Teachers' Declared Intentions to Shift Practice to Incorporate Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theories

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Abstract—**While the number of English Learners (ELs) in the United States is steadily growing in most states, teacher preparation for working with ELs is far from universal. It fact, it is contested terrain as to whether information about topics like Second Language Acquisition (SLA) are helpful generally, and if so, what theories teachers are willing to adopt. The purpose of this study was to learn whether teachers in an SLA theory course would declare intentions to change their notions about SLA and express them as desire to shift practice. We also wondered if there were differences in pre-service versus in-service and international versus domestic students. The results confirmed that the participants were willing to change their initial theories because of participating in a second language acquisition course that presented information about SLA theories at a Completely Different or Somewhat Different level by the end of the course.**

Index Terms—**second language acquisition theory, teacher change, teacher's theories of teaching, teacher preparation for working with English learners, teacher education programs, international teachers**

I. INTRODUCTION

During the 2014-2015 school year, the United States average percentage of English learners (ELs) in a state was 9.4%. In fact, all but 15 states experienced increases in the growth of the EL population between 2004 and 2015. In households where a language other than English is the dominant language, English is only the fifth most common second language (United States Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). These statistics demonstrate the prevalence of languages other than English among students in classrooms in the United States. When these students go to school, they must learn English *and* subject matter.

To provide both prospective and practicing teachers with pedagogical knowledge to meet the needs of ELs, courses are offered in teacher education or as Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs (Horii, 2014; Rahman & Pandian, 2016). Although for most children the title is a misnomer, these courses use the term Second Language Acquisition (SLA). In these courses, language researchers and/or teacher educators provide theoretical explanations of language learners' acquisition of the target language and attempt to explain possible difficulties that ELs may encounter. Multiple theories are often included in the courses, such as Universal Grammar (UG), Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), and cross-language transfer. In ideal cases, SLA research provides theoretical and practical knowledge about how learners acquire additional languages with an emphasis on learning in instructional settings (Haley & Rentz, 2002; Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2015; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). For example, by introducing theories of the order of acquisition of phonological and grammatical features, teachers are better positioned to evaluate students' progress towards English language development and can plan appropriate instructional input and output activities.

However, it is uncertain whether SLA theories translate to language classroom practice since SLA has only existed as an independent field since the late 1960s (Horii, 2014). Some have argued that SLA is still in its infancy that it is impossible to draw conclusive findings to make practical, pedagogical suggestions (Hatch, 1979; Tarone, Swain, & Fathman, 1976). Others have argued that SLA research findings and theory have not yet provided many useful educational guidelines for teachers (Ellis, 1997, 2010). Thus, theories may have little to no direct impact on practical

language teaching and learning. One substantial piece of what is unknown or not well understood is whether teachers ever actually *intend* to use the information they learn about SLA theory in their teaching.

To that end, the purpose of this study was to learn what teachers intend to do relative to making use of SLA theories in their classroom instruction. The specific research questions were:

(1) To what extent do teachers indicate a willingness to change their initial SLA theories because of participation in a specific SLA course? and;

(2) Which SLA theories presented in an SLA theory course do teachers indicate they are willing to apply in their classrooms because of course participation?

To answer these questions, we studied SLA coursework that incorporated theoretical knowledge and pedagogical applications within a teacher education program aimed at developing culturally responsive and linguistically aware prospective and practicing teachers. For the first question, we used a rubric to measure the extent of the participants' theoretical change. To answer the second question, we used content analysis strategies to identify the initial personal theories which the teachers indicated were relevant to their practice. Subsequently, we recorded the participants' final theories that they considered to be useful for their practice. Our findings for this question result from comparing the initial list to the final one. The findings of this study shed light on how teachers shift their theories about SLA during a semester-long course, but it also identified the theories that they considered to be useful for their teaching at both the beginning and at the end of the course. Finally, this study's findings comment on the argument as to whether teaching current and prospective teachers SLA theories may help them work more effectively with ELs.

Review of the Literature concerning Teacher Use of SLA Theory in Instruction

Coursework for teachers about second language acquisition is becoming more common in teacher preparation and professional development (Lucas, 2011). Such preparation may be warranted because recent studies suggest that teachers persist in beliefs about SLA that are not in keeping with current research on second language acquisition. For example, Vaish (2012) found that many teachers still believed that parents should not use their native tongue at home because it would delay their children's progress in learning English, even though researchers consistently found that such home language use was critical to becoming bilingual and being successful in school.

Ellis (2011) offered some insights on SLA course design for teachers of ELs. Ellis proposed that designers of SLA courses should consider how SLA relates to teaching the language. An applied emphasis is essential to increasing the credibility of the material for classroom teachers. If teachers don't see the connection between the SLA research and their own classroom experience, they won't be enthusiastic about reading the research or attempting to use the recommendations of the research in their teaching. For example, Cook described a research emphasis on morphosyntax as being of very limited classroom utility, and thus, of limited value for classroom purposes.

Course content that highlights applied research should be seen as useful in shaping the beliefs and practices of teachers, there is still evidence that ESL teachers do not wish to incorporate SLA theories in their teaching because they already have theories about SLA that are not actively confronted (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004). Systematic attempts to alter teacher beliefs and enhance the theoretical knowledge base of teachers has had limited success (Ellis, 2010; Peacock, 2001). Even so, there is counter evidence suggesting that teacher education programs can exert a certain amount of positive influence on teachers (Busch, 2010; Erlam, 2008; McDonald, Badger, & White, 2001).

Since teachers enter coursework with personal theories about SLA, it is difficult to anticipate actual application of what has been learned. Accordingly, Peter, Markham, & Frey (2012) examined the attitudes and practices of classroom teachers after finishing 18-credit hours of ESOL endorsement coursework. The researchers used several sources of data available to them. The participating teachers had an average of nine years teaching experience. After completing the program, the results revealed that these inservice teachers had mixed attitudes and questionable resolve regarding changing their teaching practices.

In a case study conducted by Kamiya and Loewen (2014) the researchers investigated the way belief, SLA theory, and identity converge to shape an experienced teacher's response to second language research. The participant read SLA research concerning corrective feedback. It was determined that the participating teacher responded positively to those articles that favored corrective feedback as an effective instructional strategy and that he tended to ignore the results of studies that opposed corrective feedback as a useful instructional strategy. Despite the teacher's oppositional stance, the researchers reported that the teacher acquired more precise labels for his teaching strategies and reflected better on his practice.

Finally, Markham, Rice, and Darban (2016) used discourse analysis to explore pre-service and in-service teachers stated personal theories about SLA and the ways which teachers saw these intersecting with their practice. Besides the differences in experience level, the teachers in this study were also both international and domestic students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. They found that teachers did indicate that they changed their theories. In addition, international teachers in the study indicated a greater desire to change their practices than domestic experienced teachers.

In looking at these body of previous research on teachers' uptake of SLA theories and the ways in which teachers were willing and able to shift their practices, we realized that we wanted to know more about the magnitude of teachers' stated intentions to adopt SLA theories in their teaching practice. However, it was also important to us to document

what the teachers initially brought with them to the class, and what theories they planned on taking with them when they were finished with the course.

II. METHODS

In this study, we gathered data about what teachers' initial theories about SLA were, along with what aspects of SLA theories they intended to incorporate into their practice. We then quantified this data using a rubric and utilized Chi-Square analysis to determine to what extent teachers indicated an intention to shift. For the second research question, we looked at the frequency of keywords in their initial and post-course theories and used content analysis methods to determine exactly what theories teachers were declaring their intention to abandon and which they were planning to adopt as part of their practice.

A. Participants in This Study

A total of seventy-five graduate and undergraduate students participated in the study. The participants included graduate and undergraduates from international and domestic backgrounds who completed a second language theory course over three semesters. Most of the participants were experienced teachers, but worked with various age groups. They taught at the university, secondary, or elementary levels. A couple of the participants taught pre-school students. The pre-service teachers were mostly undergraduates. Naturally, most of the international students had no experience teaching in the United States. Some graduate students were currently teaching professionally, but others were not inservice teachers at the time of the study. The international students were from a variety of countries, but were mostly from the Middle East, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. The preservice and inservice elementary and secondary teachers were taking the course to fulfill ESOL endorsement requirements, whereas the graduate students were completing master's or doctoral degree requirements. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants. The researchers invited the students to participate in the study at the beginning of each semester and they signed an official consent form acknowledging their willingness to participate in the investigation.

TABLE 1.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

In-service Experienced American (IEA)	In-service Experienced International (IEI)	Preservice American (PA)	Preservice International (PI)
37	21	15	2
		Total = 75	

Further details concerning specific demographic categories were available, but didn't allow for useful generalizations for statistical purposes. For example, grade level teaching assignments, countries of origin, and years of service were available, but the resulting statistical categories were so small as to prohibit further numerically based generalizations.

As demonstrated in Table 1, the demographic information provided resulted in two fairly sizeable groups that can be statistically compared with any degree of confidence: in-service vs. preservice teachers and that of American vs. International students. Clearly, more data are needed over an extended period of time in order to draw worthwhile conclusions about the many variables that differentiate the participants. The researchers intend to continue the data collection effort in the future in order to collect enough data to justify generalizations about the various differentiating characteristics of the participants such as whether they teach preschool, elementary, secondary, or college age students. The secondary teachers also represent various content area specializations. Moreover, the participants represent many different countries and teach in English as Second Language or English as a Foreign Language contexts. Despite these limitations, some thought provoking patterns in the data emerged in the study.

B. Course Description

In this course, prospective and practicing teachers initially articulated their own SLA theories and then were invited to consider the implications for these theories in their current or future classroom practice during the class at regular intervals (about once per week). The students interpreted the SLA theories introduced in the course in accordance with their own initial understanding of L2 learning and teaching, and then were given the opportunity to indicate when and how they might use these theories and concomitant research findings in their work with ELs.

Similar to the Kamiya and Loewen's (2014) investigation, the course from which the data were collected for this investigation presents information supporting various second language acquisition theories and information that argues against those same theoretical positions. It is a graduate level second language theory course that includes a few undergraduates who enroll in the course in the cross-listed format. The graduate students are mostly, but not always, inservice teachers and the differences between the master's level and doctoral level students can be as dramatic as the differences between graduate and undergraduate students. Some of these doctoral students have taught in schools in the United States. Others are international students interested in SLA research. The international students have sometimes taught English or other languages outside of the United States, but not within it. The course consists of 14 lessons that cover topics related to meeting course requirements. Table 2 provides a list of the topics covered in this course. The course design was driven by ongoing developments in the field of second language acquisition and was also necessarily aligned with state-level ESOL endorsement accreditation guidelines. In addition, national accreditation guidelines must

play a role in enabling the program to meet the standards provided by the national accreditation organization. The university handbook also lists the requirements for the number of instructional hours necessary for an acceptable course.

TABLE 2.
WEEKLY LESSON TOPICS

Week	Lesson Topic
1	What is a theory? How do we evaluate it?
2	What is language? First language acquisition
3	Relating first and second language processes to the critical period hypothesis
4	History and research on bilingual education
5	Research on learning versus acquisition
6	Psychological foundations of language learning: Cognitive styles, strategies, and affective factors
7	Psychological foundations of language learning: Information processing—parallel and distributed processing
8	Linguistics and language learning: Universal grammar?
9	Sociolinguistics, pidginization and creoles
10	Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage study
11	Communicative competence
12	Applying the previous lessons: The case of computer assisted language learning
13	English for Specific Purposes
14	Future trends/Final exam review

A complication with the format of the course is that both regular classroom sections and online sections of the course were offered. Additionally, some students watched video recordings of the course lectures and discussions in the online format for some course sessions and attended in person for other course sessions. Thus, the students received the course content in three different ways. Though most of the course participants attended the course in person, these variations in attendance add another variable to the course that might have influenced the responses of some of the course participants in unknown ways.

Original research articles are the primary texts for the class. These articles constitute both supportive and non-supportive positions regarding the SLA theories included in the course. These articles conform to quality standards in accordance with Cook's (1999) criteria. For each lesson, students complete the assigned readings and then respond to questions that require them to evaluate the content of the assigned readings with guidelines for the evaluation process. The students are then required to take a position in response to the readings that is supportive or oppositional and then defend their decisions. Students must also attend to the question "What have you learned from this week's readings that might help you become a better teacher?" This is the final question that comes at the end of each lesson. Though participating in this study, this question suggests that teachers must at least consider taking something with them into their practice.

Moreover, students not only evaluate the content of the research articles they read for each lesson, but they also must describe their own personal, working theories of second language acquisition at the beginning and end of each semester. They are required to share information about their working theories of second language acquisition. As they share their informal theories, they draw on their own life experiences in learning a new language, experiences with other language learners in various contexts, and discuss second language acquisition content they have encountered in other courses that has influenced their current thoughts concerning SLA. Additionally, the course participants discuss the ways in which their working theories of SLA have evolved during the course. They also make commitments concerning changes in their teaching based on what they have learned in the course. Students are given multiple opportunities to discuss their knowledge of the course content and how those theories might guide teaching. While it is certainly possible that students in the courses simply told the instructors and researchers what they thought they wanted to hear, statements about planning are an indicator of teachers' intentions for practice (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Krathwohl, 2002).

C. Data Collection

The dataset for this study consists of assignments from 75 students who participated. Students submitted their assignments as e-mail attachments that were then made accessible to the researchers. The students' assignments were then evaluated by the instructor or a graduate assistant and then returned to the students with written comments. After the beginning of the study, the students were not reminded of their participation in the investigation so that their responses would be as untainted as they possibly could be under the circumstances with the intent to avoid the Hawthorne effect (Adair, 1984). The researchers had access to all of the student assignments over 15 weeks in addition to the final exams. As would be expected, some students neglected to turn in an assignment on occasion. All submitted student assignments and their final exams were stored in a password protected electronic folder in a secure storage cloud until after the semester was completed and teacher evaluations and final grades had been issued.

To answer the first question about the extent of the change, we developed a rubric and applied it to the theories. First, we looked at the initial theory articulated by the teacher in Lesson One. Then we looked at the students' final theories at the end of the semester, compared them to the rubric, and gave them a score.

To enhance reliability, we used simple inter-rater reliability procedures. Since students submitted open-ended, written responses and not objectively scored tests, reliability measures such as test-retest or parallel forms of the test, could not be used. The researchers established a procedure to code the data and then we established inter-rater reliability

with a simple procedure (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Marteau, 1997). A very satisfactory inter-rater reliability of 95 percent was established. After we developed the rubric and applied it to the cases, we performed a Chi Square test (Corder, & Foreman, 2014).

To answer the second research question, we used content analysis techniques, specifically word frequency counts (Stemler, 2001). In counting word frequencies, we desired to learn which ideas were most often mentioned and therefore, of the greatest concern to the students. To conduct this analysis, a researcher extracted all the content words from each initial theory. The researcher tallied content words one time for each participant, but could show up multiple times across the class. For example, if a student wrote that their initial theory was that students would learn with exposure, then the word *exposure* was extracted once for that participant, even if they used the word again later in their explanation of their theory. The intent was to see how many students used the word *exposure* in their theories taken together. While the extraction was being conducted, the researcher was careful to examine context. For example, some students wrote that they did not favor audiolingual methods, while others said they did. The students who wrote they embraced audiolingual methods had that word extracted, while those who expressly said "I do not believe in audiolingual methods," did not have that word extracted. Content words that only had integrity as entire phrases, such as *bilingual education* were extracted together and counted together in the analysis. The researcher tried to take as few liberties as possible in combining terms or collapsing them with one exception. Many students wrote phrases like "there are so many factors that go into learning a language" or "learning to speak a language is more difficult than I imagined," and "language learning is so complicated." These types of phrases were deemed close enough in meaning to be collapsed under the word *complexity*. Then that research extracted all the content words from their final theory. Each dataset was then entered in a Word Frequency counting program. Thus, we could tell which ideas as represented by content words dominated initial theories and which ones were most highly represented at the end of the course.

III. FINDINGS

The results confirm that participants are willing to change their initial theories because of participating in a second language acquisition course that presented information about SLA theory. Collectively speaking, the participants were willing to make changes in their originally stated theories by the end of the course (Table 3). Similarly, both the pre-service and in-service teachers were committed to change with statistically significant preferences for *Completely Different* or *Somewhat Different* theories by the end of the course (see Tables 4 through 7). Continuing the pattern, both domestic and international students self-reported a similar preference for changing their initial theories *Completely* or *Somewhat* by the time of the final course exam.

A. Findings for Research Question 1

The first research question was: To what extent do teachers indicate a willingness to change their personal SLA theories because of participation in a specific SLA course? Table 3 indicates the percentage of students that were rated to have achieved various levels of change. This table combines data from both pre-service and in-service teacher categories.

TABLE 3.
PRE-SERVICE + IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' REPORTED CHANGE IN SLA THEORY

	Pre-service Teachers + In-service Teachers	
	Number	Percentage
Completely Different	25	35%
Somewhat Different	23	32%
Mostly the same	15	21%
Exactly the same	8	11%
Total	71	100%

Sixty seven percent or 48 participants had a *completely different* or a *somewhat different theory*. Only 23 students, or 32% reported little change in their theory.

Table 4 compares pre-service and in-service teachers' reported changes to their theories.

TABLE 4
PRE-SERVICE VS. IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' REPORTED CHANGE IN SLA THEORY

	Group			
Theory Change	Pre-service Teachers		In-service Teachers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Completely Different	7	39%	18	34%
Somewhat Different	5	28%	18	34%
Mostly the same	5	28%	10	19%
Exactly the same	1	5%	7	13%
Total	18	100%	53	100%

In this table, we see that although there are more in-service than pre-service teachers, most of the students still reported intentions changes to their theories about what they should do in classrooms with their students from the beginning of the course to the end.

Table 5 highlights results from the Chi Square analysis comparing pre-service and in-service teachers' changed theories and reported intentions to change practice based on theories.

TABLE 5
CHI SQUARE OF PRE-SERVICE VS. IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' REPORTED CHANGE IN SLA THEORY

| Theory Change | Group | | x^2 | p |
	Pre-service Teachers (1)	In-service Teachers (2)		
Completely Different	7	18	4.840	.028*
Somewhat Different	5	18	7.348	.007**
Mostly the same	5	10	1.667	.197
Exactly the same	1	7	4.500	.034*

$* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001$

The results of the Chi Square comparisons are significant at the $p < .05$ level for *Completely Different* and *Exactly the Same* categories. They are significant at the $p < .01$ level for the *Somewhat Different* category.

Table 6 compared the reported changes in theory for international versus domestic students.

TABLE 6
DOMESTIC VS. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' REPORTED CHANGE IN SLA THEORY

| *Theory Change* | *Group* | | | |
| | *Domestic Students* | | *International Students* | |
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Completely Different	11	22%	15	65%
Somewhat Different	19	39%	4	17%
Mostly the same	13	27%	2	9%
Exactly the same	6	12%	2	9%
Total	49	100%	23	100%

The international students (n=23) had a large percentage (65%) that had a completely different theory from the beginning of the course to the end. In fact, 82% changed their theory overall. For domestic students (n=49), 61% changed theories overall.

The Chi Square analysis results for international versus domestic students appear as Table 7.

TABLE 7
CHI SQUARE OF DOMESTIC VS. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' REPORTED CHANGE IN SLA THEORY

| Theory Change | Group | | x^2 | p |
	Domestic Students (3)	International Students (4)		
Completely Different	11	15	.615	.433
Somewhat Different	19	4	9.783	.002**
Mostly the same	13	2	8.067	.005**
Exactly the same	6	2	2.000	.157

$* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001$

In this analysis, the categories *Somewhat Different* and *Mostly the Same* categories were significant at the $p < .05$ level. There was not as much significance in this comparison as there was between pre-service and in-service participants.

B. Findings for Research Question 2

In research question 2, we asked: Which SLA theories presented in a specific SLA theory course do teachers indicate they are willing to apply in their classrooms because of course participation? participants' initial and final theories were demonstrably different based on the evidence are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8
SLA THEORIES STUDENTS ARE WILLING TO APPLY IN THE CLASSROOM
INITIAL THEORY

ORDER	UNFILTERED WORD COUNT	OCCURRENCES	PERCENTAGE
1	PRACTICE	14	19
2	EXPOSURE	14	19
3	MOTIVATION	11	15
4	KINDNESS, CARING	10	13
5	L1 TRANSFER	8	11
6	INPUT	8	11
7	TIME	6	8
8	COMPLEXITY	6	8
9	AGE	6	8
10	FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION	6	8

From this table, it is evident that teachers are initially willing to apply SLA theories of acquisition that revolve around providing practice. They also had theories that centered on motivation, whether they thought that students should motivate themselves or that teachers should do. "Just being kind" to students also ranked high initially, suggesting that the teachers held theories about the affective state of the student and the climate of the class would provide safe space for practicing language that would lead to learning and acquisition.

TABLE 9
REVEALS THE THEORIES THAT THE TEACHERS INDICATED THEY INTENDED TO USE BY THE END OF THE COURSE.

Order		Occurrences	Percentage
1	SIOP	12	16
2	Motivation	10	13
3	L1 transfer	8	11
4	Practice	8	11
5	Communicative competence	8	11
6	Input	8	11
7	Bilingual education	6	8
8	Feedback	6	8
9	Age	6	8
10	Learner variability	5	7

As teachers learned content based instructional principles, they took them up, so much so that ideas about practice slid down their list, but did not fall off (perhaps because practice is a component of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol). Motivation remained important, but "caring and kindness" as strategies for enhancing language acquisition did not appear on the final list. Concerning the results for the second research question, it is evident that the prospective and current teachers are willing to adjust their initial, personal theories of SLA based on the content of the SLA course material and they do incorporate new terms from research associated with those theories.

IV. DISCUSSION

Overall, preservice teachers and practicing teachers were both likely to change their initial personal theories because of course participation. Clearly, the numbers overwhelmingly support this point of emphasis as 67% of preservice teachers and 68% of practicing teachers changed their informal personal theories at a *completely different* or *somewhat different* level because of what they had learned by the end of the course. However, there was a noticeable difference between the domestic and international students regarding changes in their initial and final personal theories. Eighty one percent of the international students changed their personal theories *completely* or *somewhat*, whereas only 61% of domestic students demonstrated similar changes in these categories. From the data, we collected in this study, there are no obvious reasons for this outcome. Perhaps the international students were more open-minded about change because they had left their familiar homelands behind to study TESOL in a very different context in the US. Another possibility is that international students are more likely to rhetorically position themselves in alignment with instructors.

Certainly, one difference between the current study and a previously published study (Author, 2016) is that the percentage of domestic practicing teachers willing to change their personal theories of SLA from their initial position to a different final position was much higher. The reasons for this departure from the results of the earlier study are not entirely understood, but it is certainly plausible that the larger number of student participants by itself was a factor. Further qualitative research could document the actual reasons behind these changes.

The descriptive data presented in Table 9 reveal the SLA theoretical knowledge that students would be willing to apply in the classroom based on their final course exams. For example, no participants mentioned the *SIOP* model *(based on English for Academic Purposes, EAP)* in their initial theories as highlighted in Table 8. However, the most frequently mentioned factor in their final theories was *SIOP*. Moreover, *Practice* lost support as a major factor in their final theories. An even more surprising outcome is that *Exposure*, tied for first place in their initial theories, did not make the list of the top 10 most frequently mentioned factors in their personal theories at the end of the course. Certain factors, such as *L1 Transfer* and *Input* were supported at the same level of intention to shift their practices in their initial and final rankings. In addition, *Bilingual* Education, *Feedback*, and *Learner Variability* received some support among the top 10 factors mentioned in their final theories, but received no mention in their initial theories.

We saw these findings as positive not just because they showed that teachers were willing to declare intentions to shift their practices, but because they were shifting them to more inclusive practices and ones that involved more complex planning and skill. For example, in our view, embracing students' multilingualism is much more likely to be helpful to ELs than simply being caring and kind, even though we obviously desire that teachers care about students. For example, making use of ELs' home languages in a manner that facilitates better academic learning increases the probability of successful learning experiences.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Certainly, one of the most important findings of this study is that prospective and practicing teachers in an SLA expressed a willingness to change their initial informal theories and intentions for practice because of what they are taught in such courses. Such findings align with previous studies that share a positive outlook on what teachers can do

when they receive information about research within a higher institution setting (Busch, 2010; Erlam, 2008; McDonald, Badger, & White, 2001). Such findings support the notion that it is not *whether* teachers are taught about SLA theories, but other factors that determine whether this instruction changes their theories and intentions for practice.

Both pre-service and in-service teachers self-reported that they were willing to change their teaching practice in the future. Similarly, both domestic and international students exhibited a similar pattern of willingness to change. These changes were not just changes for change's sake: they were changes that indicated a willingness to understand the complexity providing language support in classrooms, rather than just acknowledging that language acquisition is complex, as they stated initially. Finally, we also acknowledge that teachers enter SLA theory courses with ideas about L1 transfer and motivation (as examples) that are legitimate factors in language acquisition, according to research.

The implications of this study would seem to indicate that teacher education courses designed to build prospective and practicing teachers' knowledge base and skills can, in fact, change theories (as expressed in intentions for practice) about student learning and entice them to commit to making engaging with ELs as children who are capable of success in learning English and subject matter. As previously stated, the degree of actual implementation of these expressed teaching intentions in the SLA setting needs to be much more vigorously investigated. Since we also learned that teachers come into classes with certain personal theories, it might be possible to design SLA courses that leverage these existing ideas and propel them through course content in more strategic ways than this current SLA course could provide. For example, we don't know what the outcomes might have been if we had taught the content in a different order.

We also wondered if there might be clearer pathways for international students to become practicing teachers in the United States, given their willingness to learn and their declared intentions to apply theories. We expected that international students would draw from their own experiences and it would be difficult to convince them to move from those spaces, but instead, they seemed very open to learning about SLA apart from their own previous teaching and learning experiences. Even if these students do not become teachers in K-12 public schools, there is potential that having closer relationships with university graduate programs in TESOL could be a resource to local schools in helping both ELs and non-ELs understand language learning processes.

For future research, it would be helpful to know what teachers do in their classrooms after the course is over. Such If the teachers would consent to being directly observed, future research efforts could perhaps focus on the level of actual implementation of their theoretical preferences in the classroom. This follow-up would be important since previous research (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis (2004) suggests a potential gap between teachers' expressed intentions and actual classroom practice in other teaching contexts. Certainly, new in-service teachers face socialization pressure and multiple other pressures associated with helping their students achieve adequate scores on standardized tests. These pressures might quickly lead novice teachers away from idealistic beliefs and good intentions. Quantitative and qualitative studies that shed light on the experiences of new teachers coming out of TESOL and English as a Foreign Language Education programs and entering the work place are worthy of further investigation.

The actual success of teacher education in TESOL and in other SLA disciplines depends on willing prospective and current teachers who have a real desire to make a positive difference in the lives of the students they teach. All teachers, regardless of their experience level or international/domestic status, must be prepared with both the knowledge and the tools to enable them to achieve success in a teaching setting that is extraordinarily diverse. In the SLA setting, perhaps the most important tool in the repertoire is the ability to adapt to the widely variable needs of second language learners in the continually evolving landscape of second language education.

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