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Understanding Literacy Teacher Educators' Use of Scaffolding

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──────── **Abstract** ────────

This inquiry examined four literacy teacher educators' perspectives and practices as related to scaffolding by using document analysis (i.e. syllabus), observations, and interviews. Findings indicated these teacher educators used scaffolding to develop preservice teachers' dispositions, strategies, and conceptual understandings. Faculty used scaffolding processes such as modeling, feedback, purposeful structured assignments, discussions, and reflective pieces. Participants' use of scaffolding varied; with the participant with more years of teacher education experience exhibiting a richer and larger repertoire of scaffolding strategies. Findings also suggested some faculty might be unsure of how to monitor preservice teachers' growth in order to provide subsequent scaffolding

In today's diverse schools, meeting the individual needs of students is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching. Instructional scaffolding is a powerful tool that many teachers utilize to meet the challenge. Many educators consider scaffolding to be one of the most effective instructional procedures available (Cazden, 1992; Graves, Graves, & Braaten, 1996). Scaffolding refers to support that a teacher, or more knowledgeable peer, supplies to students within their zone of proximal development that enables them to develop understandings or to use strategies that they would not have been capable of independently (Meyer, 1993; Palincsar, 1986; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

Researchers have examined the use of scaffolding strategies such as modeling, cognitive structuring, providing information, prompting, encouraging self-monitoring, and labeling and affirming as means of assisting students' performance in the classroom (Gallimore &Tharp, 1990; Many, 2002; Meyer, 1993). Research has also found that scaffolding can be planned before teaching through the creation of broad instructional frames or in the form of responsive instruction which is shaped during teaching events by the needs of those participating (Many, Dewberry, Taylor, & Coady, 2009; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997). In addition, Many et al.'s (2009) work went beyond describing processes (how to scaffold) to also examine the focus of scaffolded instruction (what was scaffolded). Her and her colleagues' findings indicated scaffolding was related to development of conceptual understandings and to development of strategies.

Providing scaffolded instruction is a complex task and can be challenging for teachers. To be responsive, teachers must be alert to teachable moments in instruction and choose supportive strategies based on the movement of students through their individual zones of proximal development (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Maloch, 2002; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). This process is complicated by teachers' need to weigh, in a moment's notice, questions regarding what to teach, what to ignore, how much help to give, and what kind of help to give (Rodgers, 2004). In addition, learning to use scaffolded instruction effectively requires not only considerable knowledge of the domain, but is a process that evolves over an extended period of time (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 2004; Many et al., 2009; Pinnell & Rodgers, 2004; Pressley, 2002).

While a strong body of research exists on the use of scaffolding in the K-12 classroom, the focus of this study is to examine the presence or absence of such contingent teaching used by teacher educators. We were specifically interested in literacy teacher educators' perspectives on scaffolding and the ways instructors enacted scaffolding in their program and in their individual courses. Our work

focused on a graduate initial teacher preparation program that leads to state certification as a bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher for K-12 schools. From the inception of this program, faculty and administrators had examined the key role instructional scaffolding played in the performance of enrolled preservice teachers (Many et al., 2009; Many, Taylor, Tinker-Sachs, Wang, & Schreiber, 2007), but there had not been systematic attention to how the faculty modeled scaffolding themselves in response to preservice teachers' differing backgrounds, needs, and/or performance. Consequently, the question addressed in this study was: How do teacher educators consider background knowledge and experiences of their students in the design and implementation of instructional scaffolds in their ESL preparation program?

Literature Review

Previous research has underscored the need to consider preservice teachers' prior knowledge and the ways their attitudes and perspectives can influence their development as educators. Kellner, Gullberg, Attorps, Thoren, and Tarneberg (2011) stress prospective teachers' tacit ideas about teaching serve to filter their consideration of students' conceptions regarding content knowledge. Their work indicated the effectiveness of special case studies for math and science topics which elicited candidates' conceptions about students' difficulties and enabled teacher educators to provide a context for scaffolding within their teacher education program.

Other research has also found that providing careful attention to the foundational content knowledge of specific topics can support preservice teachers' development of effective pedagogical approaches for that topic (Hume & Berry, 2011). Scaffolding in teacher education has also examined how preservice teachers can be supported in developing an identity as a teacher (Van Zoest & Stockero, 2008) and in developing a diverse constructivist perspective (Kaste, 2004). Devereux and Wilson (2008) studied the effectiveness of scaffolding on helping students improve their literacy abilities. They found that by carefully structuring tasks and assessment requirements across a four-year undergraduate program, they could assist students of diverse backgrounds in developing complex literacy strategies needed for success at the university and in their teacher careers. Overall, these studies indicate teacher educators across content areas have been effective at designing coursework and assignments in ways which support preservice teacher learning.

Other research has specifically examined how preservice teachers' prior experience and beliefs about language and literacy can shape their views of literacy teaching and their teaching practices. Two studies have found that ESL teachers hold theoretical orientations that shape the methodological approaches they use in classrooms and that their personal practical knowledge is partially influenced by their prior knowledge as learners (Golombek, 1998; Johnson, 1992). Johnson found that formal language learning experiences have powerful impacts on ESL preservice teachers. When the participants' experiences were positive, they wanted to replicate them. But when these experiences were negative, they rejected them and wanted to implement better instructional practices. Milambiling (1999) found that preservice teachers' prior knowledge or personal background can advance their learning as teachers. Participants argued that preservice teachers who were non-native English speakers or those who had experiences learning a second language (L2) before entering teacher preparation programs had some advantages over their native peers or those who had never gone through the process of learning an L2. Firsthand experiences about how an L2 is learned was seen as helping teachers to anticipate students' difficulties, facilitating effective teaching and teachers' own learning. Milambiling's study also revealed that non-native speakers of English can notice the subtleties in the target language lexicon and semantics.

Gupta and Saravanan (1995) investigated how prior beliefs may impede student teacher learning of reading instruction. They found that preservice teachers favored traditional reading instruction and these beliefs were resistant to change. When candidates had not experienced strategies themselves, they did not judge that it was necessary to incorporate such strategies in their repertoire. Their study showed the necessity for teacher educators to evaluate and understand the beliefs about reading instruction that teacher candidates bring to teacher education programs in order to help them examine critically such beliefs.

Many, Howard, and Hoge (2002) investigated how literacy preservice teachers' epistemological beliefs were related to their reactions to teacher education coursework and to their field-based experiences. Results indicated some participants held a dualistic perspective and an interactive view of reading. Preservice teachers holding this view saw knowledge as external to the knower; they believed the teacher was the transmitter of knowledge and skills and the learners were passive receivers. Another lens used by some preservice teachers demonstrated a contextualized view of learning. From this perspective, preservice teachers indicated that the learner constructs knowledge and the role of the

teacher is to facilitate the student' knowledge construction. Participants with a constructive epistemology learned most effectively from modeling within the course and from field experiences. From these experiences they gleaned how "reading and writing instruction should be organized in school ... They learned from their reading and from their writing of authentic pieces" (p. 308). Some participants in Many et al.'s (2002) study demonstrated a consistent epistemological stance throughout their program, with their beliefs matching their classroom practices. Others held conflicting epistemological stances evidenced in their comments and their observations in field work. This latter group experienced tensions in terms of beliefs implementation in practicum settings. Because of the influences of preservice teachers' epistemological beliefs on their learning and growth in teacher education programs, the researchers recommended that teacher educators need to understand the kinds of epistemological beliefs their teacher candidates hold. This understanding could help teacher educators in providing an appropriate scaffold to teacher candidates who can then reach a greater understanding of their profession.

There is some indication, however, that educators in the academy may find instructional scaffolding in the university classroom to be a challenge. Speer and Wagner's (2009) case study noted that a faculty member's ability to scaffold during class discussions was related to both his pedagogical content knowledge and his specialized content knowledge. In addition, Many et al. (2002) found the effectiveness of some of the approaches to scaffolding they used depended on the ways in which their preservice literacy teachers' viewed knowledge and the process of knowing. As a result, what was an effective pedagogical approach for some candidates in a methods course failed to be supportive for others. Similarly, Adler (2011) also underscored the difficulties of having preservice teachers examine their epistemologies as they develop their understandings as educators. In light of the important role prior knowledge and beliefs can play in preservice teacher development and the need to better understand the challenges and successes of trying to use scaffolding within teacher education programs, the purpose of this study was to examine teacher educators' beliefs about scaffolding and the ways in which they enacted scaffolding within their instructional practices.

Methodology

Context and Participants

The context of this inquiry was a Master's in the Art of Teaching program in reading, language, and literacy education in a large urban research university in the Southeast United States. The graduate degree was designed (a) in light of the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Association's standards for programs preparing educators to work with English language learners as well as (b) consideration of the International Reading Association's standards for the preparation of classroom teachers of reading. The program was recognized by the state as leading to an initial certification as a PreK-12 ESL teacher and to a reading endorsement.

Faculty participants included one international associate professor, one international assistant professor, one African American part-time literacy instructor, and one white clinical assistant professor who taught both literacy courses and the cultural issues course (See Table 1 for country of origin and teaching responsibilities). Candidates enrolled in the cohort program during the year of data collection included ten preservice teachers. All of the preservice teachers indicated a proficiency in a second language, and in all but one instance the preservice teachers had studied or lived in international contexts.

Table 1. Faculty Participants' Countries of Origin and Program Responsibilities

Pseudonym	Faculty Position	Country of Origin
Dr. Hope	Associate Professor of ESL and Literacy Education, Program Coordinator	Bahamas
Dr. Goldenstar	Assistant Professor of ESL Education	South Korea
Dr. Wellborn	Clinical Assistant Professor of Literacy Education and Instructor of Cultural Issues course	USA
Dr. Allbright	Part-time Faculty for Literacy Education courses	USA

Data Collection

Data for this study focused on interviews with program administrators and faculty involved in the program, program documents, field notes of class sessions, and copies of course syllabi and assignments.

The primary data source consisted of interview data from the four ESL/ literacy faculty members who taught in the program. Initial interviews during the first semester of the program focused on having faculty describe their understanding of the prior knowledge and experiential background of their preservice teachers, ways in which they take into account this background knowledge in their teaching, and specific pedagogical approaches or assignments which were designed in light of awareness of candidates' diverse backgrounds or beliefs. Follow up interviews in the spring semester focused on teacher educators' reflections on how candidates' prior knowledge and beliefs may have impact their learning across the program.

As part of a larger study, additional data were also collected from the preservice teachers. In their first summer of coursework, preservice teachers completed demographic surveys and were interviewed regarding their experiences having learned a second language, their academic and professional backgrounds, and their literacy histories. These data were used as secondary sources for this research project to contextualize the interview data or instructional approaches of the teacher educators.

In addition to interview data, field notes were used to describe instructional approaches used by the teacher educators. During the first semester (summer) of this cohort program, teacher candidates took courses related to reading methods and cultural issues for bilingual and ESL learners. These field-based courses included opportunities to plan and implement daily literacy lessons in a summer program for English language learners. Field notes were taken in the on-campus reading and culture classes. Field notes were also taken in the fall semester in the ESL methods course which was paired with an internship experience. In addition, syllabi were obtained for the following courses: ESL methods, applied linguistics, cultural issues for the bilingual/ESL teacher, reading methods, reading assessment, literacy in the content areas, and all practica.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the first day of data collection by identifying all instances of scaffolded instruction through the use of marginal notes. Using a constant-comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to data analysis led to the emergence of patterns in the types of scaffolding noted in the interview transcripts and field notes. Working hypotheses regarding faculty members' views of and uses of scaffolding were used to guide creation of follow-up questions, focused observations, and review of syllabi and program documents. Following the

summer data collection of field notes and initial interviews, the research team began a recursive- generative process of data analysis. First, the team identified units of data related to scaffolding and compared these to initial codes and to categories found in previous scaffolding research (Many et al., 2007; Meyer, 1993; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997). As a result, the definition of scaffolding used to identify relevant units of data in this study was expanded to include not only instances where instructors endeavored to provide explicit structures to support learning and development (e.g. scaffolded instruction) but also all data related to drawing on prior knowledge and background experiences. This led to continual refinement of the coding system and subsequently elaboration of specific definitions for each category. Findings were triangulated across data sources and drafts were crafted of the findings. All findings related to a specific faculty member were emailed to that faculty member to allow for member checks. Faculty members sent minor clarifications related to transcriptions of some sentences but otherwise agreed with the thematic analysis.

Results

Analysis resulted in delineations of both the focus of scaffolding and ways in which teacher educators utilized scaffolding in their program design, coursework, and interactions with the preservice ESL teachers. As shown in Table 2, the teacher educators designed and implemented this program in ways which supported candidates by scaffolding strategy development, conceptual understandings, and dispositions.

Table 2.Understanding the Focus of Scaffolding and the Ways Scaffolding Was Used

Focus of Scaffolding		Ways Scaffolding Was Utilized
Disposition	Toward Diverse Learners	Creating Affordances
	Acceptance of Diverse Perspectives	
Strategies	Learning Strategies	
	Academic Language	Instructional Design
	Development as a Writer	
Conceptual Understandings	Theories	
	Instructional Approaches	Teacher/Student Discourse
	Language Learning Process	

Scaffolding the Dispositions of Future ESL Educators

Faculty working with the program believed in the importance of ESL certification candidates demonstrating both positive dispositions toward diverse learners and acceptance of diverse perspectives. Teacher educators' primary way of scaffolding these dispositions were through creating affordances through specific entrance requirements and through discourse in the classrooms. The sections below illustrate these themes.

Creating affordances for the development of positive dispositions. One way the teacher educators' created a context for the graduation of preservice teachers who had positive dispositions toward diverse learners and diverse perspectives was to ensure candidates who were accepted into the program had rich background experiences related to second language learning.

From the time this ESL teacher preparation program was created in 2003, entry requirements stipulated all candidates would bring with them the experience of having learned a second language. Talking about this requirement, Dr. Hope, who also served as the unit coordinator noted:

> We do not admit anyone into our program unless the person has lived abroad and/or has a second language learning experience. If the person does not meet either condition, we advise the person to learn a second language and provide evidence of that before getting accepted in the program. It is an important requirement for us because it brings a knowledge base, sensitivity, awareness to the program, cultural sensitivity as well as learning sensitivity of the trials and tribulations one goes through as one tries to learn a second language. You can tell the difference if one has not had such experiences or if one has not deep language learning experience because they don't have that sensitivity. They don't have that sense of awareness. When you have learned another language, you have another schema to draw upon. Without such language learning experiences, you miss a lot important schemas. You can only guess what learning a second language is about. Experience brings a different set of perspectives.

The degree to which this background was considered of importance was further evident in the focus of prompts faculty used during the interview process. According to program documents, beginning with the first applicants in 2004 candidates have been asked to respond to the following:

> Write a short autobiography of your experiences in learning a second language. Include descriptions of the types of positive or negative teaching events that were part of this experience. How do you feel these background experiences might shape your work with students?

In subsequent oral interviews, candidates expand by talking in detail about their prior experiences with learners and views of teaching.

The current faculty seemed to feel having such a background contributed to preservice teachers' dispositions toward second language learners from diverse cultures. Dr. Wellborn noted:

> From what I observed in my class, I noticed that the pre-service teachers (PSTs) had travelled extensively, learned many languages, and are opened-minded. They tended to examine their own biases. As they encountered people from other cultures, they discovered their own blind spots. I have one particular one whose parents travelled extensively and who can relate easily to her native land and the United States. They are very open-minded and tend to get away from the deficit view we tend to have of low socio-economic groups' students or of minority children.

In some cases, faculty assumed the fact the program required background experiences with second language learning created affordances such that students would be able to make connections and capitalize on their prior knowledge independently. This perspective was evident in comments which indicated faculty assumed background was being utilized in a positive ways, but they did not necessarily articulate that they systematically drew out such prior knowledge or had students analyze such experiences. For instance, Dr. Goldenstar, who was working with the ESL applied linguistic course and practica explained, "I think [the preservice teachers] are a carefully-selected group, and they are eager to learn. I don't have to do a lot of groundwork with them. Also, they care about the students they are working with at Latin American Association. They are excited about teaching." Remarking on the preservice teachers' varied backgrounds, Dr. Allbright commented:

> Their backgrounds varied. They speak multiple languages and they come from many fields. [...] I have one particular student who volunteered to teach in Bolivia and who ended up getting married to one Bolivian. She noticed the struggles of her husband as

related to second language learning. These diverse experiences bring some uniqueness to the course.

Using discourse to scaffold dispositions. While the fact that candidates brought second language learning experiences to this program afforded them the opportunity to appreciate the experiences of second language learners, the teacher educators noted these experiences may not necessarily lead to positive dispositions. Faculty expressed a sensitivity to monitoring preservice teachers' language for presence of attitudes which might alert them as instructors to the need to scaffold candidates' dispositions. Dr. Wellborn explained, "[I use] reflective responses to articles. I don't have the opportunity to look at the responses of all of them. But when I notice something puzzling or of concern in a response, then I address that." Dr. Allbright also used class discussions to try to understand candidates and to help uncover possible negative assumptions:

> The first day of class, I asked them: Who are you? Where they are coming from, and how they end up here. We talk a lot about assumptions. I chose a set of pictures about people and I asked them to attribute a profession to the people based on their look. We all make judgments based on the appearances of people; we make a lot of assumptions. [...] we cannot do that with children. We can't assume that they can't speak English or are not literate. They might be literate in their first language and they understand English. They will become literate in English [...] So my first task is ask them to talk about biases as related to people and races. The reason is that your assumptions are going to drive your teaching.

Faculty also believed background in learning a language contributed to candidates' ability to value different perspectives. Dr. Hope, who taught the ESL method's course and supervised practica experiences, believed strongly in capitalizing on the contributions the candidates' background knowledge and expertise could bring to the program:

> ...When I teach about certain things and I know that a student has already some background related to those things, I ask the students to tell us about them before proceeding. I do this because I feel that they know certain specific things I don't know and drawing on that helps contribute to a better understanding. ...I scaffold because I think that the student might have the

knowledge but with gaps or the knowledge is insufficient or she needs more help understanding such and such things.

Similarly, Dr. Wellborn noted she drew on the diverse backgrounds through class discussions. Her course syllabi (Cultural Issues for the Bilingual/ESL teacher) identified learning outcomes which were consistent with this focus by stipulating that students were expected (a) to explain the nature of culture and understand how one's own and others' assumptions, attitudes and behaviors are shaped by culture, and (b) to understand through first-hand experience issues related to crossing cultural boundaries. Fieldnotes from course discussions supported the instructor's contention by documenting ways in which students drew on their experiences in Italy and Jamaica, for example, to add to the class' understanding of individuals in other countries toward women and regarding social practices. In encouraging such discussions, this faculty participant noted she hoped to aid students in seeing others' views. She commented, "[I draw on the diverse background of the preservice teachers] primarily through classroom discussions. I also try to take them out of their comfort zone so that they can see things from different perspectives." She recognized some students needed more scaffolding than others in order to value and recognize diverse opinions, "I think that those who are sheltered or who have fewer life experiences or who feel that their worldview is threatened are the most in need of scaffolding. I also notice that boys [sic] tend to be more closed or tend to be less open-minded. I draw all this type of preservice teachers into the conversations and talk to them outside of the class."

Summary: Scaffolding dispositions. In summary, faculty in this preservice teacher education program created programmatic structures to ensure that candidates would bring relevant background (having learned a second language) to the program related. For many of these candidates, this involved having studied abroad or having lived in another country. Through this requirement, faculty felt they created affordances for the teachers to have positive dispositions toward children of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In some cases, faculty did not articulate ways of systematically scaffolding candidates' dispositional attitudes, although most noted being sensitive to the language candidates used in reflections and class discussions and a willingness to address biases or negative assumptions as they were uncovered. Faculty also noted the varied background of the candidates proved useful in helping them to consider diverse perspectives; some purposefully drew on this background in classroom

discourse to aid candidates in appreciating the views, knowledge, and attitudes others brought to the program.

Scaffolding Candidates' Strategy Development

In addition to focusing on the development of dispositional attitudes of their preservice teachers, faculty members in this teacher education program were responsive to candidates' development as learners. They explicitly identified course assignments and ways of providing feedback that they utilized in order to help preservice teachers (a) improve their ability to read and critically analyze information, (b) to communicate using academic language, and (c) to write effectively. The sections below are organized by the ways scaffolding was utilized to address these different strategies.

Using instructional design to scaffold strategy development. Dr. Hope integrated scaffolding of students' ability (a) to learn from texts and (b) to acquire and use academic language. In the following example, she describes a classroom session in which she purposefully scaffolded students in these areas:

> I asked my preservice teachers to go to Chapter 11 in Marie Clay's book and list all the literacy behaviors. I told them that I am going to grade the assignment and they know that I will do that. They had 10 minutes to complete the task. When time was up, I asked them to look closely again as I was about to walk them through the same chapter so that they could add any behavior they might miss the first time. The purpose was not testing. What I really wanted was their learning through noticing, to support their learning. It has a connection with professional language because when you are talking with parents, these are these things you are going to be talking about: you need to be able to describe the kinds of things their children will learn and when you are talking with other educators, you need to be able to describe behaviors in specific ways. I told them that what I had just taught is noticing. This came to upfront of the consciousness. They can attend to that [more] attentively. I told them that when they submit their assignment, this is what I am looking for. This is part of my scaffolding because I am telling them explicitly what I want and what they need to learn. They can also see the big reason for that because that's what we, professionals, need to know. That's my way of double-checking that they are reading and they are

learning. They have to learn to learn to highlight [important things] when reading.

This activity illustrates this faculty participant's approach to scaffolding her students' ability to learn by the ways she structured class sessions. She valued not only their need to acquire reading strategies that could assist their learning, she also systematically supported their acquisition and use of academic language. Her emphasis on these areas was further evident in the way she addressed an assigned reading on another occasion:

> We have to model the kinds of practices we want them to take on. For example, today we did cooperative learning. I have divided the class in expert group and home-based group and I gave them articles to read. The expert group will come and explain things to the home-based groups. Afterwards, I asked them to tell me what we have just done and why it is important for learning. What is the rationale behind? As far as L2 learning is concerned, they have to read and understand for themselves and go and share as experts. That's what they need to do as educators. We need to provide learners with the best examples.

Dr. Hope purposefully structured assignments sequentially to ensure students built knowledge and expertise gradually and were able to draw on their growing abilities as they pulled together their final projects. In addition, during her ESL method's course, Dr. Hope was observed explicitly calling the preservice teachers' attention to her own scaffolding of their learning in her class discussions. Reflecting on her approach to scaffolding, she explained:

> Let me take the example of the class I am teaching currently. I told them to keep in mind that everything we are doing in class is directed toward their final project in the class. The same thing applies when I teach my TESOL students. For example, when they have to design curriculum as the final project, I use backward design, referred to in language teaching as task-based assignment. All the small steps on the way have the purpose to build up their knowledge as for the final project. The readings, the work with the students, the transcriptions, and the understandings we gain should be used for that final project. ...So when I am teaching, I am scaffolding, explaining the assignments slowly. I am giving them a lot of hints.

Lastly Dr. Hope exhibited her approach to scaffolding through her attitude toward allowing students to revise and resubmit assignments. From her perspective, the primary objective of assignments should be to support the preservice teachers' learning. Consequently, when students failed to come up to par, her interest was in pushing them to continue learning rather than in giving them a grade and having the learning stop at that point.

While the other instructors were not as systematic about integrating scaffolding into their instructional approaches, instances of scaffolded instruction focusing on the need for students to develop new strategies was evident in their instructional approaches as well. Dr. Albright described her approach to scaffolding her students' development by the way she paired students together for projects based on their abilities. Talking about her use of scaffolding in her literacy course, Dr. Albright explained:

> Let's me take the example of the debate of today. I deliberately formed the two groups. I know which student is strong and which one is not strong enough. I know which student will never dare speak and I know which one can help them. So in order to provide the necessary support the less strong students need, I pair them with the ones who can support them. At the end of the debate, you can see that each of them does well. That's one of the scaffolding strategies.

Provide individualized support for strategies through teacher/student discourse. In additional to designing specific instructional approaches which provide scaffolding for strategies, some faculty discussed their attempts to provide individualized oral or written feedback to support their preservice teacher development. Dr. Wellborn, for example, described her belief in the importance of scaffolding the students' learning by explaining:

> ... In the literacy assessment course, when they do reading assessment and they just provide a list of things they notice such, as the student makes this number of errors, the students does not self-correct, or anything else, I can reply back and ask them to elaborate on what such things tell them about that child as a reader. A range of possible explanations include the child is not constructing meaning, or is shy of reading in front of you, or s/he does not how to read in a way that can make sense, or it is OK to go back and self-correct. Examining such possibilities help you

design assessments that can help design which one is true. That's the kinds of scaffolding I provide.

In a follow up interview, she clarified further:

I think that I do provide some form of scaffolding during the weekly reflections. Usually, I do something like this: I am not sure of the point you are trying to make in a particular area, or in relation to a specific issue, or I want to see more depth here, just a way of encouraging them to put more depth in their responses.

As for Dr. Goldenstar, she noted some difficulty of regularly providing scaffolded instruction, particularly in terms of drawing on specific elements of her students' background. She commented, "... I can't say that I try to connect to students' background in a systematic way because it is not easy for me to tap in each preservice teacher's background. Except for ethnicity or race, I can say that it is not easy." When describing the backgrounds of her students, however, she did note one area that she felt they needed improvement stating:

If there is one area I think I need to work with them about, it is the academic writing. I think this represents one of the best ways to communicate in the field. I want to see their works public in educational journals.

This interest in developing the preservice teachers' ability as writers led to her process of providing individualized feedback on introductory paragraphs, progress reports, and initial drafts prior to the students submitting final papers. She noted:

At each step I provided them with scaffoldings through the feedbacks and encouragements as well as through peer support. I also provide scaffolding through writing conferences between steps. During the writing conferences, we can talk about their topics, the organization, and the content of the writing or anything relevant such as academic writing or showing them models.

Summary: Scaffolding strategies. In summary, all faculty members included specific instructional frames in the way in which they designed their courses. These assignments and pedagogical approaches supported students' strategy development by either focusing on their development of strategies for learning to read and write critically, their use of academic language, and/or their abilities as writers. Faculty varied in the degree to which they were systematic in

their use of oral and written discourse to recognize differences in students' backgrounds and to offer differential support as teachable moments arose.

Developing Preservice ESL Teachers' Conceptual Understandings

Faculty in this initial preparation program felt the candidates' background as having been second language learners afforded them with knowledge and experiences which could contribute to understanding of (a) theory, (b) instructional approaches, and (c) learning processes involved in second language learning and teaching. Some faculty members carefully drew on this background in their construction of assignments or in the way they framed instruction so as to help candidates make connections, critically analyze, and carefully construct their knowledge and expertise. The sections below describe ways faculty used instructional designs to support students' use of their background knowledge to develop conceptual understandings.

Using Instructional Designs to Scaffold Conceptual Understandings. In two courses in the program (literacy methods and applied linguistics), assignments were described in the syllabi which required students to purposefully reflect and critically analyze their experiences as they constructed understandings of how to teach English language learners. In the literacy methods course, the literacy history assignment required critical analysis of four episodes related to learning to read in school, at home, and/or in out-of-school learning environments and how these experiences shaped them as a readers and learners. This assignment resulted in rich, detailed descriptions of the preservice teachers' background experiences and they subsequently made explicit connections between these experiences and their understanding of specific theories and approaches to literacy instruction. Dr. Albright noted:

> ...I think that it is a good assignment because it is related to how the preservice teachers view reading and how they learn to read. Usually, when preservice teachers come to your class, whether it is theory or strategies, they tend to think of reading as the printed text. It goes beyond that and literacy encompasses listening, talking, writing, viewing and so on. So talking about their literacy history forces them to see things that make them as readers.

While the assignment had potential for helping the preservice teachers construct personal understandings of theory and pedagogy, the instructor particularly appreciated the way the assignment could help the candidates envision the important role teachers could play in children's lives. She explained, "I want

them to see how their experiences from childhood through adulthood have influenced them today. We are the sum of our experiences. As teachers, we are making some impression on our students."

An assignment in the applied linguistic course also involved students considering their personal backgrounds as they constructed understanding of language learning. While Dr. Goldenstar did not discuss this assignment when asked about her consideration of students' background knowledge or her use of scaffolded instruction, the purpose of the assignment as listed in the syllabus was to raise students' meta-linguistic awareness as a language learner and to enable them to become a more sensitive language teacher.

In addition to assignments such as these, some faculty members used pedagogical approaches designed to tap into students' prior knowledge and, in some cases, to explicitly support students' use of this information to construct understanding. For instance, Dr. Hope described her process of carefully gathering information in the following way:

> One of the things I do is to collect their background information on index card that I use when I am teaching. As I teach, I draw on their background. For example, I have had one preservice teacher who went to Japan and taught English to Japanese children. One day, I asked that preservice teacher to tell us about the issues related to teaching English to them and how they learn. Likewise, I had many others who went abroad. So I asked them to tell us about their experiences as strangers and foreigners. We draw on such experiences.

This faculty member also used the background of her students to aid her in conveying content. For example, on one occasion she had a preservice teacher Magda, who was from an Arab country, use her expertise in that little known language, to provide all of the preservice teachers with an experience on which they could draw to better understand their students' learning processes: " I asked [Magda] to teach us her language. The rationale behind that is to help understand what it feels or it is like when one is learning or teaching a language to people who do not know anything about the language."

Both of the ESL faculty members in this program had an international background, but Dr. Hope in particular drew on her own experiences of having been a student in a second language environment to inform her own perspective on the importance of tapping into her students' background. She explained:

> I do all these things with my students because I know what it means when one's background is not drawn upon. For example, when I was in Canada to get my education, the educators never drew upon my background. They were not interested in it. I was the only international student among them. The only thing I could do is to shut up and learn. But I felt it was unfortunate.

In addition to explicitly drawing on their background knowledge and then using preservice teachers' input in lessons, this faculty member also carefully modeled instructional approaches such as collaborative learning or language experiences, which she wanted preservice teachers to later incorporate into their own classrooms. She saw this modeling as a very important form of scaffolded instruction. She explained:

> My instructional strategies also vary every time I have the opportunity to teach the methods course. What I am projecting for Fall, for example, is language experiences approach. I am thinking of taking them to [the state capitol building] so that they can take a look at the statues there; they are packed with history. After the field trip, we come back to class and I will ask them to design curriculum based on their observations and what they learn that I will teach to English language learners. I am going to ask them to design online newspaper and this will be backward design. What kinds of steps and writings children need to go through until they achieve the final project? These kinds of learning tasks are real.

For this instructor, modeling effective instructional approaches and ways to tap into students' funds of knowledge were crucial to implementing an effective teacher preparation program. She explained:

> So all this is modeling. What we do here will prepare them for practicum, that is, what they will do on their own when they go to field experiences. This is important because I don't want us (teacher educators) to be accused of being Ivory towers. That is, we are not effective in preparing teachers. The teachers cannot cope and deal with real classroom issues.

Summary: Scaffolding Conceptual Understandings. In summary, while all of the faculty appreciated that candidates' experiences having learned a second language could be beneficial in their understanding of theories, pedagogy, and language learning processes, faculty were varied in the degree to which they

explicitly drew on this prior knowledge when teaching. One faculty member systematically drew on students' prior knowledge and modeled effective pedagogical approaches as she designed her course experiences.

Discussion

Requirements for candidates to have background experiences in learning a second language seemed to be valued by faculty in that it provided affordances for preservice teachers to have developed positive dispositions toward diverse cultures, to value diverse perspectives, and to provide a foundation for understanding the process of learning a second language. In addition, this requirement established a foundation on which faculty could draw in developing conceptual understandings. Interestingly, while background knowledge was valued and acknowledged by the faculty, their use of such knowledge to frame instruction varied across individuals. Some instructors integrated multiple assignments designed to tap into unique experiences, while some faculty felt that scaffolding was more applicable in other courses, in field experiences, or that they were challenged in being able to tap into individual students' prior knowledge.

When the focus of scaffolding in the program was examined, the foci included development of dispositions, of strategies, and of conceptual understanding; scaffolding for dispositions was often passive. Faculty often relied on the fact that entry requirements created affordances for understanding and valuing others rather than explicitly framing assignments to understand and unpack candidates' perspectives or to move to them to more positive dispositions. While instructors recognized the importance of being alert to teachable moments, systematic and explicit attempts to understand how individual backgrounds of candidates were shaping the prospective teachers' dispositions were not frequent. Previous research has underscored the need for teacher educators to understand candidates' dispositions, to have them explore their current perspectives, and to support development of positive dispositions and orientations toward culturally diverse learners (Kaste, 2004; Raths, 2001; Muehler & Hindin, 2011). While some researchers contend pre-existing frames of reference can be difficult to change (Pattnaik & Vold, 1998), Muehler and Hindin (2011) contend that careful assessment of dispositions can aid teacher educators in understanding factors influencing candidates' dispositions and be helpful in shaping coursework and field experiences in ways that positively impacts the social consciousness of preservice teachers. While requiring specific background experiences may afford

candidates with opportunities to understand and value diverse learners, teacher educators may also need to consider how specific assessment tools or case studies may be systematically used into order to unpack, analyze, capitalize on, and/or neutralize the impact of specific prior experiences on developing dispositions.

The second focus of scaffolding evident in the program focused on strategy development. Faculty recognized that as students in a graduate program, their preservice teachers could benefit from developing strategies for learning. Consequently, all faculty emphasized the development of preservice teachers' learning strategies and their use of academic language both in class discussions and as writers and seemed comfortable in providing this support. This emphasis seems consistent with Van Zoest and Stockero's (2008) work on synergistic scaffolding which indicates that carefully designed scaffolds, provided during the writing of papers, can enhance preservice candidates' explorations of self-as-teacher. Often, course assignments and carefully designed scaffolds such as in Van Zoest and Stockero's (2008) work, are planned in light of a pre-determined need. Instructors in this program drew on their prior experiences with preservice teachers in graduate program as well as their observations with current students to construct assignments, to sequence tasks over the semester, and to provide individual feedback in ways that supported their graduate students' development as academic writers and their ability to express themselves as educators.

Use of scaffolding to develop conceptual understandings was predominant in methods courses where the faculty integrated assignments designed to unpack the theoretical underpinnings of their literacy and language learning experiences. It also invited participants to model and clarify instructional approaches in light of their own prior experiences. While most courses had some type of assignment designed to tap into candidates' background experiences, course instructors varied in the degree to which they purposefully capitalized on or concentrated on such information. Only one instructor, the associate professor, systematically used both predetermined assignments and responsive instruction in order to understand individuals' perspectives and help individuals draw on their own unique backgrounds as they constructed their understandings of second language development and instruction. This may indicate a need for programs in teacher education to consider the professional development that new faculty or part time instructors may find valuable as they develop as teacher educators. As Adler (2011) indicates, having students examine their background epistemologies is challenging, as students are required "to look to their past experiences, participate in the present dialogue, and anticipate how new knowledge and perspectives will help

them develop multiple perspectives in their future teaching" (p. 617). Such a process requires teacher educators to work alongside candidates to explore the preservice teachers' beliefs, practices and expectations and how these, which came from their worldview, are translated into pedagogical choices. In some cases, teacher educators may find that assignments, course experiences, and instructional approaches which are effective for some students may be ineffective for others (Many et al., 2002). However, such differentiated instruction is a complex undertaking and may call for program administrators and others to consider how we mentor teacher education faculty to help them consider how to utilize such approaches within their programs.

Finally, although this study identified teacher educator's use of scaffolding by creating affordances through instructional design within assignments and class experiences and use of responsive instruction in oral and written discourse, there was less indication of teacher educators' systematic monitoring of students' growing abilities as a result of scaffolding. Previous research on scaffolding has noted responsive teachers need to be aware of students' zone of proximal development, and then choose the amount of support necessary as students begin to respond to instruction (Maloch, 2002; Meyer, 1993). During such episodes, educators and researchers need to understand the ways in which teachers provide for a gradual release of responsibility to students. Some researchers contend that scaffolding of conceptual understandings, in particular, may resemble a collaborative co-construction of knowledge within a community of learners, and thus not incorporate a release of responsibility to the learner (Many, 2002; Roelher & Cantlon, 1997). In the case of this study, evidence of a gradual release of responsibility to the learner was not clear from the data related to scaffolding of learning strategies and dispositions. Future research focusing on the nature of teacher educator-student engagement may be beneficial in more fully understanding the way in which a gradual release of responsibility may be used within teacher education programs with respect to students' development of dispositions, learning strategies, or conceptual understandings.

Conclusion

In this study, we examined the perspectives of four teacher educators towards instructional scaffolding, and the way in which these perspectives were evident in the the design and content of the teacher education program focusing English language learners in which they taught. While all the participants believed

that instructional scaffolding is crucial for preservice teachers' learning and development, the faculty members varied in the ways they approached the task of scaffolding.

Scaffolding foci generally included preservice teachers' development of dispositions, strategies, and conceptual understandings while ways of scaffolding encompassed (a) creating affordances, (b) instructional designs such as modeling, purposeful structured assignments and group activities, and (c) teacher/student discourse in the form of discussions, feedback, and reflective pieces. These ways of scaffolding were not equally distributed among participants.

More experiences or seniority in teacher education might give some advantage in the use of instructional scaffolding. This finding left us with the question of whether novice teacher educators might need some professional development or mentoring in how to provide instructional scaffolding. In this case, future research needs to investigate what kinds of scaffolding strategies these teacher educators need to acquire most and the conditions under which such strategies work more effectively. For instance, particular ways of scaffolding may be best suited for supporting development for specific foci (e.g. strategies as opposed to conceptual understanding). In addition, teacher educators may need to consider ways to differentiate instruction when data indicate variation in the effectiveness of specific approaches to scaffolding across different individuals.

Finally, we found less evidence of systematic monitoring of the ways preservice teachers were learning. This might be problematic in the sense that some scaffolding provided might not be necessary or might be less effective as course instructors might not be aware of where preservice teachers are in their zone of proximal development. Again, future research might need to examine how teacher educators monitor their candidates' cognition and growth and how such monitoring efforts affect the ways they tailor their instructional scaffolding.

In closing, this inquiry focused on the role scaffolding played in teacher educators' own approaches to designing coursework and providing instructional support to preservice teachers. While the importance of understanding learners' zone of proximal development and ways to support development has been stressed in research examining literacy teachers and literacy preservice teachers approaches (Palincsar, 1986; Many et al., 2009, Many et al., 2007; Meyer 1993), this study suggests the instructional support provided by literacy teacher educators needs to also be carefully considered. Professional development for literacy teacher educators focusing on their own instructional approaches and ability to support preservice teachers' learning, as well as additional research on the use of

scaffolding in teacher education is needed to ensure that scaffolding is not only stressed in teacher education programs as an important approach for P-12 instruction, but is also modeled and utilized in teacher education classrooms as well.

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