



# Teacher Education and College and Career Readiness for All Students

Dr. Holly Hungerford-Kresser  
The University of Texas at Arlington

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### **Introduction**

College and career readiness<sup>1</sup> has been cited as a national educational priority since 2000 (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). The importance of a post-secondary education in the United States has been emphatically underscored in empirical data (McCaughy & Venezia, 2015; Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011) as well as in anecdotal evidence from business leaders and educators alike. Predictions suggest that by 2018, some postsecondary education will be required in 63% of all new jobs in the U.S., and nearly 90% of high wage jobs in a variety of industries (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010 as cited in McCaughy & Venezia, 2015). Few argue against the import of teaching secondary students the skills necessary to pursue education after graduation, making college and career readiness a relatively ubiquitous phrase in educational circles (e.g., Conley, 2010, 2005; McClafferty Jarsky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996).

At the same time, the under-preparedness of students for post-secondary education is considered a historical problem (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005), and while the importance of assisting students in becoming college-ready at the secondary level is being emphasized, the gaps among student groups remain, with minorities lagging behind their peers, particularly in six-year graduation rates at four-year institutions (Camera, 2015). Texas is fast becoming a minority majority state, with 2010 census data showing the Hispanic/Latino population at 38.6%. At the same time, it is estimated that 41% of the

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<sup>1</sup> College and career readiness and post-secondary readiness are used interchangeably in this white paper (Conley, 2010 & McCaughy & Venezia, 2015).

Latina/o population in the U.S. do not have a high school diploma (Fry, 2010), and those that do enter post-secondary education are dropping out at far greater rates than their White classmates (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). As school systems in the United States, and Texas more specifically, are only projected to become more diverse but increasingly (re)segregated (Orfield & Yun, 1999), there continue to be gaps in persistence and graduation for minority students—gaps that have been cited in educational research for years (Camera, 2015).

Clearly pre-service teachers in our teacher education programs are about to begin careers in a decidedly difficult academic environment. In an age of testing and standardized curriculum, these new teachers are stepping into an increasingly diverse setting (though often highly segregated) with significant achievement gaps, and in addition to content, supposed to be teaching future generations the skills they need to succeed in post-secondary education. In the midst of trying to navigate curriculum and other elements of their profession, teachers are also attempting to prepare students for the world beyond their classroom doors. At the same time, many academic discussions on college and career readiness either focus on school-wide systems (Mehan, et. al., 1996; Standing, Judkins, Keller, & Westat, 2008; Texas Center for Educational Research, 2012), on abilities individual students need for success (McClafferty Janksy, et. al., 2009), or a combination of the two (Conley, 2010, 2005). It is rare to find a classroom study on college and career readiness at any level, and an emphasis on college and career readiness is often missing altogether from discussions in teacher education, even though it is consistently and more broadly referred to as an important goal in education. The

classroom and curriculum piece is important to creating any sort of partnership K-16, especially those that include a variety of stakeholders (McCaughy & Venezia, 2015). Thus, emphasizing post-secondary readiness in teacher education is valuable for both future teachers and the educational spheres they will enter. The term *college and career readiness* is both complicated and nebulous, but vitally important to the classrooms future teachers will lead and the projects they will encounter.

However, in my own teaching and research I have posed a number of questions: How do I begin the conversation about college and career readiness with future teachers, both complicating and making the concept more concrete? Specifically, how can I help future English Language Arts teachers begin to grapple with an individual perspective on college and career ready classrooms and give them strategies to best meet the needs of their future students? And finally, how do pre-service and novice teachers incorporate or distance themselves from these ideas in the classroom? These questions became the foundation for this work. Therefore, this project is focused on the ways in which elements of college and career readiness can be combined with an effective English curriculum to help future teachers build classrooms ready to meet the needs of their future students.

### **Supporting Literature and Study Rationale**

Conley (2010) argues, “College and career readiness for all students seems to be an idea whose time has come” (p. 1). He continues, “Although the idea that high schools should prepare students for college and careers is hardly novel, what is new is the notion that essentially *all* students should be capable of pursuing formal learning opportunities beyond high school” (p. 1). There are a variety of very successful college and career readiness initiatives in the U.S., a few in which I have been involved as a classroom

teacher (e.g., GEAR-UP, AVID) and as a faculty member (e.g., AVID, Pathways). Two popular initiatives in Texas are AVID Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996) and GEAR UP, which stands for “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (Standing, Judkins, Keller, & Westat, 2008; Texas Center for Educational Research, 2012). AVID, in particular, is remarkably successful at helping first-generation students gain access to four-year institutions and to persist once enrolled. Students self-select into the AVID program, and through a variety of services, such as an elective class and tutoring, develop college and career readiness skills throughout their education. GEAR-UP follows a cohort model, using an entire 7<sup>th</sup> grade as a cohort until they graduate from high school. Students are exposed to college and career readiness early on, and early data analysis indicates GEAR-UP’s success at helping students enroll in post-secondary education at rates higher than their peers (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013).

Scholars argue that both policy initiatives and research related to access and attainment are “overwhelmingly focused at the individual level” (Jarsky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009, p. 368). In previous work I have emphasized large college readiness initiatives such as GEAR-UP and AVID and the ways they often require students to self-select as “college bound” or to be a part of a specific cohort of students to receive services (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Since most research on college and career readiness focuses on school-wide partnerships to help students enter post-secondary education, for this paper, I was particularly interested in college and career readiness in classroom contexts. In sum, I am focused on what can be done for all students, not as an add-on or an extra service, but within the educational experiences in

their secondary school classrooms via their teachers, especially new teachers recently graduated from teacher education programs.

### **Defining College and Career Readiness**

Conley (2010) defines college and career readiness as the level of preparation a student needs to enter post-secondary education, a preparedness that allows a student to enroll and succeed without remediation in credit bearing courses that lead to a baccalaureate program or a high-quality certificate program that offer opportunities in career pathways with potential for future advancement. In addition, Conley outlines four interrelated dimensions that affect college readiness at the secondary level: 1) Key Cognitive Strategies, 2) Key Content Knowledge, 3) Academic Behaviors, and 4) Contextual Skills and Awareness. McCaughy & Venezia (2015) argue for an educational climate that allows students to “learn well and succeed in whatever setting they choose beyond high school,” and that a high school diploma should open doors for students, not close access to particular pathways (McCaughy & Venezia, 2015, p. 6-7). Every post-secondary pathway has different requirements, but research has shown common elements across pathways: 1) study skills, 2) time management skills, 3) persistence, 4) ownership of learning, 5) problem solving, 6) collecting and analyzing information, and 7) communicating a variety of ways (Conley & McCaughy, 2012). These elements have been employed to align standards for post-secondary preparedness in the U.S.

Unlike other states, Texas is not a “Common Core” state. Rather than aligning our curriculum with other states through the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Texas created its own set of standards, called the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) (EPIC, 2009). These were introduced through a multi-site consortium, and intend

to help align P-16 curriculum statewide. Echoing McGaughy & Venezia's (2015) commentary on the CCSS and the CCRS, I do not critique or champion the College and Career Readiness standards in the courses I teach; I simply use them to catalyze discussions about post-secondary readiness and attainment with my students—future educators in the state of Texas. Along with colleagues, I aligned the English Language Arts sequence for our students intentionally with the standards, tracking their connections to national standards (NCTE/IRA) and to state classroom standards (TEKS). However, in my course, I also want students to think critically about standards and look beyond them. I want them to wrestle with frameworks and with their own experiences as students in the educational system (Britzman, 2003).

### **Academic Literacies & English Teacher Education**

Though I lean heavily on the definitions of college and career readiness outlined above, I believe definitions of post-secondary readiness can be strengthened through a more culturally responsive and nuanced discussion about academic literacies (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jimenez, 2010). While Conley's (2010) definition is deepened by his four dimensions and necessary for navigating a post-secondary education, it is important to note that minority and first generation students often have culturally specific struggles at post-secondary institutions, particularly in predominately White universities, also vital elements of academic literacies (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jimenez, 2012; Oseguera, Locks & Vega, 2009; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). While "skills" are often the focus when discussing college and career readiness, in my work I prefer the conversation to include academic literacies (Zamel & Spack, 1998). For a student to be deemed "successful" or college-ready, he/she must be

able to learn the particulars of the university, including the multiple discourses that exist at the institution and change from class to class or group to group (Bartholomae, 2003; Bizzell, 2003; Elbow, 1998; Rose, 1998). My participants have experienced the discourses of the institution and managed to navigate them successfully (i.e., graduates with teaching credentials). I want them to focus on and begin to re-contextualize these experiences while learning about college readiness and academic literacies.

It is estimated that prior to entering teacher education, students have observed approximately 13,000 hours of teaching (Lortie, 1975). Often referred to as the “apprenticeship of the observer” (Lortie, 1975), pre-service teachers have spent much of their lives as students, and this can cause tension in teacher education. Students in our programs have already established their sense of the teaching world before they have ever taught a lesson and over-familiarity “animates the fantasy that no one can teach anyone to become a teacher; each must learn his or her own way” (Britzman, 2003, p. 1). In short, teachers bring their own school autobiographies to their experiences in teacher education, and it becomes impossible to dissect their new understandings of education from their experiential knowledge as students. Britzman (2003) writes that teaching is

A struggle for voice and discursive practices amid a cacophony of past and present voices, lived experiences, and available practices. The tensions among what has preceded, what is confronted, and what one desires shapes the contradictory realities of learning to teach. (p. 31)

For example, my students typically come from heavily tracked school systems and might not have been a part of educational systems that strove to prepare all students for post-secondary success. Therefore, I am not asking students to leave their educational

autobiographies at the door, but through curriculum, inquiry, and metacognitive work, asking them to challenge their previous notions about education more broadly, and in particular their ideas about college and career readiness and the education of all students in their future classrooms.

### **Methods**

Study implementation and data collection are ongoing. For this study, I collect data in one of my courses, a methods class, meant to teach pre-service teachers how to teach middle school and high school English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR, grades 7-12). Data are also collected in the student teaching semester that follows the methods course. Finally, I collect data on select participants as they enter their first classrooms (induction years). The first year of data collection and analysis involved the methods course and the student teaching semester. The details of that first year of the longitudinal study follow.

This is a qualitative study—a combination of action research methods (Hubbard & Power, 1999; Somekh, 2009, 2006) and case study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Action research methodology is fluid, not fixed, and allows me to remain critical, adjusting in appropriate ways for the task at hand (Somekh, 2006). Because I am looking to transform my own pedagogy and a program sequence while conducting the study, action research methods are a practical choice. I want to be reflexive and reflective as a practitioner, continually returning to data and using it to transform my own practice while conducting the study, rather than waiting until the study's end to reflect and analyze (Hungerford-Kresser, Wiggins, Amaro-Jimenez, 2014; Somekh, 2009, 2006). It also benefits students to hear about the reflexivity of teaching and data. Ideally it will also

impact the ways they approach their future classrooms. Case study is best used with phenomena that cannot be extricated from context (Stake, 1995), like the data in this study. I consider the methods class to be a case, and I consider each of the student teaching participants to be a case. I am investigating themes found across cases, but also those unique to individual cases (Stake, 1995).

Studying not only my students and their responses to their academic experiences, but my own pedagogy, course sequencing, and models for field experience is transformative for my practice and helpful to students. The immediacy of action research allows for purposeful decisions based on stories woven from data—the ways participants describe their own learning, knowing, and opinions can help inform programmatic decisions and more significant work in the field of education. I wanted to deeply explore a few cases (Stake, 1995). In sum, my goal is that the process itself—researching one's own program sequence and the minutiae of one's teaching and supervising—can stand on its own as a model for other content teachers, both pre-service and in-service teachers. Opportunities to follow future educators throughout their teacher education courses into their induction years and build portraits of their experiences and opinions over time is particularly beneficial from a program perspective. As well, this study offers the opportunity to build transferable knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1984) that can impact other programs, the institution, and the field as a whole.

### **Phases of Research**

Phase I involved collecting data from the methods class in fall, and two student teachers (Alejandra and Stephanie) headed immediately into student teaching in the spring. Phase II (currently in process) involves a second semester of data collection in the

methods class, along with collecting data from two primary participants during student teaching, along with a handful of others. The methods class has been adapted based on last year's feedback, and the adaptations will be a primary focus. I will also collect data from the two previous participants in their first year of teaching. Phase III will involve a third semester of studying the methods course and its variations/improvements, following another group of four to six students into student teaching, and continuing the work with Alejandra and Stephanie in their second full year of teaching. I will use questionnaires and occasional observations to gather data on the other participants who have graduated from the methods class and moved into their first year of teaching. A detailed description of the methods used in Phase 1 follows.

#### **Phase 1 Participants: Methods Class**

Of the 12 participants enrolled, there were 11 females and one male. Of the 11 females, six identified as Latina/o or Hispanic. Half (six) transferred to Urban State University (USU, a pseudonym) from a junior college, and half (six) started their post-secondary educations at four-year institutions, with only one having first been at another four-year institution in the state. The majority graduated from public, suburban high schools. When asked if they considered themselves "college-ready" upon arriving at USU, half (six) responded yes, two said no, and four gave a combination response (yes/no, i.e., "in some areas yes, in some areas no"). Eleven were juniors or seniors studying English Education. Students need a cumulative 3.0 GPA to be admitted to the College of Education. One student was a graduate student studying second language teaching who opted to take the course as an elective.

#### **Phase 1 Participants: Student Teaching**

Because I wanted to study participants who were enrolled in methods and student teaching the following semester, there were four options to select as cases. I chose the two cases to study because both identified as Hispanic/Latina, but the similarities in background end there, and that is where they are important cases to look at contrast as well as convergence in data collection.

**Alejandra (all names are pseudonyms).** Alejandra's parents are from El Salvador. Both are college graduates. Her father's degree is in finance and her mother's in marketing, though her mom received alternative certification and became a teacher. When she was two her family relocated to El Salvador and she attended one of the American schools. However, they returned to Texas when she was about 7 because the political environment became increasingly dangerous. She remained in the same school district where she graduated high school. Her high school is a 3A, and according to Alejandra approximately 60% Hispanic, with a large African American population and a small percentage of White students. She was valedictorian of her high school class ("I was Miss 4.0 and valedictorian and stuff") and had a number of acceptances to a variety of colleges. In the end, she chose USU, despite the proximity to home, because of the scholarship money they offered ("That was a really good opportunity and I couldn't turn it down"). She began pre-med and after struggling with some of the courses, decided teaching was her best option because of her passion for English. Her advisor told her there was no way to get the credits she needed in time for a four-year graduation, but Alejandra did and claims after summers and heavy semester loads she told her advisor, "I told you! I told you!"

**Stephanie.** A first generation college student and Mexican-American, Stephanie's family is very proud of her pursuit of a teaching career. Her mother dropped out of school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but her father graduated high school and had two years of junior college before he chose the workforce. He worked for oil companies most of Stephanie's life, and they lived in a variety of cities with oil-centric economies before landing in the city in which she graduated. There he started his own home remodeling business. The town she in which she grew up is on the outskirts of a big city, a small town that eventually became a growing suburb. Her high school was a 4A school ("[My town] started to get big, but it was just country living pretty much"). Her goal was "just to get into college" and her parents encouraged her because out of all of their children, she was "the most willing to go." Stephanie graduated high school with a 3.4 GPA and went to junior college before enrolling at USU. She says that at some point she knew she needed to transfer to finish her degree, there were two local state colleges she considered options, and her best friend was at USU, so that is where she enrolled. Originally she thought she would be a psychologist, but after struggling in those classes she tried to figure out where her natural talents lay. She chose English because of her writing skills, and she anticipated that she would work well teaching others.

**A Note about Student Teaching Participants.** I highlight these two young women because they effectively demonstrate who comes into our teacher education programs, how they get there, and why they enroll. USU is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). However, Hispanic students come from an array of backgrounds with a variety of life and academic experiences. USU has a high-transfer population, but we also serve students at the top of their classes who begin as freshmen. All of these students find

their way into English Education at USU, and most will be entering our local public school system as novice teachers.

### **Setting**

USU is located in a large metropolitan area in the southwest. In 2014-15, student enrollment was 34,868. The six-year graduation rate hovers at approximately 45%. Ranked fifth nationally in undergraduate diversity, 25.4% of the student body is Hispanic, which gives the institution a designation as an HSI, though in the past we had already obtained our Minority Serving Institution (MSI) designation. At the same time, in 2014-15, an estimated 43% were eligible for Pell grants and 29% were first generation college students.

### **Settings for Student Teaching**

Each participant had two student teaching placements, one at a local junior high/middle school and one at a high school. They spent half of their student teaching experience in each. Alejandra was in two urban schools relatively close to USU. Stephanie was in two suburban schools in a rapidly growing suburb just outside the city. The demographic data for the schools is indicated in the chart below, as listed on the Texas Education Agency's website.

**TABLE 1 Enrollment Demographics at Student Teaching Placements**

<b>Student Teaching</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Alejandra</b>						
High School	2843	51.9%	16.3%	39.8%	37%	6.9%
Junior High	722	64.1%	18.4%	46.8%	28.8%	6%
<b>Stephanie</b>						
High School	2,333	17.3%	18.3%	19%	52.6%	10.1%
Middle School	872	27.4%	18.8%	20.5%	46.4%	14.3%

### **Data Sources**

Over the course of the academic year, I collected a variety of data from varied sources. Participants in the methods class (fall semester) were given open-ended questionnaires via Survey Monkey about college and career readiness and the English Language Arts at both the beginning and end of the semester. All responses were anonymous, and I received 26 responses—13 at the start and 13 at the completion of the semester. Some questions repeated and I asked them to try and articulate what changed their responses over the course of the semester. I also collected all of their classroom work (i.e., reader responses, Blackboard discussions, lesson plans, unit plans, Thinking Journals, Writer's Notebooks). They also interviewed one another about their journals, walking through the strategy with a classmate.

In student teaching (spring semester), for Stephanie and Alejandra I also collected all of their assignments (i.e., weekly reflections, lesson plans, unit plans, teacher work sample). At the same time, I observed their teaching regularly (six times for Stephanie and eight times for Alejandra) followed by a meeting with a recorded interview. As well as reviewing their teaching in interviews, I tried to engage them in continued discussions about college and career readiness. All videos and interviews were transcribed in their entirety for analysis. I also conducted two longer semi-structured interviews focused on life history and overall semester reflection with Alejandra and Stephanie when they finished student teaching. I kept a research journal throughout the project in which I wrote analytic memos about emerging themes, ongoing questions, and ideas for reconfiguring the class or assignments the following academic year (Guba & Lincoln, 1984; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Mertens, 2005). I also focused on reflecting after

each interview with Stephanie and Alejandra as a means of better aligning curriculum in methods to meet future needs in student teaching.

### **Data Analysis**

Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1984), I analyzed data in three waves. First, I coded the data from the methods class. I observed the questionnaires and highlighted common themes between the beginning of the semester questionnaire and the end of the semester questionnaire. I also highlighted outliers and looked for any apparent changes or disconnection from the course curriculum. I followed the same process with the video transcripts of students interviewing one another about their Thinking Journals. Second, I coded all of the interview transcripts from the student teaching semester in the same way. I found common themes and looked for outliers and apparent disconnect from curriculum or my goals as a facilitator. I compared to the first round of coding and tried to combine codes into related themes where possible. Third, as a means of triangulation, I analyzed various artifacts—student assignments, reflections, lesson plans and other key assignments, along with my own research journal, and looked for similar themes and codes or connections to any outliers. Preliminary themes are thus based on codes I saw across cases and context in this first year of data collection. What follows is a description of preliminary themes, with data excerpts that were emblematic of the threads I uncovered in analysis.

### **Preliminary Findings and Discussion**

For Phase 1 of data collection, I focused on one broad research question: How do pre-service teachers respond to an intentional emphasis on college and career readiness in a discipline specific teacher education sequence? The preliminary findings and discussion

below are simply the first attempt at analysis, and because they are part of an intentional longitudinal study, are only a snapshot based on a single year of data. However, I outline some promising emerging themes. I will determine whether these themes remain prevalent in Phase 2 and Phase 3, while also being mindful of new threads that emerge over the course of the study.

### **College and Career Readiness as a Partnership**

In the beginning of the methods semester, participants put the onus for being “college and career ready” firmly on the shoulders of the individual student. In the first round of questionnaire data, all 13 definitions of college and career readiness were student-centered. An example follows:

As far as prior intellectuality, I think colleges are able to accept any type of student. There are a plentiful amount of resources that are available to help... But for everything else I introduce you to WEBS (I made up the acronym just now). W: Students are Willing to go to class, even if it means waking up early, missing parties, and spending less time with friends. E: Students are Excited for the material they will be learning, and even if they don't particularly like a certain course or lesson, they're excited for what the learning will provide them in the future. The student is not only excited for graduation, but the work that leads to their diploma. B: Students understand that they are essentially coming in as Blank slates. They won't know everything coming in. S: Students are self-reliant. They are responsible for their work, sleep and study habits. (Questionnaire response)

This data excerpt highlights what I uncovered throughout analysis. Initially, participants seemed to talk about college and career readiness in student-centric terms. Students have

to be “[w]illing to go to class” and make sacrifices (i.e., “spending less time with friends”). It is up to the student to be enthusiastic about school, to learn (“They won’t know everything coming in”), and they have to maintain a certain level of responsibility. This in particular was echoed regularly in early data—the idea that no one else can do it for a student. Being able to motivate oneself was considered by many to be a vital element of post-secondary readiness.

However, participants’ definitions shifted over the course of the academic year and into student teaching. The secondary classroom and the teacher’s role in fostering college and career readiness, or helping students on the path to post-secondary readiness, became a theme. Excerpts from end of course questionnaires demonstrate this. For example, one student wrote: “I think I understand what [college and career readiness] means connected to the classroom now. High school classes (English in particular) have to be able to prepare students to survive in college classes.” Another student emphasized a shift from the student’s point of view to including the teacher’s role:

At the beginning of the semester I considered “college readiness” from the student’s point of view. I still do but now have added the teacher’s perspective too. Now college readiness means being organized, attentive, on time, prepared, enthusiastic, open minded, patient, creative, etc. All of those skills require great practice and will from teachers and students to create the best learning environment possible.

The focus on a learning environment that best fosters college readiness in their future students was intimated by a single student in early data collection, but by the end of Phase 1, it was a clear thread across participant responses in their questionnaires and

written reflections. In this excerpt, a participant explains the importance of teaching students learning strategies in addition to content, because this gives students “agency” to impact their own learning: “A student needs to know which study and learning strategies work for him/her. An English teacher should expose students to multiple learning strategies and encourage students to reflect on which strategies work for them... A student needs agency, the ability to take charge of [his/her] learning.” During student teaching, Alejandra discussed the importance of creating a college-ready classroom environment where students are able to meet with success and rise to challenges. She argued that prior to her methods course, she had never thought about college and career readiness at all and therefore had not considered the teacher’s role in fostering it (Alejandra, post-observation interview).

In particular, I noticed a focus on English teachers’ abilities to help with strategy instruction that would be useful in college, but by also giving future students the time to reflect on their learning and progress: “English teachers can help by showing good strategies and constantly reflecting on them” (Anonymous student reflection). I found this to be an important trend, one I want to continue tracking in future analysis. In the beginning participants’ definitions of college and career readiness are very individualized. However, as the academic year progressed, they started seeing themselves as future ELAR teachers within the definition. That is, they began to recognize their part in college readiness, an important shift. It takes the definition of college and career readiness and moves it from a difficult to understand concept to one that can be developed. Thus, skills for post-secondary readiness are viewed more like developable academic literacies (Zamel & Spack, 1998), bringing teachers into an initially student-

centered discussion. This development is not strictly on shoulders of students, but on educators and environments too, hopefully encouraging pre-service teachers to be proactive in creating college-ready classrooms, and providing opportunities for all the students who cross their paths. This is an important step in college and career ready initiatives and pathways (McClafferty Janskey, McDonough, & Nunez, 2010; McCaughey & Venezia, 2015).

### **The English Language Arts as a Vehicle for College Readiness**

It is important to note that when citing their reasons for becoming English teachers, all students pointed to a love for literacy in some form and a desire to foster this in future generations. An example from a beginning of course questionnaire read: “I LOVE literature, and I want to help others see why I think English is so awesome.” Then it is no surprise that in the beginning, when asked about the English Language Arts connection to post-secondary readiness, most students narrowly focused this connection on reading and writing. One questionnaire read, “Good reading and writing skills are necessary for college...” By the end of Phase 1, for some the focus remained there, “Students must know how to write a good paper for their classes” or on general literacy connections even when talking about college more widely: “In order to succeed in college, literacy is a must.” However, the majority of participants cited a change in definition over the course of a single semester.

One change (apparent in student reflections and questionnaires) was noting the import of the English Language Arts in other content areas, as a way to indicate their foundational place in college and career readiness. For example, one student wrote: “English Language Arts are the foundation to developing literacies in all other fields and

curricula” and another argued: “Pretty much all the skills you learn whether it’s reading, writing, speaking, listening, etc, you will need for every other subject or class taken, especially in college. It’s part of being a person in society...” (Zamel & Spack, 1998). At the same time, intertwined with the idea that ELAR helps with reading, writing, speaking, and listening in a variety of careers was ELAR’s connection to thinking and learning across disciplines:

ELA teaches students how to read critically and effectively, write in a variety of formats, speak and listen in many settings, work effectively in groups and along, and give them a variety of skills and methods to further their own learning. My answer has changed to include far more aspects of learning and its application to other fields.

This quotation is emblematic of two important trends. First, there is the element of reading and writing “critically” and in multiple formats—helping students to become more effective communicators in “many settings,” a must in any discussion of academic literacies or college readiness (Bartholomae, 2003, EPIC, 2009). Second, as demonstrated in the above excerpt, there is the connection to “more aspects” of learning and the ways in which their future students can apply success in the ELAR classroom to other subjects or “fields.” This sort of integration and carry-over can help make the secondary school experience less disjointed and more focused on readiness (Conley, 2010, 2005). It can be helpful for these future teachers to see their discipline as central to learning more broadly, and maintain a continued focus on college readiness.

Data suggest the curricular focus in the methods course and in student teaching on particular strategies and skills helped students re-evaluate their original claims about connections to ELAR. One student wrote:

I think the English Language Arts are the most important part of college readiness because it can teach the students many skills they can use in other classes. Some of these skills are literacy, cognitive and rhetorical thinking, organization, time-management, metacognition, note taking, speaking, etc. My answer has changed in that I have practiced those skills in your class and can affirm they can be learned through the English Language Arts because of that. (End of course questionnaire)

This particular idea is important because ELAR is mentioned in connection to many aspects of a common definition of college and career readiness or skills outlined in the College and Career Readiness Standards (e.g., literacy, rhetorical thinking, organization, time-management, metacognition, note-taking), and because of the connection to content in the course (EPIC, 2009). A goal for me as an instructor is not only to encourage a curriculum that fosters post-secondary success for all students, but to offer pre-service teachers tools to help them achieve this goal (Conley, 2005). In sum, the course aims to connect a theoretical discussion to the practical so that participants have a variety of tools for reaching a majority of students.

### **Adaptability, Metacognition & College-ready Classrooms**

Over time my participants referenced adaptability/flexibility, metacognition, and critical thinking nearly as often as they discussed skills like note-taking and organization, suggesting that pre-service teachers who understand this concept might be more prepared

to build college-ready classrooms. For instance, Stephanie liked to say that college readiness was about “organization, time management, open-mindedness, and flexibility.” Alejandra referenced “opening her brain” as part of the college experience, versus “how [she] learned it in high school.” When reflecting on past experiences in college, the thread of adaptability was a prominent one. Often talking about the disconnect in the kinds of writing experiences required by secondary schools as opposed to those required in college, participants began to recognize the power in helping students learn to think so that they can adapt to new learning situations in college. For many participants, metacognition is key in the ELAR classroom, as it is the vehicle for helping students reflect and recognize the need and appropriate tool for success. Again, this was an important finding for me. Data suggest that participants veered away from labeling students as “adaptable” and instead began to focus on ways to help students become more cognizant of differences in college academics, primarily through metacognitive strategies and activities (EPIC, 2009).

Alejandra likened metacognition to an “out of body experience” where students are encouraged to “step outside themselves.” She explained that she wants her students to be able to have a certain sort of dialogue with themselves: “‘Okay, this is what I am doing, this is what I’m doing well, this is what I’m not doing well, and this is why I am not doing it well. Okay, let’s go back and address that.’” These kinds of statements are particularly important because they demonstrate these pre-service teachers’ understanding of post-secondary readiness being about more than “hard skills” students either have or do not have, their understanding that the ELAR class can have an

intentional, explicit, metacognitive curriculum piece, and that seemingly peripheral or non-academic skills can be modeled, taught, and practiced (Zamel & Spack, 1998).

Additionally, participants began to understand the importance of metacognition in their own practice, as teachers, as a means of fostering college and career readiness.

Stephanie discussed embedding metacognition in a college-ready classroom: “It [metacognition] really helped me start making a foundation for the kind of teacher I want to be... I’ll always tell my students you need to know why you are thinking the way you are thinking... It’s letting them know why they’re learning the things they are.”

Metacognition can be a powerful concept when embedded in secondary classrooms and in the daily focus of teachers. Seeing the concept embraced as pre-service teachers began to envision their future classrooms is an important finding and ideally will lead to a more reflective pedagogy for the pre-service teachers who will model it for their students.

### **Conclusion**

Early indications are that discipline-centered instruction (in this case, ELAR), carefully threaded with the theme of college and career readiness, can impact the ways pre-service teachers view opportunities for teaching and learning in their future classrooms. Additionally, data suggest that an intentional focus on strategy implementation and ongoing reflection helped participants develop an understanding of ELAR as central to college and career readiness and position themselves as able to impact future students’ post-secondary pathways. While preliminary, these early findings are encouraging. In the revision of this course and program sequence, I grounded the changes in the belief that Conley (2010) is correct: the time for college and career readiness for all students has come. The classroom is the place where students can have

the initial educational experiences that help make this a reality. Studies on college and career readiness initiatives tend to focus on the college-going culture of a school or a district or a program. Those programs are important and I champion the work they do. However, for this study, I wanted to look at the possibilities of a college going culture in classrooms. Pre-service teachers are the beginning of this cycle. As they move into classrooms, they are going to have the opportunity to be instrumental in any P-16 initiatives occurring on their campuses, but they will be particularly influential as English teachers within their classrooms.

The first step is an awareness of post-secondary readiness, as well as an exposure to the idea that all students should be given opportunities that allow them to pursue whatever post-secondary option they choose. No pathway should be off limits, and gauging how these future teachers respond and wrestle with this concept before entering the profession proves significant. Similarly, looking at how these ideas do or do not impact their future classrooms will be elucidating, making the next two phases of data collection equally exciting. Classroom studies on pre-service teachers and college and career readiness are nonexistent. Classroom studies on in-service teachers and college and career readiness are also rare. However, these contexts are important to understanding how we can better prepare our pre-service teachers to meet the needs of the students they will soon encounter. This action research study and the cases embedded within can provide insight into meeting the needs of pre-service and novice teachers, and, by extension, all of the students they serve.

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