IN EDUCATION

Crossing the Threshold:

New Graduate Student Research in the Applied Social Sciences

Issue Editors:
M Cecil Smith & Charles Howell
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Developing Graduate Students' Research in Education

Introduction

M Cecil Smith
Northern Illinois University

Throughout most of my career as a professor I have had the great pleasure to teach and mentor graduate students exclusively. In the early days of my career, this occurred largely through the happy accident of course scheduling, and, over time, I found myself teaching only graduate courses, an assignment that suits me well as an academic. Also, my field, educational psychology, is a graduate-level discipline, so this has afforded me multiple opportunities to work with those who aspire to become professional educational psychologists. I enjoy the seriousness of purpose that graduate students bring into the classroom, and the work experiences that many of them draw upon adds a level of complexity—and applicability—to classroom discussions. Also, their relative maturity enables more collegial relationships that sometimes blossom over time into full-fledged research partnerships.

Yet, helping graduate students develop the knowledge, skills, and temperament to engage successfully in independent research and scholarship is the fundamental challenge for any academic mentor. Every student is unique, and each brings a different background, perspective, preparation, aptitude, and eagerness to embark on the difficult task of earning a graduate degree.

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The professor's task in shepherding a graduate student through a program of study requires that they spend many long hours working closely with the student. Professors read their graduate students' initial—often painful—efforts at writing coherent, meaningful, and substantive papers and provide (hopefully) instructive feedback. They advise their students about a program of coursework and a plan of action to accomplish their mission (to earn the degree) within a reasonable time period. Professors take students on as apprentices in research enterprises, training them in the particular (and favored) research methods necessary to carry out a specific line of inquiry. And, through all of this activity, professors closely observe their students' growth as thinkers, scholars, and researchers. Such growth doesn't happen quickly or smoothly, but more likely in fits and starts and through episodes of self-doubt, anxiety, and frustration (sometimes experienced by both parties!).

Graduate students who emerge from such difficult times with the assistance and support of their professors reap a number of rewards. They discover a topic of study that interests them, develop a line of inquiry and an approach to research that is invigorating, develop close and fruitful relationships with their professors and fellow students, and acquire the requisite skills, knowledge, and dispositions to become successful professionals in their chosen fields.

Yet the way there is difficult for even the most able students. The best graduate programs endeavor to provide opportunities and experiences that enable students to develop the necessary skills for accomplishment and success. In the winter of 2008-09, I organized a university-wide graduate student research conference that focused on education, learning, and human development. The conference grew out of a more modest

effort that began, a few years before, as a program-level conference for graduate students in educational psychology. Working with a committee of graduate students from across the College of Education, we endeavored to establish an annual research conference for students in education and the social, behavioral, and health sciences. The conference was held in late March, 2009, and featured more than 25 research paper presentations by doctoral and masters students from three colleges at Northern Illinois University.

Shortly after the conference, my department chair—and the co-editor for this special issue of *Thresholds in Education*—Charles Howell, raised the possibility of publishing some of the best student papers from the conference in the journal. I immediately concurred that this would be a terrific way to showcase our students' work. A few weeks later, I was asked to be the keynote speaker for a graduate student research conference in the prestigious Workforce Development and Education program at The Ohio State University. I heard many fine student presentations during my visit to Columbus, and I invited those students to submit their work to *Thresholds in Education*.

This issue features the work of eight graduate students from Northern Illinois University and The Ohio State University who represent the disciplines of educational foundations, educational psychology, cognitive and instructional psychology, and workforce development. These students are at different stages of their academic and professional development. Some have recently completed the masters degree. Others are in the early portion of their doctoral study, while a few now are engaged in advanced pre-dissertation research. The brief biographies that accompany each article provide additional information about these students' individual journeys from novice to proficient (though not yet expert) educational researchers.

Jessica Heybach Vivirito's article, adapted from her masters thesis in educational foundations, examines the ongoing debate over the appropriate role for contemporary public school teachers. Should they be merely conveyors of (or indoctrinators to) the culture who—at best—pass along, without judgment or critical reflection, the accumulated knowledge of the society to their young and impressionable students? Or should they engage them in intellectual activism of the sort that engenders critical discussions of social issues, challenges students to question the status quo, and which leads students to develop a sense of civic identity and a desire to pursue a purposeful life? It is a decades-old debate in public education, and one which is yet again meaningful. Can teaching ever be a neutral enterprise? Vivirito argues that teachers do students a great disservice when they do not offer their own opinions and judgments about the dilemmas of modern life. How can students ever come to form their own beliefs and values if they do not have something by which to contrast? Sharing one's opinions and judgments with students need not be indoctrination into a set of beliefs, but rather an invitation to develop one's own beliefs.

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Many teachers, even highly experienced educators, struggle with the problem of low student engagement in learning. The education enterprise is populated by all manner of workshops and professional development seminars that offer ideas to teachers about best practices for "motivating" students. Yet, the problem of student disinterest in learning and intellectual disengagement remains. Creating appropriate classroom conditions that encourage student engagement remains a significant challenge for many teachers. Anna Strati conducted a secondary data analysis of data from the Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development. Her study examined the role of teachers' support in high school students' academic engagement. Strati operationalized teacher support as students' perceptions of teachers' interest in them, listening to students, getting along with students, and praising their hard work. Strati's findings contribute to a more nuanced

understanding of the impact of teacher support on students' engagement. The relationship between teacher support and student engagement was moderated by students' socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity. Her findings invite further work by educational psychologists to examine the complex relationship between student-teacher classroom interactions and students' engagement in academic tasks.

As a ground commander for U.S. troops in Iraq, Brian Gerber observed firsthand the consequences of individual soldiers' exposure to extremely stressful, life-threatening situations. A significant percent of soldiers experience post-traumatic stress symptoms, which inhibit their effectiveness and that of their fellow soldiers. Gerber's project focused on developing and validating a prototype screening measure for post-traumatic stress symptoms. The purpose was to enable commanding officers to quickly and effectively identify soldiers who could benefit from psychological support and assistance following exposure to traumatic incidents in the field. Evidence shows that early identification and intervention can delay or prevent the onset of post-traumatic stress disorders, which are costly and debilitating to soldier and military unit alike.

Educational psychology doctoral student Nicole Allgood interviewed nine young adults to gain insights into the challenges and the consequences of growing up in a family with a sibling having autism spectrum disorders (ASD). These are complex developmental disabilities that present stark challenges to families. Siblings of those with ASD often feel embarrassed and angry about having a sibling with such a disabling problem, and those lacking appropriate parental and other social supports may experience a number of behavioral and emotional problems as a result. Allgood examined these siblings' beliefs about how living with a sibling having ASD influenced their friendships, choice of a romantic and marital partner, and career selection. In doing so, Allgood's work gives voice to those who have experienced the unique and tragic circumstances of a close family member with ASD, individuals whose perspectives on this experience might not otherwise be recognized and understood.

Stacey Todaro and Paul James Perry, both doctoral students in the cognitive psychology program at Northern Illinois University, collaborated with Professor Janet Holt on a project that examined graduate teaching assistants' (TAs') abilities to construct "good" items for university classroom assessments and the effects of a test item-writing tutorial on the TAs' abilities to detect flawed test items. Because TAs are often cast into teaching roles with little preparation or mentoring, they are not always well-equipped to develop classroom tests that have good measurement properties. Indeed, even many experienced teachers in higher education find test construction to be daunting. The brief tutorial resulted in significant improvements to the TAs' abilities to detect problematic test items. The investigators suggest that more training in basic measurement concepts be incorporated into the educational preparation of teachers.

As a native of Spain, Mercedes Sanchez is intimately familiar with the socioeconomic and workplace challenges that many immigrants face as they settle in their adopted countries. For U. S. immigrants who do not speak or read English, these challenges are even greater. A doctoral student in the Workforce Development Education program at The Ohio State University, Sanchez in her work provides a brief historical perspective on the political and educational ideologies that have influenced curriculum development in the variety of educational programs directed to immigrant adults, including adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) literacy instruction. Periodic anti-immigration sentiments, fueled by xenophobia and racist attitudes, have buffeted efforts to establish and deliver well-funded,

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pedadogically appropriate literacy programs for non-English-speaking immigrants. Yet, more recent efforts have taken on more student-centered pedagogical approaches that take into consideration immigrants' lives and perspectives on language learning. These later efforts are likely more effective in encouraging political participation, promoting civic values, and reinforcing immigrants' desire to become proficient in English.

Children born in this country to immigrant parents often quickly learn English, but they may not acquire their parents' native language—particularly if the parents do not frequently speak the language at home but, rather, endeavor to speak English to support their own language learning efforts. Solanlly Ochoa-Angrino, a doctoral student in educational psychology, conducted an informal but extended observational study of a preschool aged child who was learning her mother's native language, Spanish. During trips home from day care, while riding in the family's automobile, mother and daughter sang songs, recited poems, and talked in Spanish about the events in their lives. Ochoa-Angrino's study illustrates that these simple, everyday conversations provide rich and meaningful opportunities for children to learn a second language through the careful and considerate scaffolding that parents can provide.

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More formalized schooling also provides rich opportunities for second language learning. As part of a doctoral course in ethnographic research methods, Elena Lyutykh conducted an interview study with parents of children and young adolescents who attended a Russian language weekend school. The parents were all Russian immigrants, and all desired that their children learn Russian history and culture through their participation in the weekend school. However, they emphasized that learning to speak and read Russian was of much greater importance than the cultural and historical aspects of Russian life. Lyutykh offers a few implications for heritage language educators and researchers based on her findings.

Graduate school is a time that is intended for deep and extended learning. Time is needed to acquire and refine the habits of mind necessary to engage in the kinds of thinking required for scholarly work—analysis, interpretation, reflection, synthesis. It requires that the student become acquainted with the rules and conventions of academia and of the disciplinary field itself—the theories, the intellectual debates, the movers and shakers who stir up the discipline and propel it forward. For students who intend to become academic practitioners and scholars, such knowledge is invaluable to have upon achieving an entry-level faculty position. The graduate students whose work has been featured in these pages represent individuals who stand at different points in their development as knowers, thinkers, and scholars. They all have much promise and much to give, as demonstrated by the work presented here.

M Cecil Smith is a professor of educational psychology at Northern Illinois University. He earned a doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1988. His research interests include adult literacy, adolescent identity development, and science education. Professor Smith recently edited the Handbook of Research on Adult Learning and Development *(Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2008). He teaches graduate courses in educational psychology, research methods, and human development.*

Revisiting the 1930's *Social Frontier* Debates: Teacher Neutrality, Indoctrination, and the Making of Citizens

Jessica Heybach Vivirito
Aurora University

The problem of indoctrination and teacher neutrality has been comprehensively analyzed by George Counts and others through the 1930's debates that played out in the journal *Social Frontier*. These debates, a direct consequence of Counts's (1932) fiery speech "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?" and the subsequent book, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?,* articulated a vision for education that could respond to the Great Depression and the other pressing social problems of the day. Counts's 1932 speech at the Progressive Education Association's (PEA) annual conference shocked the audience and led to the abandonment of the entire program in order to consider his call to action. Counts (1932) issued a call to action directly challenging progressive educators to come to terms with imposition and indoctrination:

> If Progressive Education is to be genuinely progressive, it must emancipate itself from the influence of this class, face squarely and courageously every social issue, come to grips with life in all of its stark reality, establish an organic relation with the community, develop a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare, fashion a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny, and become somewhat less frightened than it is today at the bogeys of *imposition* and *indoctrination*. (para. 8)

The debates that followed in the pages of the *Social Frontier* confronted the difficult task of forging a professional identity for teachers as agents of change. These debates, both then and now, highlight the complicated relations that exist between teacher neutrality, objectivity, indoctrination, and the idea of social reconstruction through education.

Counts's ideas sparked a vigorous civic dialogue that included both liberal and conservative social and educational theorists. The bulk of contributors to *Social Frontier* called on teachers to mobilize and become leaders in the struggle to create a new social order based on a prophetic understanding of democracy. Many wrote that democracy in the United States was in danger of being degraded by unrestrained capitalism. Counts challenged teachers to radically redefine their vocational identities in the midst of the intensifying conflicts brought about by the Great Depression and the modern age. Teachers had a responsibility to their students and the world not simply to react to social forces but to actively create democratic citizens based on a renewal of democratic values. For Counts, the modern age, technology, and the industrial revolution had not automatically made the world a better place. Therefore, schools, not industrial progress, needed to fulfill their function as vehicles of social transformation.

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As indicated, one major interpretive conflict that occurs throughout the debates in *Social Frontier* concerned what, exactly, the identity of teachers ought to be. Are teachers to promote the values of social reconstruction or should they stay above the fray—be neutral—and thus work to maintain the status quo? One set of authors, unofficially led by University of

Chicago President Robert Hutchins, articulated that schools should be followers of the social forces of the day. Hutchins argued,

> the pupil must be taught to earn a living in the society that exists—not in the one that ought to exist some time. He must be made a good citizen of this commonwealth—not of another, no matter how much better that other may be . . . education does not determine the political and economic situation. (Hutchins, as cited in Editorial Board, 1934, para. 7)

In this passage Hutchins clearly embraces an essentialist philosophy of education. This approach to education is persistent throughout much of American history, and common among many current conservative education reformers. In contrast, another set of authors clearly defined the role of schools and teachers as leaders and co-creators of an evolving social order.

Some educators and theorists placed great faith not only in the democratic possibilities of the nation, but in the nation's teachers as well. For example, President Glenn Frank of the University of Wisconsin observed:

> The nation's schools owe their students and the adult public something more than a neutral listing of the dilemmas of our time. Schools must set lamps burning in those dark places where social decisions falter for want of light. The nation has the right to expect from its educators candor of judgment upon even the most controversial issues (as cited in Editorial Board, 1934, para. 10)

Other prominent leaders of the social reconstruction movement, including John Dewey, William Kilpatrick, Harold Rugg, Charles Beard, and Sidney Hook actively made teacher identity a central issue in their program for reconstruction. They argued that much greater curricular value should be placed on a frank discussion of social problems, on the formation of a democratic civic identity, on questioning and challenging the status quo, and ultimately on creating citizens who could make judgments and define their own purposes. While Hutchins and other conservative writers saw these ideals as utopian and unobtainable, the social reconstructionists were convinced that by excluding the honest treatment of "social problems" within the schools, American democracy was being imperiled.

The conscious exclusion of certain topics in education—what Eliot Eisner (1979) would later call the "null curriculum"—was considered largely responsible for the impotence of the schools to effect social change within the United States.

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Critics of social reconstruction claimed that the ideas of Counts, in particular, were rooted in a dubious sympathy for socialism and communism and that he really intended to use the school as a public arena for non-neutral, radical indoctrination. To refute the assumption that schools of America, or any nation, could ever be neutral the editorial board of the *Social Frontier* dedicated an entire issue to the subject. The editorial board began the issue with the startling admission that American schools have always been engaged in indoctrinating students

> Textbooks have always been written and selected with the idea of spreading particular social, religious, and moral doctrines . . . The New England Primer . . . Webster's Speller . . . McGuffey Readers . . . were potent instruments in maintaining and intensifying the dominant ideals which had become identified with the American character . . . suggesting that the school should inculcate this or that virtue, ideal, or outlook, should shape one or another type of personality, should impose one or another mold on national character. (Editorial Board, 1935a, para. 2)

The *Social Frontier* debates strongly suggest that "indoctrination" is an inescapable reality of the educational enterprise. In a sense, then, every lesson carried out by teachers and schools in the service of certain values is an act of indoctrination, an imposition of official power into the world of the child.

Obviously, some impositions or actions are more

profound than others, but the end result is an imposition and indoctrination into cultural and time-specific rules that normalize a certain conception of American identity. Harry Gideonse (1935) reinforces this claim.

> Indoctrination is probably an essential and inevitable function of education in the broadest sense of the term. Social cohesion and the very notion of a "society" may depend upon some such process of "making" citizens. The real question is not whether we should have freedom or indoctrination in the schools, but rather whether we should make a conscious and deliberate attempt at imposition there. (para. 1)

Gideonse continued his analysis by making an important distinction between the profound difference of indoctrination into a worldview that is complete and thus requires citizen compliance with the status quo and a worldview and vision of education as an agent of change in society. "There is an important difference—as John Dewey has recently pointed out— between education with respect to a changing society and indoctrination into settled convictions about that society" (para. 5). If indoctrination is inevitable, teachers might benefit from viewing their role as one of a "social indoctrinator." Perhaps then they would take more seriously the character of their influence in shaping the hearts and minds of their students.

The social reconstructionists believed that the ideals of democracy, the ideals that should comprise the national identity, had yet to be achieved and that educators needed to strive to reach those ideals anew with each generation.

In examining the spectrum of opinion in the *Social Frontier* debates on indoctrination and teacher identity, the central conflict seemed to involve the question of how one ought to define the very character of American national identity. The social reconstructionists believed that the ideals of democracy, the ideals that should comprise the national identity, had yet to be achieved and that educators needed to strive to reach those ideals anew with each generation. On the other side were those who believed that American identity had already been achieved and therefore wanted to conserve the character of the present society. These contradictory forces shaped the broad outlines of the *Social Frontier* debates—a creative and difficult tension between competing images of the past and the future—over the meaning of "America" itself.

Those who opposed the ideas of Counts and the social reconstructionists argued that teachers were morally and intellectually unprepared for the challenge. They said that teachers themselves were socially illiterate when it came to the enormity of the problems and the forging of potential solutions. Yet, many other authors writing in the *Social Frontier* argued repeatedly that teachers were up to the challenge and did indeed have the potential to exercise more social power and responsibility. A 1935 editorial piece in *Social Frontier* highlights this position:

> They [teachers] are potentially powerful because they are numerous, because they are strategically placed to re-fashion the mentality of the nation, and because education occupies an important place in the traditionally sanctioned democratic way of life. The mental poverty, the cultural philistinism, and the social isolation of the average teacher impose serious difficulties in the way of his effectiveness. But there is no more reason for him to postpone active participation in social life because of lack of skill, knowledge, and insight than for an individual to refuse to step into the water until he has learned to swim. (1935b, para. 3)

The suggestion here is that teachers do not need to know all or have a secure grasp on the "right" answers to all social problems before treating them as subjects of inquiry. Offering students opportunities to negotiate, develop opinions, and render judgment on the pressing social problems of the day is the role of the teacher, for if teachers wait to know *all*, students will likely never be offered this type of inquiry in the classroom.

Although W.E.B. DuBois did not directly weigh in on the indoctrination debates on the pages of *Social*

Frontier, it is worth noting that he did make an explicit reference to the conference in which Counts issued his call to action. DuBois (1935) argued in a speech to Georgia teachers that the task of social reconstruction was indeed problematic:

> Whenever a teacher's convention gets together and tries to find out how it can cure the ills of society, there is simply one answer; the school has but one way to cure the ills of society, and that is by making men intelligent. To make men intelligent, the school has again but one way, and that is, first and last, to teach them to read, write and count. And if the school fails to do that, and tries beyond that to do something for which the school is not adapted, it not only fails in its own function, but it fails in all other attempted functions. Because no school as such can organize industry or settle the matter of wage and income, can found homes or furnish parents, can establish justice or make a civilized world. (p. 11)

DuBois continued his vision of the purpose of American schools by articulating that once students are literate, the schools should then move on and offer a proper social studies curriculum to expose social realities.

However, DuBois continued his vision of the purpose of American schools by articulating that once students are literate, the schools should then move on and offer a proper social studies curriculum to expose social realities.

> If the school does furnish the basic essentials for intelligence, then the public who can read, write and count, can go forward. . . . Above all, he can study the social science, the history of industry, and of the machine, the function of money, the use and abuse of capital, the law of income and wages. He can get some insight into the newer observations of the human mind and of the group mind. In this way, the student has an opportunity, between the years of 11-17, of grasping the meaning of the world in microcosm, and he can begin to apprehend what it means to live in this age and in the foremost ranks of time. (p. 12)

DuBois eloquently lays out the twofold purpose of education: The first goal is basic literacy and the second is offering students opportunities to use that literacy to better understand the many kinds of social relationships that exist in the world.

Schools may not be able to do *everything*, but they can do *something* in the struggle for social reconstruction. In a sense, DuBois's prescription for studying society explicitly embraces central features of what I take Counts and his supporters to be advocating. Students are to study, among other things, "the function of money, the use and abuse of capital, the human and the group mind" It is hard to imagine the opponents of Counts encouraging students to study the social phenomena that DuBois describes, for these are studies that would expose "the way things are" to critical scrutiny.

Contemporary Expressions of the Social Frontier Debates

The stunning qualities of these Depression-era debates about the appropriate ends of education still resonate some seventy years later. Every major educational theorist who has sought to define teacher identity and come to grips with indoctrination invokes the spirit of George Counts and the *Social Frontier*. Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, William Ayers, Howard Zinn, and Jonathan Kozol, to name a few, all speak to the task of social reconstruction through education and the schools. All of these figures agree one can never be neutral. William Ayers (2004) offers his insight: "Education is always for something and against something else. It is a startling idea initially: this notion that we must choose, that education is not and never can be neutral. But the longer I teach, the clearer it becomes" (p. 10).

Echoing this sentiment, Myles Horton (1990), in a conversation with Paulo Freire, articulates the reality of neutrality and how ultimately it must be rejected on moral grounds.

All the people that are supposed to be guiding

> this country say you've got to be neutral. As soon as I started looking at the word neutral and what it meant, it became obvious to me there can be no such thing as neutrality. It's a code word for the existing system. It has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be—that's what neutrality is. Neutrality is just following the crowd. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be. Neutrality, in other words, was [is] an immoral act. (p. 102)

Neutrality as an "immoral act," as Horton describes it, stands in contrast to the commonsense thinking that many teachers arrive at when they choose neutrality to shelter students from bias and prejudice. Horton (1990) describes of the morality of teacher neutrality:

> It [neutrality] was to me a refusal to oppose injustice or to take sides that are unpopular. It's an excuse, in other words. So I discarded the word neutrality before I even started thinking much about educational ideas and about changed society, it became more and more obvious that you've got to take sides. You need to know why you take sides; you should be able to justify it. (p. 102)

Unfortunately, aspiring teachers learn in many different ways that they must be neutral and distance themselves from social problems.

Unfortunately, aspiring teachers learn in many different ways that they must be neutral and distance themselves from social problems. The assumption that a stance of neutrality reflects sound moral conduct on the part of teachers runs counter to the deeply human experience felt by teachers daily. The injustice Horton asks us to stand up against is intensely seen and felt inside the classroom and in the lived experience of students. Regularly adopting a neutral stance does little to transform the moral obligation that many teachers feel towards their students and does little to combat the frequently boring and alienated lives of students.

The larger ramifications of a neutral education can also be seen to constitute a form of actual curriculum that has very real implications for teachers and students. The concept of the null curriculum illuminates

What we do not know affects what we are able to know.

the complexities of what is omitted from classroom curriculum. Eisner (1979) writes

> It is my thesis that what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach. I argue this position because ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problem. The absence of a set of considerations or perspectives or the inability to use certain processes for appraising a context biases the evidence one is able to take into account. A parochial perspective or simplistic analysis is the inevitable progeny of ignorance. (p. 83)

Thus, what we do not know affects what we are able to know. The conceptual framework of the null curriculum helps to theorize how the removal and omission of social problems from the serious business of schools articulates itself in the civic identity of both teachers and the nation as a whole. Furthermore, the null curriculum exposes how neutrality can also constitute a form of indoctrination.

What we do not say, what we do know, is "not a neutral void"? Rather, this void limits our ability to interpret and understand the complexity of our social reality. Many teachers feel that their objectivity and neutrality is good in terms of not indoctrinating their students into a particular opinion. However, if teachers do not offer a set of issues for students to consider, students cannot develop any opinions and judgments about the very real dilemmas of our times. I contend that, in fact, this form of objectivity acts as a very dangerous form of indoctrination—a form of indoctrination into neutral citizenship that works against the aims of democratic education.

The various layers of curriculum, the teacher, the setting, the social climate of the community, the lives of the students—these factors reinforce the belief that schools must respond to the social realities of the world if we are ever going to engage students and work towards the values embodied in democratic education. Education is never a neutral venture, and in a democracy teachers have the freedom and the responsibility to "indoctrinate" students into the non-neutral murky waters of citizenship. Counts (1969) reminds us that to become truly democratic we must abandon neutrality.

> The big question therefore is not whether we should impose anything on the child in the process of education but what we should impose. In the swiftly changing world of the twentieth century we must certainly examine our cultural heritage critically in the light of the great and inescapable realities of the present age and the trends toward tomorrow. What this means, in my opinion, is to present to the younger generation a vision of the possibility of finally fulfilling the great promise of America expressed in the Declaration of Independence. (p. 188)

American education, carried out in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, would promote democratic ideals that champion freedom of thought, justice, divergent thinking, critical self-reflection, equality among all, and the power of the people to change the course of their destiny. Thus, if America is ever to become truly democratic, its teachers must learn to dare: dare students to know what they do not know, dare students to be uncomfortable, dare students to consider different perspectives, and most importantly, dare students to work toward a more humane and just social order.

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Jessica Heybach Vivirito's passion for research in social foundations is a reflection of the very personal meaning that the work has had and continues to have in her life. She was living in a self-described "cocoon," the life of a suburban wife, mother, and schoolteacher that her schooling had attempted to prepare her for, when her husband's deployment to Iraq in 2004 changed the course of her life forever. The special challenges faced by families of reservists deployed overseas (who qualify for fewer services and benefits for their service) raised questions to which traditional perspectives didn't provide adequate answers.

Graduate coursework provided the perfect opportunity to examine and interrogate questions regarding the nature of American institutions and our national identity. Building on the work of key figures like George Counts, Herbert Marcuse, and Simone de Beauvoir, her work asks provocative questions about the nature of those institutions and practices. She is currently working on a doctorate in NIU's Teaching and Learning Department, and hopes to complete her dissertation exploring the pedagogical implications of critical aesthetics and tragedy in shaping the civic sensibilities of students.

As her graduate work continues Jessica brings a perspective rooted in critical theory to her work as a member of the faculty at Aurora University. Her research continues to provide more questions rather than answers. Jessica's greatest hope is that teacher education can evolve out of its narrow and ideologically-constrained traditions that perpetuate patterns of dehumanization, inequality, and social dysfunction.

The Influence of Teacher Support on High School Students' Academic Engagement

Anna D. Strati
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Research conducted over the last few decades underscores the importance of the classroom social environment on students' academic as well as motivational outcomes (Burnett, 2002; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Patrick, Anderman, & Ryan, 2002; Wentzel, 1997). An inseparable component of the classroom environment is the teacher who acts as the socializing agent, creating the optimal conditions for learning to occur. Teacher-student relationships have, therefore, received increasing attention in the last two decades as they are thought to positively influence students' engagement.

Several studies provide compelling evidence of the positive impact of teacher support on students' academic engagement (Hudley, Daoud, Polanco, Wright-Castro, & Hershberg, 2003; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). For example, Davidson and Phelan (1999) delineate central characteristics of the relationships with teachers such as trust, respect, and care, which are related to students' engagement. Likewise, examining both teachers' and students' perspectives on the relationship between teacher support and student engagement, Klem and Connell (2004) provide further evidence of the effects of teacher support on engagement. Specifically, the researchers found that for middle school students, high levels of teacher support were indicative of high levels of engagement, with 74% of students less likely to feel disengaged when they perceived high teacher support.

An inseparable component of the classroom environment is the teacher who acts as the socializing agent, creating the optimal conditions for learning to occur.

Considering the ameliorative effects of teacher support on students' academic and emotional adjustment in school, researchers have also examined the effects of teacher support on students' engagement while taking into consideration students' gender, race and socioeconomic status (SES). Investigators have found that student engagement is mediated by students' grades and race, as well as by students' SES (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). In a recent study, Shernoff and Schmidt (2008) found that Black students reported higher engagement, intrinsic motivation, and affect in classrooms but lower GPA when compared to White students. Researchers termed this effect the engagement-achievement paradox.

Similarly, Ryan and Patrick (2001) also found that students' reports of relatedness predicted changes in classroom engagement over the secondary school years. Specifically, relatedness to teachers uniquely contributed to students' emotional engagement. Although females reported higher levels of relatedness to teachers than males, relatedness to teachers was a more salient predictor of engagement for males.

Taken together, these studies substantiate the significant effect of supportive teacher-student relationships on students' engagement. One important limitation of this research, however, has been its relatively narrow conceptualization of student engagement. Until recently, researchers have focused only on one aspect of student engagement—behavioral, emotional, or cognitive. Fredericks and his colleagues (2004) have suggested that engagement should be conceptualized more broadly. Following this suggestion, the present study adopts a construct proposed by Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, and Shernoff (2003), which brings to light the importance of looking at engagement as integrating both emotional and cognitive elements.

Stemming from Csikszentmihalyi's Flow theory, the researchers' conceptualization of engagement was

theorized as the simultaneous experience of concentration, interest, and enjoyment in an activity. *Interest* denotes the degree of interestingness with the task (e.g., "Did you find the activity interesting?") whereas *concentration* indicates the level of absorption with the task (e.g., "How well were you concentrating?"). *Enjoyment* refers to the degree of contentment with the task (e.g., "Did you enjoy what you were doing?"). According to Flow theory, the simultaneous experience of all three components (interest, concentration, and enjoyment) leads to higher levels of Flow. Adopting a similar approach, scholars have developed a construct of engagement by taking the mean of students' ratings of *interest*, *concentration*, and *enjoyment* when in school.

In this paper, characteristics of teacher-student relationships were used to predict student engagement in a sample of 586 high school students. Analyses controlled for students' gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and grades. This study identified several significant predictors of students' engagement, including teacher support, ethnicity, and students' socioeconomic status. A significant interaction of students' ethnicity and teacher support on engagement was also supported by the analyses. Contrary to expectations, maintaining a strong rapport with the teachers was not indicative of higher levels of engagement for Black students. Unlike other studies, gender and grades were not significant predictors of student engagement when all variables were considered. Implications of the study are addressed and future directions are proposed in the discussion section.

In this paper, characteristics of teacher-student relationships were used to predict student engagement in a sample of 586 high school students. Analyses controlled for students' gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and grades.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of teacher support on academic engagement after controlling for students' ethnicity, gender, grades, and socioeconomic status. The research questions guiding this study are: 1) (a) What are the effects of teacher support on students' engagement in the classroom? (b) Is the relationship between teacher support and engagement moderated by students' gender, grades, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status? 2) Are there any interaction effects between teacher support and student engagement, and if so, are they moderated by students' gender, grades, or ethnicity?

Methodology

Measures

Defining teacher support

Factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to assess the underlying structure for four items taken from the "The Teenage Life Questionnaire" (TLQ) survey. The four items that loaded highly into the first factor had a moderately high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .74$), thus allowing for the creation of a composite variable called *teacher support.* The variable "teacher support" was created by taking the mean response to the following four items: teachers are interested in the students ($l_1 = .79$), teachers really listen ($l_2 = .80$), teachers and students get along ($l_4 = .57$), and teachers praise hard work ($l_3 = .81$).

Defining student engagement

As mentioned earlier, student engagement was a composite variable created from the mean responses on students' ESM measures on interest, concentration, and enjoyment. Despite the fact that this construct achieved only a moderately high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .64$), there is reason to believe that when these three components are experienced together, they may help us understand student engagement.

Participants

The sample for this study was part of the Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development (SSYSD), a national longitudinal project examining adolescents' experiences in school (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2001). These data were collected from 12 sites, 13 high schools, between the years 1992 and 1997. Data were collected in three waves, 1992-1993 (Year 1), 1994-1995 (Year 3), and 1996-1997 (Year 5). Even though the original data were longitudinal, for the

purposes of this study, only data collected with high school students were analyzed. Therefore, 46% of the sample consisted of 10th grade students (n=270), whereas 54% (n=316) were in 12th grade. Sixty-one percent (n=352) of the sample were female. Sixty-five percent of the respondents were White (n=381), 16% were Black (n=96), 9% were Asian (n=50), and 10% were Latino (n=59). Students' socioeconomic composition was also diverse with 6% (n=33) belonging to a low-income class, 17% (n=97) coming from working-class communities, 38% (n=218) living in middle-class areas, 24% (n=155) belonging to upper-middle-class communities and 15% (n=83) residing in upper-class communities. Only students who had completed all items on the questionnaires of interest were included in the analyses, yielding a total sample size of N = 586 students. For further information on sample characteristics, the reader is referred to Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2001).

Procedures

Students' perceptions of their classroom environment as it was experienced "in the moment" were assessed using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) (Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2007). Students were signaled at random moments throughout their classroom time via the use of wristwatches, which were distributed to the students at the beginning of the project (see Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2001). When the students were signaled, they were asked to respond to a two-page survey (ESF) regarding their experiences. Items on the ESF were targeted to measure the participants' feelings and thoughts while in school. Students were also asked to note their location and the activity they were engaged in when they were beeped. Because of the repeated measures nature of the ESM, recollection errors were minimized (see Hektner et al., 2007). In addition to the ESM, students' perceptions of their feelings and cognitions of their classroom experiences were obtained through responses on the Teenage Life Questionnaire (TLQ), a modification of instruments used in the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 1988-94). Students indicated their agreement with each item on a 4-point Likert-type response scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree).

Results

Research Question 1: What are the effects of teacher support on students' engagement in the classroom, and is the relationship between teacher support and engagement moderated by students' gender, grades, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?

Teacher support significantly predicted student engagement (β =.28). The stronger moderator of student engagement was students' ethnicity and especially being African-American (β = .60). Black students reported higher levels of engagement in the classroom when compared to the other ethnic groups. Latino students were also more likely to report more engagement when compared to Asian students (β = .36), but the difference was not statistically significant. SES was also a significant predictor of student engagement (β = -.10), yielding a negative relationship to engagement. This means that students of higher SES were reporting lower engagement in the classroom. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Shernoff and Schmidt, 2008). Contrary to other studies, gender and grades were not significant predictors of student engagement when all variables were considered.

Research Question 2: Are there any interaction effects between teacher support and student engagement, and if so, are they moderated by students' gender, grades, or ethnicity?

The correlation between teacher support and student engagement differed by students' ethnicity. The negative black-tsupport interaction term in Table 2 indicates that teacher support was inversely related to engagement for Black students (β = -.45), which means that the correlation between teacher support and student engagement was lower for Black students. The Latino-tsupport and Asian-tsupport interaction terms were not significant. There was also no significant relationship between gender and teacher support on student engagement. That is, teacher support did not affect male and female students' engagement levels at school differentially. Similarly, no interaction effects were found between grades and engagement.

Summing up, the relationship between teacher support and student engagement is moderated by students' ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Contrary to expectations, maintaining a strong rapport with the teachers was not indicative of higher levels of engagement for Black students. Similarly, students' SES was also inversely related to engagement, with higher SES students reporting lower levels of engagement. Overall,

this finding is consistent with recent studies reporting racial and socioeconomic differences in engagement (e.g., Shernoff & Schmidt, 2008).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of teacher support on academic engagement, using a construct combining affective and cognitive dimensions, after controlling for students' ethnicity, gender, grades, and socioeconomic status. Findings of this study add to the current literature by providing evidence of the link between teacher support and student engagement in the classroom. Moreover, the findings substantiate the results of previous studies reporting a strong link between teacher support and student engagement (e.g., Hudley et al., 2003; Klem & Connell, 2004; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Therefore, the importance of having supportive teachers in high school is confirmed by the results of this study.

Based on the current study's results, the relationship between teacher support and engagement is moderated by students' ethnicity and SES. As stated above, and contrary to expectations, maintaining a strong rapport with the teachers was not indicative of higher levels of engagement for African-American students. This result suggests that minority groups' relational patterns should be examined more closely when looking at student engagement in the classroom. Similarly, students' SES was also inversely related to engagement, with higher SES students reporting lower levels of engagement. Overall, this finding is consistent with recent studies reporting racial and socioeconomic differences in engagement (e.g., Shernoff & Schmidt, 2008). Future studies may benefit by exploring racial and socioeconomic differences further in order to explain why students' demographic characteristics interact with students' perceptions of what constitutes a supportive teacher and examine how these perceptions influence engagement.

These results, based on a nationally representative sample, show how important it is for educators to pay closer attention to minority students' engagement patterns in the classroom.

Contrary to studies reporting gender differences in the relationship between teacher support and engagement (e.g., Furrer and Skinner, 2003; Ryan & Patrick, 2001), this study found no significant differences between students' gender and the effects of teacher support on engagement. Future studies may benefit by examining a more ethnically representative student population.

There are a number of areas, not touched on in the present study, that merit further investigation. Hoge and colleagues (1990) argued that students' perceptions of a supportive teacher varied by subject area, suggesting the importance of examining teacher-student relational patterns by domain. Additionally, both quantitative and qualitative measures need to be implemented in order to capture the constellation of factors affecting the teacher-student relationship as a means of gaining a more thorough and accurate idea of the effects of a positive relationship with a teacher on students' engagement with school.

When taken together with other studies' results, the present study provides further evidence of the importance of teacher support in the lives of adolescents, especially for minority students. These results, based on a nationally representative sample, show how important it is for educators to pay closer attention to minority students' engagement patterns in the classroom. The results of this study also inform our understanding of factors educators need to focus on to enhance the classroom environment so that all students feel more connected to their school.

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Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Student Engagement	5.20	1.25	**.142*** **	.054	**-.117** **	-.044	-.045	**.179** **	.009	.074	-.037	**.174***	.011
1. Teacher support	2.81	.56	-	-.051	.094	.213	.047	-.107	-.041	.181	.072	.006	.035
2. Gender (reference = female)	.60	.49		-	-.006	.007	-.008	.136	-.022	.954	-.006	.121	-.030
3. SES	61.63	21.09			-	.235	-.012	-.233	-.117	.027	-.010	-.242	-.124
4. GPA	3.20	.64				-	.108	-.235	-.162	.059	.115	-.213	-.139
5. Asian	.085	.28					-	-.132	-.100	.008	.991	-.128	-.098
6. Black	.16	.36						-	-.142	.093	-.131	.969	-.139
7. Latino	.097	.30							-	-.035	-.099	-.138	.975
8. Gender * tsupport	1.68	1.43								-	.013	.108	-.023
9. Asian * tsupport	.25	.82									-	-.127	-.097
10. Black* tsupport	.42	1.00										-	-.134
11. Latino* tsupport	.27	.83											-

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Student Engagement and Predictor Variables

	Outcome variable: Student Engagement		
Variable	B	SEB	β
Teacher support	.63	.15	.28***
Gender	.42	.54	.16
SES	-.01	.003	-.10*
GPA	-.02	.08	-.01
Asian	-.55	1.4	-.12
Black	2.08	.65	.60**
Latino	1.51	.83	.36
Gender * tsupport	-.11	.19	-.13
Asian * tsupport	.14	.48	.09
Black * tsupport	-.56	.24	-.45*
Latino * tsupport	-.51	.30	-.34
Constant	3.748***	.51	
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001			

Note: $R^2 = .08$; $F(11,564) = 4.672$, $p < .001$

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis for Teacher Support, Gender, SES, Grades and Ethnicity Predicting Student Engagement

Before coming to N.I.U., Anna Strati received an undergraduate degree from Aristotle University in Thessalonica, Greece, and a master's degree from Purdue University. She has taught courses in educational psychology at Purdue and NIU and served as a research assistant on a number of projects at both institutions. Motivated by her own "thirst for learning and love for teaching," Strati has long been interested in the role of the classroom environment in shaping students' feelings and beliefs. Through her doctoral studies and research, she hopes to explore "how the relationship a teacher forms with his/her students influences students' engagement in science learning and whether the quality of that relationship can help explain students' motivation to perform well in class." In her dissertation study, she hopes to examine videotaped interactions between students and teachers in high-school science classrooms with the goal of understanding the relational factors that contribute to the momentary engagement of students from different races and ethnicities in their science classrooms. Exploring teacher-student relationships at this developmental level, Strati believes, "might help us understand some of the reasons minorities stray away from science-related fields and may help us identify possible avenues for encouraging the participation of more minorities in these fields."

A PTSD Screening Instrument for the U.S. Army

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Within a week of arriving in Baghdad, Iraq, five armored vehicles conduct a patrol along Route IRISH, a six-lane paved artery which connects the airport with the city center. As the vehicles move under an overpass, a soldier, exposed in a vehicle's turret, is shot in the neck from above. The medic in the patrol attempts trauma aid while the vehicle rushes to the combat hospital. The soldiers carry their comrade into the hospital where he is pronounced dead. Two months later, the same soldiers are targeted by a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device. A soldier, who was near the vehicle prior to detonation, is nearly vaporized, covering his comrades with chunks of human flesh. Within three days, the soldiers are once again conducting patrols in the volatile area.

Soldiers are this country's most precious resource. They are sworn to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. The U.S. Army spends millions of dollars to train our soldiers. The nation, in turn, expects its soldiers to carry out the missions of their units. When soldiers suffer as a result of the dangers they experience and the traumatic events they witness, the nation suffers.

Exposure to traumatic events may result in the development of symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). U.S. Army soldiers are exposed to traumatic events as a result of the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), respectively. Soldiers witness attacks on their unit, noncombatants, and other civilians on a daily basis, only to wake the following day and potentially be exposed again to similar traumatic events. Leaders responsible for the well-being of the nation's soldiers ponder if repeated exposure to horrific, traumatic events affects the ability of individuals or units to carry out their missions.

Rates of PTSD were initially determined to be approximately 16% (Hoge et al., 2004) for soldiers deployed in a combat zone in support of OEF/OIF. Other estimates have been as high as 31% (Lapierre, Schwegler, & LaBauve, 2007). These rates increase for soldiers who have been injured (Koren, Norman, Cohen, Berman, & Klein, 2005) as well as for those under 25 years of age (Grieger et al., 2006). Additionally, the number of soldiers accessing mental health care significantly increased over a four-year period (2000-2004) from 145.3 to 222.3 per 1,000 (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006).

Leaders responsible for the well-being of the nation's soldiers ponder if repeated exposure to horrific, traumatic events affects the ability of individuals or units to carry out their missions.

The purpose of this study was to devise a quick screen scale that enables commanders to assess the combat readiness of soldiers, their ability to participate effectively in combat missions, and the presence and scope of symptoms of posttraumatic stress (PTS) that might affect performance. A second purpose was to describe brief psycho-educational interventions that may alleviate these symptoms and reduce the stigma associated with seeking professional behavioral health assistance outside the unit chain of command.

The post-combat event exposure/early intervention quick screen prototype [PCEE/EI-QS (P)] was designed to analyze four research questions on combat-

exposure, stigma, and the properties of the scale prototype itself. Question 1 determined the usefulness of the quick screen prototype from the commanding officer's perspective. Question 2 determined if a relationship exists between the number of deployments and PTS indicators. Question 3 was designed to measure the relationship between the number of deployments and the likelihood of the soldier to report a desire to seek professional behavioral health assistance. The final research question was designed to determine if soldiers were more likely to report intent to seek professional assistance after their commanding officer administered the quick screen prototype and talking points.

Methods

The prototype was designed for use by company commanders currently deployed to a combat zone. The quick screen scale was administered when the units had completed approximately 50% of their 15-month tour. A unique feature of this study was that soldiers were administered a scale to screen for potential PTS indicators *during* a combat deployment. Additionally, soldiers received talking points on PTSD and had the opportunity to discuss symptoms with their commander in a one-on-one setting. The talking points provided information on indicators of PTSD. Additionally, the talking points provided Hobfoll's (Hobfoll et all., 2007) five intervention principles to guide practices following exposure to traumatic events. Follow-up interviews between the researcher and commanders were also conducted to determine if commanders saw evidence that stigma associated with mental health intervention might prevent soldiers from seeking help if they need it.

A unique feature of this study was that soldiers were administered a scale to screen for potential PTS indicators during a combat deployment.

A nonrandom, purposive sample of respondents was recruited for this study. Soldiers were recruited from combat arms units in Afghanistan and Iraq to represent a diverse group in geographic location and mission type. U.S. Army company commanders, known personally to the researcher, were contacted by email and provided information about the background and purpose of the study. Commanders who agreed to participate were given the quick screen scale, commander's interview questions, consent forms, and envelopes to return the data.

When the commander could allot 10 minutes to administer the PCEE/EI-QS (P) and conduct the interview, soldiers were seen individually in a location chosen by the commander. Soldiers completed the six-question scale and returned it to their commander. Once complete, the commander shared information from the talking points and conducted the two-question commander's interview. This data was similarly recorded and stored with the quick screen data in a separately marked envelope. Once all participants completed the PCEE/EI-QS (P) and the commander's interview, the commander returned the data and consent forms to the researcher.

A descriptive analysis of the prevalence of PTSD, the number of PTSD symptoms, the number of deployments among OEF/OIF veterans, and the usefulness of the PCEE/EI-QS (P) was conducted. Pearson correlation and chi-square tests were used to confirm important epidemiologically plausible associations. SPSS version 16.0 for Windows (SPSS, 2008) was used to conduct the correlation analyses and chi-square tests.

Results, Conclusion, and Importance

The sample consisted of 32 soldiers serving in field artillery units with infantry-type (maneuver) missions in Afghanistan (n = 13) and Iraq (n = 19). Responding soldiers and commanding officers were all male. While some combat arms units are task-organized with female soldiers, the sampled units were not. The percentage of soldiers whose responses met the screening criteria for PTSD was 25% (n = 8).

Sampled current and former commanders (N = 7) overwhelmingly supported the usefulness of the PCEE/EI-QS (P). The quick screen prototype was easy to implement, and deployed commanders, who were asked to administer the screening and conduct interviews without prior clinical experience, found the information in the talking points beneficial. The former commanders also believed the talking points would help create an environment within the unit where soldiers and leaders were encouraged to talk about PTSD in a serious manner.

To understand possible effects associated with combat exposure, the number of deployments and the number of post-traumatic indicators were examined using bivariate correlations. There was a statistically significant correlation between the number of deployments and the number of symptoms, $r = +.34$, $N = 32$, $p < .05$, 1-tail. The overall effect size was medium ($r^2 = .12$).

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the number of deployments and the likelihood of the soldier to report a desire to seek professional behavioral health assistance. There was a statistically significant relationship between the number of deployments and whether a soldier reported intent to seek professional assistance, $c^2(2, N = 32) = 11.63$, $p < .005$. This is a large effect, $V = .60$. Examination of percentages and residuals indicated the number of soldiers with one deployment were significantly less likely to report seeking help as compared with soldiers with two or more deployments (see Table 1). Soldiers with one deployment contributed significantly to the c^2.

Number of Deployments	Report Intent to Get Help		?^{2}	F
	No	Yes		
1	9 (75.0%)**	3 (25.0%)	11.63*	.60
2	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)		
3	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)		

Note . *= p <.005. **= % within number of deployments.

Table 1. Crosstabulation of Deployments and Intent to Get Help

Question four was analyzed with descriptive statistics to determine if stigma would prevent soldiers from seeking assistance outside the chain of command. 62.5% of soldiers who reviewed the PTSD talking points with their commander ($n = 20$) reported that they would seek professional assistance in the future. This suggests that when the commander is involved in the process of identifying and talking about PTS indicators, soldiers may seek assistance outside the chain of command.

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to develop a screening protocol for soldiers at risk for developing PTSD symptoms and to devise talking points for discussing PTSD symptoms. Interdicting a soldier who meets diagnostic criteria with brief psychoeducational intervention therapies may allow the soldier to return to the scope of his or her mission. Further, the tool and its full utilization may interdict the onset of full symptomology, according to *DSM-IV-TR* criteria for PTSD. This study indicates that this is possible when the stigma about mental health concerns is overcome at the lowest echelon of U.S. Army units.

Commanding officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) portray and invite a sense of community with the unit. Their unswerving commitment to each member of the unit is unique and may not be

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to develop a screening protocol for soldiers at risk for developing PTSD symptoms and to devise talking points for discussing PTSD symptoms.

found in any other organization. The strength of rapport and trust is strongest with the soldier's immediate supervisor. Soldiers engage the enemy together with these leaders; they eat together; they share family stories with one another; and in turn, they care for one another. Addressing PTSD with unit leaders is likely to have greater results in reducing symptoms than discussing PTSD with professional counselors once a company redeploys. This is consistent with Hobfoll's (Hobfoll et al., 2007) research, which promotes building connectedness and reducing isolation.

In the Hoge (Hoge et al., 2004) study of soldiers who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, 16% were diagnosed with PTSD. Some two-year estimates conclude costs associated with PTSD are approximately $5,904 to $10,298 per individual (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). A U.S. Army company task force organized for combat may have 120 or more soldiers. This suggests that the two-year health care costs for soldiers in a U.S. Army company could exceed $390,000. There are more than 180 companies with infantry missions currently serving in Iraq. Commanding officers or NCOs who can

successfully interdict one of the six criteria for PTSD can delay its onset, potentially saving the U.S. Army tens of millions of dollars each year.

In this study, the PCEE/EI-QS (P) was found to be a useful protocol, which enabled commanding officers or NCOs to screen for PTS indicators. Commanders and NCOs used the results of the quick screen prototype to guide discussion with soldiers affected by trauma. U.S. Army command policy states commanders must: 1) accomplish the mission; and 2) take care of soldiers (Department of the Army, 2008). Providing information on early intervention brings meaning to a soldier's experiences and offers opportunities for him or her to cope with other soldiers who have had similar experiences. In this regard, the study supports U.S. Army command policy by taking care of soldiers first, so that they may accomplish future missions.

Screening for indicators of PTSD allows commanders and NCOs to care for their soldiers. The U.S. Army screens for PTSD using the PCL-M before and after deployments to OEF/OIF. Because multiple opportunities exist which may expose soldiers to trauma, commanders and NCOs must be knowledgeable about PTSD indicators manifested in their soldiers. This study suggests that soldiers will seek professional assistance when they are screened by their commander and NCO and when they receive clinical information on PTSD reactions in the form of the talking points. Having the opportunity to discuss PTSD reactions at any time during a deployment, at the lowest command echelon, is beneficial to the mental health of soldiers.

Successfully implementing a behavioral health program for the U.S. Army is uniquely challenging. The program must accommodate the entire population of soldiers, it must support the chain of command, and it must consider the role of stigma (Britt, 2000). The PCEE/EI-QS (P) and talking points adhere to these three tenets at the lowest echelon of U.S. Army command. The study indicates that company leaders can implement the quick screen prototype and use the talking points to guide conversation with soldiers who continue to suffer from exposure to traumatic events, thus potentially interdicting the six criteria of the *DSM-IV-TR* PTSD diagnosis. In that all six of these criteria must be met for a sustained 30 days, interdicting any one of them may prolong the development of the full diagnosis. If this occurs, then the ramifications of successfully fulfilling the U.S. Army's mission are greatly enhanced, battlefield integrity and mission accomplishment are improved, and long-term veterans' costs are curtailed.

One major limitation of this study was the lack of longitudinal data. Data were collected solely at the point of the interview. There was no opportunity to follow up longer-term effects of the intervention. Even if conditions allowed for continued monitoring, identifying exactly what a soldier does in a combat environment might be difficult. As noted by Castro, Engel, and Adler (2004), "There are a number of questions and issues to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention.…Most of them remain unresolved and serve to highlight that the uncertainty associated with the utility of early battlefield mental health intervention mirrors the chaos and uncertainty of the battlefield" (p. 303).

Intervention may well provide an efficacious outcome that will reduce post-theater care costs, increase the effectiveness of battlefield missions, and sustain the health and well-being of military cohesiveness in trauma-producing missions.

Longitudinal data are particularly important in evaluating soldiers' willingness to seek assistance outside the chain of command. This study indicated that 62.5% of the soldiers reported that they were likely to seek assistance if their commanding officer encouraged them to do so, but there was no way to assess follow-through. A previous study (Hoge et al., 2004) revealed a large number of respondents did not seek professional help after they stated that they intended to do so. This discrepancy is most likely attributable to the stigma of seeking assistance outside the chain of command. The intervention described here shows promise in addressing this issue.

In the military culture where stigma exists and PTSD is a measureable outcome of battlefield engagement, immediate intervention following traumatic events is indicated. Early intervention through discussion of traumatic events with peers and leaders can delay the onset of full PTSD. Further, intervention may well provide an efficacious outcome that will reduce post-theater care costs, increase the effectiveness of battlefield missions, and sustain the health and well-being of military cohesiveness in trauma-producing missions. A leader who develops trust and rapport with his or her subordinates might provide the crucial first step toward more comprehensive and deliberate intervention for soldiers exposed to potential PTSD events.

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Major Brian Gerber's aspirations for graduate study grew out of his service in Iraq, where he encountered problems that "needed to be addressed from a new perspective." Through graduate training, he hoped to learn research strategies that would lead to solutions that hadn't previously been considered. The military decision-making process, he points out, involves careful consideration of options and evidence, but is constrained by time and available resources. "Seldom," he explains, "do soldiers like myself learn how to properly research a problem."

The article presented here, based on thesis research completed for his master's degree, reflects learning throughout his coursework, and demonstrates his growing understanding of research methodology and ability to apply it to practical problems of combat. With the degree completed, he reports, "I am using what I know as I interact with more combat-hardened soldiers in my current assignment in the Middle East. I get to apply what I have learned when speaking with soldiers and when recommending services and resources."

Gerber hopes to return to graduate school when his operational tempo slows, which will probably be four years or more. In the mean time, he hopes to "stay current with the emerging literature and continue professional discussions with peers and U.S. Army leaders."

Growing up with a Sibling with an Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Phenomenological Investigation of Impact on Young Adult Transition

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Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are complex developmental disabilities that significantly impact the individual and his or her family. Individuals with ASD typically have challenges with social skills, communication skills, and the development of appropriate interests (ASA, 2009). Families struggle with inability to handle problem behaviors, withdrawal by a parent, overinvolvement by a parent, burnout and resentment, breakdown of extended family relationships, feelings of isolation, financial problems, and sibling rivalry (Doyle & Doyle Iland, 2004; Randall & Parker, 1999; Waltz, 2002). Available literature related to siblings has focused on siblings' feelings of jealousy, problem behaviors, resentment, embarrassment, and misunderstanding of the diagnosis (Evans, n.d.; Glasberg, 2000; Harris & Glasberg; Hastings, 2003; Matthew, Leong, & White; 2002; Schubert, n.d.; Sullivan, 1979). Little research has explored how the experience of growing up with a sibling having ASD affects the individual's development.

The Autism Society of America (2009) reports that over 1.5 million Americans are affected by ASDs.

The Autism Society of America (2009) reports that over 1.5 million Americans are affected by ASDs. The current prevalence figures cite as many as 1 in 150 children being diagnosed (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). Autism spectrum disorders refer to a set of pervasive developmental disorders that includes autistic disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, Rett Syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorders not otherwise specified (APA, 2000). Asperger's Syndrome and high functioning autism are characterized by restricted or unusual interests, repetitive routines, challenges with speech and language, socially inappropriate behaviors, difficulties with understanding nonverbal behaviors, and clumsy motor movements (NINDS, 2009)

ASDs significantly impact the family. Notably, families deal with challenges with relationships, practical aspects of life with a child with autism, and emotional responses. These challenges directly relate to the overall quality of life for both the child and his or her family. Siblings are an important part of the context of the family. Sibling relationships are typically the longest lasting family relationships. Early research questioned how siblings react to the child with autism. Sullivan (1979) found that siblings expressed both frustration and positive feelings about having a sibling with ASD. Sullivan advised parents to evaluate not only how they are managing their own responses but also how they are supporting their other children.

Other research has examined the potential impacts of having a sibling with ASD on the siblings' play interactions and behavioral adjustment. Studies have also examined the nature of siblings' understanding of ASDs. One study compared play interactions of family members with the child with autism (Hassan El-Ghoroury & Romanczyk, 1999). The results indicated that siblings did not appear to compensate for their sibling's disabilities and displayed typical play behaviors. The author concluded that siblings could be taught strategies to engage their ASD siblings in play.

Hastings (2003) evaluated the potential of problems with behavioral adjustment of siblings of children with autism. Data were collected from the mothers of 22 siblings and compared with a sample from families not

affected by ASD. Results indicated that siblings of children with ASD were rated as having more peer problems, more overall adjustment problems, and lower levels of prosocial behaviors.

It is important that siblings gain an appropriate understanding of the nature of their brother's or sister's disability (Evans, n.d.; Harris & Glasberg, 2003; Matthew, Leong, & White, 2002; Schubert, n.d.). Glasberg (2000) interviewed 63 siblings on their understanding of their sibling's disability. Siblings of children with ASD acquired these concepts in accordance with their level of cognitive development. As children matured, they were able to understand the disability on a more complex level.

One aspect of the sibling experience that has not been explored in depth is young adult development and, in particular, processes connected with identity development such as peer selection, mate selection, and choice of occupation. Although these processes often occur after the young adult has left home and, therefore, no longer has daily contact with the ASD sibling, it is a mistake to assume that the experience of having lived with a person with ASD does not influence these processes. Individual development is largely shaped by early experiences in one's family. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model stresses the importance of the sociocultural and interpersonal systems—including the family—that shape development (Turnball, Blue-Banning, Turbiville, & Park, 1999). The sibling relationship has tremendous potential to impact development, as it is one of the longest lasting family relationships. This impact is the focus of this study.

One aspect of the sibling experience that has not been explored in depth is young adult development and, in particular, processes connected with identity development such as peer selection, mate selection, and choice of occupation.

Young adulthood represents a transition from childhood to adulthood that is characterized by "the active process of choosing appropriate institutional involvements, organizational memberships, and interpersonal relationships" (Shanahan, 2000, p. 675). Recent perspectives on young adult transition have focused on how childhood experiences shape adult choices (Hawkins, Oesterle, & Hill, 2004). The current study explores the experience of nine young adults and how growing up with a brother or sister with ASD has affected their lives. Specifically, the study examines participants' reports of the connections between their experiences and specific young adult transitions—peer selection, mate selection, and career selection.

Method

The study adopted a phenomenological approach that "focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study" (Glesne, 1999, p. 7). A phenomenological approach seeks to develop the meaning of everyday events and experiences by giving voice to those who have the lived experience in order to develop an interpretive understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Key characteristics of this approach include: 1) the researcher has some contact with the phenomenon; 2) an assumption that the researcher does not truly know the phenomenon, but wishes to, and 3) the methods used are focused on the human experience. Therefore, the investigator works from a place of familiarity but assumes that the participants have the knowledge or expertise to bring meaning and understanding to the phenomenon. Previous phenomenological studies with siblings of individuals with ASD allowed the voice of the sibling to be heard directly (Connors & Stalker, 2003; Myers, 2004). In the current study, the sibling participants are the experts in their own experience.

Participants were 18-25-year-olds with a brother or sister having an ASD diagnosis. Participants were asked to sit for two interviews. Nine persons were solicited for the study using purposive sampling. They were solicited through the investigator's professional connections through the state autism association and a local network of adult siblings using a written description of the purpose of the research. All of the participants identified that they had a brother or sister with either Asperger's Syndrome or high functioning autism.

During the first round of interviews, the investigator used a semistructured interview format. A list of questions was prepared based on an initial pilot study

and review of other research involving young adult siblings (Myers, 2004). The questions were designed to solicit basic family information, participants' impressions of their own development, and information about the participants' current lives such as interpersonal relationships, career choices, and future planning. Interviews were fluid and followed the interests and commentary of the participants. The investigator did note that participants tended to be more open when the investigator shared information from professional experiences to create a sense of shared knowledge.

Data were analyzed through a procedure described by Maxwell (1996). All interviews were voice recorded and then transcribed verbatim. All audio files and transcriptions were coded so that no identifying information was present to maintain confidentiality of the participants. No participants were aware of the identity of other participants in the group.

The first round of interviews served to explore the individual stories of the participants and their experiences growing up with a sibling with ASD.

The investigator then completed an initial reading of the transcript and made notes regarding any relationships, themes, or categories that begin to emerge. Upon second reading, the investigator began to code the data. Maxwell explains that the goal of coding is to break down the data and "rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78-79). The investigator then evaluated the interviews in terms of any themes of emotional expression and grief. Copies of the transcripts were given to the participants to seek any clarification regarding the participant's perspective through member checking (Maxwell, 1996). Upon completion of all interviews, the investigator compared themes that emerged from the interviews to discover any common trends among the participants. The common themes then became the foundation for the second round of interviews.

During the second round of interviews, the investigator acted as the voice of the sibling group and shared with individual participants the data that emerged from the first round of interviews. Participants were then asked to comment on the data and provide additional commentary on the themes presented. Again, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for later processing. Data were processed as described above to reveal more details about the themes that emerged in the first round of interviews.

Results

The first round of interviews served to explore the individual stories of the participants and their experiences growing up with a sibling with ASD. Data gathered through those interviews then formed a common narrative. Each participant had a unique perspective, but themes emerged relative to the experience of having a sibling with ASD. During the second round of interviews, the investigator reported on those themes, which essentially allowed the participants to respond to the comments of others. The findings are organized around three themes that represent a range of experiences expressed by the participants. These themes focus on peer, mate or partner, and career selection decisions that are influenced by having a sibling with an ASD diagnosis.

Peer Selection

Peers are important for young adults for social networking, support, and identity development. During the first round of interviews, some participants noted how their sibling with ASD affected peer relations. Decisions about which people to befriend were reportedly shaped by the potential peer's responses to the sibling with ASD. Participants reported being guarded about telling others about their sibling with ASD, "I'd always be feeling out my friends…how much am I going to be telling them about my sister? When will I tell them about my sister? When will it be okay for me to just ask them to come over unexpectedly and just risk it and see what happens?" Participants expressed concerns about whether their friends understood and accepted their sibling with ASD. One participant remarked on the end of a friendship that occurred when the peer made a negative comment about her sibling's abilities.

Participants also looked for their friends to be interested in their sibling with ASD. One participant

stated, "I think that hurts as much as not being tolerant because she's a very significant part of my life, so when I don't get a response as much it makes me not think that much of them. So I guess in some ways that's kind of how I trim the fat on my friends is by seeing kind of how their reaction is."

The theme of peer selection was brought into the second round of interviews, and comments such as those listed above were reflected back to the participants. The participants consistently supported the tone of the first round of interviews related to peer selection. They again emphasized how peers must understand and accept their sibling with ASD. One participant stated, "If my friends couldn't handle (my brother), they weren't my friends." Another participant also described how peers' acceptance of her sister was a sort of barometer for friendship. Her peers must accept her sister "or they are out the door." Several participants talked about being careful and guarded about letting people into their family life. Once peers were invited into this inner system, their acceptance and understanding could provide tremendous support. One participant reflected "It happened with all my friends at one point where all of a sudden they understand it." It was in that authentic understanding of the challenges of having a sibling with ASD that the participant found support.

Mate Selection

Another one of the hallmarks of the young adulthood is mate selection. While only one of the participants was married, a few of them did comment on how their sibling with ASD did have some impact on their dating relationships. During the first round of interviews, the one participant who was married shared that her husband's family had a close friend who had adopted a child with autism. Her husband not only had early experiences with a person with ASD, but he was also currently pursuing a degree in special education. So, "[he] knew exactly how to relate and so that was one of the big things why [my husband] and I work."

Another woman commented that she tended to seek out relationships with men who she defined as "socially awkward" and "science-y." She felt that she understood these type of men well because "I've grown up with my brother and my dad's kinda weird, too." Another participant commented that his girlfriend was supportive toward his brother with ASD because "it's another person for him [the brother] to talk to and try to get comfortable with." Dating relationships appear to offer the participants an important source of support when the partner shows empathy and understanding.

Mate selection was another theme reflected back to the participants during the second round of participants. One married participant commented, "You get me, you get my brother—for better or worse." Other participants stated that although they were not yet at a place to consider marriage, they could see how their sibling relationship had impacted their choices for dating. One woman commented, "I think part of my decision not to marry so far is I feel that I'm almost married to my sister." One of the men in the study shared that a previous girlfriend "didn't get it at all" but that his current girlfriend tries to develop a relationship with his brother with ASD. He commented on how the difference between how these two women related to his brother was reflective of the quality of the relationship. For him, it was "progress where at a certain point that really means you understand my family." Another participant did not feel that her sister with ASD would be an issue in future relationships. She stated, "I'm sure as more boyfriends come and go that they'll probably be pretty accepting of her because she's not crazy. A lot of people will be more accepting of that."

Dating relationships appear to offer the participants an important source of support when the partner shows empathy and understanding.

Career Selection

During young adulthood, individuals are typically working or completing education or training for future work. Participants were asked about their current work or education during the first round of interviews, and some of the siblings were consistent with past research. One participant claimed, "I went into special ed because of her." She further stated, "I think she affected my life more than she could ever realize because I mean, I've always wanted to be, like, this is the challenge and how do we attack it." Another

participant was completing studies for recreation therapy and she shared her interest in working with individuals with autism and their families. She recognized that "I have a unique perspective because I can also help with my personal experience and letting them know, hey, I'm a sibling of an individual with autism and I turned out okay." A participant who was completing a degree in education reflected on experiences in which she was able to advocate for students with ASD or provide support to family members in school settings. She stated, "I'm so good with these kids. I'm so good with their parents." Other participants did not indicate an explicit connection between having a sibling with ASD and their career choices.

Career selection was discussed again in the second round of interviews. Several participants had gone into helping fields and were aware of the connection of this choice to their sibling experience. While others were not in helping fields, they made connections between their experiences growing up with a sibling with ASD and their career choices. For one man, his goal to be an accountant was related to greater comfort dealing with numbers than interpersonal relations. He stated, "I would rather not have to deal with that. There are

Several participants had gone into helping fields and were aware of the connection of this choice to their sibling experience.

situations where I have to be in a leadership role with people that are not necessarily rational and it's very frustrating." Others described what they learned from having a sibling with ASD and how that translated to their career selection. One participant is studying to be a pharmacist. She commented how interacting with her sister with ASD taught her that people learn in different ways and that understanding will translate to her future interactions with customers who are learning about medication use. She described how this was one of the themes she discussed in her application letters for pharmacy school. Another participant was an aspiring writer. He described being motivated by his brother's imagination. He also stated that he developed his interest in writing as a coping mechanism to deal with the challenges of his household while he was growing up.

Conclusion

Growing up with a sibling with ASD is a unique experience, which has the potential to impact the development of individual family members. This study explored some of the implications pertaining to the young adult transition. All of the participants shared examples of how their early experiences shaped their life choices. One participant claimed, "It's not a small impact on your life. It can't be." The impact has both negative and positive aspects, and it is not the intent of the study to draw conclusions along those lines. Rather, the intent is to give voice to the participants related to this experience. With the growing numbers of people being diagnosed with ASD, it is important to recognize the impacts on the family, in particular the ASD child's siblings. As one participant shared, "No one's ever asked how do you feel about that. Everyone asks about her. No one's asked me what it is like to grow up like that." This study asks that question to learn from the voices of those who have indeed grown up with a sibling living with ASD.

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Nicole Allgood is a doctoral student in Educational Psychology at Northern Illinois University (NIU). This article presents part of the results of the research she conducted for her dissertation, which she expects to defend this fall.

After many years as a music therapist, Allgood embarked on graduate education "to strengthen my knowledge of learning theories and methods of inquiry." Educational psychology appealed to her because she could apply what she was learning to her work, rather than focusing on a completely different area.

When she started graduate study, she expected to continue her career as a music therapist, integrating inquiry and research with her clinical practice. Along the way, however, she earned an administrative certificate through coursework in NIU's Educational Administration program. She worked for several years as an administrator, and then she began teaching Educational Psychology courses in NIU's teacher and administrator preparation programs. She both enjoyed and excelled in university teaching; she was recognized in 2009 as NIU's Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant, and now holds a full-time teaching position in the Psychology Department at North Central College.

The current article reflects her years of experience working with individuals with ASD and their families. She writes:

> *The clients and family members were some of my best teachers! This article is a way that I can use the skills that I developed through my studies and continue to develop through my dissertation work to give voice to members of that community. . . . My goal will be to find appropriate forums to communicate this work to members of the autism community so that siblings' experiences will be represented to both families and professionals.*

Assessing Graduate Student Teaching Assistants' Ability to Construct Well-Functioning Items

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One important skill a teacher can possess is the ability to construct classroom-based assessments that adequately test whether students have acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to fully understand the topic of study. Although students' competency can be assessed in multiple ways (e.g., interpretive exercise, short-answer), the most frequently used is the multiple-choice (MC) item format (Haladyna, Downing, & Rodriguez, 2002). MC formats are advantageous for a number of reasons, chief among them being that they can be easily pretested, stored, used, and reused. Unfortunately, MC items are seemingly difficult to construct and often contain flaws pertaining to either the stem or the distractors (Marso & Pigge, 1988; Oescher & Kirby, 1990).

There is a great deal of empirical evidence to suggest that both an item's discrimination and difficulty is compromised when the item is flawed (Dudycha & Carpenter, 1973). For instance, the inclusion of "none of the above" as an answer option has been shown to increase item difficulty (Kolstad & Kolstad, 1991), whereas the inclusion of implausible answer options tends to decrease item difficulty (Haladyna, Downing, & Rodriguez, 2002). To address these issues, a number of research endeavors have focused on generating taxonomies for constructing well-functioning items (Frey, Peterson, Edwards, Pedrotti, & Peyton, 2005; Haladyna et al., 2002). Many of these taxonomies, however, rarely make it into the hands of those constructing tests for the purposes of classroom-based assessment. Consequently, educators often rely on their own test taking experience and intuition.

This study sought to a) examine graduate-level teaching assistants' (TAs) ability to construct well-functioning items for the purpose of classroom-based assessment and b) assess whether an item-writing tutorial improves graduate TAs' ability to detect flawed items.

Graduate-level teaching assistants are one population of educators that may be more likely to rely on intuition when constructing test items. The reason is that they are expected to generate their own assessments for the course in which they are teaching, without having received proper training in test construction. Thus, the primary objectives of the current studies were to a) examine graduate-level teaching assistants' ability to construct well-functioning test items for the purpose of classroom-based assessment and b) assess whether an item-writing tutorial improves graduate teaching assistants' ability to detect flawed items.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Fourteen graduate-level teaching assistants were

selected for the study, all of whom were currently teaching Introductory Psychology at a Midwestern university as part of their assistantship.

Instrumentation

Each TA supplied the researchers with eight 10-item quizzes that the TAs constructed throughout the course of a semester (N = 1120). Table 1 provides example items that were constructed by different TAs to assess student competency. As these examples illustrate, each item functioned to assess competency of psychological concepts. Moreover, as these examples illustrate, the preferred item format was that of MC (97%).

Coding and Scoring Measures

To assess the extent to which TAs constructed well-functioning items, we developed a coding scheme consisting of 18 item-writing rules derived from Haladyna et al. (2002) and Frey et al. (2005). We focused specifically on these 18 item-writing rules because they were most pertinent to MC items (e.g., see Frey et al., 2005). Of these 18 items, five pertained to the stem, seven pertained to the distractors, and four pertained to both the stem and the distractors. Two additional rules that pertained to the general format of the test were also included in the coding scheme: (1) directions should be included and (2) test copies should be clear, readable, and not handwritten.

When the stem of a question is ambiguous or contains unnecessary information, respondents may fail to understand the task set forth in the stem.

Provided that it would have been untenable to code each of the items (N = 1120), we focused specifically on those items that were derived from quizzes 2, 5, and 7 (N = 400). A value of 1 was used to indicate that the item-writing rule had not been violated, whereas a value of 0 indicated that the item-writing rule had been violated. For example, consider the item-writing rule "answer options should not be longer than the stem." Clearly, item 5 (see Table 1) violates this rule because all answer options are significantly longer than the stem. Both the first and second author coded each of the items. Percent of agreement among coders was acceptable (98%). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Results and Discussion

In order to assess the extent to which TAs adhered to the item-writing rules, we obtained frequency counts for violation of each of the rules. As is shown in Table 2, a vast majority of the items adhered to the item-writing rules (e.g., see items 2, 12, and 18). There were, however, some item-writing rules that were more frequently violated than others. For example, consider item 17. This item-writing rule was followed 27% of the time. Because most students are familiar with MC item formats, the GAs may have thought directions were unnecessary. However, it is advisable to include directions at the beginning of an exam that specify there is only one correct/best answer to each item. As another example, consider rule 5. This rule was followed 63% of the time. Phrasing the stem as a complete sentence increases the likelihood that the problem will be clearly stated and that only one answer will be appropriate. Finally, consider rule 16. When the stem of a question is ambiguous or contains unnecessary information, respondents may fail to understand the task set forth in the stem. Consequently, variability in responses will likely be due to a lack of understanding, rather than different underlying levels of knowledge or skill. The stem of the item should be so clear that a student can understand it without reading the alternatives.

Provided that there was some degree of rule violation, we examined the item difficulty and discrimination indices for those items that contained a specific item-writing rule violation (N = 292). The item difficulty index for each item was obtained by calculating the percentage of test takers who answered a given item correctly. As is shown in Table 2, there was some evidence that the difficulty of an item tended to either decrease or increase when an item-writing rule had been violated. For example, the average item difficulty for items in which the correct answer was the longest answer option was 77.33, suggesting that this type of violation tends to make the item easier. Presumably,

test takers are drawn to the answer options because of the length and as such, these answer options are more likely chosen as the correct answer option. With respect to increasing item difficulty, the results of the present study suggest that the inclusion of "none of the above" as an answer option tends to make items more difficult (Kolstad & Kolstad, 1991).

Item discrimination indices were obtained by correlating a test taker's performance on an item (i.e., correct or incorrect) with their overall performance on the test. As is shown in Table 2, the average correlation coefficients were in an acceptable range (positive and strong). Though not shown in Table 2, the minimum correlation coefficient for item discrimination was -.030 and the maximum correlation coefficient was .80. Together, these two values suggest that the range among item discrimination indices was quite large. Thus, while the *average* item difficulty and discrimination indices suggest that these items may appear to be well-functioning items, the minimum and maximum values suggest that the presence of an item-writing rule violation certainly has an impact on how well an item functions.

In our qualitative assessment of the items, it became apparent that specific item-writing rules tended to be violated on a consistent basis. Thus, one could hypothesize that perhaps TAs' might not be aware of when and to what extent they are violating item-writing rules when constructing items. Thus, the goal of the second study was to assess TAs' ability to detect flawed items and whether an item-writing tutorial would improve this ability.

Study 2

Method

Participants

Sixteen graduate-level teaching assistants were selected for the study, all of whom were currently teaching Introductory Psychology at a Midwestern university as part of their assistantship.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study. The first was an item-writing tutorial created by the first and second author. The tutorial contained general information about test construction as well as information about the 18 item-writing rules that were examined in Study 1. For each of the 18 item-writing rules, a general description of the rule was provided, along with an example item in which the rule had been violated (poor) and an example item in which the rule had not been violated (better).

The second instrument was the Item-judgment Task (IJT) and was created by the first and second authors. The IJT consisted of 32 items, 24 that contained a flaw and 8 that did not. There were two versions of the IJT: (1) pre-IJT and (2) post-IJT. Parallel forms reliability analysis indicated that these two forms were comparable ($r = .657$, $p > .01$).

With respect to increasing item difficulty, the results of the present study suggest that the inclusion of "none of the above" as an answer option tends to make items more difficult.

Procedure

At the start of the semester, TAs completed the pre-IJT. For each of the 32 items, they were instructed to report whether they thought the item was flawed. If they thought that an item was flawed, they were instructed to report the specific flaw. If they felt that an item was not flawed, they were instructed to report "no flaw detected." After completing the pre-IJT, TAs were administered the item-writing tutorial and were encouraged to use the tutorial when constructing items for their quizzes. At the end of the semester, TAs completed the post-IJT.

Coding and Scoring Measures

The pre- and post-IJT were coded in order to determine whether the TAs' judgment on each of the items was either accurate or inaccurate. There were two types of accurate judgments: (1) the item contained a flaw and the TA reported the correct flaw and (2) the item contained no flaw and the TA reported that the item was not flawed. Inaccurate judgments were one of three types: (1) the item contained a flaw and the TA reported that the item was not flawed, (2) the item was

flawed and the TA reported the incorrect flaw, and (3) the item was not flawed and the TA reported a flaw. Both the first and second authors coded the pre- and post-IJT. Percentage of the agreement among coders was acceptable (93%). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Results and Discussion

The mean number of accurate judgments made by TAs (with standard deviations in parentheses) for the pre- and post-IJT were .30 (.06) and .47 (.13), respectively. A paired-samples t-test revealed that these two means were significantly different, $t\,(15) = 5.216$, $p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 1.30$, suggesting that TAs were more accurate in their judgments after having received the tutorial.

General Discussion

In sum, the data presented here have both educational and theoretical implications. With respect to the educational implications, the results of the present study suggest that graduate-level teaching assistants are less than proficient at constructing items for the purposes of classroom-based assessment. They also have limited capacity to recognize poorly-designed items constructed by others. Although Study 2 did not include a control group, the results suggests that recognition can be greatly improved with proper training in test construction. Thus, incorporating test construction workshops into the graduate curriculum would certainly serve an important function (e.g., see McMorris & Boothroyd, 1993). Theoretically, the results from the quantitative analysis suggests that when analyzing how well an item functions, both the item's difficulty and discrimination indices should be examined in concert (e.g., Shultz & Whitney, 2005). In other words, it may be acceptable to have a more difficult item that readily discriminates between students who have knowledge of a particular topic and those who do not.

It is important to note that, although graduate-level TAs were better able to detect flawed items after having received the item-writing tutorial, we cannot ascertain whether the item-writing tutorial actually caused a change in TAs' ability to construct well-functioning items. In other words, improvement in one's ability to detect flawed items doesn't necessarily mean that the TA constructed better items after having received the tutorial. Thus, in future research we plan to qualitatively analyze those items that were constructed during the period in which the TAs had access to the item-writing tutorial.

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Item	Question
1	What is a main characteristic of those high in need for cognition? a. They rely on others for information b. They seek out new knowledge* c. They have IQ scores in the gifted range d. They frequently use cognitive heuristics
2	Which of the following types of memory are associated with riding a bicycle? a. Semantic memory b. Episodic memory c. Procedural memory* d. Flashbulb memory
3	In Milgram's classic study of obedience to authority, who was the confederate? a. The person receiving the "shock"* b. The person giving the "shock" c. Milgram d. Harry Potter
4	Laughing Laura sees that her dog, Yo-Yo, drools when he sees his dish filled with canned dog food. Now Laura sees Yo-Yo drool when he hears the sound of the can opener. According to classical conditioning, the sound of the can opener is what? a. Unconditioned stimulus b. Conditional stimulus* c. Positive reinforcement d. Conditioned response
5	What did Elizabeth Loftus' (1974) study find? a. Participants who were asked how fast the cars were going when they "smashed" estimated a higher speed than participants who were asked how fast the cars were going when they "bumped."* b. Participants who were asked how the cars were going when they "contacted" estimated a higher speed than participants who were asked how fast the cars were going when they "collided." c. Participants who were asked how fast the cars were going when they "contacted" estimated the same speed as participants who were asked how fast the cars were going when they "smashed." d. Participants who were asked how fast the cars were going when they "bumped" estimated about 65 mph.

Table 1. Example Items Constructed by Graduate-Level Teaching Assistants to Assess Competency in Introductory Psychology.

Item-Writing Rule	Percent	Diff	Discrim
1. Items should cover important concepts and objectives	99%	76.48	0.41
2. Specific determiners (e.g., always, never) should not be used	100%	x	x
3. Vague frequency items should not be used	90%	72.97	0.36
4. Stems must be unambiguous and clearly state the problem	94%	65.28	0.41
5. Multiple-choice stems should be complete sentences	63%	72.48	0.42
6. "All of the Above" should not be an answer option	97%	72.91	0.22
7. “None of the Above” should not be an answer option	95%	62.96	0.45
8. All answer options should be plausible	93%	74.68	0.21
9. Answer option should include only one correct answer	97%	x	x
10. Answer options should be homogenous	89%	76.44	0.41
11. Correct answer option should not be the longest answer option	93%	x	x
12. There should be 3-5 answer options	100%	62.34	0.17
13. Negative wording should not be used	87%	69.02	0.18
14. Answer options should be grammatically consistent with stem	99%	68.10	0.51
15. Answer options should not be longer than the stem	93%	77.31	0.45
16. Unnecessary and irrelevant information in the stem	81%	75.88	0.22
17. Directions should be included	27%	x	x
18. Test copies should be clear, readable, and not handwritten	100%	x	x

Note: Diff = Item difficulty index; Discrim = Item discrimination index; x = Index not calculated.

Table 2. Frequency at which TAs adhere to the item-writing rules and the Average Item Difficulty and Discrimination Indices.

Stacey Todaro, a doctoral student in cognitive psychology, has recently been appointed Assistant Professor of Psychology at Adrian College in Michigan. An undergraduate psychology major at NIU, Todaro worked on a grant funded by the Institute for Education Sciences before entering graduate school. As a research assistant, she “was able to learn first-hand how to ask deep questions” which could be tested experimentally.

As a graduate student, she has focused on learning the research process, especially statistical techniques for analyzing psychological data; in the course of her doctoral course work, she has earned a Certificate of Graduate Study in Advanced Quantitative Methodology, offered by the Department of Educational Technology, Research, and Assessment.

The research described in this article grew out of a course she took in measurement theory. Todaro reports, “I was amazed to learn about the various factors that could influence how a test item functions and even more amazed to learn that most educators are unaware of such factors.” She hopes to use the results to help educators improve the quality of their tests, and is planning to share the manual developed for this project with professors in a variety of different disciplines.

Janet Holt, Professor of Education in the Department of Educational Technology, Research, and Assessment, supervised the research project described in this article. Paul J. Perry, a graduate student in the Department of Psychology, also participated in this research.

Review of Ideologies in Adult ESL Curriculum Development and Instruction

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Limited English Proficient (LEP) adults represent a growing and critical segment of the U. S. population. In 2006, there were 37.5 million immigrants; according to 2007 U.S. Census data, 32.0 percent of immigrants lacked a high school diploma and 40.0 percent were LEP (Camarota, 2007). Low levels of formal education and English proficiency put immigrants at a great disadvantage to meet the needs of the workplace in the United States. (Wrigley, Richer, Martineson, Kubo, & Strawn, 2003), challenging their upward mobility, and ability to communicate in English (IPC, 2008).

The large number of LEP individuals in adult education programs, as well as new funding initiatives from the U.S. Department of Education, have heightened interest in integrating language development with civics education (Terrill, 2004). Skills development and improving English proficiency increase immigrants' access to education, strengthen immigrants' position in the community, and promote upward mobility and social

The economic, social, and political aspects of immigration have caused much controversy in issues regarding ethnicity, economic benefits, job growth, work habits, impact on upward social mobility, nationalities, settlement patterns, levels of criminality, political loyalties, and religion and moral values, among others.

socioeconomic and political participation. Therefore, the integration of immigrants has become an urgent and critical issue to be addressed in this country. According to Saverino (2008), the economic, social, and political aspects of immigration have caused much controversy in issues regarding ethnicity, economic benefits, job growth, work habits, impact on upward social mobility, nationalities, settlement patterns, levels of criminality, political loyalties, and religion and moral values, among others. The Immigration Policy Center (IPC, 2008) defines the integration of immigrants by their civic participation, commitment to the host society, and exercise of their equal corresponding rights and obligations. The level of integration is measured by immigrants' socioeconomic and political participation, and political participation, as well as diminishing their isolation and discrimination (Pastor & Ortiz, 2009). According to Ferrer, Green, and Riddell (2004), the literacy proficiency of the nation's immigrant populations is strongly associated with their labor market behaviors and outcomes. More years of formal education, stronger English-speaking skills, and higher literacy levels can significantly raise the earnings of immigrant adults (Ferrer et al., 2004).

However, developing English literacy involves more than just the ability to understand and produce elements of a certain language. There are greater implications of having English writing, speaking, and reading skills in regards to education, social status, job marketability, and so on (Hull, 1997). It is important to take into

consideration that the immigrant population is comprised of multiple language and culture groups, which include individuals old and young of diverse ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. These individuals' integration process into a new culture may require a profound adjustment or transformation of their social identity (Ullman, 1997). Ullman refers to social identity as the aspects of the self (e.g., life skills, family role, sense of community) that define people's understanding of themselves in relation to others. External factors also have a significant impact on language and literacy learning, such as issues related to immigration (war, famine, and natural disasters), regulations (welfare reform), and the existing anti-immigrant movement, which add urgency to the need to learn English language and literacy, whether existing classes are appropriate, available, or accessible.

To properly serve LEP individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, effective and responsive English as a Second Language (ESL) adult education programming requires a clear understanding of the characteristics, needs, and aspirations of program participants. It makes sense, therefore, that ESL programs should include civics education and accommodate cultural considerations, life experiences, and the preexisting knowledge and points of view of immigrant students. In this way, it may be possible to discover the incentives and disincentives that LEP adults perceive and experience while acquiring literacy skills and to examine the ways in which literacy can play a role in promoting economic productivity or in contributing to personal empowerment (Lave, 1986 as cited in Hull, 1997).

Since the early twentieth century, the integration of immigrants has been a critical issue. This paper provides a historical review of ideologies that have influenced the curriculum development of adult education programs for immigrants, as well as more current ideologies and approaches, which are now implemented in adult ESL literacy instruction to facilitate the integration of the immigrant population.

Historical Review of Ideological Approaches

Ideological Approaches in the Early Americanization Efforts

Studies by Gleason (1980), Bernard (1998), and Saverino (2008) revealed that early Americanization efforts were aimed at erasing the native cultural identity of immigrants and were based on fears that immigrants posed a threat to American values and institutions. During the 1850s, the arrival of a large number of Irish and Chinese immigrants with languages, cultural beliefs, and practices that were unfamiliar to Americans spurred anti-immigrant feelings in the United States for the first time. By the turn of the 20th century, the anti-immigrant sentiment heightened even more with the arrival of Italians and Poles (Saverino, 2008). Cultural intolerance, political tensions, the arrival of large numbers of immigrants, job losses, and harsh economic conditions due to the economic recession of 1919 prompted initiatives to Americanize immigrants to conform to the "American identity" and create social homogeneity (Bernard, 1998; Gleason, 1980). The notion of social homogeneity is based on *homogenism,* an ideology from the colonization period that rests in the belief that the ideal society should be as uniform and homogeneous as possible by using (and imposing) the White European culture as the norm to achieve cultural homogeneity. Homogeneity in Western countries has been considered by some as desirable and as the most normal manifestation of a human society (Blommaert & Vershueren, 1988).

This paper provides a historical review of ideologies, which have influenced the curriculum development of adult education programs for immigrants.

From the 19th to the mid-20th century, Americans adopted several philosophies that reflected fears that immigrants posed a threat to American values and institutions. These ideologies imposed the superiority of the Western European culture and beliefs of the White majority. The notion of White superiority is best illustrated in the theory of *Social Darwinism,* which applied certain ideas about of biological evolution (e.g., competition among species or survival of the fittest) to human social systems, "placing different cultural groups on a linear ladder of evolution" (Saverino, 2008). White English speakers were at the top of the ladder, while all other ethnic groups (e.g., African American, Irish, Italians) were believed to have lower intelligence or

even to be less than human. This theory was thought to provide the scientific evidence that justified the tolerance of unfair labor practices and opposition to legislation to correct social ills. The sociopolitical policy of *nativism*, which favored the interests of established

Immigrants wanted to learn English; however, the educational system found it hard to meet the demand for English night classes.

inhabitants over those of immigrants, combined with anti-immigrant feelings, gave rise to the passage of federal laws restricting who could enter the United States (Bernard, 1998). These laws included the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Quota Act of 1921, and the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred individuals from the Middle East from entering U. S. borders, and imposed severe restrictions on immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, while favoring newcomers from Northern and Western Europe (Gleason, 1980).

In the early 20th century, fearing that the tide of immigrants would totally erase the American way of life, both independent and government-sponsored groups organized programs to Americanize the newcomers (Gleason, 1980). Before World War I, these programs focused on forging law-abiding citizens; later, Americanization efforts took a clear nationalistic approach, emphasizing loyalty to the country and conformity to the American way of life. Immigrants were thus pressured to assimilate in all aspects of American life, including the workplace.

Historically, immigrants worked very hard and responded creatively to the challenges that they faced in their new home country. As part of their job placement, they were often required to take English classes (Bernard, 1998). For the most part, immigrants wanted to learn English; however, the educational system found it hard to meet the demand for English night classes (Savarino, 2008). Special classes to teach women American homemaking skills were also established, so that they would pass on American culture to their families (Gleason, 1980).

By the 1930s through the 1950s, increased social tolerance gave rise to the theory of *cultural pluralism*, which promoted the harmonious coexistence of several subcultures and value systems in a diverse society. The expectations were that all newcomers had to assimilate into American ways of living. Many people believed that ethnic identity would disappear over time, but this has not happened. Immigrants have adopted many aspects of American culture, while still maintaining many of their own cultural traditions (Bernard, 1998; Gleason, 1980; Saverino, 2008).

Current Philosophies and Approaches in Adult ESL Programs

To fully participate socially, economically, and politically in the United States, immigrants need to learn American culture, government, and history. New polices and funding initiatives from the U.S. Depart-

Curriculum development of ESL programs takes into account immigrants' perspectives, based on the understanding that their literacy practices and events are inextricably linked to their social and political circumstances.

ment of Education have addressed this issue and promoted the integration of civics education with English language development. While the complexity of the language training varies from level to level, significant civic content can be imparted at all levels (Terrill, 1994). Research studies suggest that while some adult ESL programs focus on the requirements of the naturalization process, teaching such topics as U.S. culture and government, other curriculums are designed so that adults can learn English at the same time that they are learning to feel comfortable and becoming competent in a new cultural environment (Terrill, 1994).

Research by Crandall and Peyton (1993, 1995) and Terrill (2004) shows that the current approaches used in adult ESL literacy instruction are learner-centered and incorporate the learner's previous knowledge and

life experiences. Curriculum development of ESL programs takes into account immigrants' perspectives, based on the understanding that their literacy practices and events are inextricably linked to their social and political circumstances. There are four approaches currently in use: Freirean or participatory education, whole language, the language experience approach, and competency-based education (Crandall & Peyton, 1993, 1995). These approaches are discussed briefly below.

Freirean/Participatory Approaches

Also called participatory, learner-centered, or liberatory education, the Freirean approach is based on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy principles (1970) and revolves around the discussion of issues drawn from learners' real-life experiences. One of the major contributors to participatory education is Lawrence Berlin (2005). Berlin's framework synthesizes Freire's principles, multicultural education, and the communicative approach to language teaching. The central proposition of this approach is that education and knowledge have value only when they help people liberate themselves from the social conditions that oppress them. Freire's ideas have impacted adult education in the United States and have been adapted to fit diverse learners and educational contexts. Freire's methodology includes the notion of an emergent curriculum where learners identify their own problems and issues and seek their own solutions in a culture circle, where discussion takes place between teachers and learners about issues of concern in their lives (Crandall & Peyton, 1993, 1995).

Whole language emphasizes that learners should focus on meaning and that language is social.

With the participatory approach, teachers become facilitators of class discussion and activities and learn along with the class. They apply Freire's participatory approach in the ESL classroom through *problem-posing*, using objects, pictures, and written texts; teachers and learners describe what they see, examine the relationships among the objects and people represented, and talk about how they feel about what they see. Ultimately, learners articulate the problem illustrated and propose solutions (Crandall & Peyton, 1993, 1995), employing a three-stage process that includes naming, reflection, and action (Wink, 1997). According to Berlin (2005), the process of naming materializes through discussions with students, whereas the process of reflection contextualizes the problem in the larger society, and the process of action provides a way to redress the problem.

Whole Language

Whole language philosophy is based on socio-psycholinguistic theory and was influenced by educators such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky (Brockman, 1994). This approach incorporates oral and written language skills into activities that encourage social interaction and are personally meaningful to students. It is based on the principle that learning a language involves a system approach (Crandall & Peyton, 1993, 1995). Whole language emphasizes that learners should focus on meaning and that language is social (Brockman, 1994). This approach to teaching emphasizes the use and recognition of words in everyday contexts and books that are not textbooks. Learners work together to develop the curriculum and read and write for and with each other (Crandall & Peyton, 1993, 1995) using the language experience approach described below. Furthermore, students and teacher evaluate student work and class success on an ongoing basis. One activity that embodies this approach is peer feedback on student essays. In pairs or in groups, students read each other's essays, provide either written or oral feedback, and discuss the writing process that each has employed (Brockman, 1994).

Language Experience Approach (LEA)

The language experience approach is a teaching technique similar to the whole language perspective, in that it is based on activities and stories developed from learners' personal experiences. The stories are written down by a teacher and read together until learners associate the written forms of the words with their oral forms. This is regarded as an ideal approach for ESL learners with well-developed speaking skills and low-level literacy skills because it capitalizes on their language competencies and allows their reading and

writing to evolve naturally from their activities and spoken language. LEA also addresses the lack of appropriate and interesting texts for beginning readers of ESL classes (Crandall & Peyton, 1993, 1995). Among the benefits of language experience are that by combining writing, reading, art, and language, this approach extends the learners' creativity in storytelling through writing and helps learners understand that they can write down what they think and say. This technique provides suitable reading materials because it uses the learners' natural language (McCormick, 1998).

Competency-Based Education (CBE)

Since the mid-1970s, CBE has been widely used in ESL literacy instruction. In this approach, the knowledge and skills of the learner are identified in order to develop a suitable curriculum to address the learner's individual needs. Program planning for CBE includes an initial assessment, selection of competencies to be learned, continued adaptation of learner needs, and ongoing evaluation of learners' progress (Crandall & Peyton, 1995). Competencies can include basic survival skills (e.g., obtaining food, using public transportation, providing personal information), more academic or job related skills (e.g., taking notes during class, following directions to complete tasks at work), or argumentation of personal views and opinions on an issue. A CBE approach is suitable for programs that combine job readiness with academic instruction (Crandall & Peyton, 1995).

Conclusion

The social, political, and economic integration of the foreign born in the United States has become an urgent and critical issue to be addressed. Early Americanization efforts focused on teaching immigrants the ways of American life while erasing their native cultures and traditions. Current polices and funding initiatives from the U.S. Department of Education include the integration of civic education with language learning in an effort to encourage political participation, promote civic values, and reinforce immigrants' desire and commitment to become English-language proficient and to root themselves in the fabric of communities (IPC, 2008).

Until recently, a major problem facing adult ESL literacy programs has been the lack of authentic reading materials of interest to adult learners and that were appropriate for their various levels of English proficiency. New approaches take advantage of the fact that many ESL *learners* have excellent training and skills in their native languages and include the learner in curriculum development. ESL adult literacy programs are increasingly encouraging adult learners to write about their experiences, and programs internally publish these writings, making them available for other learners to read. Reading the writing of peers and writing for publication provides learners many opportunities to reflect on what constitutes good writing (Crandall & Peyton, 1995) as well as validating learners' experiences, which serves as a motivation to remain engaged in the literacy program.

New approaches take advantage of the fact that many ESL learners have excellent training and skills in their native languages and include the learner in curriculum development.

There are also programs which follow the participatory model of education and look to sociopolitical writings, such as those of Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), to guide learners to participate in making changes in social conditions (Peyton & Crandall, 1995). As the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence (CREDE) have reported on their website, "No single approach or program model [for linguistically diverse students] works best in every situation. Many different approaches can be successful when implemented well. Local conditions, choices, and innovation are critical ingredients of success" (IPC, 2008). Respecting immigrant cultures and experiences is key to the success of the integration of the foreign born into mainstream American culture, while still maintaining their individual identities.

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Conversations on the Way Home as a Setting to Teach and Learn Spanish

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The situated and functional nature of language has been studied extensively. Scholars have established that interactions during everyday activities are where children use, learn, and develop their language skills and knowledge. Children develop language through their social interactions, and "it is acquired in the course of human development as a means of interacting with those 'significant others' who are more involved in the life of the child" (Wells, 1981, p. 16).

Parents help children to develop their language abilities through a series of scaffolded interactions (Greenfield, 1984; Rogoff, 1990) that support and provide feedback when children listen and speak to them. Bellon-Harn and Harn (2008) point out that adult scaffolding characteristics such as modeling, redundancy and repetition, use of *wh*-questions, cloze procedures, and expansions help children rapidly build their communicative skills. Through parent-child verbal interactions, children increase their vocabulary knowledge, thereby improving the ways in which they describe objects, increase and expand their spontaneous utterances, learn to employ more interpretive language, and use a variety of syntactic structures to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Scholars that have studied parent-child interactional contexts propose that many family activities can effectively encourage children's language learning (Heath, 1983; Wells, 1981).

Scholars that have studied parent-child interactional contexts propose that many family activities can effectively encourage children's language learning.

The benefits of specific language activities, such as reading storybooks and orally re-telling stories, are well documented (Bornstein & Bruner, 1989; Tomasello, Kruger, & Rather, 1993, cited in Bellon-Harn & Harn, 2008). Parents can also draw children into conversations to foster their language development (MacLure & French, 1981; Wells, 1981). Conversations provide a natural language context and "through successive turns in conversations, joint activities are planned, coordinated, and known" (Wells, 1981, pp. 16-17) While conversations with very young children can be rudimentary, they permit adults to structure language learning for the child.

The characteristics and functions of parent-child conversations at home have been frequently studied (MacLure & French, 1981; Mayall, 2003; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Lian, 2005), and there are also rich comparisons between conversations at home and at school (MacLure & French, 1981). However, conversations between parents and their children on their travels to school and back home (while in a car or walking) are less known. Because parents frequently converse with their young children during these occasions about what to expect on that day at school or about what they did at school, examining such conversations is important to understand the kinds of language learning that can take place in such intimate and informal interactions.

The study described here focuses on the conversations between a preschool aged child, Ana (4.8 years), and her mother (a Mexican immigrant) while riding in the family car on the way home from preschool. Observations and interviews were carried out while riding in the family car over a three month period. This study describes the topics discussed in those conversations, the nature of the utterances employed by the participants, and the ways that the mother assisted Ana in learning to speak her mother's native language, Spanish.

Method

Context and Participants

Ana lives with both parents and a younger sister in a university community in the Midwest. Her father is African (and speaks both Portuguese and English) and her mother, Marisol, is a native of Mexico. Ana speaks English, Portuguese, and Spanish. She frequently engages in code-switching, ably changing language depending on whom she is with and where she is (e.g., preschool, home). She speaks Spanish with her mother and her caretaker, Portuguese with her father, and English with her preschool instructors and peers.

While conversations with very young children can be rudimentary, they permit adults to structure language learning for the child.

Both of Ana's parents are well-educated and work full-time. Ana attends an all-day preschool program and occasionally stays for a few hours a week at her caretaker's home. After preschool hours, her mother, in the company of her younger sister, picks her up and drives her home. This travel takes approximately 15 minutes. During this time the girl, her mother, and sister have several conversations in Spanish. I observed these conversations one day or two days per week over three months.

Procedure

I observed Ana during conversations with her mother and younger sister. I obtained detailed descriptions of what occurred during these verbal interactions. I did not attempt to instruct Ana's mother, Marisol, about the kinds of language interactions that should occur, nor did I elicit speech from any of the three participants, except in the case of a few interviews. Two informal interviews were conducted with Ana and four with Marisol. These conversations enabled me to clarify the participants' thoughts, beliefs, and intentions about their language use. For example, I asked Ana about whom she spoke to in her different languages, in what situations, and why and how she knew to switch from one language to another.

I used specimen descriptions for each interview and observation. Specimen descriptions are narrative descriptions of events (in this case behaviors and utterances). According to Irwin and Bushnell (1980) "the task of the observer doing specimen descriptions is to record all that he or she can about what is happening and the context within which it is happening according to some predetermined criteria (time of day, person, setting, and so on)" (p. 103).

After recording and transcribing the observations and interviews, I began data coding. To develop the coding scheme, I read the participants' utterances looking for general themes and topics regarding language use that I could categorize. I employed discourse analysis (Miller et al., 2005) to assess both the content and function of the observed verbal interactions.

Observations were divided into episodes, defined as an interaction involving a specific topic where the participants' discourse is related to the topic and with an identifiable beginning and end. I determined five types of episodes: conversations about preschool, conversations about caretaker home events, conversations about future activities, conversations about math activities, and singing songs.

I examined the utterances during each episode. An utterance is "the real unit of speech communication" (Bakhtin, 1986, cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 50), concrete, and belonging to a particular individual. Each individual utterance, of course, belongs to a longer chain of utterances spoken by the individual. Ana and Marisol's utterances were categorized as: descriptions and clarifications, repetitions, explanations and feedback, yes-no responses, *wh*-questions, expansions, requests, and propositions, instructions, and modeling.

Results

Five types of utterances were observed. Conversations about preschool and about the caretaker's home activities were the most frequent such utterances, accounting for nearly one third (31.25%) of the total utterances observed. These utterances included questions, descriptions, and clarifications about what Ana was doing or had done that day, what she ate, who was with her, what her teacher and caretaker had said to her that day, and information or ideas about the next day's anticipated activities.

Marisol taught Ana the Spanish names for different animals, fruits, vegetables, and a variety of other

objects. Marisol repeated and added words and meanings to words that Ana spoke, and provided examples such as the names for birds and flowers, women's clothing, and musical instruments. Marisol also placed emphasis on different aspects of language, for example, how to pronounce letters and words, and appropriate ways to ask a favor or to greet an adult. She frequently invited Ana to tell her more about her activities at preschool, using *wh*-questions such as: "what did you do today?" (¿qué hiciste hoy?) and "at snacktime what they did give you to eat?" (¿y después del refrigerio qué te dieron?).

This study demonstrates how informal practices such as engaging one's child in conversation enable parents to teach their children a variety of language skills.

Both Ana and Marisol sang with and to one another, and these interactions enabled Ana to practice Spanish word and phrases. These utterances accounted for nearly 20% (18.75%) of the total observed. During the interviews, Marisol had told me that she and her husband frequently sang Spanish songs to both of their children. All of the songs that Ana listened to in the car were in Spanish, and she knew many of them word-for-word. Generally, after the conversations about preschool and the caretaker's home activities, Ana and her sister asked for specific songs to be played on the car stereo, and repeatedly sang the songs—often, three or more times. Frequently, Marisol corrected Ana's pronunciations of some Spanish words.

Conversations about future activities and math work at school were also observed, although these occurred less frequently—only about 10% (9.37%) of the time. Marisol and Ana planned a visit to the grocery store, and Marisol encouraged Ana to memorize the list of items that they planned to buy. During another conversation, they planned to bake a cake for Halloween. Conversations about math activities concerned Marisol's modeling, correcting, and reinforcing Ana's pronunciation of numbers in Spanish (uno, dos, tres, cuatro) and, a few times, in English or Portuguese.

Approximately one quarter (23%) of Ana's utterances involved her descriptions of her activities during preschool and while at her caretaker's home:

> Marisol: *Cuál fue tu morning job?* (What was your morning job?)
> Ana: *Hicimos algún juego hoy* (We did some game today.)
> Marisol: *Qué hicieron?* (What did you do?)
> Ana: *Fuimos outsider y luego hicimos un drum. De art hicimos un drum y luego no teníamos jobs.* (We were outside and then we did a drum. For art we did a drum and then we had no jobs.)

Other frequent utterances were Ana's repetitions (23.58%), such as when she was learning a new word or song, or when her pronunciation was not accurate.

Bellon-Harn and Harn, (2008) point out that adult scaffolding characteristics, such as feedback in response to a child's utterances, help children build their communication skills. I observed several examples of scaffolding in Marisol's interactions with Ana. For example, Marisol frequently asked *wh*-questions (45% of all utterances) to prompt Ana to speak in Spanish.

Educators should encourage parents to capitalize upon opportunities, such as trips to and from school, to have conversations with their young children that will contribute to the child's language development.

She also used expansion (6.74%) and repetition (5.61%) to help with Ana's vocabulary development. She gave corrective feedback only about 5% of the time, however, generally when correcting Ana as she mixed Spanish and English words and phrases in the same sentence. Marisol resorted to explicit instructions when teaching Ana letters and word pronunciations; about 5% of her utterances were instructions.

Conclusion

Parent-child conversations on the way to and from school provide rich opportunities to observe young children's language learning and uses. During such conversations, children and parents ask and answer questions and provide descriptions, explanations, and justifications. In general, these conversations encourage children to expand their vocabularies. This study demonstrates how informal practices such as engaging one's child in conversation enable parents to teach their children a variety of language skills. Through specific conversations about children's everyday activities, parents can give feedback and model and reinforce appropriate language skills. Children actively participate in those conversations and in doing so, they can plan, describe the world, explain their decisions, and ask questions. Educators should encourage parents to capitalize upon opportunities, such as trips to and from school, to have conversations with their young children that will contribute to the child's language development. The amount of time that parents and children spend in such trips is not trivial, particularly when the time is used appropriately. Conversations are opportunities for parents to learn about their children's lives away from home and for children to improve their language proficiency.

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When she arrived at N.I.U., she was interested mainly in metacognition (learners' reflection on and management of their learning processes). As she progressed in her graduate studies, her interests shifted to literacy, specifically to the ways students use reading, writing, listening, and speaking in their classroom learning. She is currently working as a research assistant on the National Science Foundation-funded project, Science in the Moment, an investigation of science pedagogy and its effects on student engagement. For her dissertation, she is hoping to examine high school science teachers' encouragement of literacy practices and their effects on student learning.

Parents' Perspectives on the Role of Community in Children's Learning: A Case of Russian Americans in a Weekend School

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The American public is increasingly aware of the positive effect of bilingualism on children's cognitive development and learning (Bialystok, 2001; Dworin, 2003; Gibbons & Ng, 2004) and of the advantages that bilingualism may offer in the global economy (Brecht & Ingold, 2002). Hence, the present generation of immigrant children is encouraged by parents and educators to develop proficiency in their heritage language and maintain their cultural heritage (Friedman & Kagan, 2008). Despite encouragement, few immigrant children continue to speak their heritage language with proficiency or learn to read and write it (Fishman, 2001, 2006; Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006). As the English language and American cultural practices become the preferred means of interaction for immigrant children, it is challenging for immigrant families to control the assimilation of the children into mainstream culture and monolingualism. A number of studies of immigrant children from a variety of backgrounds confirm that they typically become English-only speakers by middle to late childhood (Oller & Eilers, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Therefore, it is important to help families support their children in learning their heritage language.

We draw upon sociocultural theory to argue for the key importance of communities in providing immigrant children with a cultural frame of reference and the cognitive tools necessary for heritage language and cultural learning (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986). We describe how an authentic Russian holiday practice—*Novogodneye Predstavlniye* (New Year's Celebration)—is used within a weekend Russian Language School's educational program to support children's learning and cultural development. We interviewed parents to assess their perspectives on the value of this activity for their children's language learning.

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The Role of Community for Heritage Language Learning

From a sociocultural perspective, individual language development is inseparably understood in its social, cultural, and historical context (Vygotsky, 1986). Learning the heritage language and culture depends on the activities, communities, and institutions in which learning activities are conducted. A *cultural commu-*

nity is defined as a "group of people who have some common and continuing organization, values, understanding, history, and practice" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 80). As people go about their everyday lives, they use language to create, ascribe, and share meanings about their organizations, values, and practices. Children learn to use language through the co-participation of others in culturally meaningful activities and events within authentic and dynamic communities of practice.

Learning the heritage language is more likely to occur with a cultural community that places high value on learning the language.

Through engagement with others in language activities children first internalize culturally appropriate ways of language use and gradually adapt language to their own purposes (Vygotsky, 1986).

Success in maintaining a heritage language depends in large part on the communities where the language is spoken and collectively practiced (Compton, 2001; Fishman, 2001). Learning the heritage language is more likely to occur with a cultural community that places high value on learning the language. When immigrant families attempt to maintain their heritage language for their children in isolation from the larger cultural community, the chances for success are diminished. Children tend to view the task of learning their parent's native language as a meaningless task having no relevance to their everyday lives.

Restructuring of the U.S. economy and growth of suburban areas as major employment centers has shifted immigrant settlement patterns. While previous generations of immigrants tended to settle in ethnic and cultural enclaves within cities, today's immigrant families are more likely to be isolated from one another, scattered across large suburban areas (Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008). Accordingly, the majority of recent Russian-speaking émigrés are suburban middle-class people with high expectations for the educational attainment of their children (Friedman & Kagan, 2001). Many of these well-educated parents, however, deem it important for their children to learn Russian language and cultural practices (Kradinova, 2007). Without a supportive Russian community, however, these parents' efforts are likely to encounter a divide between their own values, traditions, and language and that of their children (Li, 1999). The challenge, then, is to create a cultural community that exposes their children to and supports children's learning of the heritage language and culture.

Heritage language schools have emerged from a common desire among immigrant parents to provide opportunities for their children to learn the heritage language and cultural norms and practices (Compton, 2001). Heritage language schools incorporate culturally meaningful and authentic practices, and these schools provide opportunities for community members to interact and share stories, celebrate heritage holidays, and develop a supportive network of community members (Brandunas & Topping, 1988). Accordingly, studies have shown that heritage language schools have been largely successful in maintaining cultural heritage for immigrant communities (Lo Bianco, 2000; Maloof, Rubin, & Miller, 2006; Portes & Hao, 1998; Shibata, 2000).

The Russian Language School

The Russian language school program began as a grassroots attempt by Russian-speaking parents to create a school for their children to develop appreciation for Russian language and culture. Fifty-two suburban parents organized to establish the Russian

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Center (RC) in 2007. The RC rented several rooms on the weekend from the local cultural center; rent, supplies, and the teachers' honoraria were covered by the tuition paid by the families. Saturday classes in Russian language were offered for children of all ages.

Participating children ranged in age from 7 to 15. Most could speak only a few words or phrases in Russian; none were fluent speakers. Students were organized into several groups, based on age, Russian language proficiency, and teachers' availability.

The RC program emphasized students' preparation for *Novogodnee Predstavlenije* (the New Year's Celebration), an important event in Russian family life. There are specific cultural practices associated with preparations for this holiday. Children dress in costumes and participate in staged performances featuring Father Frost (the Russian Santa Claus) and his granddaughter Snegurochka (Snow Girl). In the holiday celebration scenario, these characters are part of an extensive social network whose members have specific behavioral patterns. For example, the Fox has a conniving personality and befriends the Wolf. Together, they conspire to steal Father Frost's sack of presents, intended for the children. Rabbits and squirrels band together and help Father Frost to save the presents. Russian children learn songs, poems, tales, crafts, and games related to this holiday and often participate in multiple celebrations during the holiday season at school, at their parents' workplace, and in the community center.

Several parents commented that prior to the participation in the program their children perceived themselves as oddities among their American counterparts and had resisted learning Russian.

Using authentic Russian practices as a blueprint, the RC program began preparations for the New Year's celebration. More than 40 children, ages 3-16 years, were assigned roles in the Father Frost play. Children learned lines of dialogue, dances, and songs. Those most fluent in Russian enacted the speaking roles, but all children were given opportunities to read Russian poems and songs. Parents assisted the children at home by practicing reciting the poems and singing the songs with their children.

Method

Participating parents were interviewed and asked to provide feedback regarding the perceived benefits of the Russian language program for their children. Seventeen parents participated in the interviews, which were approximately 35 minutes long. All interviews were recorded for subsequent coding and analyses.

Our analyses employed qualitative methods, drawing upon the inductive strategies of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We were careful to preserve the participants' understandings of the experience. The first author marked the benefits named by the parents on the transcripts, summarizing meanings in the margins as the tellers expressed them. Next, codes developed by the first author were employed to identify common themes in the parents' discourse. The author coded each transcript independently. Coded transcripts were exchanged, coded again, and codes were compared across transcripts. Disagreements were resolved by discussion.

Finally, relationships between the emergent categories were examined and contextualized (Denzin, 2002), drawing upon the authors' experiences as educators and researchers, and within the relevant theoretical background. This contextualization yielded one overarching theme—the functions of a language and cultural *community*— which emerged in parents' descriptions of their children's preparations for the New Year's Celebration.

Findings

Parents viewed the New Year's Celebration as a successful effort to develop their children's Russian language skills and sense of community. More than 50 families attended the holiday event, and most of these families had not previously participated in the Russian Center school. The parents identified multiple benefits resulting from the holiday program, including (1) motivational benefits to their children for language learning, (2) strengthening of cultural identity and family ties, and (3) social benefits in terms of extending and strengthening interpersonal connections in the Russian language community.

Motivation

Several parents commented that prior to participation in the program their children perceived themselves as oddities among their American counterparts and had

resisted learning Russian. They had no peers who were also learning the language. The preparation for the celebration transformed a "why do I have to learn Russian when no one else does" mood into excitement about the holiday performance. The Russian school enabled them to meet, interact with, and practice speaking Russian with other children.

Preparing for the holiday program let students assume responsibilities to carry out the program. One parent remarked, "My son was proud that the school depended on him. He appreciated the seriousness of the event because he realized how much work went into preparing it." Parents felt validated that their efforts to teach their children Russian were worthwhile, and they expressed a desire to continue their family's participation at the Russian Center.

Strengthening Cultural Identity

Participation in the program provided support for the children's Russian roots. Assignments to rehearse a song or learn a poem turned into conversations at home where the parents could share their childhood stories, read relevant books, and cook holiday recipes. One parent noted:

> My daughter proudly announced in school that she is partly Russian! Finally she admitted that! She recited a Russian poem to her teacher! I think this is because she saw other children who are just like her and other parents who are very much like me: We speak English with an accent and pack "weird food" for lunches. This gave me a chance to talk more about our traditions; we even watched some Russian movies together. I hope that this program will help her be more accepting of her Russian roots.

Several parents said they had enrolled their children in the Russian program so that the children could have a "commonality of experiences" with their parents. When the children recited a traditional poem or sang an old song during the celebration, parents would exclaim: "Just like me when I was that age!" One mother shared this memory:

> I am glad that I was able share my childhood memories with my children. We sat down at the dinner table the other day and went over some old pictures of me standing by the New Year tree in a Fox costume. I remember that I always wanted to be Snegurochka (Snow Girl), but never got that role. Instead I was often a Fox; I guess the teachers believed that I had the right face and personality for the Fox character. As I helped my daughter and son to prepare their costumes for the performance and shared my memories, I realized that they finally "understood" these pictures of me.

Despite the success of the program, parents expressed concern that the preparations and rehearsals took time away from traditional classroom language instruction—which they viewed as the principal role of the school.

Other parents reported that relatives were touched to see their American grandchildren, nieces, and nephews recite familiar holiday poems during the program or hear them recite their lines over the phone. Parents commented that the children were happy to know how they had pleased their relatives. "My approval is important to my daughter; she likes to see that she is making me happy. In this celebration, she knew how much it meant to her parents and she tried hard," said a mother of a 13-year-old.

Social Benefits

The program performance enabled parents to meet others and to speak Russian in a community of Russian immigrants. All the interviewed parents said that the families enjoyed the party. They shared ideas, exchanged Russian language videos and music, and found new friendships and wider social and community connections. Despite the success of the program, parents expressed concern that the preparations and rehearsals took time away from traditional classroom language instruction—which they viewed as the principal role of the school. One parent said:

> We paid for classes and I expect to see some improvement in my sons' reading and writing levels. While Celebration is a fun idea and a pleasant experience, I am not sure that it is worth the time spent on preparation. Often I felt that the teachers were wasting the class time on rehearsals and the mothers just enjoyed each others' company too much. I am not sure how much learning is actually happening in all this fuss.

Another parent agreed, stating:

> Well, I feel that the basic focus of this school should be teaching the kids Russian language, literature, and history. At this point I do not see enough of this. Holidays and celebrations are nice, they give us a chance to socialize and have fun, but they will not teach my child how to read and this is what he is here for. I think that the teachers should teach in the classroom; once the basics are covered we can add celebrations, not the other way around.

While themes regarding the importance of community were prominent, these parents positioned the community-building aspect of the holiday program as overshadowing what they viewed as more essential language proficiency outcomes.

Discussion

Parents of Russian American children feel strongly about the importance of supporting their children's language and cultural heritage learning. Our interviews revealed that most parents believed that the Russian Center's program to celebrate a traditional Russian New Year offered a number of benefits to their children and families. Family participation in this culturally authentic practice contributed to making the collective, communal character of the program an essential learning experience that immersed their child in Russian culture and language.

Several parents expected that the primary focus of the Russian Center program would be to teach Russian language to their children and, in doing so, instill some knowledge about Russian culture, literature, and history. While themes regarding the importance of community were prominent, these parents positioned the community-building aspect of the holiday program as overshadowing what they viewed as more essential language proficiency outcomes. They saw the emergence of a community as a secondary benefit of the program, rather than as something essential to their children's success.

Parents' concerns with the lack of attention to academic learning in the weekend program may be justified. Researchers have noted that historically heritage language schools were more successful in maintaining the culture and community and only marginally successful in developing children's language proficiency (Lo Bianco, 2000). While building community is necessary and a prerequisite to language learning, it remains to be seen if the academic program at the Russian Center will significantly contribute to students' Russian language proficiency.

Despite the modest scope of this present study, the evidence suggests that parents see the primary mission of the heritage language school as developing their Russian language skills. Less essential purposes are to create a sense of community that will further support the nonacademic and social needs of the children.

The implications of this study for heritage language educators and researchers are twofold. First, heritage language educators should incorporate authentic cultural practices into their programs and regard community development as critical to their work. Second, more research is needed to understand parents' expectations regarding their children's language learning experiences in heritage language schools.

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Elena Lyutykh is a doctoral candidate in educational psychology at Northern Illinois University. Originally from Russia, she taught history and English language in middle grades before coming to graduate school in the United States. While in graduate school, Lyutykh taught developmental reading and study skills and, more recently, educational psychology and child development courses. First-hand encounters with students from diverse backgrounds made her acutely aware of the role society, culture, schools, and family play in human development and learning. Exploring specific ways in which these contexts interact and influence the development of thinking, language, and literacy has been in the center of Lyutykh's research interests.

Maria Polski, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of English at East-West University in Chicago. Polski received extensive training in English language and linguistics at Moscow State University in Russia. In her dissertation she compared pedagogies used in the teaching of English as a foreign language, in the teaching of Russian language, and in physical training. Her analysis revealed similarities in the process flow and highlighted areas where language instruction can benefit from borrowing the methods of physical training. Since immigration to the United States,

Polski has further developed her interests in language and culture studies, trying to merge ideas of the prominent Russian and western scholars in her work.

This paper describes a weekend educational program that brought together Lyutykh, Polski and many other Russian-American parents committed to preserving and teaching the Russian language and culture to their children. Involvement in this pilot project inspired Lyutykh to continue this line of research in her dissertation. She is currently collecting data to further investigate ways in which families and weekend schools support the development of literacy in the heritage language of Russian-speaking immigrant children.

Causal Relationships and the Importance of Graduate Study

Charles Howell
Northern Illinois University

Why are graduate study and graduate research important? As department chair, responsible for promoting programs and allocating resources, I return frequently to this question as I talk with prospective students or request resources from prospective donors or funding agencies. In order to be persuasive, I need to be very clear about why our program is worth students' investment of time and donors' or agencies' contribution of resources. Reviewing graduate student essays collected in this issue of *Thresholds* provided an excellent opportunity to reevaluate some of the answers I and others have given over the years.

In applied social science, answers to this question are often couched in terms of efficacy. Our department at Northern Illinois University offers seven graduate-level degrees, and most of them prepare students to do something more effectively: apply principles of learning and development, conduct research, think critically, or act as school administrators, for example.

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The language of efficacy, however, is problematic. Being more effective is fine as far as it goes, but as soon as someone asks, "What do you mean by effective?", I know I'm in trouble. What kind of teaching or leadership is effective depends on one's goals. As Vivirito's article in this issue points out, people disagree about goals and thus they inevitably disagree about the nature of effective performance. Furthermore, I know from being a teacher, a parent, and an administrator that there are different ways of being effective. One of the most basic requirements of leadership is to recognize and appreciate the very different talents that people bring to an organization. Should I claim our program delivers multiple versions of efficacy depending on what talents students bring with them or what goals they want to pursue? Should I say we subscribe to one among several competing theories of effective practice? Should I assert (or let others infer) that one size fits all? None of these responses seems satisfactory.

There is, however, a way of answering the question about the importance of graduate study and graduate research that avoids this issue. Efficacy implies that one will act in specified ways to bring about predetermined results. Results matter, but this description is too rigid. A more flexible account would focus on the relationship between action and results without specifying the former or predetermining the latter. Graduate study in the applied social sciences, then, could be thought of as an investigation of relevant actions and their effects, or, more simply, of causal relationships in professional contexts. An investigation of this kind could enrich professional practice by allowing the teacher, counselor, school administrator, or other professional to anticipate and therefore take responsibility for the consequences of a wider range of professional actions. This account resonates with my own experience, both as a graduate student and thereafter, much better than efficacy. It is aptly illustrated by the set of papers in this issue of *Thresholds*. Before we get to the papers, though, a brief defense and clarification of the account are required.

First, one can investigate causal relationships without committing oneself to the claim that x causes y or y causes x. This is important in the social sciences, where we frequently find correlations between one variable and another but cannot infer that the first causes the second. This is not the same as asserting that there is *no* causal connection involved. On the

contrary, a statistically significant correlation is one with a very low (usually less than 5%) probability of random occurrence. Consequently there is a correspondingly high probability that some kind of causal connection is involved.

The exact nature of this connection is not known and may never be known with any degree of certainty; however, research can be designed in a way to *rule*

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out specific causal mechanisms, making others more likely. So, for example, correlations between parenting styles and child outcomes hold up when researchers control for parents' income and educational level, ruling out the latter as independent variables that explain the correlation. Results of parenting-styles research have thus proven sufficiently robust to justify interventions—for example, parent education through programs such as Head Start—which have in turn produced positive results, thereby demonstrating the causal influence of parenting on child outcomes, though not ruling out influence in the other direction. In short, researchers can and do *investigate* causal relationships in the social world, even though caution must be exercised in stating conclusions.

The second issue requiring clarification is why the investigation of causal relationships is any better than efficacy as an explanation of the importance of graduate study. Appeals to efficacy assert the importance of graduate study while avoiding potentially controversial claims about value. Avoidance of controversy, however, turns out to be illusory because people disagree about what makes someone effective in a professional role, and that disagreement often turns on what people value.

The concept of causation does not arouse the same types of disagreement. True, people argue about the likely direction of a causal relationship or the possibility of a confounding variable, but these disagreements can often be adjudicated by further research. Conclusions about the nature of causal connections depend on evidence. Granted, as Kuhn (1962) demonstrated, how people interpret evidence may be influenced by their preconceptions (including values). In the long run, however, evidence wins out, and causal hypotheses contradicted by research results are ultimately defeated. While the causes of autism are still not known, no one believes any longer, as Bettelheim (1967) contended, that it is caused by maternal neglect.

Causation, in short, does not generate controversy because it does not appeal covertly to disputable values. But how, then, can it be used to assert the worth or importance of anything? Clearly, these are value-laden concepts; how can one argue for them without appealing in some way to value?

The answer lies in the connection between causation and responsibility and the implications of that connection for moral agency.

People are responsible for effects of their actions, but only to the extent those effects are foreseeable. If we have no way of knowing our actions will harm someone, we can't be blamed for them. We become moral agents, in part, by learning to anticipate the results of what we do. Hence our understanding of causal relationships is essential to our ability to make moral choices.

In ordinary life, we are acutely aware of short-term consequences. We know a cutting word hurts a colleague, a friend is grateful for sympathy, a family

People are responsible for effects of their actions, but only to the extent those effects are foreseeable.

member will smart at a snub over the holidays, and a child is thrilled by praise or encouragement. When we act in these ways, we can easily anticipate consequences, and thus are responsible for them and are praised or blamed accordingly. In this arena we enjoy moral agency: the ability to know right from wrong and order our actions accordingly.

We are not, however, ordinarily able to foresee indirect or longer-term consequences. Without specialized training, we have no way of knowing that a

medication that gives relief now may cause liver damage if taken over a long period of time. We sometimes shrink from sacrifices because we cannot clearly see the future benefits of prudence, self-denial, frugality, or prolonged effort. As we fertilize our lawns or drive to work or order swordfish in a restaurant, we do not appreciate how the apparently minuscule effects of our own actions are compounded and exacerbated by the similar actions of myriad others. Only through the results of our own or other people's prolonged and specialized study are we acquainted with the indirect and longer-term consequences of these actions. By acquiring this knowledge, we are able to extend the range of our responsibility. Advanced study thus expands the scope of a person's moral agency. I know of no more powerful argument for the importance of graduate education and graduate research.

The eight papers in this issue of *Thresholds* vividly illustrate how and in what directions graduate students are able to expand their moral agency. Four of the papers directly focus on causal relationships that have the potential to guide decision-making in students' current and future professions.

Allgood's work with families of individuals affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a case in point. Allgood found that the lives of family members are profoundly changed by their experience with a person with ASD. As a counselor, faculty member, and scholar, she will be able to explore ways to ameliorate those effects and enable others to do so as well. Investigation of causal relationships, in short, will enable her to attend to indirect effects of therapeutic interventions, of which she might not otherwise have been aware. This enhanced understanding expands the scope of her moral agency, enabling her to take on a higher level of responsibility for her clients and their families.

The eight papers in this issue of* Thresholds *vividly illustrate how and in what directions graduate students are able to expand their moral agency.

In virtue of this knowledge, is Allgood more *effective* as a clinician, faculty member, or scholar? It may appear that she is. But to become so, she will need to learn not only how to anticipate but also how to ameliorate the effects of ASD. The opportunity to do this may not arise until she has completed graduate study. If not, graduate study is not a *sufficient* condition of efficacy. An argument for the importance of graduate study based on investigation of causal relationships accurately reflects Allgood's experience as reported in this article. An argument based on efficacy, however, would be misleading.

We see a similar direct focus on causal relationships in the work of Gerber, who studied the relationship between an intervention by a battlefield commander and soldiers' willingness to seek help for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder; of Todaro and Perry, who investigated the effects of an intervention on graduate teaching assistants' ability to diagnose problems with test item validity; of Ochoa-Angrino, who studied a young child's response to a parent's effort to promote oral language development through informal conversation; and of Sanchez, who summarizes research on strategies that enable immigrants to connect language learning to their own cultural background and social experience. All five of these students directly examined causal relationships, refined their ability to foresee consequences, and thus expanded the scope of their moral agency.

The other three papers illustrate the account in a different way. In one way or another, they document unexpected and undesired causal relationships that undermine the intended effect of professional practice, thereby implying that different approaches or strategies should be adopted. Vivirito shows how teachers' avoidance of politically controversial material, which is defended as a way to avoid partisanship and bias, could have the perverse effect of reinforcing current social institutions and thus undermining political agency and the possibility of change. Lyutykh's paper shows how attempts to create community in a Heritage language school through cultural events unintentionally alienate some parents who patronize the school. Strati's analysis of data from the Sloan Study calls into question the widely-assumed causal link between students' perception of teacher support and their classroom engagement, particularly for African-American students. Supportive interactions with students are important, Strati concludes; but for some students, teachers will need to consider other strategies for promoting engage-

ment. These three students all scrutinized causal linkages and found that certain professional strategies and activities had results other than those anticipated or intended; thus they implicitly assumed responsibility for avoiding these divergent outcomes in their own practice.

What students learned from their reading and from the results of their research clearly expanded the scope of their moral agency. But can the same claim be made about what they learned from the *process* of conducting research? Six of the eight articles published here

We are responsible for consequences of our actions that we* do *foresee, but are we additionally responsible for those we* could *foresee if we made the requisite effort?

report the results of original empirical studies. Apart from the results of the study, did the students learn anything from *conducting* research that could help them better anticipate the consequences of their actions? Do research skills make an independent contribution to moral agency?

The seven students who completed empirical studies (Allgood, Gerber, Strati, Lyutykh, Todaro, Perry, and Ochoa-Angrino) clearly did acquire a considerable range of research skills. One can easily envision Allgood or Lyutykh setting up structured interviews with students, clients, parents, or other knowledgeable parties to investigate the effects of a certain professional action or strategy or Todaro or Perry administering pre- and post-tests to evaluate the effect of an intervention. Having developed these skills, they are in a position to investigate a wider range of causal relationships in the future. Hence, we conclude that the experience of graduate research makes it possible for them to extend the scope of their moral agency if they choose to do so. But should we interpret this capacity as an actual expansion of moral agency? We are responsible for consequences of our actions that we *do* foresee, but are we additionally responsible for those we *could* foresee if we made the requisite effort?

Obviously our ability to make this type of effort is limited by a vast array of contingencies. For routine actions, there is no opportunity to apply research skills. For a small subset of professional decisions, however, it is both possible and desirable to investigate options and likely consequences in advance. In such cases, someone with research skills is better able to collect and evaluate evidence and therefore to anticipate the results of action. Having demonstrated the requisite skills, the authors of the six research articles can take on a higher level of responsibility in this limited range of situations. We can therefore infer that, in virtue of this set of skills, they enjoy expanded moral agency.

The papers presented here offer rich and fine-grained evidence that graduate study and graduate research really do put students in a position to make better moral choices. With this evidence in hand, I really do feel comfortable explaining the importance of graduate programs to prospective students, donors, and representatives of funding agencies. I do not have to fall back on arguments about efficacy. I do not have to appeal to disputable values or take sides in disciplinary controversies.

Note, however, the limitations of this account. In-depth knowledge in the applied social sciences does not make students better people. Because people are better informed about the consequences of their actions, we

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should not infer that they will therefore make better choices. A person who knows more is not necessarily more motivated to act in appropriate ways. Furthermore, expanding knowledge in one area does not expand it in all areas. Graduate study and research tend to be highly specialized. We can expect responsibility to be enhanced only within a restricted arena, typically a professional field. One would not expect Allgood's results to be informative about the dynamics of families unaffected by ASD, or Gerber's outside the context of combat, or Lyutykh's about schools that do not attempt

to teach heritage languages. Indeed, one of the most important results of graduate study is to become better informed about what one does *not* know.

A defense of graduate study and research on the grounds of enhanced moral agency does not preclude arguments based on other considerations. Graduate work in the applied social sciences provides opportunities for enjoyment, satisfaction, and self-esteem. It advances professional skills. Yes, it can increase efficacy. It often brings economic rewards. In many fields, a graduate degree makes one more marketable. In some fields it is indispensable.

All of these are reasonable arguments. They are useful when one advises individual students. But unlike the argument from moral agency, they are not broadly generalizable. They are true to varying degrees for different individuals and within different disciplines. They are not the kinds of arguments one could easily make in a roomful of people with varied beliefs, interests, and professional backgrounds. And unlike the moral agency account, these are not the types of claims that could easily be supported by a selection of work samples from a highly diverse group of students, like the articles included in this issue of *Thresholds*.

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