Overcoming Deficit Theory toward English Language Learners: Technological Possibilities and Policy Implications
Issues in the Use of Technology in Preparing Teachers for ELLs

- Potential to facilitate preparing large quantities of teachers as efficiently as possible
- President Bush on Aug. 14, 2008 signed bill requiring higher educational institutions to set annual goals for increasing number of teachers for instruction of ELLs and other areas of teacher shortage
- Potential to bring ELLs and their parents into university classrooms via technology vs. logistics of live visits
- Danger of focusing on teaching skills only VS. developing positive dispositions toward ELLs
Deficit Theory Prevalent in our Utah Communities

- “Educational deficit thinking is a form of blaming the victim that views the alleged deficiencies of poor and minority group students and their families as predominantly responsible for these students' school problems and academic failure, while frequently holding structural inequality blameless.” Valencia, R. R. (1997). The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice. The Stanford Series on Education and Public Policy.

Technological Intervention

- How to study use of technology to influence pre-service teachers’ attitudes and efficacy regarding English language learners?

- *A Video Ethnography of A Day in the Life of an English Language Learner* Interactive CD Rom
Environment of this Study

- Design-Based Research Methodology
- 91 freshman pre-service teachers
- Predominately white, female, Christian background (same trend in teaching force nationwide)
- 1 shot technological intervention
Dispositional qualitative data could combat deficit theory

“Many children come from homes with parents who do not speak both languages as they do. These children come from backgrounds that are very similar to those who learn English first, we must remember to treat them as such. It is important to bring parents into the education of their students; if a parent does not understand English that does not automatically mean they are uninterested in the education of their children.” Iteration #2

“Just because a family may not be entirely English speaking, a member of that family still has great potential. A teacher needs to see the good and praise it and notice the weaknesses and help to strengthen them, they need to be positive. Family life may not be the easiest for people who are learning English as a second language but they need to learn and want to. Sometimes a teacher can misinterpret a child’s behavior.” Iteration #3

“I think patience is a key part of teaching ELL students. They are trying to accomplish things that most students don’t have to worry about. They have to learn a language AND learn in school. Which is incredible that they are wanting to try to do that…They should be looked up to, not looked down on.” Iteration #2
How do we put a “face” on the ELL label to positively influence dispositions and policy?

In order to humanize vs. demonize immigrants, indigenous people, and refugees:

- State office of education must provide curricular opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers to get to know ELLs and their families to help combat deficit theory attitudes.
- Utah legislators must recognize how deficit theory thinking can lead to legislative decisions.
- We must focus on the positive economic and cultural contributions of ELLs and their families to our state.
How do we put a “face” on the ELL label to positively influence dispositions and policy?

- “Meet an undocumented person. Come to know their family.”

Interfaith Dialogue on Immigration