

## Abstract

Service-learning (SL) has been validated throughout many studies as a productive experience to encourage relationship building between institutions and the community with measurable results. The aim of this meta-synthesis is to identify the underlying principles that promote SL in higher education with English Language Learners (ELLs) as a successful pedagogical tool. After the thorough examination of 12 research articles that focused on the experiences of preservice teachers (PSTs) with ELLs, five synthesized findings have surfaced: *heightened teacher awareness, recognition of cultural capital, reciprocity of the SL experience, the importance of linguistically relevant teaching (LRT), and the power of authenticity*. The data not only solidify the relevance SL with ELLs as a pedagogical tool, but also raise awareness regarding the significance of exposing all PSTs to such experiences in order to prepare them for the mainstream classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Preservice Teachers Working with English Language Learners: A Meta-Synthesis of Service-Learning as an Effective Pedagogical Tool

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### Introduction

The reality of current classroom settings require teachers to possess the ability to cater to a wide variety of learning styles based on the increasing number linguistically and culturally diverse learners present in mainstream classrooms (Baldwin, Buchanan & Rudisill, 2007; Daniel, 2014; Fan, 2013; Garver, Eslami, & Tong, 2018; Lund, Bragg, & Kaipainen, 2014; Lund & Lee, 2015; Silva & Kucer, 2016). Teacher education programs in North America have yet to provide preservice teachers (PSTs) with necessary skills that are desperately needed for the academic advancement of ELLs who have to tackle the language as well as social barriers of content area classes (de Jong & Harper 2005; Faez, 2012; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Consequently, many PSTs feel inadequately prepared to attend to the needs of diverse learners (Kolano, Dávila, Lachance, & Coffey, 2014; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014; Rodríguez-Arroyo & Vaughns, 2015; Roessingh, 2012; Silva & Kucer, 2016).

This phenomenon is quite prevalent in the Canadian context of preservice teacher education, especially in the province of Ontario. Based on the results of the 2016 Census, there were 7,540,830 foreign-born citizens residing in Canada; constituting over one-fifth (21.9%) of the total population who have entered the country through an immigration process. Ontario has experienced the fastest growth in foreign-born residents represented by a total of 3,852,145 people (Statistics Canada, 2017b). If this trend will continue in the coming years, by 2036 the population of children with an immigrant background could embody between 39.3% and 49.1% of the total population of children aged 15 and under (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Based on the above data, Ontario, the province with the highest intake of

immigrants, should expect a steady increase of ELLs entering the primary and secondary school systems in the coming years.

This ever-growing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) across the country, especially in the province of Ontario, is therefore a reality that all school boards are facing (English language learners/ESL and ELD programs and services: Policies and procedures for Ontario elementary and secondary schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b); for this reason schools have to bear the responsibility of providing equal educational opportunities to every student, including ELLs who pose quite a challenge to mainstream language teachers. Unfortunately, most teacher education programs do not offer the necessary training to preservice teachers concerning the incorporation of second language (L2) education methods nor the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy to accommodate ELLs whose rich linguistic backgrounds could serve as a base rather than a hindrance to achieve academic language proficiency as well as solid content area knowledge (Beck & Pace, 2017; Cummins, Mirza, & Stille, 2012; Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teacher education programs have to step away from the mentality of applying “just good teaching” (JGT) practices (de Jong and Harper, 2005), and rather provide PSTs with service-learning experiences that will prepare them for the challenges of diverse mainstream classrooms.

### **The Lack of Teacher Preparedness**

Many teacher education programs fail to realize that PSTs need to connect their theoretical learning with real-life experiences that go beyond the margins of traditional placements to ensure that teacher candidates actually are provided with the chance to solve issues and challenges originating in settings where a large number of culturally and linguistically diverse students are present (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas et al., 2008). According to Baldwin et al. (2007), “simple acknowledgment of the uniqueness of an individual does not go far enough in facilitating a social conscience” (p. 325).

Teacher education programs should address the need of teachers’ preparedness regarding the integration of L2 methods in conjunction with culturally relevant pedagogy which stresses the importance of not only creating a rich learning environment, but also a culturally “safe” place where students’ multicultural identities are valued and are nurtured in order to help them develop their own critical consciousness (Baumgartner, 2015; Cummins, 2009; Ford & Kea, 2009; Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Taylor et al. (2015) find that there is a definite need for more research concerning SL experiences of teacher candidates in higher education which must be addressed and evaluated to have a better understanding how to create well-functioning courses that enhance PSTs’ awareness of their civic responsibilities, analytical skills, and even more so of the diversity within their future classrooms.

### **Why SERVICE-LEARNING?**

There are many interpretations of service-learning; however, the specific typology of “SERVICE-LEARNING” and its possible role to provide institutions of higher education with clear-cut directions while designing and implementing service-learning courses was first addressed by Sigmon (1997) who stresses the importance of

providing equal weight to both entities of the expression, thereby ensuring that all parties involved in such endeavor are entitled to be represented and their voices to be heard. According to Middleton (2003), "One feature distinguishing service learning from community service is its intentional integration of academic curriculum and civic responsibility through active engagement in service to the community" (p. 231). While engaging in a well-designed methods course where PSTs have the ability to reflect on their experiences with their classmates concerning diverse learners, SL affords the opportunity to connect classroom and community learning (Hildebrand & Schultz, 2015; Szente, 2008; Taylor et al., 2015). Community-based SL opportunities with ELLs offered to teacher candidates should serve this very purpose of not only aiding future educators to develop a sense of understanding of the social and political climate of their future classrooms, but also enable diverse learners to benefit from this experience by gaining important social and language skills to promote their future academic and civic engagements.

**Deficit thinking.** One of the most important aspects of a well-designed SL placement is the opportunity for PSTs to actively engage with learners who are different from their own cultural backgrounds and teach these future educators to step away from the well-known "deficit model" thinking, thus having minority groups being recognized for their abilities and strengths rather than for their lack of social and language skills (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998; Khong & Saito, 2014; Pappamihiel, 2007; Tinkler, Tinkler, Gerstl-Pepin & Mugisha, 2014; Wong, 2008). Therefore, well-designed SL courses in teacher education programs can aid PSTs to step away from their own stereotypical views and acknowledge the strengths that learners with diverse backgrounds bring to the class and to the community at large. As Khong and Saito (2014) phrase it, "It matters greatly whether these professionals consider ELLs to be problems or assets for the school community" (p. 221).

**Multiculturalism at the centre.** SL engagements combined with a multicultural design that centralize around culturally and linguistically diverse teaching can promote the process of becoming a well-rounded mainstream teacher with the ability to embrace diversity rather than trying to apply the "one-size-fits-all" teaching pedagogy (Beck & Peace, 2017; Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998; Khong & Saito, 2014). By having PSTs be exposed to learners who come from diverse communities, the role of the teacher can expand from being an instructor to becoming a counsellor, advocate, community liaison, and perhaps even a leader or role-model for students who need educators to believe in their strengths and abilities, which ultimately help PSTs realize the transformative essence of their own work (Kolano et al., 2013; Wade, 2000). Allowing PSTs to confront the topics of vulnerability and marginalization of students who come from minority groups, affords them the opportunity to bring the concept of social justice under the microscope.

**Critical Service Learning (CSL).** Service-learning courses that are designed with a social-justice perspective can raise PSTs' awareness of the inequalities that exists in their students' communities by combining course related concepts with well-thought out placements that expose teacher candidates to such injustices as marginalization, discrimination, and racism (Kajner, Chovanec, Underwood & Mian, 2013; Mitchell, 2008). It also provides PSTs to take a critical look at their own privileges that are a representation of the "culture of power" and influence their teaching practices

(Alismail, 2016; Delpit, 1988) while stepping outside of their lived experiences (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000). Critically examining one's beliefs is no easy task, but PSTs who want to "serve" their students regardless of socioeconomic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds, need to examine their own pedagogies and practices with an analytical lens. CSL is not the answer, but the process that can help PSTs find explanations to questions that are often left out of teacher education courses. Sigmon's (1970) words ring true even today addressing educational institutions to allow students to examine their own backgrounds in a creative and critical manner. Being engaged in CSL can motivate PSTs to join others in social movements that try to bring change to underprivileged communities where their very own students reside (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016).

The above mentioned studies and prevalent themes served as an excellent base for my investigation that tried to uncover the fundamental components of SL in higher education. However, to unlock the key concepts of SL experiences that specifically focus on PSTs' work with ELLs, I had to continue my refined investigation to answer the research question that framed my study; more specifically, the SL experiences of PSTs working with ELLs either in school or in community settings.

## **Methodology**

### **Instrumentation**

The aim of a meta-synthesis is to produce new findings and fresh interpretations that can be systematically consolidated from a number of qualitative studies in a distinct field of study (Erwin, Brotherson & Summers, 2011; Finfgeld, 2003; Thorne, 2004; Walsh & Downe, 2004). According to Thorne (2004), the complexity of the human experience in qualitative research has to be translated into a commonly recognized form that can be acknowledged by those who support evidence-based research in order to gain recognition. This study was conducted with the orientation of a meta-synthesis; however, it was based on Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven-step meta-ethnography process that has been employed in the field of educational research as a framework for meta-synthesis (as cited in Beck, 2002 & Britten et al., 2002). The process includes Phase 1: Getting started, Phase 2: Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest, Phase 3: Reading the studies, Phase 4: Determining how the studies are related, Phase 5: Translating the studies into one another, Phase 6: Synthesizing translations, and Phase 7: Expressing the synthesis (Britten, 2002, p. 210).

### **Getting started (Phase 1)**

Given the scope of the studies analyzed in the previous section, I have refined my research question to: "*Which aspects of service-learning with English Language Learners can be promoted as pedagogical tools in higher education?*" My aim was to focus purely on studies conducted in Canadian context to verify my previous findings concerning the need to develop courses in teacher education programs across Canada and more specifically in Ontario in order to cater to the large influx of immigrant students who are and will be continuously entering the primary and secondary schools. However, after encountering the comprehensive research study concerning community service-learning in higher education by Taylor et al., (2015), my suspicion was raised as their

findings suggested the infancy of SL in the Canadian context and the lack of research that would support discoveries advocating SL with PSTs in general.

### **Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest (Phase 2)**

This process included several steps in order to screen out the most relevant articles that can answer the research question. The following search engines were employed during data collection: Education Source, CBCA Complete (Canadian Business & Current Affairs – via ProQuest, ERIC (via EBSCO), ERIC (via ProQuest), Academic Search Premier. The additional database, Search It All – Education and Related Disciplines helped to conduct a combined search of the above mentioned databases plus additional directories such as, JSTOR, Social Science Citation Index, PsycARTICLES, and Teacher Reference Center. This particular search engine combined with findings through Google Scholar allowed me to do a cross reference and validate the selection of the final articles that became part of the meta-synthesis. Keyword searches included: service-learning, higher education, preservice teachers, and English Language Learners. Only peer reviewed articles were incorporated into the search as they have already been scrutinized for their quality (Barroso & Powell-Cope, 2000).

This very first search produced 831 articles. To further reduce the findings and to keep the meta-synthesis as up-to-date as possible, I have focused on research that has been conducted since 2013 which reduced the number of relevant articles to 450. After reading through the titles and keywords, 129 articles remained part of the subsequent screening process. At this point to further continue the selection process, which included a thorough reading of the abstracts, two sets of criteria were established.

The first set of criteria consisted of the following: a) articles had to focus solely on service-learning experiences in North America. In this regard the search was actually widened from the initial aim to only include Canadian studies, but the lack thereof would have made the meta-synthesis impossible; b) the studies had to be conducted with preservice teachers in higher education; c) documenting research purely with English Language Learners or any of the synonyms of the criteria (e.g., learners with limited-English proficiency, English learners, newcomers, language-minority students, and immigrants).

The second set of criteria were a) the studies had to be empirical and qualitative in nature, b) the setting of the data and selection of the participants had to occur within an educational framework such as, primary and/or secondary schools or community-based courses for ELLs. The combination of the two criteria further reduced the number of articles to 28. These articles were read in their entirety which allowed the identification of false positives and aided in scaling-down the final number of relevant articles to 12 studies. Most of the studies that were excluded in the final selection failed to adhere to the set criteria in one or two aspects e.g., several articles concentrated on studies conducted with PSTs going through TESOL certification while working with ELLs, already practicing teachers being involved as research participants or the aims of the studies were too limited; consisting of the evaluation of one specific language skill.

### Reading the Studies (Phase 3)

During this stage the articles were read again, but this time the reading process consisted of careful examination of findings by open coding which identified emerging key concepts in each research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Notes were made on the margins of each article as well as noted with each author's name on a separate sheet.

### Determining how the studies are related (Phase 4)

Finding the relationship within the studies required the first stage of synthesis to identify reoccurring themes. In order to be explicit, I have created a chart depicting the aim, frame of reference and analysis, participant sampling, location of SL, and data collection. These methodological components displayed in Table 1 offer contextual data that enables readers to take a quick look at the studies at hand and see their comparative or possibly refutational nature (Beck, 2002), as well as provide evidence of data that supports the inferences researchers make in their subsequent analysis (Finfgeld, 2003).

**Table 1**

Studies focusing on SL experiences of PSTs' with ELLs

<b>Author</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Frame of reference/ Analysis</b>	<b>Sample information &amp; Location, length</b>	<b>Data collection</b>
<b>Daniel (2014), USA</b>	to investigate the circumstances under which PSTs were able to educate linguistically diverse students during their 13-month Masters with Certification program	culturally responsive framework, qualitative analysis with a primary ethnographic approach	4 participants (3 female/ one male), elementary school setting, Nov-May	case-studies, surveys, observations, interviews with PSTs and mentor teachers
<b>Fan (2013), USA</b>	to address the needs to build PSTs' linguistic knowledge while working with ELLs, and stress the importance of university and	sociocultural framework, mixed-method analysis	28 participants (16 male, 12 female), placement in 11 different local community agencies,	case-studies, pre and post-surveys, four field reports, final report & presentation in class by PSTs, field reports by researchers

	community partnership		20 hours of SL over 16 weeks	
<b>Garver et al. (2018), USA</b>	to study the effects of SL experiences on PSTs self-efficacy at different placements sites	SL framework/ based on experiential education, quantitative analysis	200 participants (196 female, 4 male) Pre K-6, community agencies & university ESL program, 10 visits/ one semester	TETTEL survey/ 31 items on the Likert scale
<b>Haddix (2014), USA</b>	to prove the importance of community engagement beyond the classroom walls	social-justice framework, qualitative analysis	number not specified, placement in the WOL annual youth-writing conference, one semester	critical reflections and narratives
<b>Lund (2014), Canada</b>	to investigate the mutually beneficial aspects of community-based SL for meeting the needs of all stakeholders	social-justice framework, qualitative analysis based on critical ethnography	16 PSTs, placement at 6 different community agencies + school lunch-hour program, 3 hours per week for 16 weeks	pre and post-placement interviews, observation, informal conversations with front-line staff
<b>Lund &amp; Lee (2015), Canada</b>	to evaluate if justice-based SL can promote cultural humility in PSTs	critical social-justice framework, qualitative analysis based on critical ethnography	10 PSTs, all female, placement at local community agencies, 10-week placements	one initial and post-placement interview, observations from class discussions, field notes from interviews between researchers & mentors

Author	Aim	Frame of reference/ Analysis	Sample information & Location, length	Data collection
<b>Ramirez et al. (2016), USA</b>	to explore which factors influence PSTs' understanding of ELLs and how they inform their practices	culturally responsive & linguistic teaching (CRLT) framework, qualitative analysis, multiple case-study approach	6 participants, placements at local high-school, Grades (9-12) one-year	case-studies including interviews, classroom observations, group interviews & artifacts by researchers; ethnographic approaches by PSTs to document their experiences
<b>Rodríguez-Arroyo et al. (2015), USA</b>	to explore the outcomes of PSTs engagement with ELLs (special focus on relationship building between PSTs and the ELLs + their communities)	exploratory case-study framework, qualitative analysis using Creswell's spiral data analysis process	35 participants, placements at middle-school campus & community sites, weekly visits over one semester	weekly and final student reflections
<b>Silva &amp; Kucer (2016), USA</b>	to examine the impact of SL experiences with ELLs on the PSTs' conceptual and emotional development	instructional and social-justice based framework, qualitative analysis using constant-comparison analysis	29 participants from Texas State U. & 13 from Washington State U., placement at middle and high-schools newcomer programs, several hours a week for one semester	reflection papers and "grand-learning" papers



<b>Tinkler et al. (2019), USA</b>	to investigate the role of critical SL in a community-based setting and the perceptions of PSTs	interpretive framework with a social-justice stance, qualitative analysis	18 participants (14 female/ 4 male), placement with middle and high-school aged youth at 3 community sites, 10-12 weeks in one semester	12 structured reflection papers, observations notes by second author during culminating SL discussion, open-ended questionnaires, analysis of course syllabi & interviews with 6 PSTs
<b>Wall (2016), USA</b>	to examine the effectiveness of SL as a pedagogical approach to bridge gap of understanding between PSTs and ELLs	service-learning framework, mixed-method analysis	23 participants (16 female/ 7 male), placement at middle-school with grade 4 students, one semester	pre and post-SL reflective papers, survey at semester's end, reflective papers written by 127 female and 14 male grade-four students
<b>Wu &amp; Guerra (2017), USA</b>	to investigate the impact of tutoring approach on PSTs knowledge and skills	N/A qualitative analysis	30 participants, placement at grade and middle-school, 50 min. session weekly for 10 weeks over one semester	journal entries after each session (300 entries), weekly discussions

### **Translating the studies into one another (Phase 5)**

In order to remain faithful to the original studies, while identifying the key concepts and themes that connected the articles, I tried to be as careful as possible to employ the same terminology. In this second order of synthesis fifteen sub-themes were recognized that represented the underlying connections among the articles. Given the length of some of the themes, such as “The meaningful connection between methods courses and SL” or “Community engagement as the answer to solve deficit thinking”, the next step of the meta-synthesis including axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) was in order.

### **Synthesizing translations (Phase 6)**

By reading the studies for the third time, I have created mini summaries of each article and highlighted the most important findings in the data analysis of each investigation. This process not only allowed me to apply an additional layer of careful examination of each article, but it also presented the feasibility to synthesize the translations that emerged during Phase 5 with the illuminated findings from the mini summaries through axial coding. With having the data repeated in two different formats, the final overarching themes of the meta-synthesis started to emerge. Beck (2002) refers to this process as “making the whole into more than the individual parts imply” (p. 216). The operation of second and third-order syntheses during Phase 5 and 6 helped crystalize the five themes which served the purpose of yielding answers to the research question (see Figure 1).

To achieve triangulation I have kept with Timulak’s (2009) suggestion and complemented the qualitative data with one quantitative and two mixed-methods articles whose studies further enhanced the importance of the final themes by being complimentary in nature. Subsequent triangulation was supplemented by compiling the final 12 articles based on more than one interpretive framework. This was a necessary must in order to have a large enough base of articles that dealt with the research question, and it also created an element of diversity within the studies while keeping the goal in sight. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), providing an analysis of various theories and methods is another avenue to achieve triangulation (as cited in Finfgeld, 2003). One refutational study also remained among the final articles because the themes that were identified in this specific study could provide a springboard for further research and discussion of the findings of the 11 inquiries that complimented each other.

### **Expressing the synthesis (Phase 7)**

The interpretive framework of a meta-synthesis requires the preservation of context while allowing the researcher to aim for a holistic perspective of the phenomena that is being investigated (Walsh & Downe, 2004). The diversity of the articles included in this study indeed contributed to a rich understanding of service-learning when applied in the context of higher education with PSTs and ELLs being on the receiving end. The five overarching themes were: *heightened teacher awareness, recognition of cultural capital, the importance of linguistically relevant teaching (LRT), reciprocity of the experience, and the power of authenticity.*

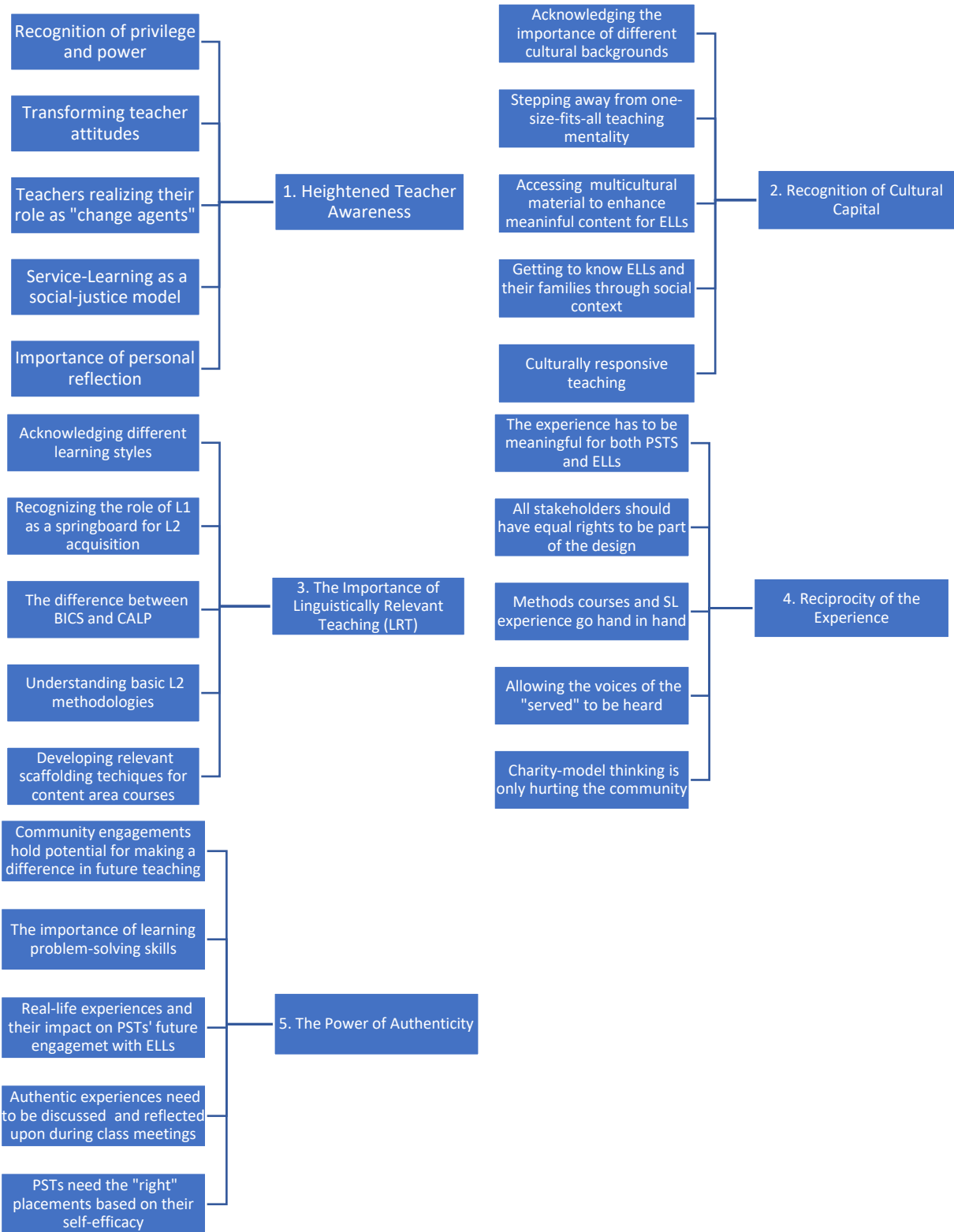


Figure 1. Second and Third Order Syntheses During Phase 5 and 6.

## Heightened Teacher Awareness

The first overarching theme consisting of several sub-themes (*stepping away from deficit framing, the role of critical reflection, and the shift in beliefs*) was addressed by all of the studies given the relevance of the topic in SL contexts. In these 12 articles, except for the study by Daniel (2014), students were engaged in SL experiences that helped them achieve a new level of consciousness which was not a straight-forward process by any means and was not a full-proof practice. However, looking back on their engagement with ELLs, the majority of teachers at the end of their placements presented a new sense of awareness of the importance of their profession in regard to working with students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**Stepping away from deficit framing.** Wu and Guerra's (2017) study focused on the SL experiences of PSTs enrolled in a methodology course that required a 10-week placement in elementary schools where ELLs were provided with weekly tutoring sessions. Many of the PSTs went through a process of change realizing that the deficit-thinking model guiding their initial beliefs, assuming ELLs and their families somehow contribute to their own inability to learn English at the rate as expected of them (which is mostly unrealistic), were overwhelmed by the eagerness of ELLs wanting to be engaged and contribute to discussions. The same transformation was witnessed by Wall (2016) whose mixed-method study affirmed the positive changes PSTs go through if exposed to culturally and linguistically diverse students. The 23 PSTs involved in her study walked in with tainted presumptions of ELLs, just to realize that by providing the middle-school children with an opportunity to be engaged in meaningful learning, and offering them a chance to be truly heard, the students were more than willing to immerse themselves in the learning process.

Lund and Lee's (2015) study presented a somewhat different experience concerning the deficit-model thinking. PSTs' deficit framing had to be addressed through continuous dialogues given their previous lack of exposure to cultural diversity in order to achieve the much desired "cultural humility" which was the aim of the study. The 10 PSTs were involved in 10-week placements through a community-based SL experience with ELLs living in Canada. The pre-interviews clearly indicated their deficit views about ELLs and lack of appreciation of the multilingual framework of Canadian society. Many of the PSTs had a hard time understanding why ELLs were not able to "pick up" the language successfully after having been in the country for an extended period of time. The social-justice framework of the methods course allowed the students to go through a critical reflection process that ultimately contributed to their growing sense of cultural humility.

Lund and Lee (2015) as well as Haddix (2014) warn about the need of carefully designed SL placements and the importance of providing PSTs with course work and discussions that allow dialoguing and reflection about the SL experiences or the deficit-mentality might just be reinforced. Because of this threat, Lund and Lee specifically put deficit-model thinking and "safari approaches" as necessary musts to be addressed by teacher education programs in order to change biases established by ill-informed PSTs who need real-life engagements with ELLs to raise their level of consciousness concerning social injustices among minorities.

**The role of critical reflection.** Most of the studies provided a social-justice or culturally-responsive framework which automatically translated into PSTs' needs to

examine their own beliefs, biases, and preconceived notions about ELLs which they had developed as a result of their lack of exposure to diversity. Ramirez, Gonzales-Galindo and Roy (2016) echoed the findings of Wall (2016) and Haddix (2014) by pointing out the necessity of having PSTs realize the power of the “hidden” curriculum that has to be explicitly taught to ELLs in order for them to be successful in their future studies and interactions in academic settings. Haddix (2014) posits that teacher education courses with a multicultural focus cannot implement diverse SL practices without including class discussions about “white privilege” and the often undiscussed notions of power and race. Eleven of the 12 studies addressed the issue of the majority of PSTs coming from white, monolingual, mostly middle-class backgrounds. Haddix as well as Rodríguez-Arroyo and Vaughns (2015) further postulate that PSTs should be discouraged from and be carefully educated concerning the all too often employed notion of “saviour” mentality that can severely impact relationship building with minority communities. Critical reflection is the key to change negative mindsets, false beliefs, and stereotypical assumptions (Lund et al., 2014; Lund & Lee, 2015; Ramirez et al., 2016, Rodríguez-Arroyo & Vaughns, 2015; Wall, 2016).

**Shift in beliefs.** Culturally responsive practices during SL placements combined with class discussion about deficit-model thinking and stereotypical views enabled PSTs to reflect on their teaching practices and go through an actual “shift” in their perspectives (Lund et al., 2014) while working with ELLs. The above mentioned studies all aimed to achieve more with their teacher candidates’ SL placements than traditional placements aim for. Having been provided with the experiences of critical self-reflection, a “snowball effect” emerged that helped the majority of PSTs undergo drastic changes transforming their views about their own roles and future pedagogical practices. As Wall (2016) posits, if PSTs can view themselves as “change agents”, they will understand the gravity of their educational work as “not just sharpening minds, but as influencing lives” (p. 188).

### **Recognition of Cultural Capital**

Students do not come to school as blank pages. When it comes to newcomers who represent a culturally diverse group with their abundance of linguistic variations, multiple ethnic backgrounds and sometimes traumatic lived experiences, the most important thing mainstream teachers can do is allow their students’ voices to be heard (Beck & Pace, 2017). Seven studies presented the recognition of cultural capital in their discussions as a profitable avenue that has to be taken into consideration when working with ELLs. The opportunity must be granted to PSTs to tap into the cultural backgrounds of ELLs which the students, their families, and their communities bring with themselves. This cultural “goldmine” should not be neglected by teachers, nor disregarded and cast aside by newcomers in order to “fit into” their current social environment. As Haddix (2014) posits, by understanding the abundance of cultural resources which emerge through deepening one’s relationship with ELLs, PSTs realize the potential that lies within newcomers and their communities. Consequently, it can translate into productive classroom engagements and valid educational resources.

The majority of studies emphasized the relevance of building relationships with students outside of the classroom through one-on-one tutoring session during after-school programs (Garver et al., 2018; Silva & Kucer, 2016; Wu & Guerra, 2017),

through community-based SL (Fan, 2013; Haddix, 2014; Lund et al., 2014; Lund & Lee, 2015; Tinkler, Tinkler, Reyes, & Elkin, 2019) or through a mix of both settings (Rodríguez-Arroyo & Vaughns, 2015). The findings in these studies highlighted the fact that instruction which is based on the lived experiences of students and focuses on issues that are relevant to students' lives, will create a productive classroom atmosphere that encourages free thinking and open discussions which will translate into academic success.

### **The Importance of Linguistically Relevant Teaching (LRT)**

LRT considered to be a natural outgrowth of CRT as culture and language ought to be taught hand in hand to create a perfect balance when helping learners of English. However, PSTs often approach cultural and linguistic heterogeneity with a "one-size-fits-all" perspective (Haddix, 2014; Pappamihiel, 2007) as they do not feel ready to address the specific needs of ELLs in classroom settings. "Just good teaching" (JGT) practices are not adequate to serve the wants of culturally and linguistically diverse learners (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Fan's (2013) study of 28 participants working in a tutoring capacity with ELLs throughout various community organization highlighted the lack of linguistic knowledge among PSTs when it came to catering to the specific language necessities of English learners. Many of the students felt that their knowledge concerning L2 acquisition was inadequate and had to go further than just providing worksheets and lists of relevant vocabulary concerning a specific subject area. If language is a "social tool" (Fan, 2013), then PSTs need to be adequately trained to develop scaffolding techniques as well as the basics of L2 acquisition in order for them to develop strategies for their specific content area. It can only happen through a well-developed program that helps mold the knowledge of different linguistic theories and methodologies together. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) method (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 1999) served as an excellent theoretical framework in three studies for designing engaging and productive lessons with ELLs in mind (Fan, 2013; Rodríguez-Arroyo, 2015; Wu & Guerra, 2017).

Six of the studies pressed the necessity of acknowledging ELLs' first language (L1) as a springboard for advancing their L2 acquisition. In these studies students' L1 served as a rich background that illustrated their literacy levels which presented crucial information for teachers who worked with ELLs in any content area class. Ramirez et al. (2016) as well as Silva and Kucer's (2016) studies echoed Cummins's (2008) theory by pointing out the distinction between BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency). PSTs in study conducted by Ramirez et al. (2016) not only realized that CALP takes much longer to develop, but were willing to tap into ELLs' lived experiences and L1 to motivate students to embrace the challenges of learning academic vocabulary through engaging and meaningful lessons. PSTs need to learn not to be afraid of L1 by thinking that an "English-only" policy (de Jong, 2013) will somehow accelerate ELLs' L2 acquisition (Silva & Kucer). On the contrary, tapping into the rich L1 literacy skills of learners will provide scaffolding material for teachers who want to see their ELLs excel in a specific content area.

## **Reciprocity of the Experience**

This theme perfectly underscores the importance of Sigmon's (1997) typology of SERVICE-LEARNING as SL should be reciprocal in order to benefit not only the PSTs, but very much the community and the learners who make the SL experience possible. Six studies pointed out the relevance of listening to the voices of those who were being "served". It was manifested throughout these works that reciprocity could only be accomplished if PSTs developed meaningful relationships with ELLs by showing true interest in their aspirations and also played a role in their advancement toward those goals. Findings by Tinkler et al. (2019) highlighted the aspect of cultivating relationships with ELLs as empathetic bonds serve to crystalize the struggles of newcomers that is too often left undiscussed in most teacher education courses. Relationship building was much better achieved in studies where a community-based SL or after-school tutoring programs were offered. Traditional placements that restricted PSTs' exposure to ELLs through classroom-only interactions did not afford the possibility of establishing deeper connections that would allow ELLs to lower their affective filter.

Walls's (2016) study is a perfect example of allowing the community to express its views on the SL experience. The 41 middle-school students who participated in the study wrote reflective letters explaining what they valued about their exposure to working with PSTs. These grade-four students not only voiced gaining self-confidence through the project they completed, but also felt appreciated having realized that university students spent extra time with them and showed interest in their cultural backgrounds. Consequently, PSTs in these six studies articulated the beneficial platform of SL which helped them reflect on their beliefs, values, and pedagogical practices. Learning took place on both sides of the spectrum dispelling many of the preconceived notions that PSTs brought into these encounters. Fan's (2013) research participants experienced complete "identity shifts" as they went through the journey of self-discovery and realized their capacity to bring about change as educators.

## **The Power of Authenticity**

The majority of teacher educators understand that SL experiences afford PSTs the ability to immerse themselves in real-life encounters which serve as the base of their expectations concerning their future work with students. Eleven of the 12 studies put SL in a favourable light by promoting the combination of methods courses with genuine placements that allowed PSTs to go through unique experiences specifically catered around the needs of ELLs. PSTs developed not only viable pedagogical methods as a result of working with ELLs, but also acquired relationship-building skills in consequence of interacting with linguistically and culturally diverse learners and in some cases, also with families and communities. Silva and Kucer's (2016) study reflected on PSTs' improved confidence concerning ELLs that would help them apply their newfound knowledge to future exposures with diverse learners. Lund and Lee's (2015) PSTs emphasized the relevance of their experience by having been exposed to "uncomfortable diversity situations" and learning to apply their understating to possible future events in actual classroom settings. Authenticity presented the context in these studies for meaningful engagements and interactions through one-on-one or small group dialoguing. These dialogues and "eye-opening" experiences awarded ELLs with the gift of allowing to be their true selves and PSTs to tap into their creative abilities

which should be the aim of any SL engagement that serves teacher education programs. That is why it is of utmost importance to ensure that SL placements offer well-thought out and justified interactions.

### **Limitations of the study**

Several aspects of limitation have surfaced throughout the meta-synthesis. As Haddix (2014) posits, relationship building takes time in order to develop a certain level of trust between participants. However, most of the studies did not go beyond 10-20 hours of SL which were generally conducted within the length of a semester while PSTs completed their methods courses. Garver et al. (2018) as well as Lund and Lee (2015) reiterate the importance of choosing a fitting location for PSTs based on their initial self-efficacy concerning culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Garver et al., emphasize the importance of community sites and even on campus English language tutoring lessons with international students for those PSTs who start their methods courses with practically no experience of having been exposed to ELLs. The community-based SL placements provided a low-stress environment in comparison to traditional, large mainstream classroom settings. Daniel's (2014) refutational study emphasized mentor teachers' lack of understanding how to apply culturally and linguistically relevant teaching which negatively affected PSTs' experiences and even reinforced their deficit-model thinking. However, even in this study, ELLs themselves aided PSTs' acquisition of promising skills once a one-on-one relationship was established through small group or paired interactions. Daniel does not necessarily put the blame on the mentor teachers themselves, but rather on the lack of preparation from the organizers who failed to search out knowledgeable and seasoned mentors. Therefore, it is very important to stress that SL placements cannot be implemented without careful consideration of all parties and stakeholders involved and the impact (positive or negative) the experience might leave on anyone involved. Considering this meta-synthesis only focused on North-American articles, international experiences of PSTs were left out that could have added new insights to the findings.

### **Conclusion**

The reality of the ever-growing number of newcomers to Canada is quickly transforming the educational landscape, and the institutions representing the academic settings must understand the necessity of change when it comes to adapting to the cultural, political, and demographical realities of Canada as a nation. The aim of this meta-synthesis was to shed light on the importance of service-learning experiences of preservice teachers in Canada while preparing them for the demands of diverse mainstream classrooms represented by the growing number of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Given the lack of research in higher education with special focus on PSTs and ELLs' reciprocal experiences, I had to widen my scope and examine studies that focused on these experiences not only in Canada but the United States as well where SL research concerning the experiences with ELLs is much more established.

While conducting my research, it became apparent that the real challenge for educators in the classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century lies in finding a balance between applying their content knowledge and pedagogical skills to assist their native speakers



while tuning their instruction to provide comprehensible input for those students who might not possess the level of academic language proficiency that is expected for that particular content area (Cummins, 2001). In their study, de Jong and Harper (2005) argue, no matter how well mainstream teachers are taught to present their course material to a diverse classroom concerning any subject area, “just good teaching” (JGT) practices will not be sufficient to meet the needs of their ELLs if they do not possess any knowledge of relevant L2 methodologies and their proper applications.

Structured SL placements that promote experiences enabling PSTs to tap into ELLs’ cultural capital through culturally responsive teaching, their literacy background through linguistically relevant teaching, and their lived-experiences through meaningful engagements have been proven to serve as effective pedagogical tools based on the outcome of the studies presented in this meta-synthesis. However, the aspects of these lived-experiences can only be translated into profitable and relevant pedagogical tools if method courses address the theoretical foundations of L2 acquisition, provide well-orchestrated placements with the input of all stakeholders, and allow engaging and relevant class discussions reflecting on PSTs’ experiences (Daniel, 2014; Fan, 2013; Garver et al., 2018; Lund et al., 2014; Lund & Lee, 2015; Silva & Kucer, 2016). Studies that were conducted with a social-justice framework also stressed the heightened need to allow class discussions prompting PSTs to reflect on their own beliefs, biases concerning power and race. The process of self-reflection is a must while working with ELLs to be able to step away from one’s deficit-model thinking as well as from the “charity model” attitude in order to realize the commonalities rather than differences that exists among those who serve and those who are being served (Fan, 2013; Haddix, 2014; Lund et al., 2014; Lund & Lee, 2015; Silva & Kucer, 2016; Tinkler et al., 2019).

SL placements that allowed PSTs to build a relationship with ELLs through meaningful practices were able to reach beyond the frames of traditional placements and opened up new pathways to explore which ultimately helped all stakeholders to gain valuable insights throughout the SL experiences. Given the mostly qualitative nature and small sample size of the majority of studies included in this meta-synthesis, there is a dire need for further investigation in order to explore SL experiences with PSTs in higher education, especially in the Canadian context. The aim of these investigation should be focused on proving the necessity of the implementations of SL placements with culturally and linguistically diverse students across all Canadian faculties of education by making SL combined with a well-designed methods course focusing purely on ELLs as a necessary requirement for all teacher candidates. Only then will faculties of education produce well-rounded teachers who are ready to embrace their diverse classrooms.

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