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## Pre-service Teachers' Reflective Writing and Learning in Early Field Experiences

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## Pre-service Teachers' Reflective Writing and Learning in Early Field Experiences

### Cover Page Footnote

Please find attached the final single spaced version for online publication. The last one was not single spaced. We have now corrected this. Thank you.

# Pre-service Teachers' Reflective Writing and Learning in Early Field Experiences

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This study examines future teachers' written reflections on their observations and learning that occurred during early field experiences conducted as part of their participation in a co-curricular Teacher Preparation Program. This study draws on extant research that examines the role of varied and early field experiences (EFE) (Shelton et al., 2020), the potential benefits of these for teacher candidates (LaMaster, 2001), and the role written reflection plays in teacher preparation (Quirke et al., 2021), including how it can serve as an instrument of self-assessment for future teachers (Altahab et al., 2021). Pre-service teachers (PST) were placed with mentor teachers in local schools during the first year of their undergraduate studies and wrote reflective journals documenting their observations and learning. To this end, the study explores how pre-service teachers' reflective writing about the EFEs documents their perspectives of learning and their emerging teacher identities as they reflect upon their engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse K12 students.

The research took place in a mid-Western university in the US, where the Latinx population in local schools surpasses 60%, compared to the 28%

nationwide (NCES, 2017). Accordingly, the demand for qualified teachers, who know how to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, has never been greater. As future teachers, undergraduate teacher candidates are required to meet professional teaching standards that include pedagogical expertise, knowledge about how to establish a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment, skills for planning and delivering effective instruction, and demonstration of professionalism through ethical conduct, reflection, and leadership (Colorado Department of Education, 2022). In 2018, and to further support growing numbers of English and multilingual learners, the State Board of Education approved new requirements for all educators with basic teaching licenses (elementary, English, math, science, social studies, or middle-level endorsements) to complete professional development and or training in CLD Education. As a result, an increasing number of teacher candidates are electing to add an endorsement in CLD to the initial licensure. A CLD endorsement prepares teacher candidates with in-depth knowledge on culture, diversity,

and equity; language acquisition and literacy development; instructional approaches that integrate both academic English and content learning, and an understanding of progress monitoring and assessment approaches with English language learners (ELLs). Therefore, this study has practical implications for understanding how we can support and prepare teacher candidates to meet the growth in culturally and linguistically diverse students in our schools and classrooms.

### **Teacher Preparation and the Changing Educational Landscape**

As the K12 school population continues to grow in both numbers and diversity (United States Census Bureau, 2022), the demand for qualified teachers increases. However, enrollment in teacher preparation programs is down, and the shortage of teachers in Colorado reached over 3,000 unfilled positions in 2021 (Colorado Education Association, 2021). This dire situation puts increased pressure on both universities and teacher preparation programs not only to recruit, but also to retain and graduate, teachers who will meet the needs of students and districts. The situation is further compounded by the crisis in Higher Education and overall declining enrollment for the past eight years (Hanover Research, 2019). If universities and teacher preparation programs are to effectively address the teacher shortage, they need to adopt deliberate and intentional approaches to support and provide future teachers with a relevant and meaningful education both in and beyond the classroom. This is not news to higher education, and as universities seek to better understand their place and role in society,

there is a growing focus on implementing systems to support student success, including the integration of educational High Impact Practices.

### **High Impact Practices and the Need for Transformative Education**

National trends in higher education recognize the importance of providing college students with transformative learning that includes High Impact Practices (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Kuh, 2008). Transformative education, in its essence, requires learners to identify, critically reflect, and then act upon an object of knowledge and particular ways of being (Freire, 1987). As part of an ongoing initiative to rethink college learning goals with the needs of the new global century, High Impact Practices (HIPs) include but are not limited to the following approaches: first year seminars and experiences, learning communities, collaborative assignments and projects, diversity/global learning, and community-based learning. Correspondingly, these approaches are of relevance to the field of undergraduate teacher preparation given the overlap and opportunities to engage pre-service teachers, especially through EFEs as a form of community-based learning that can become the basis for written reflections and learning. Research also shows that the effect of community engaged learning is greater when several high impact practices are combined (Hartley & Sponsler, 2013). Furthermore, the “relative effects of engagement in high-impact practices were also evident when comparing students from racial or ethnic minority groups with each other and with their traditionally advantaged white peers.” (Finley & McNair, 2013, p.15).

In a similar vein, there has been a growing interest in developing

comprehensive frameworks to prepare all students with knowledge and skills for success. One such framework, used largely in K12 education, is the P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning that “was developed with input from educators, education experts, and business leaders to define and illustrate the skills, knowledge, expertise, and support systems that students need to succeed in work, life, and citizenship,” (Battelle for kids, 2022). Within this framework, this study focuses on the area of learning and innovation defined as the 4 C’s; creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. These aspects, which we define in the data analysis section, essentially transcend the other areas in the P21 framework and we consider are relevant for future teachers, especially for how they are thinking about teaching and learning.

Central to the tenants of both experiential engaged learning and the P21 concept of critical thinking is a connection to student reflection about learning. Thus, learning can be considered both a response to external experience variations and an internal response that can be prompted by reflection (Moon, 2004). Moon posits that the ‘meaningfulness’ of learning is determined by the learner within the context of a given cognitive structure (the one present on any given day where learning events occur). Therefore, “[m]eaning changes with experience of a particular object, but it may change with alterations in the experience of other objects that are related to the first object” (Moon, 2004, p.24). This perspective is applicable to PSTs and their reflections because it underscores how learning happens in a social context. This in turn shapes individual understanding through dynamic relationships, including the role

that oral and written language play in socialization and the construction of meaning.

### ***Reflective Writing and Journaling***

Journaling and reflective writing are essential in teacher preparation and engaged learning because they provide insights into learners’ experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. In other words, “[w]e learn through the comparison of external experience with the current internal experiences that we bring to bear on the material of learning,” (Moon, 2004, p.30). Journals serve as a medium to reflect on action and practice and they construct an on-going record of these. Reflective journaling constitutes an “honest examination of values, feelings, beliefs, recognition of preexisting biases and assumptions; connection of new experiences with prior learning; and modification of development of new perceptions or perspectives about themselves, others, and the learning process,” (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006, p.151).

Furthermore, reflective journals whether open-end or guided have positive impacts on student learning. A guided journal is structured and usually has assigned topics or prompts that are used or provided before the experience. An open-ended journal asks students to make connections among readings, experiences, and presentations. Prior research shows that both journal types positively impact learning and self-efficacy, although no significant difference was found between self-efficacy and the journal types, (Schneider-Cline, 2018). In essence, reflective writing, whether it be guided or open-ended, can serve to represent how learners experience changes in behavior, consciousness, and self-efficacy. Reflective

writing can also shed light on how learners experience issues of social justice and equity (Garde-Hansen & Calvert, 2007; Taylor et al., 2012).

### ***Pre-service Teacher Preparation for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners***

A common concern from many initial teachers is that while their teacher preparation programs teach them “about” race and diversity, they do not usually feel equipped “to work with” race and diversity when they encounter them in the public-school classroom. Therefore, teacher preparation programs can do more to directly expose and engage candidates with culturally and linguistically diverse students, such that “[e]ven students who are not deliberately opposed to dealing with racially and culturally diverse issues in education need guidance and support in critiquing and changing thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors related to them” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, as cited in Wiseman, 2014, p. 54).

For future teachers to know how to engage with the increasing diversity and multicultural students that comprise K12 classrooms, they need to be capable of recognizing diversity and adopting a critical stance toward their own biases and group circumstances. This requires that teachers distinguish intercultural competencies and know how to support learning that values, respects, and “emerges from the contexts of diversity,” (Hortas, 2019, p.199, author translation). Such an approach involves preparing teachers to recognize the cultural and linguistic diversity that students bring as legitimate funds of knowledge (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2005) that support not only academic learning but also serve to affirm student identities and a sense of belonging in classrooms (Nieto & Bode, 2018). In sum, reflective practices are

valued in teaching broadly and serve to promote teacher candidate awareness of these issues.

One way teacher preparation programs attempt to engage PSTs with exposure to diversity is through field experiences that typically occur in the junior year, prior to student teaching. However, there is a small and growing recognition that early field experiences (EFEs), that are arranged prior to junior year, and occur in authentic classrooms and schools are a worthwhile endeavor that can increase future teacher motivation and participation (LaMaster, 2001). However, there is scarce research that studies neither EFEs in teacher preparation programs, nor the intersection between reflective writing and EFE. This study seeks to address this gap and asks the following questions: 1) How does participation in EFE shape pre-service teachers’ learning and professional identities as expressed in written reflections? And 2) In what ways does participation in EFEs impact pre-service teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and learning about cultural and linguistic diversity?

### **Methodology**

This study is an exploratory mixed methods design, using primarily qualitative and some quantitative approaches to analyze written reflections produced by participants during their first semester in a teacher preparation program. First, and to understand how participation in EFE shaped PST learning and identity, as well as evidence for any impact on their beliefs and

attitudes towards cultural and linguistic diversity, we used qualitative approaches to analyze the content and quality of the types of reflections that students wrote about from the EFE. Given the gap in the literature on early field experiences, we used a small scale qualitative and inductive approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to explore and discover patterns. We categorized written reflections informed by a priori codes from research on journal writing to account for different levels of written reflection descriptive, empathic, analytic, and metacognitive (Cabon and Lee-Wilkerson, 2006), and the professional skills from the 4C's creative, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration from the P21 framework (Batelle for kids, 2022). The criterion we used to assess written statements was that they contained at least one phrase that aligned with elements in the definitions for either levels of reflection or skills from the 4Cs. These concepts helped us to explore and discover patterns in the journals, code phenomena to identify themes (Saldana, 2016), and then describe findings that were observed in PSTs' reflections, as described in detail below.

Second, and building upon the qualitative analysis to discern if there was any variation or relationship in the quantity of levels and kinds of writing over the semester, we undertook quantitative analyses. We conducted two types of analysis. Since this is a non-experimental design study, we began with frequency counts and data analysis for each of the content codes (the four levels of reflections and the 4Cs) identified in the qualitative analysis. We also conducted a paired samples T-test to compare the types of reflection produced by PSTs in the first half

of the semester to those written in the second half of the semester

### **Researcher Stance**

As a research team, we each have a vested interest in teacher education. The lead researcher identifies as a culturally and linguistically diverse individual, a former high-school teacher, and an immigrant to the US. She is a professor in teacher education with extensive experience working in both pre-service and in-service teacher preparation. The other two researchers are graduate students. The first student is pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Studies and has experience in pre-service teacher observations. She identifies as white, cis-gender, monolingual, and not currently living with a disability. The second graduate student is pursuing a ondoctoral degree in Educational Technology and has experience teaching pre-service undergraduate students. She identifies as a trilingual, former second language teacher and an immigrant to the US. The lead researcher's observations, prior engagement with pre-service teachers in early field experiences, and knowledge of the field were driving factors and impetus for the current study.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were all first-year undergraduates who were pursuing a K12 teaching license and seeking an added endorsement in CLD education at a mid-sized public university. Recruitment for participation was through invitation at an in-person event for students in a co-curricular support program at the institution where the lead researcher works, although there was no prior relationship with the participants. An electronic communication was also sent to

all students in the program with an invitation to participate. The study has received IRB approval and all participants completed written consent. Participation was voluntary and there was no compensation for participation, since the written journals were produced as part of participants' experience in the program. Given the exploratory nature of this study, we focused on six pre-service teachers who completed two journals during the

semester. Of the six participants, one identified as male and two were bilingual Latinx (Table 1). All were students in a co-curricular support program that includes four unique components, also high-impact practices: learning community, living community, mentoring, and leadership experiences. Students wrote their reflections on the EFEs that occurred as part of the mentorship component within the first term in the program.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Female	5	84
Male	1	16
Language		
Bilingual English & Spanish	2	33
English only	4	66
First-generation		
Yes	3	50
No	3	50

## Procedures

In the first semester of their undergraduate teacher preparation program, and to expand the 'types and timing' of field experience (Shelton et al., 2020), new candidate teachers were placed with experienced mentor teachers in local classrooms. Since all students were also earning an added endorsement in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse education, they were placed in socially and culturally diverse classrooms serving English language learners (ELLs), and immigrant and refugee students. Moreover, unlike procedures in

other studies, this early field experience was not part of a credit bearing course, nor were the written reflections required assignments. Rather, students submitted reflections as part of their own self-assessment and belonging in the co-curricular cohort teacher preparation program.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Data in the form of written electronic semi-open journals were collected twice in the first semester. Eleven students completed at least one journal



entry and for this study we report using data from six students who submitted two journal entries at least three months apart. Students were provided the option to use semi-structured prompts for each response (Appendix 1). Most students responded to some or part of the prompts and added independent reflections. Student responses varied between one to two pages in length. Next, we describe the procedures for the qualitative analysis to provide details about the levels of reflection and codes that we identified. Then, we describe how we used those codes to quantify the data for the statistical analysis.

### **Qualitative analysis**

For the qualitative review, we examined the data using a content analysis and constant-comparison approach to identify eight different reflection categories, described in detail in the findings section. The criteria for categorizing journal entries was to identify quotes and phrases that demonstrated aspects of any of the four levels of the reflection: (1) Descriptive, (2) Empathic, (3) Analytic, and (4) Metacognitive (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006). The quotes were then coded with by a graduate assistant who employed cyclical coding to continuously reflect on the process and emerging themes (Saldana, 2016). Next, we reviewed the reflective journals for evidence that suggested ways in which pre-service teachers writing exemplified traits from any of the four components identified in the P21 frameworks for 21st Century Learning (Battelle for kids, 2022). This framework includes "learning and innovation skills" known as the 4Cs: (1) Creative, (2) Critical Thinking, (3) Communication, and (4) Collaboration. Although we were not directly observing pre-service teachers' demonstration of these attributes, we were

interested in how their writing referenced these skills and types of learning.

Two rounds of coding were completed by one graduate assistant in consultation with the lead researcher to identify those aspects of the reflections that were indicative of their learning and professional identities. The first cycle used emergent coding to identify aspects related to research question one and how the students' journals included different levels of reflection. Next, we coded for aspects of the 4 C's. The second round used values coding, defined as "the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). Values coding connects explicitly to the second research question where we are interested in students' perspectives concerning cultural and linguistic diversity. After each round of coding, the codes were organized with a short phrase or word that would help to reveal themes that represent a pattern in the data (Saldaña, 2016). A second graduate assistant and the lead researcher cross-checked using values coding to ensure interrater reliability.

### **Statistical analysis**

For the statistical analysis, we began by eliminating any missing data and by pairing each participant's initial journal with their follow-up reflection journal. Next using NVivo, the qualitative quotes that had been previously identified in the reflection journals were tagged and coded. Accordingly, each instance (phrase, statement, or sentence) that represented any the different types of reflection was coded using one the eight different types as either (1) Descriptive, (2) Empathic, (3) Analytic, and (4) Metacognitive (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006) and based on skills

from the 4Cs as either (5) Creative, (6) Critical Thinking, (7) Communication, and (8) Collaboration. After coding the data in NVivo, we ran frequency counts for each type of reflection in each of the journals.

Next, we calculated the mean based on the frequencies for each level of reflection and the 4 Cs in both the first and second journals (Table 4). We then transposed the frequency count data into SPSS to calculate and compared the mean for the overall sum counts for each level of reflection and each skill from the 4Cs, in the first and second journals and across all journals (Table 5). We conducted a paired samples T-test to determine whether there were significant differences between the levels and types of reflection in the first and second reflection journals (Table 6). Finally, we conducted a Bivariate Correlation analysis to determine whether there was any significant correlation between each level of reflection and each skill from the 4Cs from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills framework across the first and second journals, and all reflection journals (Table 7).

## Findings

In this section we describe findings that illustrate how teacher candidates produced various levels and types of reflections based on the early field experiences. To answer the research questions, we begin with findings from the qualitative analysis since these illustrate the different levels and types of writing that pre-service teachers produced. These findings provide a context for the subsequent quantitative analysis.

## Qualitative Analysis

We used the four levels of reflection (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006) to categorize how pre-service teachers (PSTs)

wrote about their early field experiences. We found that examples from all types of reflection (descriptive, empathic, analytic, and metacognitive) were present in all the students' journals (Table 2). We then used the P21 framework to identify evidence for the development of professional skills related to the 4Cs (creative, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration) in the education context (Table 3). We then analyzed the codes and reviewed the journals again to reveal themes and patterns in PSTs' early field experiences (EFEs) across the four levels of reflection and the 4 Cs skills. The following themes emerged from the PSTs' journals: a) creating supportive classrooms, b) promoting academic and linguistic success, and c) encouragement and relationship building. We will discuss themes related to professional identity along with beliefs, attitudes, and learning about CLD education.

During early field experiences, the PSTs observed classroom activities and sometimes participated to support the mentor teachers and students. PSTs document in their journals their observations, learnings, and reflections. With this in mind, we infer that if an observed characteristic or behavior is referenced, either in praise or critique, this can inform how PSTs might begin to construct their learning and professional identities.

As these examples illustrate, descriptive journal quotes referenced K12 student language skills and teacher practices in the classroom. Empathic journal quotes included PSTs' perceptions and feelings along with observed teacher dispositions. Analytic journal quotes discussed the classroom environment and

which practices were ideal for students' learning.

**Table 2**

*Levels of Reflection Definitions<sup>a</sup> and Exemplary Quotes from PSTs' Journals*

Level of Reflection Definition	Example Quote	Example Quote
<p><b>Descriptive:</b>            "Students demonstrate acquisition of new content from significant learning experiences" (Chabon &amp; Lee-Wilkerson, 2006, p.154). Sense making, knowledge attainment, linking old and new information.</p>	<p>Instead of writing 'Cute' or 'bunny', she would write 'Cūt' and 'bunē'. I think this makes sense, since it would be better to start off with how to pronounce the words, rather than focusing on both pronouncing and spelling. After the students found three descriptive words, they would then proceed to draw a picture.</p>	<p>I have had the opportunity to see multiple demographics of students between Lake Elementary, a Title One school with a student body that has high low SES families and ELL students, and Knoll Elementary, which has more middle class white affluent students.</p>
<p><b>Empathic:</b>            "Students demonstrate thoughts about or challenges to beliefs, values, and attitudes of self and others" (Chabon &amp; Lee-Wilkerson, 2006, p. 154). Sensitivity to others' experiences, values, beliefs, tolerance for others, and self-projection onto others' experiences.</p>	<p>It felt really nice to be able to talk to these students in Spanish and in English because I felt more like myself.</p>	<p>The English-speaking students are very comfortable with being risk-takers; however, the ELL students struggled with this at first.</p>
<p><b>Analytic:</b>            "Students demonstrate the application of learning to a broader context of personal and professional life" (Chabon &amp; Lee-Wilkerson, 2006, p. 154). Evidence that students use their own class learning to examine, appraise, compare/contrast, plan, or offer solutions.</p>	<p>Ms. G resorts to using Spanish from time to time, but not as often as I did. I wish I knew when the right time to switch languages is and what other methods there are to help students understand. I imagine that there is no real right answer for that question because it is probably different for every student and for different ages.</p>	<p>I thought that the tournament was a really nice touch, and something that I would like to incorporate into the school I will work for. It doesn't necessarily have to be soccer, but it would be good to have something to involve the English learning community.</p>
<p><b>Metacognitive:</b>            Students demonstrate examination of the learning process, showing what leaning occurred, how learning occurred, and how newly acquired knowledge or learning altered existing knowledge" (Chabon &amp; Lee-Wilkerson, 2006, p. 154).</p>	<p>Overall, I learned a lot from this classroom and gained a new experience. I learned how to work better with students who are learning English. I also learned how they work to understand new concepts and</p>	<p>Not only is it rewarding, but it is also challenging because you are always learning and growing alongside your students. Knowing the cutting-edge research and culturally responsive teaching strategies is paramount for me, and I feel</p>

how they learn to do that while learning English.

that UNI has also prepared me to go out into the educational world and make a difference in the community I am blessed to teach in.

<sup>a</sup> (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006)

### Table 3

*Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Framework (P21)<sup>a</sup>, Learning and Innovation Skills Definitions and Exemplary Quotes from PSTs' Journals.*

P21 Definition	Example Quote	Example Quote
<p><b>Creativity:</b> Brainstorm, create new ideas, expand, refine, evaluate, to improve creative work. Also, work creatively with others by responding to diverse perspectives, feedback exchange, and learning in a cyclical process.</p>	<p>My desired environment would be one where I feel like I am capable of being creative with the activities for the day and where I feel like I will be listened to. Being able to see the environment of a classroom has been beneficial for me and has helped me have a vague idea of what my future could be like.</p>	<p>If I were to assume some of the kids were English Language Learners, then they would be very different compared to the ones I saw at my first observation.</p>
<p><b>Critical Thinking:</b> Use inductive and deductive reasoning to produce results, evaluate arguments, claims or beliefs, synthesize and interpret information, and reflect critically. Ultimately, identify ways to solve problems.</p>	<p>...the best practice to meet the needs of these students is still the pull-out method for targeted instruction. I can see how this would benefit the students who are newcomers and need more isolated and focused vocabulary and syntax instruction; however, all our students are at a WIDA level 3 or higher.</p>	<p>I would not want to be hired at this school. I think it was a pretty toxic environment for the students, and they teach from a script at the school which was really defeating when I was teaching since it was not genuine, and the students could not have fun.</p>
<p><b>Communication:</b> Articulate and listen to ideas and thoughts in written, oral, and nonverbally in various contexts. Use communication for a variety of purposes and in diverse environments.</p>	<p>He seemed to gain back motivation when I explained things in Spanish, which is good, but should I always resort to that?</p>	<p>I wish I knew when the right time to switch languages is and what other methods there are to help students understand.</p>

<p><b>Collaboration:</b> Work effectively with diverse teams, flexibility, working towards a common goal, and assuming mutual responsibility.</p>	<p>It was also what I tried to do with my mom when I was going to help her learn English, but she said she would rather learn by memorizing words and phrases.</p>	<p>I am excited to see what the English Language Development (ELD) Teacher is doing and how that instruction is supporting these students' learning of the English language.</p>
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<sup>a</sup> (*Batelle for kids, 2022*)

Also, PSTs' observations of student actions were prevalent along with the appraisal of teacher practice and classroom events. Metacognitive journal quotes contained the most diverse codes of any of the levels and showed how students were reflecting on their own learning as well as making connections to K12 student learning.

As table 3 shows, we found evidence for all aspects of the 4Cs. Creativity was evidenced in the ways they were able to reflect on the observations or to respond to a problem. Critical thinking was demonstrated in the ways PSTs appraised what they were observing. Reflections also included attention to aspects of communication in the classroom, such as the use of Spanish language, and how use of other languages supports learning for linguistically diverse students. Finally, PSTs described collaborating with families, different student groups. Collaboration between students, between PST and mentor teacher. Collaboration as relationship building also involved 1-on-1 and small groupings. Further evidence for collaboration included description of bilingual teaching and relationship building were described by Latinx PSTs.

### ***Learning and Professional Identity***

To answer in more depth the first research question, we found that participation in early field experiences

positively shaped pre-service teachers' learning and professional identities, as evidenced in three interrelated themes that emerged in the journals. The PST reflections praised characteristics and behaviors in their mentor teachers that were related to: a) creating supportive classrooms, b) promoting academic and linguistic success, and c) encouragement and relationship building.

Supportive classrooms include teacher patience. This is necessary in the PST view, "After visiting the classroom, I realized how much patience is truly needed to be a teacher." Helping K12 students was described as a means of supporting academic improvement and preparation for future grades. PSTs expressed that they enjoyed helping, "I liked helping that student because it felt nice that I was able to teach him tips/tricks and how the problems we were working on functioned." PSTs acknowledged that help also comes from the home environment and the community (Table 5). PSTs valued a supportive classroom culture. For example, cultivating a toxic environment is to be avoided (Table 6), and supportive environments were favored, as noted, "I would feel extremely grateful if I were hired at this school. It seems like something that I would really enjoy, and the environment is comfortable."

PSTs documented teacher practices that support academic and linguistic improvement and techniques that foster student understanding such as procedural routines, instructional strategies, student groupings and different forms of encouragement. As observed here, "I love that the first-grade classroom that I am in is inviting and encourages students to take risks with their learning." They identified instructional routines that included wait-time, exit tickets, "I know" objectives, and content review. Other instructional strategies that PSTs emphasized included scaffolding, reflecting, goal setting, emphasizing vocabulary, using props, asking for "help" from students, modifying materials for students, diversifying instruction, promoting student voice and choice, and encouraging students to generate questions. The journals show how PSTs oriented their thinking towards student understanding and academic improvement, "I wonder if it is truly the best practice for them or not."

PSTs also noticed aspects related to encouragement and relationship building in and out of the classroom. Teachers who encouraged their students were praised by PSTs, "Now, after eight weeks of encouragement from Teacher, he is actively engaging in oral and written language in multiple content areas." PSTs described the conditions they aspired to work, teach, and learn in, as well as the characteristics and teaching behaviors they valued. The PSTs identified and sometimes evaluated the teaching they observed. This included recognition of different K12 student grouping configurations were used to encourage learning and student engagement. One-on-one and small groups were discussed as the ideal level to work with ELL students, "The small group allowed

Teacher to talk one on one and allowed the students to focus."

### ***Bilingual and Bicultural Identities***

For PSTs who are bilingual, this part of their identity was described not only as a teaching tool, but also as a connection with bilingual students (Table 5). They reflected upon when and how they could use their bilingual skills when working with multilingual students. PSTs described how their bilingualism and biculturalism helped them build relationships and find common identity with students who were culturally and linguistically diverse. For example, "In the algebra class, I had a small group of them come to me to ask more about me and we made some connections based on where we were originally from." PSTs acknowledged their bilingual and bicultural identity as a source of pride and a means for collaboration, encouragement, and relationship building.

### ***Beliefs, Attitudes, and Learning about Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education***

To address the second question, we present evidence in this section that further illustrates how participation in EFEs impacted PSTs' beliefs, attitudes, and learning about cultural and linguistic diversity. All PSTs valued learning about teaching CLD students, "Overall, I learned a lot from this classroom and gained a new experience. I learned how to work better with students who are learning English." PSTs wrote about teachers who cared about student understanding and sought to promote student success, "Overall in this class the teachers were very focused on making sure the students knew and understood the material." PSTs described academic success as improvement, especially language development for CLD students, "The one I was able to see is when

they would read the directions easier than last time. This shows how their reading abilities have improved throughout this semester." PSTs valued when students paid attention to them as the teacher, "The kids were not used to me leading, so to get their attention was very hard."

Multicultural and bilingual teaching was valued by PSTs especially with regards to academic success and relationship building. They connected the CLD community to their professional identities, "I want to be a teacher to teach. I want to help young children throughout their process and help them have a foundation for future grades." One PST stated that they would like to work at a school with a diverse student population, "[the school] is quite diverse so that is a reason why I think it would be a great opportunity." Staying current on culturally responsive teaching and implementing multicultural teaching was a priority (Table 2). PSTs identified CLD practices, "The curriculum that is utilized is English Language Development Achieve, and this program starts with a newcomer program, then develops the student's language in units that relate to daily life. However, they still need direct instruction in academic language and assistance with communication in writing." And, they wondered, "[the student] seemed to gain back motivation when I explained things in Spanish, which is good, but should I always resort to that?" Overall, PSTs documented

that they liked working with and supporting CLD students and observing their growth in English language attainment. As such, PSTs incorporated an appreciation for CLD into their thinking through critical reflection and desired to learn more (Table 2).

To further inform our understanding of how PSTs were reflecting on the EFE, we conducted quantitative analysis to explore differences within and cross the four levels of reflection and the different skills from the 4 Cs from the P21 framework from both the first and second journals written by students.

### Quantitative Findings

First, we counted each occurrence of each type of reflection across all twelve journals, six from the first half and six from the second half of the semester (Table 4). Next, we ran Paired Sample Statistics to further explore differences. The Paired Sample showed an increase in the frequency in levels of reflection from the first to the second journals in pre-service teachers' use of Descriptive, Empathic, and Analytic strategies; and in the P21 skills in Communication and Collaboration skills. While the P21 Creative skill remained the same, the use of Metacognitive reflection strategies and P21 Critical thinking skill each decreased slightly from first to second journals.

**Table 4**

*First and Second Journals Paired Sample Statistics*

	Paired Sample <sup>a</sup>	Total No.	M	SD	SEM
<b>Levels of reflection</b>					
<b>Pair 1</b>	Descriptive_1 <sup>st</sup>	31	5.17	2.787	1.138
	Descriptive_2 <sup>nd</sup>	48	8.00	2.898	1.183
<b>Pair 2</b>	Empathic_1 <sup>st</sup>	21	3.50	4.278	1.746

	Empathic_2 <sup>nd</sup>	30	5.00	5.692	2.324
<b>Pair 3</b>	Analytic_1 <sup>st</sup>	59	9.83	3.545	1.447
	Analytic_2 <sup>nd</sup>	60	10.00	3.899	1.592
<b>Pair 4</b>	Metacognitive_1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>20</b>	<b>3.33</b>	0.516	0.211
	Metacognitive_2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.67</b>	1.966	0.803
<b>P21 4Cs skills</b>					
<b>Pair 5</b>	Creative_1 <sup>st</sup>	7	1.17	0.983	0.401
	Creative_2 <sup>nd</sup>	7	1.17	1.329	0.543
<b>Pair 6</b>	CriticalThinking_1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>51</b>	<b>8.50</b>	3.017	1.232
	CriticalThinking_2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>50</b>	<b>8.33</b>	5.574	2.275
<b>Pair 7</b>	Communication_1 <sup>st</sup>	15	2.50	2.345	0.957
	Communication_2 <sup>nd</sup>	19	3.17	1.169	0.477
<b>Pair 8</b>	Collaboration_1 <sup>st</sup>	14	2.33	2.338	0.955
	Collaboration_2 <sup>nd</sup>	16	2.67	2.658	1.085

<sup>a</sup> n = 6 journals for each pair. Total No. is for observed instances across all journals.

We also totaled the number of occurrences for each level and skill across all journals to discern which were the most frequent. Based on the overall sum across all twelve Reflection Journals Descriptive

Statics (Table 5), the top three most frequently used reflection strategies and P21 skills are Analytic (M=19.83), Critical thinking (M= 16.83), and Descriptive (M=13.17).

**Table 5**

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Overall Sum across First and Second Journals*

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Levels of reflection</b>		
Descriptive Sum	<b>13.17</b>	5.269
Empathic_ Sum	8.50	9.772
Analytic_ Sum	<b>19.83</b>	5.601
Metacognitive_ Sum	5.00	2.449
<b>P21 4Cs skills</b>		
Creative_ Sum	2.33	1.862
Critical Thinking_ Sum	<b>16.83</b>	7.305
Communication_ Sum	5.67	2.805
Collaboration_ Sum	5.00	4.099

*Note.* N = 12 journals total for each level and skill (6 first journals and 6 second journals)

To compare levels of reflection and P21 skills from the first and second reflection journals, as reported above (Table 4), we conducted a paired-sample t-

test (Table 6). On average, PSTs used more descriptive strategies in the first journal (M=5.17, SD=2.787) than in the second journal (M=8,.0 SD=2.898). As table 6



illustrates, this difference was statistically significant,  $t(5) = -3.248$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ . On average, students used more metacognitive strategies in the 1<sup>st</sup> journal ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 0.516$ ) than in the 2<sup>nd</sup> journal ( $M = 1.67$ ,  $SD = 1.966$ ). This difference was

also statistically significant,  $t(5) = 2.712$ ,  $p = 0.042$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

Finally, a Bivariate Correlation analysis was conducted (Table 7), at 95% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) to explore potential relations across levels of reflection and 4Cs.

**Table 6**

*First and Second Paired Sample t-test*

		95% Confidence Interval						Sig. (2-tailed)	
Paired Differences		M	SD	SEM	LL	UL	t	df	
<b>Levels of reflection</b>									
P1	Descriptive _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	-2.833	2.137	0.872	-5.076	-0.591	-3.248	5	<b>0.023</b>
P2	Empathic _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	-1.5	2.429	0.992	-4.049	1.049	-1.513	5	0.191
P3	Analytic _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	-0.167	4.916	2.007	-5.326	4.992	-0.083	5	0.937
P4	Metacognitive _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	1.667	1.506	0.615	0.087	3.247	2.712	5	<b>0.042</b>
<b>P21 4Cs skills</b>									
P5	Creative _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	0	1.414	0.577	-1.484	1.484	0	5	1
P6	Critical Thinking _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	0.167	5.193	2.12	-5.283	5.616	0.079	5	0.94
P7	Communication _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	-0.667	2.422	0.989	-3.209	1.875	-0.674	5	0.53
P8	Collaboration _1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	-0.333	2.875	1.174	-3.351	2.684	-0.284	5	0.788

There are positive correlations between the following seven pairs: Descriptive and Critical thinking ( $r = .895$ ,  $p = 0.016 < \alpha = 0.05$ ), Descriptive and Communication ( $r = .898$ ,  $p = 0.015 < \alpha = 0.05$ ), Analytic and Critical thinking ( $r = .850$ ,  $p = 0.032 < \alpha = 0.05$ ), Analytic and

Communication ( $r = .874$ ,  $p = 0.023 < \alpha = 0.05$ ), Metacognitive and Critical thinking ( $r = .861$ ,  $p = 0.028 < \alpha = 0.05$ ), Metacognitive and Communication ( $r = .873$ ,  $p = 0.023 < \alpha = 0.05$ ), Metacognitive and Collaboration ( $r = .976$ ,  $p = 0.001 < \alpha = 0.05$ ).

**Table 7***Correlation between Levels of Reflection and the P21 Learning and Innovation Skills (4Cs)*

			Levels of reflection			
			CreativeSum	Critical Thinking Sum	Communication Sum	Collaboration Sum
P21 4Cs skills	Descriptive_Sum	Pearson Correlation	0.319	.895*	.898*	0.713
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.537	<b>0.016</b>	<b>0.015</b>	0.112
		N	6	6	6	6
	Empathic_Sum	Pearson Correlation	0.011	0.791	0.803	0.794
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.984	0.061	0.055	0.059
		N	6	6	6	6
	Analytic_Sum	Pearson Correlation	0.735	.850*	.874*	0.706
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.096	<b>0.032</b>	<b>0.023</b>	0.117
		N	6	6	6	6
	Metacognitive_Sum	Pearson Correlation	0.219	.861*	.873*	.976**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.676	<b>0.028</b>	<b>0.023</b>	<b>0.001</b>
		N	6	6	6	6

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

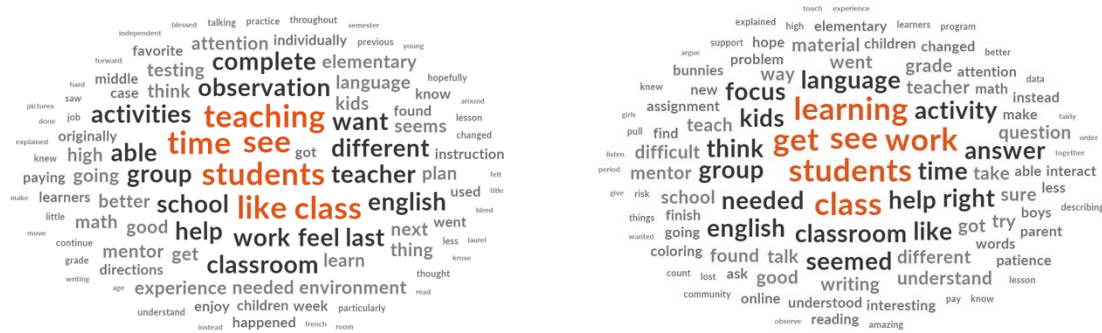
By analyzing pre-service teachers' written reflections, this study sought to examine how early field experiences inform our understanding of teacher candidates' learning and professional identities, and how these experiences impact PSTs' beliefs, attitudes, and learning about cultural and linguistic diversity. While many PSTs wrote descriptively, documenting classroom interactions, they also wrote with empathy weaving in care toward others, especially with diverse learners and communities. Descriptive quotes documented activities in the classroom, perceived language skills, and student populations (Table 2). In the empathic category PSTs were concerned with their perceptions of students' behaviors, for example, quiet ELL students

were shy. Teacher characteristics like encouraging students and patience were praised. Analytical reflections interwove critical observations about challenging aspects of teaching, creating positive learning environments (sometimes with community beyond the classroom), and managing student compliance. PSTs also wrote about teaching practices they perceived as effective for meeting ELL students' needs (Table 5). Finally, metacognitive reflections merged aspects of new learning, including teaching as a complex practice that involves issues of equity and inclusion, an enhanced appreciation of professional growth, increased confidence, and conviction in their "teacherly selves" (Goldstein et al., 2003). We close this section with word

clouds that were generated from the first and second journals and which provide a

visual representation of pre-service teachers' writing and reflections.

Figure. 1. First (left) and Second Journal (right) Word Clouds



The word clouds show the high-frequency words from the first and second journals collected via NVivo. The top three high-frequency words in the first journal are: teaching/ class (23, 1.96%), classroom/different/teacher (18, 1.53%), and group (15, 1.28%); in the second journal they are group/help/kids (16, 1.30%), learning, see/time (15, 1.22%), and English/get/language/student/understand (12, 0.97%). One interpretation is that over time the focus of PSTs written reflections shifted from the classroom teacher and teaching to students learning and understanding, as well as underscoring the role of language.

### Early Field Experiences Support Professional Standards

These EFEs provided PSTs with a low-stakes and non-credit bearing opportunity to engage with teachers and students, and the occasion to reflect upon these experiences in the journal. PSTs used different levels reflection and types of skills to document what they experienced during their EFE. Their reflections included

significant use of critical thinking from P21 4 C's framework, and analytic and descriptive reflections on their learning (Table 5). Evidence gathered in this study suggests that when PSTs engage in early field experiences and undertake written reflections on these activities, it provides a window into their learning and professional development. In this instance, this is insightful for the co-curricular program coordinators who were reviewing their journals and for teacher educators in general. Considering the state requirements for teacher candidates, and the added CLD Endorsement, the PSTs in this study clearly acknowledge issues related to *culture, diversity, and equity*, such as the need for identified safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environments. Patient, helpful, and encouraging teachers were praised in PSTs' journals. PSTs wrote that they wanted to work at schools with 'comfortable environments' and would not want to work at a school with a 'toxic culture'. This finding confirms prior research that posits that EFE are valuable for aspiring teachers, who upon entering the teacher workforce

acknowledged that the learning made apparent during their EFE shaped their teacher identities (LaMaster, 2001). PST explored and appraised teacher characteristics and a variety of teaching practices in their journals, including recognizing how teachers support academics, as well as *language acquisition and literacy development*. In the process, they potentially refined aspects of the teacher identity they will eventually assume.

The schools where these PSTs completed their EFEs had student populations that were 60% Latinx children (NCES, 2017). The PSTs who were bilingual and/or bicultural acknowledged that they had common experiences with these students. Some described having lived similar experiences in CLD classrooms or learning English with their parents. This commonality developed supportive relationships with students and allowed them to uniquely empathize with CLD students. PSTs refined their beliefs, attitudes, and learning about CLD students. They acknowledged that the teachers were concerned with student understanding and documented instances when they observed how students improved in speaking or literacy between their visits to the classroom. PSTs prioritized their own learning about and working with ELL students as crucial. They realized that developing relationships and engaging with the students' families outside school was valuable. Finally, they wanted to learn more about CLD education and related strategies to support the current students and their future students' success. In summary, EFE with K12 CLD students that include journaling practice can serve as a substantial routine to guide PSTs through their changing thoughts, values, and

appraisal of teaching practices for their future careers (Wiseman, 2014).

### Limitations

This study exclusively examined data from PST written journals. To understand further the impact of early field experiences, additional data sources such as observations or other artifacts could support and expand findings. Similarly, P21 was a helpful framework for the encoding method to reveal the ways field experience supports professional standards. However, P21 Skills are difficult to evaluate from the journal entries alone. Creativity could be identified if described in the journal as an observed experience, although it was difficult to discern evidence of creativity in the journal writing. In contrast, Critical thinking is identifiable because of the nature of journals as a reflective practice. Communication could be identified in written form only, and or as an observed experience, but because of the variety of English Language ability in PSTs, this is a judgement statement and may not link with oral communication. Collaboration could be identified if described in the journal. Paired with observations of PSTs during their student teaching experiences, the P21 as a method of evaluating professional standard attainment could more accurately assess professional standards.

Although more pre-service teachers participated in this experience only six of those that consented completed both the first and second journal assignments during this study. The small number of participants invite further study and corroboration with journals collected from more students in subsequent terms. Overall, the journals show that although pre-service teachers benefited from the experience, they were limited in so far as the degree to which they

were able to integrate into the classrooms where they were observing the mentor teacher. This is likely the function of the assignment format which is to observe and reflect and the design of the optional guiding prompt that included the possibility to write about whatever else was on their minds (Appendix 1). While the journals were not graded reflections, they were expected as part of the student participation in this experience and as belonging to the co-curricular teacher preparation program, so these factors could have been incentive to report positive experiences or learning from the classroom or field experience.

### **Implications**

Based on the analyses and findings several implications can be derived for teacher preparation programs and their work with future teachers in support of the professional standards and needs in the field. These include but are not limited to exploration of ways to increase exposure to early and diverse field experiences that include opportunities for written reflection with an emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity throughout teacher preparation, considerations for how to partner with in-service teachers and teacher preparation programs, and the need for continued research.

### **Increase Exposure to (Very) Early Field Experiences**

This study supported prior research that showed how EFEs that include journaling practice are a powerful tool to make conscious the links between learning from coursework and observations in a classroom (Moon, 2004). Unlike prior research, this study included what might better be described as *Very Early Field*

*Experiences*. Typical early field experiences start in the junior year. By contrast, in this study all PST were in the first semester of the teacher preparation program. They were still adjusting to college life and the expectations, as well as the demands of being new undergraduate students. Yet, they were all successful. In addition to first year college demands, PSTs engaged in the very early field experience and were able to complete two non-graded journals that indicate the benefits they gained from doing so.

Additionally, and while research shows that targeted prompts can increase student investment in reflective practice and focus observations on diversity issues with CLD students and their families beyond the school classroom (Garde-Hansen & Calvert, 2007; Taylor et al., 2012), this study shows that students also wrote extemporaneously about issues of cultural and linguistic diversity. Therefore, teacher preparation programs would do well to find creative ways to include such very early field experiences that emphasize CLD, even as co-curricular activities, if the curriculum does not permit.

### **Engage and Reflect on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

EFEs that include a variety of K12 student communities, specifically culturally and linguistically diverse students, help prepare PSTs for their teaching career. Classrooms are growing more culturally and linguistically diverse (NCES, 2017), and as future teachers are gradually growing in diversity, they are still not representative of the K12 student population. Therefore, if we are to impact future teachers' commitment to social justice and equity, all teacher candidates need exposure with, and occasion to reflect upon, diverse

classrooms. In addition to learning about effective teacher practices, PST learned empathy and the value of building relationships among CLD students, school staff, and community. Bilingual and bicultural teachers are an asset for CLD students because of their empathy and ability to develop unique affinity relationships. Recruiting, training, and retaining bilingual teachers is imperative, particularly for schools and districts with high percentages of CLD children.

### **Partnerships with In-service Teachers and Teacher Preparation Programs**

Although not the focus of this study, we would be remiss not to consider that the pairings of mentor in-service teachers and PST should be deliberate and intended to ensure that they are mutually beneficial. Mentor teachers who have experience and expertise in working with CLD students are ideal and can foster emerging PST, since they possess the understanding and skills to meet the unique academic and professional needs. However, teachers are often overworked, and it is imperative to ensure that the burden of the placement resides not with the in-service teachers but with the teacher preparation program or support program making the placement. There also needs to be consideration of how to

terminate or exit a placement in the unlikely event that it proves ineffective for those concerned. Long-term relationships between institutions of higher education and K12 education schools and districts can potentially facilitate these constructive experiences. Further study is needed to reveal best practices in inter-institutional partnerships.

### **Future Research Directions**

Given the limited number of participants in this exploratory study, future research that investigates the impact of very early field experiences with a larger number of pre-service teachers and over an increased time span would be beneficial. Additional data sources could also be gathered via surveys, focus groups, and questionnaires to assess student learning, standards-based professional knowledge, shifts in perspectives, and changes in cultural awareness. Longitudinal data that documents the effects of the very early field experience on future teachers as they enter the field, and with regards to their retention in both teacher preparation programs and as new teachers when they enter the profession, would also be beneficial and further support the case for increasing these experiences in teacher preparation programs.

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## Appendix 1

### Sample Early Field Experience Prompts

Journal #1. You may use this prompt or write what's on your mind.

- What were your initial observations from the classroom?
- Describe the classroom demographics and diversity.
- What connections can you make to your own school experience?
- How did you feel while you were there? Do you feel prepared?
- What are your expectations? Fears or concerns?
- Describe three things you learned about classroom teaching and/or culture?
- How did the teacher manage the classroom?

Journal #2. You may use this prompt or write what's on your mind.

- Now that you have had more opportunity in the classroom, describe three aspects that you understand to be classroom routines, or patterns, that you have observed.
- How are you able to interact with the students? Describe what you did and how students responded.
- What are you noticing with regards to how teachers are supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students?
- What do you want to learn more about next time?
- What are you learning about yourself from this project?