“A SENSE OF WHERE WE ARE IN THE WORLD”: FIRST-YEAR BILINGUAL, BICULTURAL TEACHERS FROM AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TO TEACHING PROGRAM

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The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of first-year teachers, recently graduated from an Alternative Route to Teaching (ART) program and hired to teach within Spanish-English Dual-Immersion strands at local schools. To do so, recordings and observations of classroom practice, teacher interviews, and supplementary data from previous coursework were analyzed to address three questions which arose from literature gaps and during fieldwork, namely, 1) How do graduates from an ART program engage and support their language learners during the first year of instruction and across a variety of class modalities? 2) In what ways do graduates from an ART program utilize knowledge of (a) their students, parents, and communities, as well as of (b) their own experiences and trajectories as former paraeducators, school insiders, and of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds? and 3) What are the ways in which graduates from an ART program experience and negotiate their first year as teachers in terms of support and identity?

Three conclusions were generated as a result. First, the first-year teacher participants engaged their students through a variety of activities and relations which were marked in contrast...
to typical depictions of first-year practice, notably in how activities were grounded and authentic, and in how teacher-student interactions were adaptive and relational to student needs. Second, participants leveraged a substantial understanding of student and parent backgrounds to build curriculum and in-class supports which were relevant to students’ learning needs. Finally, participants were not immune to many of the difficulties seen in the first year of teachers, despite extensive experience with schools as paraeducators, yet showed a practice quite flexible to student and instructional needs during the onset of COVID-19. In sum, participants engaged their first year of practice in ways which outpace much of the narrative literature surrounding first-year teachers, and did so in ways which were grounded in self-knowledge, as well as that of students, school system, and community.