

Title of Project:

Exploring an “invisible medium:” Teacher language awareness among K12 educators of English language learners

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Abstract:

Changing student demographics in U.S. public schools have engendered numerous instructional issues for mainstream teachers. The large numbers of English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. K12 classrooms dictate that accountability for their education be diffused across all school faculty, rather than reside with English as a Second Language (ESL) specialists. Teacher education programs for pre-service mainstream teachers have not traditionally focused on challenges associated with content and language instruction for ELLs; consequently, many mainstream teachers enter the profession with a different knowledge base than that of second language (L2) educators. Part of this knowledge base is Teacher Language Awareness (TLA), extensively studied in L2 educators, but rarely examined in mainstream teachers. TLA consists of three domains: the “user” domain, the “analyst” domain, and the “teacher” domain, representing a teacher’s language proficiency, knowledge about language, and cognition as they teach language (Andrews, 2007). To examine these domains, the proposed mixed-methods study aims to first establish a descriptive baseline of pre-service mainstream teachers’ TLA participating in the study. Next, it seeks to determine in what ways directed L2 education coursework affects the development of TLA. Qualitative data analysis will explore the experiences, values, and belief systems that may underpin participants’ degree of TLA. Initial degrees of TLA among participants are expected to improve as a result of directed coursework. Participants’ life experiences, values, and belief systems are also predicted to influence degrees of TLA. Potential implications include informing the scope of pre-service teacher education and further defining the role of what it means to be a language educator in the U.S. today.