, but this is part of the reason that his English language skills still require work.

In this excerpt, Learner B notices translanguaging, and like many who believe (or used to believe) that keeping languages separate is important, she mistakenly views this as an error that is holding back his English development, even though the student was utilizing both his languages to communicate better. In addition, the teacher learner does not know this practice is translanguaging or that it is considered a natural social practice of bilinguals. As García and Kleyn (2016) noted, “bilingual people do not speak languages, but rather use their repertoire of linguistic features selectively” (p. 19). Unfortunately, the student’s past language ideologies regarding the separation of languages get in the way of recognizing the benefit this practice has for the student. In the next example, Learner C views the Spanish language (which she does not understand) as a type of incoherent babbling rather than a legitimate language that the teacher learner does not know.
She grabbed my wrist to examine my watch, and rambled on with quite a few words. I caught a few phrases like, “Yo tengo” and “Me gusta” however could not tell you the context of what she was talking about if she had not grabbed my wrist.

In another example, Learner D notes about her student that “When he gets excited his tongue gets twisted up and he speaks a mixture of Spanish and English.” This excerpt shows she views the mixing of languages through the metaphor of physical contortion in that when you combine languages it is like mouth gymnastics. Metaphor can be defined as “understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5) and “connecting two things that are not normally related” (Charteris-Black, 2014, p. 14). “Everyday metaphor is a crucial measure of the way that public discourse articulates and reproduces societal dominance relations” (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 21) and it has great power in conveying and influencing thought. Because of metaphor’s central role in mental representation and its ability to provide the “cognitive framework for worldview” (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 21) it is particularly relevant to the present analysis in which we critically analyze the use of metaphor in the discourse of teacher learners to work out “exactly what that metaphor brings to our attention and what it obscures” (Charteris-Black, 2014, p. 203). The metaphorical mapping described previously that compares multiple language use to the physical contortion of the tongue reveals the student’s unconscious perception of language mixing as unnatural. In reality, the tongue is just fine and does not experience physical difficulty when students use words of several different “labeled languages” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 16) to make meaning. What all the previous examples have in common is the way in which language ideologies (and ethnocentric viewpoints) surface when teacher learners reflect on their experiences. This tell us that more work needs to be done to provide teacher learners with theories that counter their long-held (incorrect) beliefs about language practices as well as the language to talk about these beliefs.

**Language as a privilege, not a right**

Corpus analysis of the data revealed 48 tokens of the word allow, which led to further examination of the use of this term, and why it was used so frequently. All tokens of allow had something to do with students, but more interestingly, most of the tokens refer to language use such as in the following comment from Learner E:

> It is our job as teachers to best help a student be successful, and if this means if they need to start out speaking Spanish in order to reach that point, then we should allow them to do so by all means.

Learner F also advocates for the use of Spanish in school, but she uses the word allow, as in “Allowing the extra language as resource to help them excel shouldn’t be
the ‘giant elephant in the room.’ Why not allow them to use Spanish as a resource in the classroom?”

In these examples, the participants try to show their learning by pointing out their approval of and advocacy for the use of students’ home languages in school, which many participants note was something they learned from their class readings and discussions. However, use of the word allow reveals an underlying ideology and residue of linguistic imperialism that views languages other than English as a privilege (for which someone must obtain permission or authorization for) rather than a human right. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) defined linguistic imperialism as a process of language domination that entails the “exploitation, injustice, inequality, and hierarchy that privileges those able to use the dominant language” and is “ideological, containing beliefs, attitudes, and imagery that glorify the dominant language” (p. 494). In addition, linguistic imperialism naturalizes the dominant language hegemony as normal and promotes unequal rights for speakers of different languages (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2014). These findings support studies such as Reagan (2016), which reveal that although there is a widespread recognition of linguistic human rights embodied not only in research but also in various United Nations declarations in the educational field, these rights are “largely ignored in practice, especially in the educational domain” (p. 14). Thus, the teacher learners have likely been influenced by larger discourses of language legitimacy that have been used for “political, social, economic, and ideological reasons to maintain social class structures and power over marginalized groups in different societies” (Reagan, 2016, p. 14). In this view, using one’s home language in school is seen as a special privilege, not as a human right that all children should have, and thus it does not contest the (naturalized) hegemony of the dominant language. This is even though there is a substantial body of empirical evidence that suggests that the use of the child’s home language appears to have a positive effect on student learning (Reagan, 2016, p. 13).

**Continued misconceptions**

Despite a semester of coursework, readings, and class discussions designed to debunk myths about emergent multilingual students, we still found some of the most common misconceptions in the reflective work of teacher learners. In the following, Learner G resurfaces the myth found in Reeves (2006) that speaking English at home is the key to success, noting, “I also would recommend that the student practices English at home with his parents when the family is speaking in English.” Learner H echoes this continued misconception that the language of home is the root problem for school success, neglecting to recognize that research says the opposite (e.g., Reagan, 2016) in this comment: “Many of the difficulties with success
in school can be attributed to Spanish being the primary language that is spoken at home.

We now turn to the role of metaphor in reproducing misconceptions about language learning. When Learner I talks about her student’s learning, she uses the metaphorical linguistic expression (e.g., *absorb*) that informs us about the way she conceptualizes her student’s learning. Talking about her student she says, “At this point, she is nonverbal in English and is absorbing the information around her. Their brains are so capable of absorbing language at this age; so, why not take advantage?” Learner J (and several other participants) also uses this word to describe her student’s language learning in this excerpt: “So, special care toward language must occur in the classroom for ELL students to truly absorb the language.”

These examples show the continued proliferation of an archaic perception of learning in which students’ bodies are viewed as sponges and language (like any liquid) can be absorbed like water. This draws on more overarching misconceptions of learning that view students as empty vessels into which knowledge can be “poured” (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 159). This is despite the fact that with sociocultural learning theories, the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and others, we now know that cognitive development is an interactive process mediated by culture, context, language, and social interaction. Language is not simply something that can be absorbed without volition or effort.

Another misconception frequently found in the literature review was that some teachers believe that emergent multilingual students cannot master the curriculum and hence it must be made simpler or easier (Pettit, 2011). The following comment by Learner J shows the journey metaphor in which language learning is an obstacle in the journey, along with the teacher learner’s solution, which is to provide easier words:

> As I mentioned earlier, it seems that Araceli is struggling due to a language barrier as well as receiving workload that is too heavy for her. In this case, I would decrease the amount of work I give to Araceli and make it more meaningful. For example, instead of giving her a spelling list with 20 new words every week I would give her a list of 10 words. I would also potentially give her a list of easier words.

According to Katz (1999), “Caring about students does not mean being easy on them nor giving them artificially inflated grades” (p. 812). Instead, students need to be provided with the appropriate support (cf. García et al., 2017), which can provide them access to the curriculum.

**Indirect indexicality and “ELL students”**

Besides metaphors related to language learning, numerous metonymies in the data that were used to represent emergent multilingual students were found. We will
focus on the most common: ELL student (119 tokens). Other metonymies used to talk about emergent multilingual students were ELL(s) (48 tokens), English language learner(s) (19 tokens), and English learner(s) (6 tokens). “Metonymy is a type of figurative language used in everyday conversation, a form of shorthand that allows us to use our shared knowledge to communicate with few words than we would otherwise need” (Littlemore, 2015, back cover). It is also a form of communication that “allows us to use one well-understood aspect of something to stand for the thing as a whole” (Littlemore, 2015, p. 4) and in the process, certain things are emphasized and others are downplayed. For example, if one uses the metonymy *mother* to describe herself, she is foregrounding her family relationship and backgrounding her profession. Although metaphor has long been given much attention in CDS and cognitive linguistics, recent work has identified metonymy as equally important and scholarly consensus asserts it as “a basic cognitive and conceptual mechanism” just as metaphor is (Zhang, 2016, p. 1). The reason we focus attention on metonymy is because understanding metonymical processes that text producers (or speakers) create can reveal much about one’s perspective or perceptions of the person, action or event. The metonymy *ELL students* is problematic because it reveals a thought process which erases the humanity of the students. In this double metonymy, *ELL* stands for English language learner, which stands for all students who have been formally identified as needing support in language learning, as opposed to any student that is the child of migrants, or is bi- or multilingual. However, the use of the label *ELL* has become so common and so prevalent, it has become indirectly indexical of negative characteristics associated with research or practical information about working with these students. In the following example, Learner K uses the acronym along with the presupposition (Machin & Mayr, 2012) contained in the clause “does not have to be a struggle.”

I have learned and seen so many techniques and activities that are geared towards *ELL students*, but end up being beneficial to the group as a whole. Having *ELL students* in your class does not have to be a struggle. There are so many easy ways to modify your teaching and your classroom to help them.

Corpus analysis revealed 61 tokens of the word (or forms of the word) *struggle* in the data. In this reflection, what is noteworthy is the way in which the teacher learner presents as a given that ELL students are a challenge or struggle for teachers by proclaiming that they do not have to be. Thus, in presuppositions such as these, we are shown what is assumed (which is that ELL students cause teachers to struggle), and therefore we have a window into the ideology of the teacher learner’s unconscious beliefs about these students. These ideologies have most likely been formed by multiple exposure to discourse that refers to ELLs and then connects them to deficits or challenges in teaching or learning. Hill (2005) referred to this as indirect
indexicality, which operates on a covert level, effectively erasing the main meaning (English language learner) and replacing it with the second order or implied meaning, which connects these students to problems or struggle. Case and point, in multiple examples in the data, teacher learners talked about how ELL students struggled with various aspects of learning. With 61 tokens of this word, it is clear that struggle has become part of the discourse associated with these students. Through constant repetition, frame circuitry in the brain is activated, and strengthens synapses. “Neural circuits with strong synapses can be activated more easily than those with weak synapses, and so the probability that they will be activated is higher. And so, the frame is more likely to be activated” (Lakoff, 2016, point #23). Hence, through exposure to these words in class materials and in the discourse of the community, teacher learners have strengthened their neural pathways that associate ELL students with struggles (and other negative characteristics) and hence repeat this discourse in their own writing. Moreover, the combination of ELL with students reveals the way in which the label erases its actual meaning, because if the teacher learners were paying attention to the meaning, they would recognize that “English language learner student” does not make sense.

**Teacher learners as critical observers**

This final section is dedicated to sharing just a few of the places in the data where students exhibited their growth as critical observers of teaching practices regarding emergent multilinguals. Learner L (although she still uses ELL students) notes the languages the students she observed in the practicum spoke when she says, “In this class, I observed that 16 ELL students were speaking two different languages. Those languages included Spanish and Q’anjob’al which is a language spoken in Guatemala.”

As teacher educators, one of the challenges has often been the tendency for teacher learners to know very little about the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students in their classes. As such, we make a point to give teacher learners the tools to find information related to the languages and origin of students, and the desire to seek out this information. In Learner L’s example, we were pleased to see that she not only knew about the student’s ability to speak Spanish, but also took the time to find out how to write the Mayan language (Q’anjob’al) spoken by the student, and to know this language is spoken in Guatemala. Taking the time to find out these details and learn some words or background about the language and culture goes a long way in making students feel welcome and in utilizing their languages as resources for learning.

Besides finding that more teacher learners paid attention to the languages of their students, we also found examples where teacher learners adamantly spoke out against what they saw as unfair language practices, such as this example from Learner M:
The biggest change I would have made to the classroom, though, would be to **lift the ban on speaking languages other than English**... “In sociocultural theories, language is a meditational tool through which identities are assumed and stances are taken to identify ourselves and others in socially organized activity systems” (Razfar & Rumenapp, 2014). To deny the students’ native languages would be to deny a component of who they are, and I simply cannot support such components to be neglected in my future classroom.

We were pleased to see in this example that Learner M used her class readings (e.g., Razfar & Rumenapp, 2014) to back her statements in support of students’ home language use in the classroom. However, we were disappointed to see that despite the advances in research and professional development that teachers have to go through in the district, language bans still exist in this region, and even more so, in a district that boasts eight dual language programs (although this student did not do her practicum in one of those programs).

This final excerpt from Learner M illustrates exactly why the practicum is a necessary and fruitful component of any program model:

Coming right out of the classroom, I did not think I had a meaningful experience. I think this is due to the fact that I felt overwhelmed with being in a new situation and having such a different environment than I am used to in my regular practicum. For this reason, I can now see how much of an impact this experience has had on my views of ELL students. Many times, ELL students are put in new situations or environments where they just feel lost. It can be very difficult and almost frightening to adapt to a new culture, or in my experience a new school. I believe that this experience allowed me to put myself into their shoes...

In this excerpt, Learner M found the experience of working with children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds than hers to be overwhelming. However, the discomfort she experienced and the space she was given to reflect on this experience led her to put herself in their shoes and become one step closer to understanding her students’ needs and feelings.

**Conclusion**

In this study, we have examined reflective assignments from teacher learners engaged in a practicum experience with emergent multilingual students. We found that although the teacher learners participated in critical analysis of education policy and practice in which their teachers provided them with theory and discussions on working with culturally and linguistically diverse students, they still carried with them
language ideologies that reproduce or support the dominant paradigms regarding these students.

We believe that these findings have important implications for teacher education programs in the United States that aim to improve their preparation of teacher learners to work with emergent multilinguals. First, we recognize that the textbook or readings matter. Although teacher learners normally leave their program with many practical strategies for working with emergent multilingual students, after analyzing the data, we believe that the addition of *Transitions* (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015) gave them a sounder foundation from which to reach their attitudes and orientation. However, seeing the lack of understanding they had for natural language practices such as translanguaging, as well as lingering monoglossic discourses, we recognize the need to add to UNL’s repertoire with theoretical and practical articles or books that explain translanguaging theory and provide strategies for utilizing it in bilingual classrooms as well as monolingual education programs where classes have students from multiple languages (e.g., García et al., 2017). In addition, we still hold that many of the teacher beliefs about language learning and emergent multilingual students would be different if teacher learners had at least an intermediate competency level in a language other than English (which aligns with other studies such as Batt, 2008). Thus, we hope to at least begin to require small steps in this direction, and add a “mini” language study to our course on emergent multilingual students and/or other courses in UNL’s program (e.g., Catalano, Shende & Suh, 2016) until we can implement larger changes such as required language study for all teacher candidates. We will also continue to send teacher learners to study abroad, particularly in areas where they can experience language learning, but we know that because such a small percentage of teacher learners do this now, we need to take measures to ensure that more teacher learners have this opportunity in the future. Additionally, we believe that the time has come for this program (and the faculty teaching in it) to move toward the use of a common, more positive terminology (and not an acronym) in lectures, textbook choices, and course titles. We believe that words do have consequences, and changing the terminology could be one small step in shaping more positive perceptions that teacher learners have of emergent multilinguals.

One final implication from this study is the power that CDS could have as a pedagogical tool for teacher learners. As such, we suggest future activities in which teacher learners work in groups to examine and analyze their own discourse in reflection assignments. For example, when examining language use, teacher learners could be asked to find the word *allow* in their writing and look up the dictionary definition of the word (e.g., permit someone to have something). They could then be encouraged to return to their readings and discuss whether students’ home languages should be a privilege that only some students can utilize in certain situations, or if it is a right that all students should have. Next, teacher learners could look for alternative word choices (e.g., *encourage, advocate for*) as well as what ideologies these alternatives
might convey. There are many ways to do this, but the point is that CDS can be an effective way of learning more about teacher learners’ beliefs and practices, but also a tool for them to examine the discourses of the schools and communities in which they will teach (and their own discourse that reproduces these ideologies). In addition, we aim to provide teacher learners with the means to critically analyze their own writing, which could hopefully lead them to critically analyze their own thinking.

There are some limitations to our study. For instance, we believe that adding interviews to the data may reveal more interesting information about where teacher learners acquire their language ideologies. In addition, we did not compare the experiences of teacher learners in the dual language program with those in monolingual programs. A qualitative comparison between these experiences in the future could provide interesting information about the benefits that may be acquired from this type of practicum site.

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Notes

1. We use the terms emergent multilingual students or emergent multilinguals to refer to students that are developing bi- or multilingual competences with the support of their school and community (cf., García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). Use of other terms such as ELLs or ELL students are either quotations from the data or taken directly from authors we are citing.

2. Bolded words denote points of focus in the analysis”

References


