

# **Teacher Professional Identities and Engaging I-Positions as Teachers of English Language Learners: Insights from Multiple Case Studies of Mainstream Teacher Candidates**

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With the growing number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in K-12 classrooms across the United States (U.S.), addressing the linguistic and academic needs of English language learners (ELLs) has become increasingly urgent. Nonetheless, many teachers feel under-prepared to meet these needs or believe that supporting ELLs is the responsibility of other specialists. This study addresses the need to prepare mainstream teachers for diverse classrooms by examining the construction of teacher professional identities (TPIs) of mainstream teacher candidates (MTCs). Through multiple case studies of three MTCs, the study reveals (a) the interaction of multiple identity facets, (b) the impact of teacher education experiences on shaping TPIs, and (c) the influence of broader societal diversity issues on classroom decisions. The findings underscore the pivotal role of critical reflection in teacher education programs and the need for thoughtful practicum placements. Further discussions provide implications and recommendations for teacher education research and practice.

*Keywords: teacher professional identities; English language learners; teacher preparation; language teacher identity; multicultural education*

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## **Introduction**

As the student population in U.S. public schools becomes increasingly diverse, preparing teachers to address this diversity is crucial. ELLs represent the fastest-growing demographic in these schools. From 2000 to 2020, ELL enrollment in K-12 public schools rose by 66.4% (1.5 million students), while the non-ELL student population grew by only 31.8% (OELA, 2022). Despite the necessity of using linguistically and culturally responsive teaching methods in today's classrooms, many mainstream or content-area teachers feel under-prepared to instruct ELLs effectively (Faltis & Valdés, 2016). Although most ELLs are placed in mainstream classrooms without special English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, teachers often view ELL support as the responsibility of ESL or bilingual education specialists (Brisk, 2018; Villegas, 2018).

The need to prepare linguistically responsive teachers during their preservice training has been emphasized, aiming to equip them with the necessary knowledge, practices, and attitudes before they begin their careers, which can be overwhelming for new teachers (Athanasios & Wong, 2018). Efforts to prepare MTCs for working with ELLs—those not specializing in ESL—have included specific courses, projects, field experiences, and study abroad programs. However, research indicated ongoing challenges in changing MTCs' beliefs and practices to support bilingualism and advocate for ELLs (Baecher et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2022)..

Developing strong and effective TPIs is seen as a way to help prospective teachers commit to and advocate for ELLs. Previous studies have highlighted how TPIs shape their commitment, beliefs, and pedagogical decisions (Stenberg et al., 2014; Yazan, 2017). This study examines how MTCs construct their TPIs as future teachers of ELLs, focusing on how their past language-related experiences and their teacher preparation programs influence their TPIs. The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) How do elementary teacher candidates (ETCs) develop TPIs in the context of teaching ELLs? and (b) What language-related experiences influence the ETCs' TPIs as future teachers of ELLs?

## **Literature Review**

### **Preparing Teachers for ELLs**

The changing demographics in U.S. public schools highlight the need for mainstream teachers to be prepared for a linguistically diverse student population. The Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA, 2022) reports that approximately 5.5 million ELLs are enrolled in K-12 public schools, making up 10.4% of the total student body. From 2000 to 2020, the ELL population increased by 1.5 million, while the non-ELL population decreased from 91.9% to 89.6%. Most ELLs (67%) are in elementary grade levels, and many are now placed in mainstream classrooms rather than specialized ESL or sheltered bilingual programs (Bialik et al., 2018; NCES, 2017). Despite this, only about one-third of mainstream teachers with ELLs in their classrooms have received any ELL-specific training (NCES, 2012; Villegas et al., 2018). Consequently, many mainstream teachers and teacher candidates feel unprepared to work with ELLs (Faltis & Valdés, 2016; Kelly, 2017).

Research has documented various efforts to prepare MTCs for the diverse learning needs of ELLs, such as ELL-specific courses, field experiences, and study abroad programs. These initiatives have shown positive impacts on MTCs' beliefs, attitudes, awareness, and practices (Bodur, 2012; Clark-Goff & Eslami, 2016, Kim et al., 2022; Kolano & King, 2015; Lee et al., 2018; Markos, 2012). Evidence suggests that MTCs gain better knowledge and skills through these experiences and develop increased confidence and empathy for ELLs (Hutchinson, 2013; Kasun & Saavedra, 2016; Medina et al., 2015; Pilonieta et al., 2017; Ruiz et al., 2016; Uzum, et al., 2014). However, there is limited research specifically focused on elementary teacher candidates (ETCs) who teach the majority of ELLs.

Despite initial positive attitudes and beliefs towards ELLs, sustaining MTCs' positive changes in attitudes and beliefs emerged as a challenge. Once they enter the teaching profession, MTCs are often influenced by personal beliefs and social and political factors, which can undermine their previously constructed beliefs and attitudes (Akiba, 2011; Clark-Goff & Eslami, 2016; Kolano & King, 2015). Additionally, even though MTCs may understand theories of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, their practices often remain rooted in English-only monolingual ideologies and practices (Bacon, 2018; Mahalingappa, 2023; Moenandar et al., 2023). Transforming MTCs' belief systems and practices is therefore crucial for providing an equitable learning environment for ELLs.

To address the gap in research, this study aims to investigate and gain a comprehensive understanding of how MTCs, particularly ETCs, construct their TPIs as future teachers of ELLs. Research on teacher identity has the potential to transform MTCs' educational and philosophical beliefs (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Borg, 2017). Understanding TPIs is critical for preparing MTCs to teach ELLs, as TPIs reflect teachers'

commitment and influence their pedagogical decisions. Therefore, it is essential to explore how MTCs' experiences, relationships, and contexts impact and shape their TPIs as educators of ELLs.

## Dialogical Self Theory

Hermans' (2001; 2008; 2014) Dialogical Self Theory (DST) provides a useful framework for analyzing TPIs by considering the multiple and fluid positions, voices, and contexts that individuals embody. Hermans (2001) states that each person has several voices, or I-positions, which engage in internal and external dialogues, sometimes agreeing and other times conflicting. Hermans compared these multiple I-positions to different roles or characters in a play. I-positions may exist in the internal or external dimensions of self. The internal dimension refers to personal and social positions, while the external dimension involves positions perceived by others or the environment. These I-positions interact continuously and cross boundaries across time and space. As this study focuses on ETCs' experiences and reflections across different times and contexts, DST provided an opportune lens to analyze how these experiences and multiple I-positions constitute the construction and negotiation of their TPIs.

DST also posits an interaction between minisociety and macrosociety. The minisociety of self consists of the internal and external dimensions of self and is characterized by dynamic and independent I-positions. The macrosociety includes external elements that are not immediately relevant to the minisociety but are still in flux with it. The relevance of these positions is determined by relationships, context, and time. Some I-positions become more pertinent and enter the minisociety to engage in dialogue. During this dialogic process, ETCs can reflect on their experiences and make intentional decisions by exercising their agencies in their teaching practices (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Thus, DST allowed an analytical tool to interpret how external and societal contexts influence TPIs and pedagogical approaches.

## Dialogical Teacher Professional Identities

Previous studies have explored MTCs' construction of TPIs through DST and found that personal experiences significantly shape TPIs. Stenberg (2010) studied four MTCs, noting how their formerly constructed views and principles influenced their choices, highlighting the challenge of altering pre-existing belief systems. Cultural identities also play a crucial role in shaping TPIs. Edwards and Edwards (2017)

followed a Māori secondary science teacher, showing how cultural values and community perspectives influenced pedagogical decisions. Similarly, Rodriguez and Polat (2012) found that MTCs' views on diversity and responsibility were shaped by childhood cultural identities and a sense of belonging. These findings highlight the impact of personal history and beliefs on TPI development.

Research also emphasized the influence of social contexts and professional relationships on TPI construction. K rkk  et al. (2016) examined thirteen MTCs in Finland, revealing that practicum teaching contexts broadened their perspectives and views. Maaranen and Stenberg (2016) found that practicum environments led six MTCs to reconsider their idealistic teaching views, leading to (re)negotiation processes of their TPIs. Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2016) confirmed that MTCs renegotiated their TPIs during student teaching by assuming responsibilities and focusing on future identities. Furthermore, Hong et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study of five science teachers, noting significant changes in their I-positions as they gained confidence and built student-teacher relationships. Kayi-Aydar (2015) used Positioning Theory to examine three ETCs navigating multiple conflicting identities shaped by relationships with ELLs and mentor teachers. These studies highlight how teacher education program contexts, relationships, and tensions and conflicts can shift MTCs' positions and orientations as they construct and (re)negotiate their TPIs.

Despite numerous studies examining MTCs' construction of TPIs through DST, only a few studies have focused specifically on TPIs as teachers of diverse learners (e.g., Edwards & Edwards, 2017; Rodriguez & Polat, 2012), particularly in elementary education (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015). This study aims to address this gap by exploring the TPIs of ETCs in the context of teaching linguistically diverse learners.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study uses multiple case studies to explore the TPI construction of three MTCs. Specifically, three ETCs were recruited to observe their complex meaning-making processes in their unique contexts using a qualitative research approach (Merriam, 1988; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method allows for an in-depth examination of each ETC, revealing how their TPIs are shaped by their various I-positions and surrounding contexts. Multiple case studies also enable cross-case analysis to identify similarities and differences.

Participants were selected based on their linguistic backgrounds to provide robust findings through diverse yet comparable cases (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Among the three ETCs, two were bilingual speakers, and one was a monolingual speaker.

## Research Context

The study was conducted within a teacher education program at a state university in Florida, U.S., chosen due to the researcher's familiarity with the program and institution. This familiarity allowed for a comprehensive analysis of each case and a deep understanding of the participants' contexts (Thomas, 2016). Florida, with the third-largest ELL population in the U.S., provided a rich environment for exploring ETCs' TPI construction in relation to teaching ELLs. Additionally, Florida requires MTCs to complete specific ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) credentials to be certified, including a minimum of 300 contact hours in ESOL, as mandated by the 2001 Florida Consent Decree.

The teacher education program used a two-course model to meet this requirement, combining ESOL-specific courses with field experiences and general teacher education courses. Participants were recruited from a cohort of ETCs who began their first ESOL-specific course in the first semester of their junior year. This course covered applied linguistics and cross-cultural communication, with ESOL-specific field experiences in rural schools. The second ESOL-specific course, taken in the final semester of their senior year, focused on ESOL curriculum development, teaching methods, and assessment, including ESOL-specific field experience of small group instruction in a sheltered ESL classroom.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures during the data collection period in Fall 2020, ETCs had limited practicum access. They could serve as interns for their regular Practicum 4 but were restricted from entering sheltered ESL classrooms as volunteer teachers. Consequently, the course requirements were adjusted to exclude ESOL-specific field experiences, replacing them with microteaching sessions.

## Participants

Using purposeful sampling, the study established criteria to gain the most insight from each case (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The criteria included ETCs who (a) were enrolled in the second ESOL-

specific course in Fall 2020, (b) had ELLs in their Practicum 4 internship classroom, and (c) identified as monolingual or bi/multilingual speakers. Participants were recruited from the second ESOL-specific course in the Fall of 2020. Research indicated that MTCs in upper-level ESOL courses had a better understanding of ELLs' needs (Cho et al., 2012), so the recruitment was limited to those in the second ESOL-specific course. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the second criterion was dropped as ETCs were unable to complete the required ESOL-specific field experience. None of the volunteer participants reported having identified ELLs in their Practicum 4 classrooms, so the data collection relied on previous ESOL field experiences and interactions with ELLs. To enrich the study, two bilingual ETCs and one monolingual ETC were selected.

The three participants were Abby, Karla, and Marisa (pseudonyms). Abby and Karla, both bilingual and former ELL students, shared their unique former educational experiences. Abby immigrated from Brazil in third grade, describing her parents as highly educated and involved in her education, with her father helping her maintain proficiency in both English and Portuguese. Karla, from Cuba, described the emotional challenges she faced as her mother's translator and the financial difficulties after her parents separated. Marisa, the only monolingual participant, was born and raised in the city where the study took place and identified as biracial, which became relevant in her TPI construction. These three participants' diverse experiences provided valuable insights into ETCs' TPI construction as future teachers of ELLs.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data source for this study was interview data, supplemented by document data, physical artifacts, and audiovisual data. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant, focusing on their TPIs and experiences related to language, teaching, and ELLs. Four interviews were conducted with each participant, each lasting 30-50 minutes, covering topics such as their daily routines, K-12 education, strengths as teachers, student perceptions, and impactful assignments or courses.

Additionally, participants provided weekly video journals over six weeks, resulting in 543 minutes of interview data and 160 minutes of audiovisual data. A physical artifact, a language map drawn by participants during the second interview, helped visualize their language experiences and multiple positions. Document data included the teacher education program of study, ESOL course syllabi, and other relevant course syllabi.

Data analysis began alongside data collection, utilizing Sullivan's (2012) dialogic analysis and Merriam's (1998) constant comparative analysis. Dialogic analysis involves identifying key moments and taking notes

of significant units of meaning. Criteria for key moments included personal and language experiences, important relationships, and beliefs or plans for teaching ELLs. Interesting nuggets, or insightful experiences and expressions, were identified and coded to connect key moments. Initial themes emerged, such as personal experiences, language-related and teacher education program experiences, tensions from contexts and relationships, ideologies in the macrosociety, and forming agencies from tensions.

Additionally, cross-case analysis provided an overview of the three cases by identifying common categories, themes, or typologies. The analysis aimed to make conceptual connections with the DST framework, identifying patterns and experiences that shaped ETCs' TPIs as teachers of ELLs.

## Findings

### Dialogic Multiple I-Positions

DST emphasizes the existence of multiple positions within an individual's identity, each with its own distinct voice. Applying DST, data analysis revealed that TPIs are multifaceted, involving various I-positions engaged in dialogue. These dialogues, especially between the internal and external dimensions of the self, shape the teaching values of ETCs. The data uncovered how participants navigate these multiple I-positions by reflecting on their past schooling experiences and their current roles as future teachers. These I-positions engaged in dialogues between their past selves as learners and their present selves as ETCs, and ETCs' challenging experiences shaped their perceptions and beliefs about effective teaching.

Both Abby and Karla, who identified as former ELL students, described the difficulties they faced when they first entered U.S. classrooms, which influenced their values and views on good teaching. Abby, for example, recalled the challenges she faced when transitioning from sheltered ESL classes to a mainstream classroom, an experience that impacted her overall confidence as a student.

I felt very kind of, I don't know if ignored is the right word. But she [teacher] definitely wasn't making any effort to help...and she was very quick with getting through the material...because other kids got it. They were doing fine, but I had no idea what's going on half the time...and she kind of made me feel, I guess dumb, is the best way to put it.

She didn't make me feel too confident...my grades just started tanking...my parents saw that I wasn't doing well and I wasn't happy either. (Abby\_Interview1, p. 9)

Like Abby, Karla recounted her difficulties as an ELL and the insufficient accommodations in her classes. Both ETCs engaged in dialogues between their past experiences as ELLs and their current roles as future teachers, emphasizing the importance of making accommodations for ELLs. Due to her own experiences as an ELL, Karla expressed her desire to become a more understanding and accommodating teacher in the future. Karla used the dialogue between her I-positions to reinterpret her past and develop her agency as a teacher. Her TPIs were shaped as someone who provides appropriate accommodations, avoiding unrealistic expectations that once made her feel like a failure. Similarly, Abby's TPIs began to form as she observed her mentor teacher in her practicum classroom assigning below-grade-level readings, believing the students were "not smart enough to do it" (Abby\_Interview1, p. 9). Recalling how her own experience left her feeling incapable due to her teachers' low expectations and lack of encouragement, Abby expressed a desire to be a teacher who maintains high expectations while meeting students at their level.

Although Marisa identified as a monolingual speaker, her unique educational background also shaped her views on teaching ELLs. She recalled struggling with reading throughout elementary school and still needing extra time for course readings in her teacher education program.

In elementary school, I had a lot of reading comprehension issues. So I had a tutor for first through fifth grade. And she was also my first-grade teacher. I guess she's the reason why I wanted to be a teacher. Because I'm if she can help me for all those years, and I managed to get into a Master's program, I'll be fine. (Marisa\_Interview1, p. 9)

Attending a developmental research school significantly impacted her, which led her to believe that if she had attended a different school, she would have struggled more and might not have achieved her dream. Interacting with students in her practicum classroom reminded Marisa of her experiences as a learner, prompting her to engage in a dialogue with her past self. Marisa's past experience as a struggling learner and her current role as a teacher led her to empathize with the struggling students in her practicum classroom who needed extra encouragement. Through these reflective dialogues, her TPIs informed her to dedicate more time to providing one-on-one support for her students.

All three ETCs developed their understanding of teaching and their beliefs about effective teaching by reflecting on their past experiences as struggling learners or ELLs. These experiences influenced their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward teaching and learning. Furthermore, the practicum setting, where they interact with students and teachers, encouraged them to engage deeply in these reflective dialogues.

## Teacher Education Program Context and Relevance

In Hermans' DST, the interplay between the minisociety (internal and external selves) and the macrosociety is crucial for shaping TPIs. Abstract elements from the macrosociety, such as people and concepts, continually cross into the minisociety to engage in dialogues with the internal and external dimensions of self. These outside influences become relevant depending on time, space, and relationships. For the three ETCs, concepts from their teacher education program and broader diversity issues became relevant and contributed to shaping their TPIs.

For Karla, time and context played a critical role as abstract concepts entered her minisociety. She recalled that the strategies taught in the classroom management course were particularly meaningful because she was enrolled in the course during her Practicum 4 semester. This experience prompted Karla to reflect deeply on her teaching values and beliefs.

This semester's kind of different, and unlike anything before. I've done more reflecting on what my beliefs are or the kind of classroom that I would have...I think I am at that stage where I have my own beliefs because before, I didn't really know what I believed, and now we're taking a classroom management class that shaped what I think in terms of the kind of teacher that I want to be. And of course, the pandemic has made a big difference in that as well. (Karla\_Interview3, pp. 2-3)

During Karla's practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic and her current stage in the teacher education program, various influences from the broader societal context entered her internal and external dimensions of self. The classroom management course, particularly her professor's insights, encouraged her to see the

importance of creating a flexible and supportive environment for her students. Witnessing her students' challenges with online learning during the pandemic also prompted Karla to reassess her teaching priorities.

Both Abby and Marisa found the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) particularly relevant. In Abby's case, because she felt ignored and labeled as an incapable ELL, the UDL approach became particularly relevant in shaping her TPIs, as it could help her students feel included and acknowledged. Abby saw UDL as a suitable "catch-all" approach (Abby\_Interview4, p. 7), reflecting her desire to be treated equally as any other student. Similarly, Marisa planned to use the UDL approach to support ELLs by providing first language (L1) assistance without creating isolated instruction solely for ELLs.

Maybe some individualized learning if they need it. Then, using a lot of UDLs. They get accommodated, but they don't even know that it's happening. They're learning English, and Spanish and English translations, and my other kids are learning Spanish at the same time. Nobody knows. It's only for one kid who's an ELL. No one knows what's happening. Just a part of the classroom community. (Marisa\_Interview3, p. 11)

Marisa expressed her intention to integrate collaborative learning into her future classroom, highlighting the value of UDL approaches in fostering a sense of community where every student contributes. Specifically, Marisa illustrated how she would incorporate ELLs' first language (L1) using UDL methods to ensure ELLs feel included in the classroom community.

All three ETCs integrated different concepts and teaching methods from their teacher education program that they found relevant to their TPIs. These external influences in the macrosociety engaged in dialogues with their internal dimension of self as learners, particularly influenced by their practicum experiences. These dialogues were pivotal in shaping their TPIs as future teachers of ELLs.

## Macrosociety and Language Experiences

Influenced by their educational histories and teaching values, the three ETCs developed their TPIs uniquely as future teachers of ELLs. Besides being informed by their experiences in the teacher education program, their TPIs were also shaped by various language experiences from the broader societal context that extended to diversity and inequality. Concepts like language ideologies, globalization, discrimination, socioeconomic disparities, racism, and xenophobia became part of their internal dialogues.

For Karla, ideologies regarding bilingualism were significant. Social phenomena such as discrimination, stereotypes against Hispanics, socioeconomic disparities, xenophobia, and the existence of bilingual communities were particularly relevant to Karla's minisociety. She recounted how classmates assumed she was Mexican simply because she spoke Spanish, highlighting how certain populations are perceived differently and the stereotypes that followed her as a Spanish speaker and a person of color.

All of my classmates thought I was Mexican. That was just one assumption that I always had. I speak Spanish, so I have to be Mexican. And I actually didn't know anything about Mexican culture. Because I mean, I wasn't Mexican. Or just assuming that because I speak Spanish, my family's a certain way or are a certain kind of people. (Karla\_Interview4, pp. 8-9)

Karla also detailed the microaggressions she faced when speaking Spanish with her family in public. She recalled how she would “get looks for speaking Spanish” in public places (Karla\_Interview4, p. 10). Despite these challenges, Karla expressed gratitude for being bilingual, valuing the ability to help others and participate in a rich cross-cultural community. She embraced her connection to the Hispanic community, recognizing the support and opportunities it provided, including helping those experiencing similar challenges, like acting as a child translator for her family.

Abby's experience as an ELL differed from Karla's. Globalization and the advantages of bilingualism were particularly significant. As a former ELL with connections to the U.S., Brazil, and Portugal, she viewed bilingualism as a pathway to diverse career opportunities. Abby mentioned in an interview that having Brazilian and Portuguese passports allowed her to seek job opportunities globally, a privilege stemming from her mother's Portuguese heritage (Abby\_Interview4, p.3). She also observed her father, who speaks three languages fluently, securing a prestigious job at an international firm. To Abby, multilingualism “opens doors to better jobs,” a belief reinforced by her parents' success and encouragement to develop bilingual skills early on (Abby\_Interview4, p. 4). This made the global phenomenon of bilingualism especially relevant to Abby and shaped her belief in its value.

Although self-identified as a monolingual speaker, Marisa demonstrated ideologies similar to Karla's being relevant to her minisociety. Ideologies such as xenophobia, racism, and monolingualism were particularly relevant. Though identified as a monolingual English speaker, Marisa's biracial appearance often led to her being mistaken for Hispanic. This internal position as a biracial person of color significantly

shaped her other identities and teaching perspectives. These experiences heightened her awareness of the labels attached to racially, linguistically, or culturally diverse individuals. Reflecting on bilingual speakers and ELLs, Marisa recognized the hate and pain they often endure.

It must be a big pain. Not because you don't speak English but just because of the hate that you must get from some people. It's a whole different ballpark of frustration that I just cannot even imagine...If you want to know what they're talking about, you learn their language. Otherwise, you leave them alone. I don't get the hate that some people get just because they are not speaking English. (Marisa\_Interview3, p. 15)

She also shared personal experiences of offensive comments and rude questions about her mother and her appearance, as well as witnessing disrespect towards an Arabic-speaking family in a store. These experiences made her more empathetic towards the challenges ELLs face daily. Consequently, Marisa saw herself as an advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse students in her practicum classroom. The Black Lives Matter movement at the time of her practicum and having a mentor teacher who was also a person of color influenced the relevance of these ideologies in her TPI construction.

As these language and diversity-related issues from the macrosociety engaged with the three ETCs' I-positions in their minisociety, their TPIs as teachers of ELLs were reshaped. Abby, viewing bilingualism as a valuable asset for better job opportunities, believed in the importance of incorporating both ELLs' first (L1) and second (L2) languages in her classroom. Her positive experience with a second-grade teacher who knew some Portuguese reinforced her belief in the benefits of bilingualism. Karla, having faced assumptions about her abilities and family due to her background, informed her to become a genuinely understanding and caring teacher, especially during students' times of hardship. Marisa's experiences as a struggling learner and a biracial woman shaped her desire to create an inclusive classroom where ELLs felt welcome, and their language diversity was normalized. The practicum setting, relationships with students and mentor teachers, and the social context at the time, along with their personal histories, influenced what concepts from the macrosociety were deemed relevant in their minisociety. These relevant ideas engaged in dialogues with the ETCs' internal dimension of self, contributing to the formation of their TPIs as future teachers of ELLs.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore how ETCs construct their TPIs as future teachers of ELLs. The findings highlight several key implications for both research and practice. First, aligned with previous research (Stenberg, 2010; Stenberg et al., 2014), ETCs' TPIs are shaped by their diverse identities and experiences, particularly their histories as struggling learners. Personal experiences and educational backgrounds significantly influenced their beliefs and values as teachers. For example, Abby's experience of being treated as a less competent ELL student and her parents' roles as educated and involved figures shaped her beliefs. Karla and Marisa, who faced discrimination and felt incapable in school, developed strong advocacy for ELLs. Subsequently, this study underscores the importance of providing opportunities for ETCs to reflect on their personal and educational experiences. Such reflection is crucial for developing robust TPIs, especially for prospective and beginning teachers. Prior research supports the significance of self-reflection in teacher preparation programs, suggesting it helps prospective teachers understand their identities and improve their teaching practices (Alsup, 2008; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Martin & Strom, 2016; Vandamme, 2018).

Furthermore, different teaching methods and concepts from the teacher education program impacted the ETCs differently, influencing their TPIs. Abby and Marisa found the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach relevant for its broad applications, while Karla valued classroom management strategies that emphasized care. Their minisocieties, shaped by their relationships and contexts, determined what they found relevant from the macrosociety. This also indicated how thoughtful practicum placements in diverse settings are crucial (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kolano & King, 2015; Lee et al., 2018; Markos, 2012). These experiences help ETCs confront diversity-related issues and adapt their perspectives. Practicum should foster dialogues between predominantly White, monolingual MTCs and diverse learners, as well as connect MTCs from diverse backgrounds with mentor teachers who share similar identities.

Lastly, ETCs' multiple positions engaged in dialogues with various external positions, particularly related to diverse languages and cultures. Abby valued the capital and benefits of bilingualism, while Karla and Marisa were more critically aware of discrimination, xenophobia, racism, and socioeconomic issues. Previous research indicated that individuals who identify as 'others' often empathize with the challenges faced by marginalized groups (Bower-Phipps et al., 2023; Kim, 2023; Rodriguez & Polat, 2012). Although Abby identified as a former ELL student and bilingual speaker, her educational and personal experiences differed from those of Karla and Marisa, who continued to encounter academic struggles and inequities,

significantly shaping their TPIs. Further research is needed to understand how MTCs' past experiences shape their commitment, investment, and motivation as prospective ELL teachers. Additionally, examining the identities of MTCs who feel "othered" and their racial or ethnic backgrounds can provide insights into their TPIs. Studies emphasize the importance of supportive classroom environments that appreciate the diverse experiences of MTCs, aiming to broaden the perspectives of the predominantly White, female, and middle-class MTC population (Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011; Miller, 2017; Téllez, 1999).

This study examined how three MTCs constructed their TPIs as future teachers of ELLs by considering their past experiences as learners and their current experiences in a teacher education program. The findings suggest several implications for teacher education practice and research. First, the initial teacher preparation curriculum should provide more opportunities for MTCs to critically reflect on and question their TPIs. Additionally, MTCs' diverse linguistic, racial, ethnic, and 'othered' identities are valuable resources that should be leveraged at the program level to enhance all MTCs' critical awareness. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, participants in this study could not fully engage in their final ELL-specific field experiences. This limited their reflections and exploration of ELL-specific pedagogy and teaching methods, as they primarily relied on their initial ELL-specific field experience and other informal teaching experiences. Therefore, in-depth and longitudinal research without training interruptions is necessary to deepen our understanding of MTCs' complex TPI construction, particularly concerning their linguistic identities and roles as language teachers of ELLs.

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