

THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES OF ESL  
TRAINED CLASSROOM TEACHERS

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## ABSTRACT

This research study emerged from a desire to understand how classroom teachers construct their professional identity after earning a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) graduate degree. There has been research about professional identity development among beginning TESOL teachers who only teach English Learners (ELs) and about classroom teachers' attitudes on teaching ELs. However, little research has been done on how classroom teachers who have extensive training on how to teach ELs after completing a graduate degree in TESOL construct their professional identities to incorporate teaching ELs. The purpose of the study was to understand how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees develop professional identities in practice and discourse. This qualitative study investigated the identity construction of five classroom teachers who have a TESOL graduate degree and teach ELs in their classes. The five participants were interviewed three times. The participants reflected on how their professional identities were influenced by developing new teaching methods. They constructed their identities in discourse and practice, and their identities often shifted within different contexts, such as the classroom, school, and community. The participants also positioned themselves in relation to ELs, other teachers, and their communities. The findings of this study indicate that teachers can construct their professional identities to include relationships with new groups of students and new methods of teaching. The participants' empathy and self-awareness were the foundation of their interactions with ELs. The participants developed caring relationships with ELs, which enabled the participants to become advocates for their ELs' academic, linguistic, and social needs in their schools and communities.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. It is first dedicated to my father who celebrated my educational accomplishments in every way possible. It is dedicated to my mother, who taught me that there was nothing I could not do. Finally, it is dedicated to my sister and nephews.

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CHAPTER I:  
INTRODUCTION

**Introduction to the Problem**

Graciela, a dark-haired, Spanish-speaking kindergartener, was the first English learner (EL) in a small rural county elementary school in northeast Alabama. No teachers at the school had received training to meet her educational or linguistic needs. Her teacher, now the school's principal, recalled that Graciela spoke very little English but was bright and eager to learn. The then-teacher desperately wanted to communicate with Graciela's mother, but no one would help her. At the time, Muscogee County Schools<sup>1</sup> (a pseudonym) had no personnel for ELs and few Spanish-speaking employees. Teachers with ELs in their classes did not know how to meet these students' academic needs.

How to best educate ELs in the United States has been a topic of concern for educational researchers and policymakers for decades (Cummins, 2000; Fenner, 2014). An EL is a student who speaks a language other than English and who needs additional language support to have academic success (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Wright, 2010). A student qualifies for language services based on a qualifying screener test, and an English assessment is given every year to measure English proficiency (Menken, 2006). When an EL reaches proficiency as determined by each state, the student no longer receives language services (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Debates about the best programs and instructional placement for ELs originated in the 1970s and remain today (Crawford, 2008). Federal government officials supported both bilingual

and English as a second language (ESL) programs during the 1980s and 1990s (Cummins, 1998; Ovando, 2003). However, a lack of trained bilingual teachers, growing EL populations, and shifts in political opinions about bilingual education have resulted in ELs' placement in mainstream classrooms (Gibbons, 2002; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Skilton-Sylvester, 2003; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005).

Historically, urban areas have had concentrations of ELs, but there is now a growing EL population in rural and smaller cities (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2019). Almost 75% of U.S. public schools have ELs in their student populations, and ELs comprise over 9% of the entire population of U.S. students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to *Lau v. Nichols*, educators cannot discriminate against students based on language or national origin (Wright, 2010). The ruling also indicates ELs' rights to receive special instruction for their English needs from qualified teachers. Furthermore, according to *Castañeda v. Pickard*, ELs have the right to sound educational programs backed by research. Mainstream classroom teachers have linguistically diverse student populations and must meet these students' academic needs.

Teaching culturally and linguistically diverse student populations requires a shift in the way teachers construct their identities; teachers must perceive themselves as teachers of ELs, not just teachers of monolingual English speakers. Teachers might struggle to develop professional identities that include being teachers of ELs. Preservice or in-service teachers do not often receive extensive professional development to support the academic and language development of ELs (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Bunch, 2013; de Jong & Harper, 2005). Many teachers with limited experience with ELs or linguistically diverse students may view them as “linguistically

deficient” (Lucas & Villegas, 2010, p. 303). Teachers with deficit views of ELs often ignore these students and do not express interest in learning how to meet their linguistic needs (Lucas et al., 2015; Lucas & Villegas, 2010; Walker et al., 2004). Fully meeting ELs’ needs requires teachers to have expertise beyond “general good teaching practices” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 137). Teachers must attend to ELs’ academic and linguistic needs; however, they lack professional teaching identities reflective of this instructional component.

As in many U.S. schools, a negativity about ELs permeates many Muscogee County Schools, suggesting that ELs are problems or burdens (Lucas & Villegas, 2010). Many teachers do not want ELs placed in their classes and resist making the accommodations needed to support ELs’ academic success. The Muscogee County school system’s leaders decided to meet ELs’ needs by partnering with a local university in a federally-funded grant program. The grant program provides tuition support for classroom teachers to obtain graduate degrees in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), producing teachers certified in English as a Second Language (ESL) among those already employed in the system. The new training resulted in new groups of EL students placed in the participating teachers’ classes. The participating teachers also have additional responsibilities, such as training other teachers in their schools. These classroom teachers added to their professional identities as ESL experts at the school or grade level.

There have been many benefits of the grant in Muscogee County Schools, including classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees at every school. These teachers have training in TESOL methods and teaching techniques that help ELs. However, despite these benefits, the teachers with TESOL degrees appear to have varied commitment levels to ELs. Some of the teachers with TESOL degrees have become the advocates for ELs that the full-time ESL teachers

hoped that they would become. However, although they appear to have embraced ESL methods and strategies, some do not actively challenge the negative discourse about ELs in their schools. The purpose of this study was to explore how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees develop professional identities in practice and discourse.

### **Background**

Mirroring the growing EL population in the U.S. South (Horsford & Sampson, 2013), the number of ELs in Muscogee County Schools in Alabama has been increasing since the late 1990s. Alabama was among the top ten states with the fastest-growing EL enrollment for the 1997–1998 to the 2007–2008 school years, resulting in a 239.2% increase in EL enrollment (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). From 2000–2001 to 2011–2012, there was an 18% increase in the U.S. K-12 EL population (Horsford & Sampson, 2013). Furthermore, Muscogee County, the site of this study, is in the labor market commuting zone of Coste, Alabama<sup>1</sup>, which, according to the 1990 census, was 98% White. According to the 2010 census, more than 27% of the city’s residents were Hispanic or Latino (Peri & Wiltshire, 2017). The schools in Muscogee County with the highest EL growth is close to Melton County<sup>1</sup>, which contains Coste. Many ELs’ parents work at the poultry farms and processing plants that attract immigrant laborers. All community, county, and school names in this study use pseudonyms.

High EL growth provides opportunities for multilingual schools and access to other cultures; however, it also coincides with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which focused on standardized testing and school accountability (Menken, 2006). Many of these accountability standards and testing policies resulted in ELs’ marginalization (Menken, 2006), as did a lack of resources and community values about multilingualism (Fogle & Moser, 2017).

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) has struggled to provide support for teaching ELs in school systems. Before 2010, Muscogee County Schools did not require ESL certification because it was not an ALSDE requirement. The ALSDE provides ESL certification. However, a teacher with certification in elementary education, foreign languages, or secondary English language arts can teach ESL because NCLB does not dictate that ESLs need highly qualified teachers (Harper & de Jong, 2009). According to the court ruling of *Castañeda v. Pickard*, ELs must have qualified teachers to teach English as a second language (ESL); however, the NCLB has not indicated ESL as a subject that requires “highly qualified teachers” (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Wright, 2010). Additionally, the ALSDE has never addressed the number of ESL teachers needed in a school system based on its population (ALSDE English Learner Guidebook, 2018).

The Muscogee County school system did not have teachers with ESL certification or TESOL degrees before 2008, and they did not make accountability goals for ELs as set forth by NCLB in 2001. The failure to accomplish these goals caused the county to undergo state monitoring that included additional training and documentation. After Muscogee County Schools hired three ESL-trained and certified full-time teachers from 2008 and 2010, EL scores on the annual English proficiency standardized assessment improved. Many students exited the ESL program or improved their proficiency scores. Thus, the school system no longer required monitoring because the students and educators met the ALSDE’s accountability goals. There appeared to be an improved situation for ELs in the school system. Within 3 years, one ESL teacher for 150 EL students in 20 schools increased to three ESL teachers for 120 EL students in 20 schools. ELs had increased access to teachers; however, ESL teachers felt that they had too many students and schools to ensure ELs’ academic success.

Two ESL teachers had received their TESOL degrees from a large urban university with a TESOL program. The university had a long history of teaching ESL teachers through regular school system partnerships, providing tuition support for classroom teachers to pursue TESOL graduate degrees. The system's leaders contacted the urban university, which had a grant for a school system in its urban area and available spots for teachers from the system. Eleven classroom teachers started the graduate program in 2010 and earned TESOL graduate degrees. Due to the first 11 teachers' success, the school system officially partnered with the university through a National Professional Development grant project awarded by the Office of English Language Acquisition.

The grant program provided tuition support for most of the classes required for a TESOL graduate degree. Almost 60 teachers have received TESOL graduate degrees. Of the grant graduates, fewer than ten teachers have left the system. Therefore, by the end of the grant program this year, over 50 teachers will have received intensive TESOL training to meet ELs' needs.

Teachers in the TESOL graduate degree program take courses in second language acquisition, ESL methods and materials, and linguistics, such as pedagogical grammar and phonology. The program occurs over at least seven semesters over three academic years and two summer sessions. The teachers start the program by learning the major theories of language acquisition, including the influential factors in second language learning, such as home language, home culture, and learning environment. The teachers also learn about multicultural education and ESL special topics, which include culturally responsive teaching and relevant laws and civil rights issues pertaining to bilingual students.

In the final summer, teachers work in the ESL summer camp. Muscogee County Schools has had an ESL summer camp since 2010, providing ELs with a fun, engaging 2-week learning experience. EL students in kindergarten through high school can attend the camp. Teachers doing their internships usually teach different grade levels in the summer camp. For example, a middle school science teacher might teach a first-grade class, or a second-grade teacher might lead a high school class. The teachers also provide fun, elective classes, such as soccer, cake decorating, gymnastics, coding, and trebuchet building. Throughout the program, classroom teachers can develop a professional identity as educators who meet the needs of ELs; however, it remains unknown how teachers develop and maintain that identity after they graduate.

### **Significance of the Problem**

ELs are one of the fastest-growing student populations in the United States, with a 60% growth between 2003 and 2013 (Breiseth, 2015). ELs under the age of 8 years comprise almost one third of the total school population (Park et al., 2017). ELs attend schools in all 50 states and rural and urban school systems (Breiseth, 2015). Alabama is one of the 10 states with the highest increases in ELs; thus, the state's teachers must be able to meet the educational needs of their bilingual and dual-language students. Teachers must see themselves as responsible for ELs' education and incorporate second language and culturally responsive teaching into their teaching repertoires. Educators can provide for ELs' educational needs by developing professional identities that include ESL teaching methods.

ELs are among the fastest-growing student populations in the country and Alabama; thus, classroom teachers must receive training to meet ELs' needs. When ELs began attending Muscogee County Schools, the teachers and administrators felt unprepared to meet their demands and the ALSDE goals. Despite hiring ESL teachers with ESL certification in the

county, administrators wanted the classroom teachers to receive extensive training to meet students' language needs. The partnership between the university and Muscogee County Schools resulted in dozens of classroom teachers earning TESOL graduate degrees and adding ESL credentials to their professional certifications. The TESOL graduate degree program provided new discourses of education and teacher identity and new teaching practices. Studying how classroom teachers construct their identities in discourse and practice after finishing a TESOL graduate degree resulted in a deeper understanding of how teachers incorporate ESL concepts into their professional identities.

Research is available on teachers' knowledge base for teaching ELs, beliefs about teaching ELs, and pedagogical and instructional practices (Echevarría et al., 2012; Fenner, 2014; Lucas et al., 2015; Pettit, 2011; Solomon, 2008; Turkan et al., 2014). The extant research shows what teachers know, believe, and do in their classrooms, but it does not indicate how teachers construct their professional identities regarding teaching ELs. Teaching ELs requires specialized instructional practices to develop students' academic and language proficiency (Graves et al., 2004; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Short & Echevarría, 1999). Therefore, there is a need for research on how classroom teachers, especially those with TESOL graduate degrees, construct their identities with specialized instructional practices to understand how constructing these identities relates to ELs' education.

In-service teachers have time to construct their professional identities. However, identities are shifting, constructed in context, and negotiated through discourse (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Teachers in graduate TESOL programs learn about new teaching practices, new theories, and new students. Such teachers face new expectations, as they must be the ESL experts at their schools or grade levels. Additionally, they may experience tension between their

previous expectations as classroom teachers and the new expectations of classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees. They could have contact with new students in their classes because all teachers in the grant program must work with ELs to fulfill their course requirements. They also learn new ways of speaking about students, teacher expectations, and teaching roles and identities. These changes in students, expectations, practices, and discourses can also cause teachers to alter how they construct and negotiate through discourse their professional identities in the school context. Understanding how teachers incorporate the discursive resources of being classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees will contribute to the professional development and training of classroom teachers who meet ELs' language needs.

There is much research on the teacher identity of language and ESL teachers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Varghese et al., 2005; Vasquez, 2011). Many studies address how teachers construct their identities and how professional identities emerge in new teachers (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001; Olsen, 2011). Scholars published in recent issues of *The Modern Language Journal* and *TESOL Quarterly* have addressed the teacher identity of language and second language teachers. Much research focuses on preservice teachers in English-speaking countries (Franzak, 2002; Hallman, 2015; Ilieva, 2010; Jackson, 2015; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Luebbers, 2010; Park, 2012; Yazan, 2017). There is also scholarship on nonnative English teachers who teach ESL (Aneja, 2016; Motha, 2006; Motha & Lin, 2014; Park, 2012, 2015). However, there is a dearth of research on the identity construction of in-service classroom teachers who complete TESOL graduate degree programs. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap in the research on language teaching and gain a better understanding of how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees develop professional identities in practice and discourse.

Teachers in the United States are predominantly White, monolingual, middle-class individuals who lack extensive experiences with linguistically diverse students (Geiger, 2018; Lim et al., 2009; Loewus, 2017; Worthington et al., 2011). Classroom teachers often have deficit views of ELs and feel unprepared to teach them (Lucas et al., 2015; Pettit, 2011). There is also an academic achievement gap between ELs and other students (Fry, 2008; Reardon & Galindo, 2009).

Data of ELs in Alabama contributed to this research. In the first decade of the 21st century, Alabama was one of the top 10 states with the fastest growth of ELs; however, it consistently has the lowest ranking among those states for overall student achievement (Johnson, 2019). The state's report card shows troubling disparities for ELs. Less than 40% of ELs are proficient in reading and math. Only 76.37% of ELs show year-to-year academic growth, which is the lowest percentage of any subpopulation other than students with disabilities (Alabama Education Report Card, 2019). There is a 64% graduation rate for ELs, which is 26 percentage points less than the overall student population average; additionally, only 26% of graduating ELs are "college and career ready" (Alabama Education Report Card, 2019, Accountability Indicators).

Muscogee County Schools' ELs have had better educational outcomes. The county has a lower academic proficiency for the EL subpopulation than for all students. Still, a higher percentage of ELs demonstrates academic growth than all students, including the subpopulation of White students demonstrating academic growth (Alabama Education Report Card, 2019). Muscogee County Schools have shown some success with ELs, especially for academic growth, suggesting that the district's classroom teachers view themselves as responsible for teaching ELs (Yoon, 2008). Teaching ELs and being classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees might

even be parts of how the teachers construct their identities. Thus, there was a need to explore how teachers who have finished a TESOL graduate degree construct their teaching identities to gain insight into the effects of enacting their professional identities on ELs' academic achievement and language development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers often struggle to construct their identities, especially amid tension between their personal values and the school and community values. New teachers often go through the process of understanding who they are as teachers, achieving their teaching identities and negotiating the tension of differences between their values and expectations for their professional identities and the expectations of their schools and communities (Alsup, 2006). Experienced teachers have established professional identities. Completing a graduate TESOL degree provides the opportunity for new responsibilities, new students, and new expectations of professional identity. This study focused on how teachers construct their identities when they complete a graduate degree program and gain a TESOL credential different from their original teaching credentials. This study sought to understand how teachers construct their identities when they add a credential in TESOL through completing a graduate degree program that is different from their original teaching credentials. It examined how teachers use discursive resources to construct their identities, how they negotiate their expanded role from being classroom teachers to teachers of ELs, how they position themselves as classroom teachers with ESL expertise, and how social context influences this discursive construction of their teaching identity.

In addition to negotiating identity construction, classroom teachers often struggle to meet ELs' needs. Many classroom teachers may not see themselves as responsible for ELs' education, which can result in the marginalization of ELs in their classrooms (Yoon, 2008). Yoon found

that some classroom teachers believed that ESL teachers were the sole instructors responsible for ELs' education. Classroom teachers may also see ELs as uninvited guests on their schools' peripheries. Teachers might not incorporate ELs' social or cultural background into class routines or account for their needs, asserting that they have had no training for teaching ELs. Therefore, classroom teachers who complete training in ESL methodology and earn graduate TESOL degrees often have conflicting discursive resources at their disposal when constructing and reconstructing their professional identities, moving from classroom teachers to teachers with TESOL graduate degrees.

Teachers in the graduate TESOL degree program complete a course of study with the same coursework and field experiences; however, they express their professional identities as classroom teachers and trained ESL teachers in various ways. Teachers in this program participate in the grant program and receive tuition support while pursuing their degrees. These teachers use a variety of discursive resources to describe their professional identities. This study's research problem was based on the lack of understanding of how teachers' identities are discursively created and affected after obtaining a graduate degree in TESOL. Understanding the effects of this degree program on their teaching identities and interactions with ELs and other educators provided recommendations for future research, professional development, and training for general education teachers who teach ELs.

### **Research Questions**

The first research question was the study's guiding, overarching theme: How do K-12 classroom teachers who have obtained graduate TESOL degrees construct their professional teaching identities? The subsequent questions provided additional information for further evidence for answering the overarching question. The purpose of the study was to understand

how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees develop professional identities in practice and discourse. Addressing the primary research question required understanding the following:

1. What are the professional identities of mainstream teachers in Muscogee County Schools who have a graduate degree in TESOL;
2. What are the resources teachers use to construct their identities as classroom teachers who have a graduate degree in TESOL;
3. How do teachers negotiate their teaching identities as they expand their teaching roles from classroom teacher to classroom teacher of ELs; and
4. How do teachers position themselves and their students in ways that reflect their identity formations?

Investigating these questions during the study consisted of conducting interviews to identify the resources that the classroom teachers used to form their professional identities after earning TESOL graduate degrees.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Identity construction is a dynamic process with many external and internal factors that affect professional identity. Teachers shape their identities by what they do, their agency, and their work. Educators' professional identities correlate with their learning and development as teachers (Danielewicz, 2001). Identities often include tensions or contradictions, as teachers must strive to make sense of themselves, their work, and the relationship between the two. Strain can occur when teachers are at odds with their expectations for themselves in their identity constructions or teaching practices (Beijaard et al., 2004). Teachers can also be at odds with their institutions' expectations.

Although the literature on identity construction contains a wealth of themes and frameworks, many researchers agree that identity is a shifting and not fixed concept. Individuals construct their identities in contexts and negotiate their identities through discourse (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Theories of identity construction are components of poststructural and sociocultural frameworks. Many researchers, such as Varghese et al. (2005), use both poststructural and sociocultural frameworks to investigate how individuals construct their identities in discourse and in practice.

The idea that identity is not fixed contributes to a teacher's sense of agency because a teacher constructs identity within a discursive framework. The discourse of identity focuses on how individuals shape their identities collectively and individually in a community. Many researchers find identity formation discursive (Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Søreide, 2006; Varghese et al., 2005). Shifts or changes in identity can occur due to changing contexts or relationships, along with the resulting emotions. Teachers make sense of shifting, unstable, and multiple identities and construct their identities in social contexts through language and discourse (Olsen, 2011; Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

Both identity-in-practice and identity-in-discourse comprised the framework used in this study to address how the participating teachers developed their identities after they shifted from being classroom teachers to classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees teaching ELs. Individuals may have shifting and multiple identities that they create in context through relationships (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Olsen, 2008; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). In addition, identity formation is an ongoing process negotiated through positioning and discourse with narrative resources (Clarke, 2009; Davies & Harré, 1999; Kayi-Aydar, 2015).

## **Researcher's Positionality**

I am an ESL teacher for Muscogee County Schools. I have an insider position because I grew up in the area and currently teach in the school system. I have taught for Muscogee County Schools for more than ten years and have been an ESL teacher the entire time. I conducted this study because I wanted to understand how classroom teachers become invested in teaching ELs in their classes.

Like the teachers in this study, I did not begin my teaching career as an ESL teacher; rather, I first worked as a middle school Spanish teacher in one of the largest county school systems in the state. The system also had one of the largest EL populations in the state, and its leaders partnered with a large urban university through a grant to enable teachers to earn ESL certification or TESOL graduate degree. I had already earned a master's degree, but I entered the grant program to earn ESL certification, having taught community ESL classes when I lived in Argentina and being interested in teaching abroad again. I taught Spanish and two social studies classes for ELs during the 4 years in that system. I found that being an ESL teacher was an integral part of my teaching identity, especially as an ESL teacher who initially taught at an international school and now teaches in Muscogee County.

Because I work for Muscogee County Schools, I interviewed teachers who also work for the school system. I took care to treat my participants and their data with respect. My research connected with my work as an ESL teacher. I encountered the same dilemmas faced by St. Pierre (1997) and recognized that my work was not innocent or free. I held myself accountable to my participants' standards of knowing and constructing knowledge (Richardson, 1994).

## **Assumptions**

There were several assumptions made in this research. First, there was the assumption that completing a graduate TESOL degree would influence classroom teachers' construction of their professional identities. Another assumption was that engaging with new teaching methods, new EL students, and new teaching expectations would affect the narratives that classroom teachers use to talk about their identities. An additional assumption was that the participants would incorporate being classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees into their narratives of their professional identities. The last assumption was that the participants would answer the interview questions candidly.

## **Organization of the Study**

This study consists of five chapters, works cited, and appendices. Chapter I included the study's issues and research questions. Chapter II presents the study's theoretical framework and a review of the literature on evolving trends in teacher identity and ESL teacher identity. In Chapter III, I will address the methodology, research setting, participants, data collection, and interview protocol. Chapter IV comprises the study's findings, analysis, and interpretation. The last chapter includes conclusions and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II:  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

**Perspectives on Identity**

Identity construction is a dynamic field for researchers with roots in diverse fields of study, such as psychology, sociology, and education. Scholars in these fields define identity differently, having varying assumptions on how individuals shape identity and the active resources and contexts in identity development. They also hold differing perspectives on the individual's role in identity construction. The oldest theoretical perspective on identity originated from psychology and presented identity as the work of individuals as they attempt to make sense of themselves (Waterman, 2011). The sociocultural perspective of identity consists of the construction of identity shaped by human actions, social norms, and mental processes. The postmodern perspective presents identity as a construction from the social and cultural discourses in which individuals engage based on gender, ethnic, class, social, cultural, political, and historical context (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1987). Varghese et al. (2005) researched language teacher identities and combined sociocultural and poststructural identity theories to create dialogue between the frameworks and richness. This study included the use of both perspectives. This section presents an overview of the three perspectives and addresses the reason for following Varghese et al. (2005) and combining the two frameworks.

The psychological perspective of identity suggests that a person has a core identity and engages in an autonomous process to develop the essential self (Erikson, 1968). Individuals do mental work to make sense of themselves and enact their roles (Burke & Tully, 1977; Waterman,

2011). An individual has agency in developing identity (Erikson, 1968). Identity theory is based in the field of psychology and focuses on how individuals relate to certain roles and how they develop and act out those roles (Stets & Burke, 2000). The individual as a unit of study is foregrounded in this area of identity study (Turner, 1987). Social identity theory has a different focus on how individuals develop in relation to a group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). The psychological perspective of identity formation focuses on how an individual is autonomous and has agency in developing identity.

The second perspective on identity is the sociocultural perspective, which originated in the field of psychology. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that individuals develop consciousness from interactions with others. In this perspective, individuals construct identities through human actions, mental processes, and social influences. Many theories are compatible with sociocultural theory, such as activity theory and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1985). Activity theory focuses on how social tools and organizations mediate individual social action, addressing the object or goal of the activity, the context of the activity, and the subject involved in the activity (Engeström, 1987). Activity theory focuses on social practices and dominant value systems and how individuals use them to position themselves and exercise agency when interacting with the different components of the activity system (Grossman et al., 1999; Riyanti, 2017).

Another aspect of sociocultural theory is the effect of context on identity development. Gee (2011) asserted that identity consists of the recognition of a certain identity to both oneself and others. Individuals partially construct identity through contexts. In the sociocultural perspective, individuals develop identity through interactions with others in specific contexts. An individual can have many different contexts; thus, they can have many different identities and

exercise agency in constructing those identities. Gee (2011) suggested that a person can have a core identity but enact different identities depending on the context and the situation. This perspective focuses on the context in which individuals situate their identities.

Interactions with others and their perceptions influence identity formation, which causes shifts in identities based on the “outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 606). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) described constructing identity as “less than fully conscious” (p. 606), as identity construction can be an intentional process also formed through habits not completely intentional. Identity is a dynamic and continuously changing concept based on context and across time (Clarke, 2008; Norton, 2006). The context in which a person constructs identity consists of the immediate setting and social, cultural, and institutional settings, such as laws, language, policies, and historical events (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). According to the sociocultural perspective, individuals engage in multiple contexts and have multiple identity constructions.

Identity construction is a complex interaction of the individuals’ context and the cultural tools they use (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). The individual has a degree of agency in the interaction of context and cultural tools. Gee (2011) maintained that language is a way to examine how individuals use agency to construct identity because they employ language to interact with the world. Analyzing language enables researchers to explore how individuals construct their identities in their given contexts. Gee (2000) identified four categories of defining identities for an individual: the nature identity a person has at birth, the institutional identity provided by institutional contexts, the discourse identity that results from speaking and interacting with other people, and the affinity identity that results from shared experiences within groups.

Scholars have defined discourse in many ways across various disciplines (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). In general terms, discourse indicates the language used (Gee, 2012, 2014a, 2014b). Gee (2000) defined the different uses of the word and used “discourse” without capitalization to refer to “stretches of talk or writing” (p. 120). “Discourse” with capitalization indicates “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities” (Gee, 2012, p. 3). Discourse includes more than just language use.

Discourse and language use are essential components in the poststructural viewpoint, as well. Poststructural perspectives of identity focus on social and cultural discourses as main shaping forces of identity. Discourses are the norms socially enacted by members of particular social categories like race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Cherryholmes, 1988; Weedon, 1987). Produced socially, discourses are examples of identities and practices reflective of certain institutions and groups (Foucault, 1965, 1978). Discourse produces the subjectivities and power relations that constitute the formation of identity.

Positioning theory, with its focus on language as social discourse, suggests a link between sociocultural and social constructionism to poststructural theory. Kayi-Aydar (2015) argued that positioning theory is a useful means of understanding the effect of different discourses on how a person shapes various identities because it focuses on “social construction of identities and the world through discourse” (p. 95). Positioning theory addresses “how individuals construct and enact identities during moment-to-moment interactions” (Vetter et al., 2013, p. 233).

Positioning can be used in dynamic ways to understand relationships (Davies & Harré, 1990). The normative structures that shape the social meanings are demonstrated through

positioning in conversation (Davies & Harré, 1990). Davies and Harré (1990) described discourse as “institutionalized use of language” (p. 45). Competing discourses can occur as individuals work out and negotiate meanings. Discourse has power, but people have agency in the discourse as they participate in various discursive practices and construct and reconstruct their identities.

Feminist poststructuralism focuses on using social power in social relationships and how discursive practices contribute to positioning in those practices (Weedon, 1987). According to feminist poststructuralism, the contexts of society, community, and institutions and their discursive practices are essential components in addressing everyday social meanings and constructs of power. Feminist poststructuralism includes the use of theories of language, subjectivity, positioning, and social interactions to understand power relations and ways of producing knowledge. Discourse is key to a feminist poststructural understanding of knowledge and identity. Language is not transparent because individuals base meanings on socially and historically situated language. Therefore, due to changes in language, meanings are not fixed and could be contested. Individuals can reinterpret and contest experiences and interpretations through different understandings. Various subjectivities can occur due to a range of discourses that produce power relations differently. Subjectivities are unstable because they are concepts formed in language and continuously in process (Kristeva, 1981). Individuals might have limited access to certain subjectivities due to social factors and must struggle to access those subjectivities.

Discourse is a way to know and constitute knowledge (Foucault, 1978). Discourses enable individuals to structure meaning variously, such as the different discourses of what it means to be a trained ESL teacher. Discourses are also a means of structuring the construction of

individual subjectivities. Weedon (1987) contended that individuals are always subjected to discourse. Effective and powerful discourse occurs when based in social institutions. Other discourses without a strong base of social authority can provide spaces of resistance to dominant discourses. The activation of these discourses occurs through individual agency when people are embodied subjects. Discursive practices are where the subject is socially constructed.

Language is central to the social relationships of knowledge production because language is the location of existing social relationships and possible social ties (Weedon, 1987). Language is the place where individuals construct and contest definitions. Teachers create their identities and subjectivity in language through discursive practices in contexts. Weedon (1987) described subjectivity constructed in language as “a site of disunity and conflict” (p. 21). According to Weedon, individuals can be agents of change because “social meanings are produced within social institutions” (p. 25). Individuals influenced by these institutions can change the institutions in ways that “serve hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations” (Weedon, 1987, p. 25). Language also presents diverse discursive positions through historical and social contexts because individuals interact with material surroundings through discourse (Althusser, 1971). Individuals give meaning to their environments through language.

According to the poststructural perspective, identity is performative and follows social roles (Butler, 1990). Individuals create identities through a process of production and reproduction, as influenced by social discourses. Weedon (1987) used the idea of subjectivity and the recognition of producing one’s sense of self through production and reproduction to explain how to reinterpret the self-based on the social role.

Sociocultural and poststructural theories on identities were appropriate for this study due to Varghese et al. (2005). Varghese et al. researched language teacher identity and combined

sociocultural and poststructural language identity theories to create dialogue between the frameworks and richness. These approaches are “identity-in-discourse” and “identity-in-practice” (p. 39). An identity-in-discourse approach indicates that teachers negotiate, construct, and maintain their identities through discourse. The identity-in-practice approach focuses on the link of identity and institutional practices with involvement in professional communities. Identity-in-practice is a component of the sociocultural framework that indicates identity’s relation to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability.

Because identity is not fixed, Varghese et al. (2005) connected identity construction to teacher agency and teachers acting intentionally. Varghese et al. outlined the difference between the assigned identities given by others and the identities teachers claim and acknowledge for themselves. Teachers have social identities based on social categories and often struggle with conflicting, multiple personas. Varghese et al. noted that social identity provides insights into the interconnection of personal and professional selves; how individuals identify socially and categorize themselves influences how they understand themselves. Social groupings are also a way to understand how hegemony presents in the power and status inequalities of teachers’ various conflicting identities. Teachers’ identities in relation to students, their negotiated identities, and the construction, negotiation, and maintenance of their identities through discourse are critical components to understanding the complexity of their identity development. Using both sociocultural and poststructural understandings of teacher identity is a “complex theoretical response” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 40) to the complex phenomenon that occurs as teachers construct, negotiate, and maintain their identities through social processes and discourse. The identity-in-practice part of the framework enabled consideration of contexts and activities,

including the contexts and goals of identity formation activities; identity-in-discourse facilitated positioning in discourse and examination of the use of language in identity development.

### **Teacher Knowledge, Learning, and Cognition**

Teacher identity connects to knowledge, learning, and cognition. Teacher knowledge is a field focused on what teachers know, how they know, and what they should know.

Fenstermacher (1994) asked four questions about teacher knowledge: What is known about effective teaching? What do teachers know? What is the essential knowledge of teaching? and Who produces teacher knowledge research? Teacher knowledge correlates with teacher identity because they influence each other. A teacher's identity affects how the teacher learns, understands, and practices theory and interacts with students and colleagues (Miller, 2009).

Teacher knowledge is not an "isolated set of cognitive abilities" (Johnston et al., 2005, p. 54); instead, it is a component deeply connected to teacher identity. Ben-Peretz (2010) argued that ideas about teacher knowledge have shifted over time to include not only content, curriculum, and pedagogical knowledge but also knowledge of societal and global issues.

The first conceptualization of teacher knowledge is teacher knowledge as pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman (1987) developed the concept of pedagogical content knowledge to distinguish between the types of teacher knowledge. Shulman described seven categories of teachers' knowledge: pedagogical content, content, general pedagogical, curriculum, learner, educational contexts, and educational ends. Classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees understand English linguistic characteristics, second language acquisition, pedagogy, and students' cultural backgrounds.

## **Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

According to Shulman (1987), pedagogical content knowledge is a “special amalgam of content and pedagogy” (p. 8). Educators often think of ESL content pedagogy as solely related to language instruction and the strategies and methods of learning a language or academic vocabulary and discourse in English (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Teachers do not push themselves to get beyond what Keith (2010) calls the “anemic love” of celebrating differences in a way that does not challenge the structures that marginalize culturally diverse students. ESL teachers and teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners should remain aware of anemic love and seek to create pedagogies of difference such that students become aware of and challenge oppressive educational structures.

According to Bartolome (1994), teachers who do not critically reflect on their schools’ policies and practices maintain the status quo at the expense of their culturally and linguistically diverse students. Many educators think that getting students to achieve academically and gain English proficiency involves finding the right methods to teach these students, a concept called “methods fetish” (Bartolome, 1994, p. 174). Educators who engage in methods fetish see underachievement as a technical and not a structural problem with the school or the society. A generic, one-size-fits-all approach to seeking the perfect methods or strategies to teach English presents the danger of separating ELs from their cultures, languages, and histories in dehumanizing ways, as the deficit ways that educators and society members view their English needs remain ingrained in school structures. According to Bartolome, teachers should reflectively critique the pedagogical systems that create student agency and “produce more far-reaching, positive effects than the implementation of a particular teaching methodology, regardless of how technically advanced and promising it may be” (p. 177). Students benefit when

teachers go beyond methods and strategies and critically reflect on their practices and school structures; this is ESL pedagogical content knowledge.

Classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees have a broad knowledge base of general pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Such teachers should know how students learn and how to build relationships with them. They must choose appropriate, accessible resources according to students' proficiency levels, authentic for the task, and appropriate for the content (Tsui & Nicholson, 1999). These teachers must also know the best assessments for their students. Classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees must also empower and motivate students and provide learning environments not overly stressful (Tsui & Nicholson, 1999).

ESL teachers must know their students well to understand the learners' knowledge and background, recognizing that home language, culture, and educational background are fundamental aspects of their students' identities (Farrell, 2013). Additionally, EL content and classroom teachers should become actively involved in their students' lives outside school because "helping the students outside of class is not in the job description. It's not part of the job really. Nobody asks us to do it. It's something you do because you like your students" (Farrell, 2013, p. 1078). In knowing their students, ESL teachers can meet their students' needs in the classroom in in-depth ways. According to Shulman (1987), the last two areas of teacher knowledge are educational contexts and educational ends. In addition to knowing students well, teachers must know the educational context and the school environment intimately.

Placing teacher knowledge within a social context of teachers' roles, Elbaz (1983) proposed a model of teacher knowledge that includes self, context, subject matter, curriculum, and instruction. Elbaz viewed teacher knowledge as informed by theoretical knowledge and through implicit knowledge that affects their practice. The relationship of knowledge and theory

presents complications to the concept of identity. Beijaard et al. (2000) noted that teachers form their identities by viewing themselves as “subject matter experts, pedagogical experts, and didactical experts” (p. 751) and connecting with teacher pedagogical content knowledge.

Pedagogical content knowledge may have contributed to the TESOL teacher education programs adopted by members of the TESOL international organization for teachers and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (TESOL International Association, 2019). The TESOL professional teaching standards include the linguistic content, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching strategies that preparation program curriculum should include to show teachers how to teach ELs effectively (TESOL, 2019). The five standards range from linguistics to advocacy. The first standard consists of teachers’ knowledge of the English language, including structure in contexts across the four domains of language: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This standard also includes knowledge of second language acquisition, language processing, and academic language use and development. The second standard addresses sociocultural aspects of EL teaching, such as school and community contexts, home cultures, personalities, backgrounds, and educational histories. The third standard focuses on instruction and teaching strategies, such as scaffolding, interactive teaching techniques, collaboration with colleagues and community, and appropriate resources. The fourth standard addresses assessments and the appropriateness of assessments with suitable accommodations to provide valid, reliable information of students’ knowledge and language acquisition. Finally, the fifth standard focuses on professionalism and leadership, especially in advocacy for ELs and their families. The measure includes collaborating with school staff to meet ELs’ needs, knowing policies and legislation to advocate for ELs, and reflecting on teaching practices.

## *Advocacy*

Pedagogical content knowledge often results in advocacy on the part of the teacher. In the TESOL and education fields, the definition of advocacy varies but includes acting on behalf of students who cannot or do not have the resources or access to represent themselves, such as ELs (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007). Teachers advocate out of a sense of fairness and equity.

Athanases and de Oliveira (2007) identified two types of advocacy: nontransformative and transformative. In nontransformative advocacy, a teacher sees inequity and promotes change but does not challenge inequitable practices. Conversely, in transformative advocacy, a teacher challenges “institutional practices that enable the inequity to occur” and works “to propose and build an alternative to the problematic practice” (p. 210). Teachers often see problems in differentiating instruction and have to stand up against bad policies or problematic administrators.

Athanases and Martin (2006) emphasized that the first step toward educational equity entails centering on individual student needs by focusing on student learning. Educational equity requires combating inequities in education instead of merely celebrating student diversity and difference. Advocating for educational equity also includes giving time and attention to students with more significant needs to achieve equitable learning outcomes. Athanases and Martin identified cultural competence as one of the characteristics of educational equity. Teachers who engage in cultural competence use students’ cultures as a base for learning. Fairness and sensitivity in working with students further contribute to educational equity. Teachers often have a deficit of experiences with people of other cultures and backgrounds, creating cultural deficit perspectives of their students. Some teacher participants reported tutoring students, meeting learning needs, encouraging and purchasing better resources, taking field trips, sponsoring

extracurricular activities, and fostering parental involvement. The participants felt strongly prepared to meet ELs' needs in their classrooms with language development, scaffolding, intervention, and inquiry teaching.

Linville (2016) found that most ESOL-trained teachers considered advocacy an important part of being an ESL teacher. In an online survey, the participating teachers reported advocacy in the school setting as more important than community advocacy. Linville identified two factors associated with beliefs about advocacy: length of time spent in an ESL training program and prior experience as a teacher. In general, ESL teachers were more likely to identify as advocates for their students than general education teachers. Also, ESL teachers frequently involved themselves with instructional advocacy in their schools. In another study, Linville (2020) noted a connection between how teachers perceived themselves as advocates and how they acted as advocates. ESL teachers must think of themselves as advocates and feel obliged to be advocates to do advocacy work.

Linville (2016) identified a type of advocacy that ESL teachers can do: act on behalf of students and parents who might lack the language skills to advocate for themselves. ESL teachers can also advocate for program change when bilingual students do not have their needs met. Fenner (2013) also recommended scaffolded advocacy so that ELs can learn self-advocacy strategies. Advocacy is a component included in the TESOL standards for ESL teachers. ESL teachers must push for reforms and commit to educating for and about ELs in communities and schools. Leone and Cisneros (1991) identified five areas of advocacy: teacher relationships, school community, classroom, institutional, and professional. Classroom advocacy provides students with a safe space to discuss political, social, and cultural factors that affect their lives. ESL teachers must also challenge injustice in the school and community and among their

colleagues while maintaining good working relationships with their colleagues and administrators.

ESL teachers tend to have an advocacy mindset about how others view and treat ELs in schools. ESL teachers must advocate for appropriate assessments and equal treatment and access to educational programs and correct misconceptions that classroom teachers might have about ELs. Suárez and Domínguez (2015) studied how ESL teachers negotiated equity and advocacy efforts and found that ESL teachers were motivated by their “critical caring” for ELs to advocate on their behalf. The teachers did not explicitly state that they wanted to change unjust systems or have social justice goals; however, in their deep caring for their ELs, they “saw caring for their students as their central obligation and commitment” (p. 53), suggesting that they advocated for their ELs in their schools.

In a study on advocacy among bilingual teachers, Dubetz (2014) found that teachers advocate for students in their circles of personal and professional influence. Teacher advocacy is political in nature. Teachers can form alliances with other educators and community members. Classroom teachers do not often see themselves as needing to advocate for ELs at their schools in as ESL teachers do. Classroom teachers initiate conversations with ESL teachers because they consider them workers in the “service category” (Pawan & Craig, 2011, p. 307), not equals.

### *Narrative*

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) conceptualized teacher knowledge as personal and practical narratives, the stories of teaching that provide context to a teacher’s understanding. They identified three types of stories: secret, cover, and sacred. Secret stories are those occurring in the classroom and lived practice. Cover stories are what teachers tell the world about their

teaching. Sacred stories are the narratives of theory influencing practice told to teachers by administrators, education theorists, or others in authority over teachers.

Teachers obtain knowledge through their stories and the narratives of their embodied practices (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The stories are the means through which teachers know themselves and their students. Classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees know and teach ELs through their backgrounds and lived experiences, contributing to teachers' personal, practical knowledge in and out of school. Teachers know their students better when they know the youth's stories.

Knowledge through narrative connects to Rodgers and Scott's (2008) conceptualization of identity as storied. Narratives and stories are the ways that individuals make sense of things. Teachers shape their identities through stories and the narratives that they tell themselves that shift over time. Later sections of this chapter will address the connections between identity and narrative.

### ***Inquiry as Stance***

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggested three approaches to teacher knowledge: knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice, and knowledge of practice. These concepts comprise the relationship between knowledge and practice, images of knowledge, images of teachers and teaching, and images of teacher learning and teacher roles. The term *images* refers to teachers' attitudes about teaching. Conceptualizing learning with images and role connects to teacher identity because how teachers view themselves and their roles provide a sense of identity.

Knowledge for practice is the content and methodological knowledge that competent teachers use to reach students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). A teacher's role in knowledge for

practice is as a knower of content and methods to effectively reach students. The most accomplished teachers have the most knowledge, which they acquire through education and professional development. Knowledge in practice is action-oriented knowledge. Teachers are crafters and artists who use their storied, relational understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Educators acquire knowledge through and within action and convey knowing through stories.

Knowledge of practice is the third concept of teacher learning and knowledge by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999). In knowledge of practice, knowledge is not a factor separated from the knower; instead, it connects to the networks and contexts of the educator, including social and political contexts. Educators generate knowledge within multiple layers of context with many perspectives of meaning. Teachers are agents of knowledge as they co-construct knowledge through inquiry.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) developed inquiry as stance, moving the development of teacher knowledge away from researchers and nonpracticing teachers and back to practicing teachers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle used “the term ‘inquiry as stance’ to describe the positions of teachers and others who work together in inquiry communities take toward knowledge and its relationship to practice” (p. 288). Stance is a way to ground the development of knowledge and show position to challenge forces that result in the marginalization of students, such as ELs, to improve education and life for students. Inquiry as stance is not only a way to develop teacher knowledge; it is also a way of being a teacher. Therefore, inquiry as stance has both epistemological and ontological meaning for teachers.

In an inquiry as stance approach to teaching, teachers think about who they are as teachers. Teacher learning is a process of composing views of oneself as a teacher and disrupting certain aspects of school. Inquiry as stance consists of work in communities through positioning

and correlates with uncertainty and questioning, especially questioning or challenging unfair practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). A teacher has a dual role of researcher and teacher—not just researcher *or* practitioner; a teacher must take on both roles to develop knowledge. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) believed inquiry as stance as an epistemological approach produces learning equitable for students because it is an approach intended for action that requires involvement from both school and community members.

The inquiry as stance approach to teacher knowledge contributes to ESL teachers' knowledge because teachers use inquiry for understanding, as teacher learning and development require the inclusion of experiences in and out of the classroom. Inquiry as stance is a social process that occurs in learning communities. Teacher identity also focuses on finding a common language and discourse about ELs in an inquiry community.

### **Teacher Learning**

According to Britzman (2003), learning to teach is a process of formation and transformation, or becoming. Second language teachers may appear to be technicians (knowledge for practice) who merely need to apply the right method; however, classrooms are more complex environments (Varghese et al., 2005). Classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees might have students from five different countries and four different religious backgrounds who speak six different languages. Being a classroom teacher with a TESOL graduate degree who teaches ELs consists of more than just knowledge or beliefs; it is the teacher's whole identity. Sociocultural aspects such as race, class, and gender are important considerations. Therefore, understanding teacher learning and knowledge requires an understanding of teachers' professional, individual, and contextual identities.

Freeman and Johnson (1998) wrote a landmark article about teacher learning and teacher knowledge in second language teaching. They encouraged researchers to examine teachers' memories, learning experiences, beliefs, and values. Johnson (2009) framed "teacher learning as socially negotiated and contingent on knowledge of self, students, subject matter, curricula, and setting" (p. 20). Also, according to Wenger (1998), constructing one's identity is part of learning in a social context. Learning is a way of transforming who teachers can be and what they can do.

Lave and Wenger (1991) viewed learning as a process of identification that occurs as teachers integrate and play active roles in communities of practice. Being a legitimate part of a learning community is a process of engagement, negotiation, and a shared language. The process correlates with Cochran-Smith's and Lytle's (1999) conceptualization of teacher knowledge as knowledge for practice, as learners co-construct knowledge and learning through practice and in context. In the view of situated learning, teachers construct identity in context through a process of identification and becoming.

### **Teacher Cognition**

Teacher cognition is a complex part of teaching that includes almost every part of being a teacher, including "beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphors, conceptions, perspectives about teaching, teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities, self" (Borg, 2003, p. 82). Teacher cognition focuses on the internal mental processes of teaching and learning (Borg, 2006). Borg described teacher cognition as "the complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs that language teachers draw on in their work" (p. 272). Miller (2009) connected teacher cognition to teacher identity because a teacher's cognition is a vital

part of how teachers construct their identities. According to Miller, cognition is “continuously performed and transformed through interaction in classrooms” (p. 175).

Teacher cognition research focuses on the development of teacher cognition, the cognitions, and the interactions of the cognitions with teacher learning and practice. Borg (2003) explained that teachers’ experiences as learners influence their cognitions and teaching practices. Context also affects how teachers use cognition and practice to inform each other. Teacher cognition contributes to teacher identity development because both teacher identity and teacher cognition research focus on the value of teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, thinking, and learning.

### **Teacher Identity Development**

Teachers’ backgrounds indicate how they teach and interact with students, colleagues, parents, and communities. Research on teacher identity focuses on teachers as agents instead of the assets of being teachers, such as knowledge or beliefs, which is a holistic way of understanding what it means to be a teacher (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Teacher identity consists of teachers’ learning and development of teaching selves (Danielewicz, 2001). Identity is an important component of teacher development at the beginning of a teaching career and during the shifts in teacher identity that occur throughout the career (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Olsen, 2008). Teacher identity is a way to examine the tensions and contradictions teachers face over their tenure (Olsen, 2008). A lens of identity is also a way that teachers “use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large” (MacLure, 1993, p. 311). Teacher identity researchers study teachers’ emotions, commitments, and challenges (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Clarke (2009) provided a framework of the identity factors. The researcher noted that “identity is a complex matter of the social and the individual, of discourse and practice, of

reification and participation, of similarity and difference, of agency and structure, of fixity and transgression, of singular and multiple, and of the synoptic and the dynamic” (p. 189).

Individuals shape identity relationally and individually, which enables an understanding of how others see individuals and how the individuals view themselves (Richards, 2017). Individuals also construct identity through discourse and practice (Reeves, 2018; Varghese et al., 2005).

According to Gee (2014a), identity has a performative nature because people “have to talk the right talk, walk the right walk, behave as if they believe and value the right things, and wear the right things at the right time and right place” (p. 24).

A person who inhabits multiple Discourses has multiple contextual identities (Gee, 2000; Pennington, 2015). Individuals negotiate identity through experiences and participation in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Clarke (2009) noted the similarity and difference of people to the groups they associate with or to which others assign them. According to McKinlay and McVittie (2011), identity includes “the social part of ourselves, the bit of ourselves that we think about when we are considering whether we are the same as the other members of some social groups or other” (p. 4).

Viewing identity as a constantly changing concept provides a complex understanding of how teachers’ identities include many different dimensions, including professional, personal, and social (Canrinus et al., 2012). Identity can be both a singular and plural concept, as a person can have multiple identities simultaneously, including multiplicity within a single identity position (Reeves, 2018).

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) addressed the difficulties in defining identity, including the role of emotions, discourse, power, and connections to the self and the intersection and overlap of these components. An individual can define identity as a label that collects effects of

prior experiences, positioning, meaning-making, and immediate contexts. The effects in all “become intertwined inside the flow of activity as a teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments” (Olsen, 2008, p. 139). The discourse of identity is also a dynamic factor in how individuals shape their identities by collective discourse through individual and community voices (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Sachs (2005) considered the dynamic nature of identity and noted that teacher identity is at the core of teaching; it provides “a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of ‘how to be,’ ‘how to act,’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society” (p. 15). Sachs also described identity as ever-changing and negotiated through a teacher’s experiences. Beauchamp and Thomas further noted the variety of words used to describe the dynamic and shifting nature of identity, including “‘formation,’ ‘developing,’ ‘shaping,’ ‘building,’ and ‘constructing’” (p. 178).

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) expanded upon Sachs’ notion of teacher identity by noting how notions of the self are linked to identity, how emotion relates to identity, and how narrative and discursive elements shape identity. For example, new teachers have identity shifts that continue as they develop and interact with their schools and communities. Teacher identity is a framework or a way to organize understanding of contexts and self-development.

Beauchamp and Thomas noticed close connections between the self, identity, the role of emotions, and the power of stories. Emotions affect the teaching profession; likewise, the teaching profession influences emotions. Teachers must appear caring toward students and express emotions in a caring way; however, education reform can cause feelings such as frustration and anger. There is a dynamic process of teacher identity construction. However,

many factors can cause a change in the process, including internal factors, such as emotions, and external factors, such as school environment, administrators, and colleagues.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) identified the notion of the self and its relation to teacher identity as one of the most complex issues of teacher identity research. They connected identity development to the notion of self and the notion of self with others in contexts such as schools. They also noted how individuals construct and reconstruct the idea of identity through contact with other educators and students. Pinho and Andrade (2015) highlighted self and identity as the same concept, which they considered both stable and dynamic based on a three-dimensional concept of the self: the actual self, the ought self, and the ideal self. They described the actual self as the prevailing self, the ought self as the self that is designated by members of an outside group as the goal, and the ideal self as what people set as their achievable goals. Within these three dimensions, the personal and professional identity work together as the individual navigates the self through dialogue within the self (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Beauchamp and Thomas linked teacher identity development to an understanding of the self, both in context and in relation. Rodgers and Scott (2008) described self and identity as the self being the maker of meaning and identity as the meaning made.

In a review of early research on teachers' professional identities, Beijaard et al. (2004) found that older scholarship fell into three categories: identity formation, identity characteristics, and the stories teachers tell about their identities. Identity formation is a unique, complex process in which teachers find themselves at odds with what others expect or require them to do in their professional roles and what they desire to be as teachers (Antonek et al., 1997; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). Many of the reviewed studies presented teacher identity formation as a struggle to understand conflicting roles and expectations (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Changes can occur over time in the characteristics of identity and by the subject matter taught (Beijaard et al., 2000). Beijaard et al. (2004) also reviewed the narrative research tradition of professional teacher identity. Teachers who live out and tell their unique professional stories construct their identities (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2002).

Through their review of the research, Beijaard et al. (2004) determined four major features from the identity research. The first feature is that identity formation is an ongoing, dynamic, and continually evolving process. The second feature of professional identity is that teachers interact with their contexts in unique ways to shape their identities. Beijaard et al. described identity as a “relational phenomenon” instead of a “fixed attribute” (p. 108). Identity was a concept developed in “an intersubjective field and can be best characterized as an ongoing process, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context” (p. 108). The third feature is that multiple subidentities exist within a teacher’s overall identity. The fourth feature is that professional identity includes agency as teachers actively pursue professional learning and development.

Rodgers and Scott (2008) linked personal and professional aspects of identity by noting that contexts and relationships of the external elements connect to the stories and emotions of the internal ones. According to Rodgers and Scott, identity formation incorporates other topics relevant to teachers, such as beliefs, attitudes, life narrative, or history. They identified four basic assumptions of contemporary conceptions of identity in line with major features noted by Beijaard et al. (2004). Rodgers and Scott (2008) defined the four assumptions of self and identity:

- (1) that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple *contexts* which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation;
- (2) that identity is formed in *relationship* with others and involves *emotions*;
- (3) that identity is

*shifting, unstable, and multiple*; and (4) that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through *stories* over time. (p. 733; emphasis in original)

Rodgers and Scott (2008) concluded that the four assumptions enable teachers to gain awareness of how they construct their identities through their context, relationships, and emotions to “(re)claim the authority of their own voice” (p. 733). They described self as the “meaning maker” and identity as the “meaning made” (p. 739), as shifts and changes occur in these two aspects over time.

The first of the four assumptions of the construction of identity in context is that social, cultural, political, and historical are widespread in identity research (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Coldron and Smith (1999) described context as a matter of “space and location” (p. 714) with an influence on a teacher’s identity by being the location of a person out of the multiple professional possibilities open to the teacher. The context to teachers includes the people they encounter in school, such as learners, staff members, other teachers, school administrators, and parents; the school environment; and the disciplines and grades taught (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Context influences how teachers understand themselves and how other people understand the teachers. Context can also be a normative force. Britzman (1999) attributed the power of contextual forces to people in positions of authority who seek to maintain their power. When teachers do not know of the power of contextual, normative forces, it can result in the loss or reduction of their agency (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

Context influences identity shaping through the people teachers come into contact within the spaces and locations of context. Thus, the second assumption is that individuals construct identity by relationships and the emotions caused by those relationships (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Teachers have different relationships in the multiple contexts of their lives that cause them to bring out different aspects of themselves. Relationships are important components for

identity, as others seek to recognize the kind of person or teacher that an individual is. Teachers have relationships with their students, other teachers, support staff, administrators, and even state and community stakeholders. Teachers' emotions are "shaped by the conditions of their work (for example, high stakes tests) and are then manifest[ed] in their interactions with students, parents, administrators and others" (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). ELs who struggle on a state-mandated, high-stakes assessments, and their presence in classrooms could cause fear, frustration, and even anger in teachers who fear low test scores. The teachers could express such emotions to the parents of ELs who may not speak English well, teachers who do not have ELs in their classes, or the administrators who create classroom rosters.

Zembylas (2004) wrote that emotional rules at schools indicate which emotions teachers can value and which emotions they should dismiss. Emotions and the expression of emotions are important components in teacher identity. According to Zembylas (2003), "Messy meanings of teacher identity as it comes to be constituted through social interactions, performances, and daily negotiations within a school culture that privileges emotional self-discipline and autonomy" (p. 109). Emotions are not private. Individuals work out images in language and express power relations. Emotions are sites of resistance and, according to feminist poststructural scholars, cause disruption to certain discourses. Emotions have an embodied and performative nature.

The contextual, relational, and emotional nature of teacher identity could result in an unstable identity (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). External forces could influence identity, causing shifts when changes in external forces occur. Rodgers and Scott (2008) presented identity as shifting and multiple, a concept that aligns with the review of Beijaard et al. (2004), who presented identity as a constant process of becoming. Rodgers and Scott identified three points

about unstable identity: (a) identity always undergoes the process of making, (b) shifts occur according to relationships and context, and (c) it has variability and multiplicity.

In the first three assumptions of Rodgers and Scott (2008), identity may appear to lack coherence or continuity. The researchers pointed to narratives and “identity as storied” to make sense of “shifting, multiple, constructed” identity formation (p. 736). Narratives and stories are ways to make sense of experiences; therefore, identity is “both interpreted and constructed through the stories that one tells oneself and that others tell. These stories change over time, across contexts, and depend on relationship” (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 737).

The four assumptions of Rodgers and Scott (2008) are that individuals form identity in contexts, identity is shifting and multiple, individuals form identity through relationships, and identity is storied. The four assumptions align with Akkerman and Meijer (2011), who researched the characteristics of teacher research and listed multiplicity, discontinuity, and the social nature of identity. Akkerman and Meijer extend this discussion to a dialogical perspective.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) traced the theories of identity from premodern through postmodern times to show the formation of the dialogical perspective on identity. In premodern times, individuals were subject to norm and structures bigger than themselves, such as religion. In modern times, the individual has taken the place of a cosmic, supernatural whole and is the source of truth. According to modern thinking, an individual is unique and different from the outside other; there is truth centered on the individual. Postmodern scholars of identity do not put the individual at the center. Instead, they view the person in the context of the social environment. The unified subject no longer exists; there is fragmented identity, and there are people in many different discourse communities simultaneously. According to the postmodern perspective, teachers’ have a dynamic identity that continually undergoes construction and

reconstruction. The postmodern perspective is a way of describing how people develop over time and consider different situations and others in the positioning process. Akkerman and Meijer believed that a completely decentered identity might present problems. The first problem is understanding how people maintain their sense of self through time. The second problem is understanding how people demonstrate agency as individuals in their contexts instead of being socially determined by their social settings.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) identified three commonly seen characterizations of teacher identity research: multiplicity, discontinuity, and social nature. The three portrayals suggest that identity shifts occur with context and time and that identity is not a fixed or stable concept. Akkerman and Meijer emphasized a recent shift in thinking about identity, which has historically presented identity as fixed and unchanging. The three characterizations comprise a dialogic approach. Akkerman and Meijer noted that the multiplicity and unity, discontinuity and continuity, and social and individual natures of identity contribute to a complete picture of identity. The dialogic approach to understanding the dimensions provides “a theoretical viewpoint that assumes a multiple, discontinuous and social nature of identity, while simultaneously explaining identity as being unitary, continuous and individual” (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 310).

In explaining how multiplicity and unity work dialogically, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) returned to Beijaard et al. (2004). Multiplicity consists of multiple perspectives on identity, including personal and professional identity. According to multiplicity, the individual understands the self as composed of multiple I-positions. Scholars developed the concept of multiple I-positions from the work of Bakhtin (1986), a Russian linguist and philosopher. Bakhtin theorized that people speak with multiple voices. Akkerman and Meijer connected these

multiple voices to multiple I-positions, which are “a speaking personality bringing forward a specific viewpoint and story” (p. 311). Therefore, teachers with conflicting I-positions could face tensions in constructing their professional identities.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) explored how recognizing multiple identities connects to a person’s sense of unity of identity and “the natural desire of people to maintain a consistent and coherent sense of self” (p. 312). According to Salgado and Hermans (2005), multiple I-positions do not result in the negation of a unitary self. When shifts in I-positions occur, individuals consider other subjectivities (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). The negotiation of I-position may not be harmonious, which can cause tension or conflict in identity construction.

Discontinuity indicates how identity is “fluid and shifting from moment to moment and context to context” (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 310). Teachers use certain parts or I-positions of the self in specific contexts or situations. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) explored the engagement of continuity dialogically with the discontinuity of identity positions. Akkerman and Meijer used postmodern notions of narratives to maintain a sense of unity because the narration occurs “both within the self and in the form of verbal accounts to other” (p. 313). Individuals construct identity through narration, including past and new experiences. Akkerman and Meijer also described how teachers seek coherence in their narratives of their experiences and context; therefore, “by reinterpreting past experiences in current conditions, a conflict between two I-positions was resolved and continuity was maintained” (p. 313). Individuals do not only maintain continuity through narration; rather, routines, patterns, and cultural and historical expectations also contribute to continuity. Teachers can use specific discourses and language patterns to maintain continuity.

The third characteristic identified by Akkerman and Meijer (2011) is the social nature of identity, which exists in dialogue with the individual nature of identity. The third characteristic addresses the influence of the social environment on a person's identity. A dialogical approach to identity construction connects to Bakhtin's (1986) work of voice intended for the person speaking and the person receiving the utterance. Individuals plan speech by the reaction they anticipate from others in the social context. Other people shape individuals' thinking and how they shape their identities. The groups to which individuals belong also affect ways of speaking and thinking. When joining a group, such as ESL teachers, individuals take on the voices of the group.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) pointed out that the self is not a process contained to one person; instead, it occurs in a social context, a concept that aligns with Mead (1934). Mead described how members of social groups impose rules that affect individuals and how a person's positions of identity consist of more than interactions with other individuals. Lave and Wenger (1991) expanded on the concept of a generalized group of people with their concept of communities of practice. Other people can define an individual's positions; for example, there are no ESL teachers without ELs. Individuals also mark the boundaries of themselves through the inclusion and exclusion of other people. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) connected the social nature of identity to the individual nature of identity, noting that every individual is part of multiple social environments. Thus, according to Akkerman and Meijer, the "multiplicity of a person is 'held together' in a unitary self," which is "a continuous activity of self-dialogue" (p. 315).

The dialogical approach to identity by Akkerman and Meijer (2011) provides a holistic view of teacher identity that presents identity as both/and in terms of the dimensions of

multiplicity-unity, discontinuity-continuity, and social-individual. Through self-dialogue, teachers can achieve a unity of self across multiple I-positions. Shifts in I-positions might cause discontinuity; however, teachers can maintain continuity to a historical self through patterns and narrations linking past to present. Finally, a unique self-transcendence across group memberships and social interactions still impacts multiple I-positions. Akkerman and Meijer defined teacher identity as “*an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one’s (working) life*” (p. 315, emphasis in original).

Beijaard et al. (2004), Rodgers and Scott (2008), and Akkerman and Meijer (2011) expressed that teacher identity is a concept dependent on context, identity is dynamic and multiple, and individuals construct identity through relationships with narrative experiences. Olsen (2011) found this “loose, tacit consensus” (p. 257) to include other aspects of teacher identity in the framing of teacher research on identity. Olsen gathered several tenets of consensus in teacher identity research, finding teacher identity a dynamic and shifting concept, not a fixed one. Teacher identity involves how the idea of a core self relates to multiple identities. Constructing a teaching identity is a product and a process that consists of “an ongoing and situated dialectic among person, others, history, and professional contexts” (Olsen, 2011, p. 257). Teacher identity is both an ontological process and a political action due to its socially situated nature. Olsen concluded by differentiating teacher identity from the role of a teacher but not the teacher self.

Olsen (2011) considered teacher identity a useful conceptual framework and tool for researchers to gain “fuller, richer context-sensitive accounts of teachers and teaching” (p. 257). Teacher identity research shows that teachers engage in interactions that include previous

versions of themselves. At the same time, they recreate themselves in relation to other professionals. Exploring professional identity is a way to address the collaborative or conflicting natures of agency and structure. Teachers' agency enables them to make choices; however, the structure of the school culture, education policy, and institutional norms produce a framework in which the teacher makes choices. A teacher might have agency limited by the educational practices and discourses of the school where the teacher works (Coldron & Smith, 1999).

Teacher identity is also a way to investigate how educators integrate different aspects of being a teacher, including content knowledge, personality, school context, and pedagogical practice and expertise. Olsen (2011) shifted from studying teacher knowledge to teacher identity because teacher knowledge alone was “an insufficient analytical frame since it suggests a static, rationalistic, transferable product” (p. 258). Research on teacher identity shows teachers as multidimensional individuals with lived experiences affecting how they develop their personal and professional identities. Teachers also exist in social contexts both constraining and empowering to their agency. According to Olsen, teacher identity is a tool for “identify[ing] multiple, interrelating, situated personal and professional dimensions of teachers and teaching and examin[ing] them deeply—both individually as influences and together as an embedded process of professional development” (p. 258).

Olsen (2011) developed a conceptual framework of teacher identity with five tenets. The first tenet is that there is no mind-body dualism. According to Olsen, minds are not separate from matter. People meld with their experiences; therefore, understanding cannot occur out of context. Individuals do not merely perceive or engage with conscious reality—they also construct it. Such concept aligns with Heidegger's (1997/1927) view that people are their existence and do not live separately from it; this causes humans to continually adjust themselves in relation to their

context. Similarly, Mead (1934) theorized that humans are both subject and object to themselves as they reflect on themselves. Mead believed that people become aware of themselves through social interactions, which enable them to develop the concept of self. Olsen connected these ideas to sociocultural-constructivist traditions that present the construction of the identity and the self as influenced by macro- and microcontexts, including the intersections of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and language that affect a teacher's consciousness. Olsen asserted that "teacher learning is a process of negotiating and mediating multiple (often conflicting) identity sources and help teachers critically interrogate and adjust the conceptions on which their professional learning rests" (p. 261).

Olsen (2011) suggested that individuals construct the self through social interactions with other people through language use. Therefore, studying language and language use is beneficial to understand the construction of teacher identity. Theorists of language, including Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1986), believe that language influences social development and correlates to the development of the self (Olsen, 2011). Olsen noted that language includes "body language, semiotics, and facial expressions" and is "the social practice through which one self divines the intents and actions of other selves and similarly makes his or her own intentions and actions understood" (p. 262). Therefore, views on teacher identity must include language and language practice in the construction of identity.

Olsen (2011) identified two views related to language in use, or discourse. The first perspective is the dialogic view of language in use, through which identity results from language practice and an individual remakes identity through language use. For example, Bakhtin (1990) believed that people wrote themselves as both the subject and the object of the novels of their lives. Language is the means, product, and stage of the interrelationships between self and other

(Olsen, 2011). The second view of language in use is the representational nature of discourse in which individuals use language to represent identity. Olsen believed that these two views contribute to each other. This tenet of teacher identity suggests the need to recognize the power of language and discourse and its links to the effect of power and cultural history on education and teacher identities (Bourdieu, 1995; Foucault, 1977).

Each teacher uses prior experiences to understand the world unique to the individual (Olsen, 2011). Constructing identity is both a process and a product. When individuals have experiences, their prior selves play roles in how they react to each set of circumstances. At the same time, new experiences cause changes to the self, and circumstances and identity construction inexorably connect. Olsen (2011) pointed out that although there might be generalized or shared processes or circumstances, each person has a unique identity construction. Therefore, each teacher's experiences contribute to the construction of that teacher's identity. Olsen argued that teachers' unique experiences are why teachers have different outcomes from teacher education programs or professional development initiatives. According to Olsen, teachers "negotiate among past and present, personal strands of influence to construct their professional selves" (p. 264).

Olsen's (2011) fourth tenet is that identity is a "cultural study of persons-in-practice" (p. 264). There are two levels of context of individual subjectivity. Macrocontexts are broad frames of culture and society, and the resulting identity constructs are race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or language. Microcontexts are specific contexts, social relationships, and language practices on which macrosocial structures have an influence. Each person has multiple overlapping macrocontexts and microcontexts with influences on identity development. Olsen believed that individuals develop their social positions and negotiate meaning in those positions

through their actions, behaviors, and beings. Identity is a contradictory, multiple, and relational concept that Olsen defined as,

The process of constructing a self-one that is considered (consciously or not) to be meaningful and coherent by its owner--out of the innumerable, often contradictory, only partially understood influences that are available to a person. This is how an individual acts inside socially constructed worlds guided by self-understandings. (p. 266)

The active, dynamic construction of identity results from constant (re)interpretation, (re)construction, and (re)assemblage. Teacher identity development is not a linear process. Olsen considered teacher identity research essential for celebrating the diversity of teachers, their students, and their school contexts. Furthermore, teacher identity is a holistic framework for examining macro- and micro- social contexts and identities.

Understanding identity constructed through discourse aligns with the identity-in-discourse for language teacher identity by Varghese et al. (2005). Identity-in-discourse is a way to challenge seemingly fixed categories and embrace contradictions (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001). Discursive construction of identity consists of complementary and contradictory voices (Varghese et al., 2005). Varghese et al. described how a performative discursive construction of identity could occur as teachers perform assigned roles; teachers can either subvert or modify the norms expected of their positions. Varghese et al. used poststructural theories of discourse to understand and account for the roles of power and agency, which are discursively constituted. Poststructural theorists of identity-in-discourse focus on the importance of identity for teachers while challenging a priori categorizations of identity and embracing “the contradictory, dynamic, and embodied (re)fashioning of identities” (Varghese et al., 2016, p. 549). Teachers who can see their contradictory (re)fashionings can understand themselves and their discursive contexts. Aneja (2016) presented identity as performative and discursively constructed. The participants in Aneja’s study discussed their linguistic identities and the

contestation, construction, and negotiation of those subjectivities. Teachers live “languaged lives,” which language history and experience can influence (Ellis, 2016).

Søreide (2006) believed discourse and narrative positioning a useful way to study identity construction because it provides an “understanding of teachers as active agents in their own lives and the construction of teacher identity as a dynamic and changing activity” (p. 529). All teachers understand and use the narrative resources at their institutions differently. Therefore, teachers in the same context might construct different identities using various subject and discursive positioning (Søreide, 2006).

Teachers construct their professional identities when they position themselves using different subject positions in their narratives and statements about themselves (Søreide, 2006). Søreide (2006) explained that constructing teaching identity is a “process of positioning and negotiation” (p. 538). Discourses provide certain subject positioning, so context or institution individuals may present limits to the discursive practices. However, teachers have choices in their positioning toward these discourses and subjectivities. Søreide identified two types of positioning interactions, the first of which is positioning and dominance. Søreide’s participants mentioned positioning and dominance as dominant identity constructions, including “caring and kind” (p. 540) teachers. Many teachers in the study used positive positioning to act in caring and kind ways toward their students. This is an understanding of teacher identity as hegemonic and dominant in the narrative resources.

Positioning and dichotomies are the other interactions noted by Søreide (2006). When individuals use narrative resources to construct identity in the presence of alternative narrative resources, dichotomies function as presuppositions and can be understood through conflicts between two positioning because that is where the negotiation is located. Teachers can empower

themselves by negotiating different identities when constructing their unique identities. Awareness of everyday assumptions of discursive practices and identity narrative construction enables teachers to understand the function of power in institutions through discourse. The narrative understanding of identity does not include the construction of universal identities for teachers. Instead, subject positioning and identity are resources available to teachers in certain schools or contexts (Søreide, 2006). According to Søreide, having “an understanding of teacher identity as negotiable, flexible and adaptive” (p. 544) is a way to facilitate discussing the challenges that teachers face.

Aligned with Søreide (2006), this study included the notion of narrative resources and the idea of discursive resources, which are the words, phrases, or linguistic devices affecting and drawn from practice (Fairclough, 1992; Kuhn et al., 2008). Formal organizations of the individual’s context and the relationships within the various levels of that context produce discursive resources. In this study, the levels of context were the microcontext of the classroom, the mesocontext of the school, and the macrocontext of the community or great educational community outside of the school level (see Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

According to Varghese et al. (2005), identity-in-discourse and identity-in-practice produce a full picture of teacher identity. Identity-in-discourse has its foundations in poststructuralism, as “meanings of the material world are produced within discourse” (Weedon, 1999, p. 107). Varghese et al. described identity-in-practice as founded in social theories of language. Individuals construct identity-in-practice via “practices in relation to a group and the process of individual identification or nonidentification with the group” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 39). This concept aligns with Beijaard et al. (2000), who studied teachers’ perceptions of their identities. Identity in practice also appeared in the work of Olsen (2008), who studied teachers’

identity construction with a sociocultural perspective and explored how “immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems” (p. 139) influence identity construction.

### **Language Teacher Identity**

Language teacher identity development, especially for an English teacher, connects to work on mainstream teacher identity construction. However, there has been a shift in views of language teaching due to the context of ESL education in schools and the interactions of teachers and students (Varghese et al., 2016). Language teacher identity development has similar narratives as general teacher identity development. However, the status of English, the racialization of English teachers and ELs, and how language teachers are positioned by themselves and others as foils to their students suggests that language teacher identity is a unique concept.

Summarizing many scholars’ conceptualizations of language teacher identity, Barkhuizen (2016) stated,

Language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical – they are both inside the teacher and outside in the social material, and technological world. LTIs are being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying. They are struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued, by self and others. They are core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, hybrid, and they are foregrounded and backgrounded. And LTIs change, short term and over time – discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrator, and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places, and objects in classrooms, institutions, and online. (p. 4)

Barkhuizen indicated that language teachers’ identities contain many different dimensions, including self-image as a certain kind of language teacher, connection to classroom practices, and positioning in relation to students, colleagues, community members, and the teaching profession.

Varghese et al. (2016) contended that language teacher identity discourse influences the TESOL profession due to the use of terms such as EL and English teacher. The label EL requires having an English teacher. ESL teachers embody the English language and the ideology of race and empire associated with English and language teaching (Motha, 2016). The complex and racialized history of English language teaching includes the juxtaposition of teachers and learners (Motha, 2016). ELs in schools experience both racial and linguistic marginalization, and teaching English has a “legacy in which constructions of English and ownership of and authority of English are dependent on unequal racial, linguistic, and colonial formations” (Varghese et al., 2016, p. 551). English is a language associated with “wealth, power...and whiteness” (Motha, 2016, p. 218); therefore, ESL teacher identity often suggests the power of English.

Teacher identity is an important component not only for individual teachers or groups of teachers but for the entire TESOL profession. Motha (2016) claimed that ESL teacher identity “underpins the profession” by producing the “logic for the profession” (p. 218). It is impossible to construct English or English instruction without the connections between ESL teachers and their students.

ESL teachers and ELs co-construct their identities in context and discourse (Varghese et al., 2016). ELs’ identities have undergone linguistic and racial marginalization; therefore, advocacy and agency are often part of ESL teachers’ identities. Thus, Varghese et al. (2016) believed that such an experience resulted in the differentiation of language teachers from other teachers. Hawkins and Norton (2009) believed that ESL teachers play important roles in addressing educational inequalities because they teach marginalized students and teach English, “which can itself serve both to empower and marginalize” (p. 32). Classroom teachers with

TESOL graduate degrees have new groups of students and must advocate for students in new ways. This shift in identity and role for in-service teachers requires further study.

### **Research in Language Teacher Identity**

Language teacher identity has been a rapidly expanding area of research over the past 2 decades (Martel & Wang, 2014), with many studies in English-speaking contexts on preservice language teachers (Ilieva, 2010; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Park, 2012; Vetter et al., 2013; Yazan, 2017). An overview of teacher identity research and an identity-in-practice and identity-in-discourse framing were the key concepts of language teacher identity researched for this study. The selected studies focused on the ways individuals form identity through discourse and narrative resources, such as positioning; the shifting and multiple nature of identity; the ways individuals form identity through relationships and emotions; and the ways individuals form identity in contexts (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Clarke, 2009; Olsen, 2008; Rogers & Scott, 2008).

Positioning and narrative positioning affect teacher identity development and identity-in-practice as well as identity-in-discourse. Kamhi-Stein (2013) used narrative positioning in work on teacher identities, employing autobiographical narrative inquiry to consider the effect of stories on practice and how identity then affects institutional practice. Kamhi-Stein found that teachers perceived themselves through their positioning. Vetter et al. (2013) used discourse analysis to research the effects of positioning and power dynamics on teacher identity. They found that the participant negotiated with students in ways that enabled or did not enable him to access his preferred teacher identity. Rogers and Wetzel (2013) noted that a teacher used narratives and counternarratives to position herself as a culturally relevant teacher. Kayi-Aydar (2015) also used positioning theory to explore agency and the identity (re)negotiation of pre-

service teachers. Kayi-Aydar analyzed participants' identities through semistructured interviews and journal entries and found that positioning, agency, and identity were intertwined concepts dependent on context. Yazan (2017) also studied the positioning of preservice teachers who positioned themselves as ESL teachers, members of the teaching community, and public-school experts. Yoon (2008) studied three teachers and how they positioned themselves and the effect of their positioning on their classroom practices. Yoon found that "whatever the positions teachers take, that positioning guides them in their interactive approaches with students in classroom settings" (p. 499).

Identity is not a stable or fixed concept; changes in identity can occur given the context. Norton and Morgan (2013) described teachers' identity work as filled with conflict, change, and contradiction. Kanno and Stuart (2011) found that changed teacher identity correlated with changed teaching practices. Discursive teaching identity links with power differentials, especially inequities between teachers and students (Reeves, 2018). Liggett (2009) also explored the effect of race on language learning in a study of White teachers and how they aligned with and resisted institutional racial and linguistic privilege.

Identity development includes relationships with students. Higgins and Ponte (2017) researched elementary teachers in a professional development course on multilingual learners. They found that the teachers drew on their linguistic backgrounds and histories to develop close relationships with students, question deficiency discourses, develop nurturing positions toward multilingual learners, and become open to multilingual pedagogies. Barkhuizen (2017) researched the identity development of immigrants' tutors and how they negotiated identity development over space and time in communities and contexts both macro and micro. Barkhuizen used stories and narratives to analyze the content and context of identity

development, finding that teachers could increase the social inclusion of students learning English. Miller et al. (2017) drew on Foucault's sense of ethical self-formation in their study of social practice and relationships with students and doing the right thing as an ethical practice for teachers. Motha (2006) found that teachers negotiated their spaces to challenge their students' perceived English deficiencies. The teachers' enacted identities affected their students. Hawkins and Norton (2009) showed that language teachers were important actors in addressing inequality in school settings for ELs.

Research on the effect of context on a teacher's identity construction aligns with the Douglas Fir Group's (2016) framework that focuses on macrocontexts of the larger movements of society, mesocontexts of institutions and communities, and microcontexts of interpersonal relationships. Individuals develop beliefs, values, and cultural identities at the macro level. The meso level includes social identities of agency and power. Individuals engage semiotic resources for identity work at the micro level. Park (2012) researched the identity development of one East Asian, nonnative English-speaking teacher during her TESOL education and student teaching experience. There were changes in the teacher's confidence in her English proficiency depending on her context, and she felt disconnected between her experiences in China and her graduate TESOL work. Park showed how this teacher navigated multiple identity positions as a non-native English-speaking teacher and accepted these positions in different contexts. Edwards and Burns (2016) used an ecological perspective to explore the influence of action research on teacher identity with a focus on context, agency, and critical perspective. Edwards and Burns found that context was an important factor in the two participants' perceptions of their conceptual selves as teachers. Haneda and Sherman (2016) noted that the microcontexts teachers

encountered every day had as much of an impact on the teachers as the macrocontexts and mesocontexts of the school.

### **Research Approaches to Language Teacher Identity**

Kanno and Stuart (2011) built on the work of Varghese et al. (2005) and Tsui (2007) and studied two novice ESL teachers' identities. The researchers used a situated learning perspective to follow two graduate-level TESOL students over a year as they taught their first classes and became ESL teachers. The novice teachers' identity development linked to their classroom practice; the teachers' classroom practice influenced how they shaped their emerging professional identities and classroom practices.

Kanno and Stuart (2011) strove to understand how novice teachers identify themselves as professional ESL teachers over time, as there were no studies of this identity formation as it occurred. Kanno and Stuart distinguished between teacher role and teacher identity because they believed that becoming an ESL teacher "requires the self, not just playing an assigned role in the classroom" (p. 239). Becoming a teacher requires a transformation of identity. Kanno and Stuart used Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning to explore how teaching and social interaction between students and teachers contribute to identity formation. Changes in identity occur through practice because there is a "mutually constitutive relationship between identity and practice" (Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 239).

Kanno and Stuart (2011) coined the term identity-in-practice, influenced by the work of Varghese et al. (2005). However, Kanno and Stuart theorized that identities in discourse are part of identities in practice and are verbal, narrated expressions of a teacher's identity-in-practice. They used the terms "narrated identity" and "enacted identity" (p. 240) and a variety of data, including interviews, journal entries, observation, recorded lessons, and documents. They

conducted case studies for each novice teacher and analyzed the data within each case and across cases. The researchers paid attention to conflicts between narrated and enacted identities, grouping themes into the practices with an influence on identity and the changes in identity affecting the teachers' classroom practices.

The novice teachers in Kanno and Stuart's (2011) study struggled to adopt and internalize an identity as an ESL teacher. The participants felt like they were playing a role. The teachers gained more experience and felt competent in the daily practice of being teachers, especially with activities such as giving directions, answering questions, and explaining concepts. In the second semester of teaching, both teachers had more confidence in teaching the same subject for a second time. However, the educators had different ways to manage shortcomings. One teacher addressed his weaknesses by teaching another class that required him to teach advanced grammar, his most challenging topic. The other teacher drew upon her strengths to teach a class on one of her favorite subjects. Both teachers could identify and focus on core components of their teaching identities. Kanno and Stuart linked identity development to acquisition of knowledge, especially the "personal practical knowledge" that Clandinin and Connelly (1996) noted teachers acquire as they teach. Knowledge acquisition is part of a teacher's identity development. Changes in teacher practices correlate with changes in teacher identities.

Trent (2017) employed the ideas of identity-in-practice and identity-in-discourse by Varghese et al. (2005) to explore the discursive positioning of five former English teachers. Trent used a discursive analytical approach to study the former teachers' identities in discourse and identities in practice. Trent conducted semistructured interviews to understand attrition for a detailed, contextualized investigation into how teachers' educational contexts and available discourses affected their narratives of identity construction and why they left teaching. The study

occurred in Hong Kong, which Trent described as having difficulties retaining teachers due to a challenging environment for teachers.

Trent (2017) noted the influence of Varghese et al. (2005), who called for an identity framework that includes both identity-in-discourse and identity-in-practice. Trent created an integrated framework that presented discourse as an influence on agency through language. Trent used the critical discourse analysis by Fairclough (2003) that includes modality and evaluation as markers of discourse. Modality and the use of modals indicate what a person values in terms of personal commitment. Individuals use language associated with modality, such as “should” or “must.” Evaluation indicates what individuals view as desirable or worthy of attainment.

Trent (2017) employed Wenger’s (1998) three modes of belonging to account for the identity-in-practice approach: engagement, imagination, and alignment. The engagement mode suggests that teachers partially construct identities through negotiated meanings and relationships with other teachers, mentors, or administrators in the school setting. Teachers use their imaginations to place themselves in situations beyond their experiences, and alignment includes the institutional expectations placed on the teacher. Wenger emphasized the importance of negotiated meanings to identity formation, as a lack of negotiated meanings could result in marginalized or isolated identity.

The concept of negotiated meanings leads to agency recognition on the part of a teacher negotiating meanings. Trent (2017) extended the sense of negotiation to a contested construction of identity, in which factors with an influence on identity formation both constrain and enable a teacher. Trent used both Fairclough’s (2003) and Wenger’s (1998) frameworks to understand discursive identity construction and the practical, action-oriented identity construction of five former teachers in Hong Kong who had taught for fewer than 3 years before leaving the

profession. Trent conducted semistructured interviews with each teacher, analyzing the data to identify subject positions and nodal points that might have been the phrases that the participants used to make sense of their experiences teaching in Hong Kong schools.

Trent (2017) found that two discourses impacted teachers' identities: teaching is an individual accomplishment, and teaching is a community accomplishment. The discursive ideas about individual and community present a teacher as an agent of change conforming to the status quo. The participants constructed the discourse of teaching as an individual accomplishment through the interrelated themes of "challenge and change, distance, difference, the teacher I can be, and spontaneity and excitement" (Trent, 2017, p. 92). The teachers in the study used the terms "challenge and change" to describe the aspects of teaching in Hong Kong that they wanted to change. The teachers often distanced themselves professionally and socially from other teachers to access a positive identity construction, such as challenging the status quo; however, this distance also resulted in their positioning as outsiders. When the participants engaged in the teaching practices of other teachers in their schools, they felt stifled and limited in their potential identity possibilities. The discourse of teaching as a community accomplishment contributes to a social construction of identity, not an individual one. One of the teacher identities in the teaching as a community accomplishment theme was that of a team player for lesson planning uniformity. The competing discourses of teaching as an individual activity and teaching as a community achievement often caused the teachers to feel caught between the two. Being a teacher who challenges the status quo can provide better outcomes for students, as the teacher contests established practices; however, the discourse of teaching as a community focuses on the values of those established practices.

Trent (2017) found that the discourse of teaching as a community accomplishment was the most powerful approach due to the hegemonic practices in the participants' school contexts. The participants felt constrained in their teacher agency and limited in their abilities to construct their preferred teacher identities, which contributed to their reasons for leaving. Trent recommended that teachers reflect on dominant discourses, especially in teacher support groups, to see the effects of teachers positioned by dominant discourses. Reflecting on dominant discourses provides a "more complex understanding of identity construction" that contributes to teacher agency "by allowing teachers to occupy the borderland between the discourses of teachers and teaching they confront" (Trent, 2017, p. 102) in their teaching environments. Trent's findings were valuable for this study on classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees due to the use of a similar theoretical framework and exploration of the interplay between conflicting discourses that enable the construction of certain teacher identities.

Kayi-Aydar (2015) explored the agency and identity formations and reformations of three preservice classroom teachers who taught ESL classes for an ESL endorsement over a school year. The researcher used a narrative positioning perspective to study data from interviews and journal entries to understand how the participants took on various identity positions in relation to their social contexts. The positional identities often conflicted with each other but influenced classroom practices and teacher agency.

Kayi-Aydar (2015) argued that a teacher's positionality correlates to teacher agency in the complex negotiation of identity. Teachers position themselves and their students in interactive ways with their agency. Kayi-Aydar used the positioning theory by Davies and Harré (1999), which focuses on how individuals construct identities through discourse and positioning to situate and give rights and responsibilities to themselves and others through talk. Kayi-Aydar

explained that “the discourse we produce is shaped by our multiple selves while at the same times discourse shapes our multiple selves” (p. 95). Identity is always in process, with the term “position” indicating the fluidity of identity possibilities.

The process of positioning is a guide for how teachers interact with students, which Kayi-Aydar (2015) connected to teachers’ agency. According to Kayi-Aydar, agency is how a teacher acts purposefully in social interactions and in context. Teachers often experience constraints in these interactions and have limited agency. However, Kayi-Aydar believed that “agency is possible or achieved when individuals are assigned agentic positions” (p. 95). Agency influences position because a teacher might feel enabled to act by taking on certain roles.

Kayi-Aydar (2015) studied three preservice teachers as they taught three different K-5 classrooms for 33 weeks to earn ESL endorsements in their graduate work. The researcher used a single case design with multiple participants who shared many characteristics. The data for the research consisted of journal entries and interviews. Data analysis occurred in four phases of line-by-line coding, recursive reading, positioning analysis, and thematic coding.

The participants positioned themselves in relation to their ELs and their mentor teachers. They saw themselves as teachers of all students, having empathy for ELs’ struggles in their schools. Two of the teachers perceived language as the main barrier to ELs’ success in school and positioned themselves as language content teachers. The third teacher saw herself as a bridge between ELs and the dominant culture. The participants also positioned themselves in relation to their mentor teachers in terms of experience and teaching style. However, positioning often occurred in contradictory ways. For example, one participant saw herself as a teacher of ELs yet positioned herself as struggling to differentiate instruction for these students. Kayi-Aydar’s study

was relevant to this study because it provided insight into how teachers position themselves in relation to ELs and other teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Individuals construct identity through discourse and practice and negotiate their identities through positioning and narrative resources in relationships (Davies & Harré, 1999; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Søreide, 2006, Varghese et al., 2005). Identity has multiple and shifting contexts, including macrocontexts, mesocontexts, and microcontexts (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). This study included identity-in-discourse and identity-in-practice to contribute to the literature on classroom teachers and ELs. Additionally, this study focused on the negotiation of classroom teacher identity in relation to ELs. The participants had different contexts and positioning narrative resources; thus, they enacted their identities in discourse and practice. The purpose of this research was to understand how teachers enact their identities in discourse and practice. This study filled a gap in the literature by focusing on classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees who taught ELs in their classes. The study had the following guiding research question: How do K-12 classroom teachers who have completed TESOL graduate degree construct their professional identities? The next chapter presents the methodology used to collect and analyze data to answer the overarching research question.

CHAPTER III:  
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

**Introduction**

This study was a means to determine whether earning a TESOL graduate degree affects how teachers construct their professional identities. The theoretical framework and literature review in Chapter II provided a basis for understanding how classroom teachers construct their identities in discourse and practice after earning graduate TESOL degrees. Understand these issues required a methodology that addressed the positioning, context, identity-in-practice, and identity-in-discourse that teachers face as they develop their professional identities.

This chapter presents the methodology used for the study. The chapter includes the research questions as well as a brief overview of qualitative inquiry and why it was the most appropriate approach. Individuals view knowledge as situated and co-constructed in context. The chapter also includes the study's setting and participants. There is a description of data collection from three sources: interviews (see Appendix A), journal notes, and documents related to a TESOL graduate degree and the selected school system. The chapter also presents the study's timeline, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the researcher's role.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore classroom teachers' professional identities after earning TESOL graduate degrees. The qualitative method was the approach chosen to investigate how classroom teachers constructed their professional identities in discourse and practice, used narrative resources in positioning, negotiated those identities in relationships, and constructed

their identities in a social context. Thematic analysis and discursive positioning were means to analyze the data from interviews and other documents related to the program. The overarching research question was, how do K-12 classroom teachers who have completed TESOL graduate degree construct their professional identities? Four subquestions emerged:

1. What are the professional identities of mainstream teachers in Muscogee County Schools who have a graduate degree in TESOL;
2. What are the resources teachers use to construct their identities as classroom teachers who have a graduate degree in TESOL;
3. How do teachers negotiate their teaching identities as they expand their teaching roles from classroom teacher to classroom teacher of ELs; and
4. How do teachers position themselves and their students in ways that reflect their identity formations?

### **Overview of Qualitative Inquiry Research Design**

Qualitative inquiry was the research design chosen for this study. Creswell (2013) argued that a motive for conducting qualitative research is understanding an issue not measurable or easily measured. The research problem of teacher identity is an issue not easily measured, thus indicating the appropriateness of the qualitative approach. Qualitative studies incorporate a natural setting, descriptive data, inductive data analysis, focus on the research process instead of the outcome, and focus on the participants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Richards and Morse (2013) recommended using qualitative methodology to study how participants make meaning within a natural setting. The objective of this study was to understand teachers' identity development within their natural settings; as such, the factors of the qualitative method aligned with this study's objective.

Qualitative researchers position themselves as the primary instruments for collecting information. Through a qualitative approach, a researcher closely studies complex social interactions and language to interpret the meanings people attribute to such interactions and language (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research has varied perspectives, but Denzin and Lincoln (2008) described it as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 4). Qualitative research also “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). A poststructural perspective was the approach taken in this qualitative study. The poststructural perspective suggests that reality is not a “fixed, objective, and constant construct” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 6). Instead, meaning is “socially constructed by individuals interacting with their world,” and reality is a “fluid, ephemeral, and ever-changing thing” (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 6). Conducting research is a subjective experience co-constructed between the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative research enables a scholar to study participants in their natural settings and provides many experiences and language expressions to explore. Therefore, qualitative research was an appropriate method for learning how in-service classroom teachers construct their professional identities after completing graduate TESOL degrees.

Rossman and Rallis (2017) described several characteristics of qualitative research relevant to this study. The first two features are characteristics unique to qualitative research: first, “The researcher is the means through which the study is conducted,” and second, “The purpose is to learn some facet of the social world” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 4). Rossman and Rallis highlighted additional qualitative research characteristics, such as naturalistic, varied, contextual, emergent, reflective, and interpretive. A researcher’s biography affects the research,

as does advanced reasoning in interpreting data. The following presents each aspect's relevance to the study to show why qualitative research was appropriate.

Qualitative research is a naturalistic method oriented toward sensory experiences in the natural world. This research approach focuses on what people feel, hear, or say (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative research is naturalistic and located in the field; thus, there were various approaches used (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative participants are not removed from their settings, requiring multiple means of data collection to understand the participants, including interviews and textual elements related to coursework or the school system. The naturalistic setting and multiple methods used provided this study with context. The shaping of the classroom setting occurs at three levels: the macro level by cultural value systems and state regulations, the meso level by forces such as societal attitudes toward immigrants and their children or community expectations of teachers, and the micro level by classroom relationships (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). The theoretical framework used in this research also suggests the context-embedded nature of professional identity. Observing the teachers in their classrooms also produced additional information for the one-on-one interviews.

Conducting research in naturalistic settings, using various methods, and focusing on the context of the research settings produces emergent findings, the next characteristic of qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative scholars approach research with conceptual frameworks and guiding questions but can change these components once in the field. Information emerged during three one-on-one interviews with each participant. The complex reasoning process of moving between the conceptual framework of the study and the emergent themes is another qualitative research characteristic (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Sophisticated,

complex reasoning enabled reflection of the conceptual framework and the data while attending to the study's components and the study as a whole.

The researcher's biography and context are important components in a study, as a researcher observes, hears, reads, understands, and represents information (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Researcher biographies indicate how they see the world, providing a unique perspective and understanding. Sensitivity to this worldview enables systematic reflection in how a researcher approaches a study and the participants. Reflecting on that biography and interactions with the participants enabled mindfulness while in the context and setting of the classroom. Rossman and Rallis (2017) suggested that researchers write analytic memos, allowing them to reflect and gain more insights into the study.

Qualitative research is an interpretive process. In this study, there was a familiar topic and setting chosen. Interpreting the study's data required going beyond field notes, interview transcripts, and document analysis to interpret "thoughtful, ethical, and politically astute" findings (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, pp. 8–9). A personal biography required interpretation in this study to reflect on its influence on the study. This was an interpretive study on which researcher biography and reflexivity had an effect. Thus, this study included the characteristics of qualitative research by Rossman and Rallis (2017), including a naturalistic setting, varied methods, examination of the research's context, and an emergent design.

### **Overview of Case Study Design**

A qualitative case study design was a suitable methodology for a detailed, rich description of how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees develop their identities in practice and discourse. The design enabled in-depth analysis of the participants' identities in practice and discourse. Creswell (2013) described a case study as a qualitative approach that

“explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 97). The sources of information in this study were interviews, documents, and reports.

The qualitative case study design focuses on the holistic nature and complexity of identity formation in the real world and enables a researcher to understand a topic. Yin (2014) described three characteristics and reasons for conducting a qualitative case. First, the purpose of the research is to answer “why” or “how” questions. Second, the research focuses on contemporary events. Third, the researcher does not have control over the participants’ behaviors. This study focused on how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees construct their professional identities in practice and discourse out of the researcher’s control; thus, a qualitative case study was an appropriate approach.

This was a qualitative, descriptive, and multiple case study with five participants based on Yin’s (2014) framework, as it addressed how the participants constructed their identities. Stake (1995) described three types of qualitative case studies. First, the purpose of an instrumental case study is to understand a specific issue or problem. Second, an intrinsic case study requires investigation due to its unique qualities. Third, a multiple or collective case study focuses on a specific problem or topic for which a researcher uses multiple cases to investigate the topic from multiple perspectives. This research was a collective, instrumental case study, as its purpose was to understand how five classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees developed their identities in practice and discourse.

The unit of analysis was an individual classroom teacher with a graduate TESOL degree teaching in Muscogee County Schools. Stake (1995) considered a case a bounded system, but there are various ways to bind a case. Stake suggested binding a case by time and activity,

Creswell (2013) bound a study by time and place, and Miles and Huberman (1994) bound their study by definition and context. For this research, time, place, definition, and context were the means used for binding. The time frame of the study over two semesters of data collection bounded the research. Additionally, the context and place, Muscogee County Schools, further bound the study. The study was additionally bound by a focus on classroom teachers of ELs with TESOL graduate degrees.

### **Population and Sample**

The purpose of this study was to understand how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees develop professional identities in practice and discourse. Therefore, the participants were not full-time ESL teachers but teachers with ELs in their classes. Due to my affiliation with the school system, most of the teachers in the grant programs were my acquaintances. Thus, to have access to all grant participants and avoid influencing the participants, there was contact made with the ESL director for the school system to obtain a full list of grant participants.

The population consisted of more than 60 teachers in Muscogee County who had participated in three grants in seven different cohorts. Of those individuals, more than 40 graduated with TESOL graduate degrees. Among this group, five teachers had left the system. Two teachers continued to work in the system as instructional partners in two schools. Four teachers in the grant were special education teachers. Therefore, in the 2019–2020 academic year, there were over 35 active classroom teachers who had graduated with TESOL graduate degrees.

The population produced a rich sample. Of the more than 40 teachers who graduated with TESOL graduate degrees, nine were men, and the rest were women. This was a sample reflective

of the demographics of a district where there are more female teachers. Only 17 of the teachers taught in middle school or high school despite efforts to recruit secondary teachers based on the needs of older ELs. Two teachers came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; however, most of the teachers in the program and school system were White. The participants had varied experience as teachers, with some in their first 5 years of teaching. However, most of the teachers had between 5 to 12 years of teaching experience, and several had more than 15 years of experience. Many of the teachers lived in the communities where they taught, and some of the teachers taught at schools they had attended as students. More than 35 of the grant participants graduated from the county system in which they were teachers. At least two teachers taught in the same physical classrooms where they were once students.

The teachers also taught a wide variety of subjects. There were science teachers in middle and high school, including one who had taught AP biology. There were secondary English teachers, math teachers, and history teachers. At the high school level, one teacher taught driver's education, another taught business and career preparedness, and two were physical education teachers. There were elementary school teachers from every grade level, from kindergarten to sixth grade. Two schools had a teacher for every K–5 grade level with TESOL graduate degrees. Several of the teachers had additional school administrative duties, such as technology coordinator, Title I coordinator, or response to instruction coordinator. Many teachers in the grant coached sports, such as softball, basketball, volleyball, football, soccer, and track.

In choosing the participants to contact for this study, purposeful sampling was appropriate to inform the research problem (Creswell, 2013). Finding teachers with identities shaped by learning to teach ELs required researching teachers affected by ELs in their schools. Therefore, there were three inclusion criteria: teachers who had completed graduate TESOL

degrees through the grant partnership, were still classroom teachers, and taught ELs in their classrooms for multiple years during and after their grant program participation.

The teachers who matched these criteria received e-mails about the research and their potential role in the study. The five teachers willing to participate signed the necessary consent and information forms before there were dates set for data collection and the interview. After identifying and briefing the potential participants on the study, grouping of the participants commenced into categories. Of the five participants, four were women and one was a man: Two taught early childhood grades (kindergarten through second grade), one (the male) taught upper elementary (Grades 4 through 6), one taught middle school science, and one taught high school English. The participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

The first participant was in the first cohort. Callie began her career as a teacher's aide who worked primarily with ELs. After one year, she began working as a first-grade teacher at the most culturally and linguistically diverse elementary school in the system. She taught for twelve years and had ELs in her classroom every year. She was married at the time of the study.

The next participant, Denise, was a high school English teacher at the high school with the most ELs in the school system. She had taught for 14 years and taught English across multiple grade levels, including advanced English classes and intervention classes. She was married and had two children.

Blake, the youngest participant in the study, was a member of one of the later cohorts of the grant. He had taught for six years in two small, rural schools in Muscogee County, including third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. He had ELs in his classroom in all but one year of his teaching career. Blake had recently gotten married.

Lily had been teaching for thirteen years. Lily taught science at the largest and most linguistically diverse middle school in the system. In the last few years, she had taught students who spoke Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Tagalog, Gujarati, and Nepali. Lily was married to a teacher and coach in a nearby system.

Andrea was a kindergarten teacher in a large, rural school that had the most ELs in Muscogee County. She had been teaching for ten years, all of them in Muscogee County. Andrea has had ELs in her class for several years, having up to 40% of EL students in some years. Andrea was married to a high school teacher and had five children.

Selecting five participants enabled interviews with early and midcareer in-service teachers for insight into a diverse range of experiences of the identity development of teachers with graduate TESOL degrees. The five teachers comprised a sample small enough to gather an extensive amount of information and large enough to develop an understanding of the research problem (see Creswell, 2013).

### **Setting**

The setting was a county school system in Northeast Alabama in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Although the county is one of the state's smaller counties, it is one of the most densely populated (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). There are three public school systems in the county. One system is the city system for the largest city in the county. The second is a city system for a smaller town in the county. The third system was the setting of this research. All students in the county not within the city limits for the other two systems are zoned to attend a county system school. The schools and communities have also been given pseudonyms.

Muscogee County Schools is the largest in the county in the number of schools and students. There are eleven elementary schools, four middle schools, and six high schools. There

is also an alternative school for students with behavior issues and a career technical center where students from all of the high schools in the county go for automotive technology, welding, or health sciences. The school system has about 9,000 students, and it is in the top 20 largest school systems in Alabama. There are over 600 certified teachers in the district.

Muscogee County Schools provides for nine incorporated municipalities and several other unincorporated communities. Several of the schools in the system are in rural areas with pastures and farms around the schools. Of the 20 schools, 15 receive Title I money, with many students receiving free or reduced lunches, an indicator of economic need among the student population.

Among the county's industries is a large tire manufacturing facility, the largest employer in the county. However, recent downsizes have resulted in a reduced workforce in that facility (Muscogee Commercial Development Authority, 2020). The largest employer at the time of the study was a hospital in the largest city of the county; the second-largest employer was the county school system (Muscogee Commercial Development Authority, 2020). Another large employer is a huge car manufacturer in a nearby county that employs over 4,000 workers, 20% of whom live in the study's county. Subsidiary car part manufacturing plants also provide employment for many workers in the county. The county's median income is slightly below that of the state of Alabama, and approximately 18% of the total population members live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Over one in five children under 18 lives below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). County education rates are below the state average. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), 17.7% of the county's residents hold bachelor's degrees, a lower rate than the state's average of 24.9% of residents over the age of 25.

In the 2016–2017 school year, the student body demographics were 91.18% White, 3.49% Hispanic, 3.43% Black, and 1.06% Asian (Muscogee County Board of Education, 2016). The school system’s demographics differed from the county’s overall racial makeup as a whole, which was 81% White, 15.1% Black, 3.8% Hispanic of any race, and 0.8% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). There were 23 languages other than English spoken by students in their homes in the 2016–2017 school year, including Spanish, Q’anjob’al, K’iche, Mam, Mandarin, Japanese, Karay-a, Gujarati, Hindi, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Nepali, Russian, Swahili, French, Ewe, Urdu, Arabic, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Bahasa Indonesian, Croatian, and Pohnpeian. The list does not include languages spoken by exchange students. The languages with the most significant numbers of speakers in the school system are typically Spanish, Gujarati, Mam, and Q’anjob’al.

For the 2019–2020 academic year, about 125 students in Grades K–12 were ELs tested on their English proficiency with the WIDA Access 2.0 standardized test for English skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Approximately 50 students had exited from the ESL program and but remained monitored by the ESL teachers assigned to six or seven schools. Itinerant ESL teachers for Muscogee County Schools traveled to several schools each week. Of the 20 schools in the system, only two did not have any ELs; both schools had former ELs or bilingual students who did not require academic ESL services. However, there were typically two to three ELs per school. Only three elementary schools had more than 10 ELs, and only two high schools had more than five ELs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework focused on how individuals construct identity through discourse and practice and negotiate identity through positioning in relationships (Davies & Harré, 1999; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Søreide, 2006, Varghese et al., 2005). Identity is a dynamic

concept with multiple and shifting contexts, including macrocontexts, mesocontexts, and microcontexts (Clarke, 2009; Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). This research study will focus on the participants' mesocontexts of the school and community level and their classroom level microcontexts. While the participants' macrocontext influences the broader language policy of the school, the attitudes of their colleagues and community members, and their classroom language practices, the scope of this research will be focused on the more intimate contexts of meso- and microcontext.

With a focus on identity-in-discourse and identity-in-practice, this study addressed the negotiation of classroom teacher identity in relation to ELs on individual, school, and community levels and how the participants changed their language or teaching practices to align or distances themselves from certain groups (Varghese et al., 2005). There were participants located in different contexts who used different positioning discursive resources. The participants enacted their identities in discourse by how they negotiated, constructed, and maintained their identities and enacted their identities through practice in their communities and their relationships to those communities.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Addressing each of the research questions required collecting information from several sources for a rich picture of participants' experiences, training, teaching encounters, and contexts. Collecting such information provided the opportunity to understand how the participants constructed their identities as classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees. Collected data entailed various evidence from multiple sources because no one source could have provided a full, rich perspective (Patton, 1990). The data sources included program documents for background information, research journal notes of the data collection activities,

three semistructured interviews, and analytic memos. The data collected indicated how the participants constructed, enacted, and negotiated their identities through writing or speaking.

Yin (2014) found documentation relevant to most case studies. This study's documentation included e-mails, administrative documents, formal studies, and research evaluations. Documentation is evidence for verifying titles, names, details, and supporting information from other sources. Archival records used to describe the setting and context included formal studies and administrative documents from the grant that provided tuition support for the teachers. There was information obtained about the timeline of the grants, course descriptions, and courses of study that the teachers took to earn TESOL graduate degrees. There were also e-mail interactions with school system administrators about the context and demographics of ELs in the school system.

Interviews were the primary source of evidence for the study. The teachers participated in both guided interviews and informal conversations in a location of their choice. Due to the circumstances of the COVID-19 global pandemic during data collection, all participants decided to conduct their interviews via telephone or videoconferencing. The three interviews with each participant lasted between 35 and 60 minutes and occurred according to the interview protocol in Appendix A. A voice recording app was the means used to record the interviews. The interviews then underwent transcription. Informal conversations occurred before and after the classroom walkthroughs.

Another source of information would have been direct observations of teachers with ELs in their classrooms. The teachers would have undergone three 45 to 60-minute observations at times of their choosing when they had ELs in their classrooms. The purpose of the observations was to investigate how the teachers interacted with ELs, performed self-talk in describing their

thinking, and engaged in other discourses related to their identities. However, data collection commenced in spring 2020, which coincided with the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Due to social distancing requirements, it was not possible to visit classrooms with students present.

The theoretical framework presented in the second chapter and the information collected from the interviews and document analysis were the means used to answer the main research question for the study. This study focused on the effect of obtaining TESOL graduate degrees on how K-12 classroom teachers construct their professional teaching identities. The evidence collected and the strategies employed provided multiple sources of data to understand the primary research question.

### **Research Journal**

During the research and data collection, I kept a research journal to write about the process of collecting data and track thoughts. The journal contained notes about research activities, thoughts, and plans. The journal served to document emergent research for future data collection and analytic memos about observations for insight on subsequent data.

### **E-mail Communications**

After the participants provided informed consent, they received e-mails with questions about background information, including age, gender, educational history, and professional history. E-mail was the communication method used with the participants to discuss interview times and engage in follow-up communication or questions from the interviews.

### **Interviews**

In qualitative research, interviews are a primary means of collecting data (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviews were a vital component in this study because they enabled the development of a better understanding of the participants' teaching identities and

their interaction within certain contexts. The interviews occurred in accordance with the semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix A) that included open-ended questions and unanticipated emergent themes (Roulston, 2010). Transcription occurred after the first round of interviews followed by an examination for emergent themes in the interview data and research journal. The second set of semistructured interviews included the emergent patterns from the data and were the means used to crosscheck and confirm the data. The third set of interviews enabled confirmation or clarification of the data obtained in the other two interviews.

The interviews included informal and guided interview approaches (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Creation of the guided interview protocols entailed conceptualizing the interviews as social practice (Talmy, 2010). According to the interview conceptualization, the data are not direct reports of facts but constructions and negotiations of meaning between the researcher and participants. This concept enabled a focus on the co-construction of meaning indicating how the participants formed and negotiated their identities. The interview questions also focused on how the teachers viewed themselves in regard to their EL students and how they enacted their role as classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). The interviews allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences on becoming classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees.

The first set of semistructured interviews included questions on the participants' backgrounds, motivations for earning graduate TESOL degrees, and classroom practices for ELs. The second set of interviews focused on the participants' role in their schools and communities and their professional teaching identities. The third set of interviews consisted of semistructured interviews based on the emergent themes from the first two interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research is emergent (Merriam, 2009). The study's guiding question was, how do K-12 classroom teachers who have completed TESOL graduate degree construct their professional identities? Teachers construct shifting identities in contexts through relationships with students, educators, and communities (Olsen, 2011). Ongoing data analysis showed how the classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees constructed their professional identities.

## **Transcription**

Transcription choices are important because they are part of the “process used to answer your question” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). When transcribing the interviews, there was a need to decide how to transcribe suprasegmental features of speech, such as volume, stress, and pitch or nonlinguistic features. Full transcription of the words occurred, with notes made about features of speech. Each interview received multiple listens, with revisions as needed. The participants engaged in transcript checking to further ensure accuracy.

## **Process of Analysis**

Thematic analysis, a common form of analysis for qualitative research, was the process chosen for this study. Thematic analysis enables researchers to familiarize themselves with the data through multiple readings; find, review, and define themes; and produce written reports (Riessmann, 2008). In this study, there were key issues and common themes noted to understand the patterns and complexities (Creswell, 2013) of how participants constructed their professional identities in regard to ELs. Vertical and horizontal readings and note-taking during the interviews indicated emerging themes and provided information about the study. Merriam (2009) suggested that a researcher make comments, notes, and observations while looking for emerging patterns in the data. See Table 2 for a chart of data management and analysis.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested that analytic memos are a way to move from revealing insights to acting creatively with the research—or, in this study, from describing to interpreting to having a concept. This study entailed multiple data reviews along with analytic memos documented and revised in line with the study’s theoretical framework. While writing analytic memos, thematic analysis was an ongoing process that enabled connections to the context of the study and the related literature to challenge the findings and look for other interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using the data from the sources in such a way enabled “richly descriptive” report of the research question (Merriam, 2009, p. 8).

### **Discourse Analysis**

A discourse analysis commenced to gain a rich description of how the classroom teachers enacted their professional identities as classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees. After interviewing the participants and listening to the interviews many times, there was a need to identify how teachers construct their identities through language. Analysis of the participants’ words commenced based on Davies and Harré’s (1990) discursive positioning and Gee’s (2014b) Discourse analysis tool of identity-building. Gee (2014b) advised researchers to identify the “socially recognizable identity or identities the speaker is trying to enact or to get others to recognize” and the “sorts of identities the speaker recognizes for others in relationship to his or her own” (p. 116). Gee also encouraged researchers to ask how participants position themselves against others.

### **Data Management**

As indicated in Table 1, the data was kept on a secure server by the researcher. After transcription, the audio recordings were deleted. Table 1 also has an explanation of the data, data

analysis and management, as well as data follow up. Participants' privacy was prioritized in data management and analysis.

Table 1

*Data Management and Analysis*

Data collection technique	Description of Data	Management of Data	Analysis of Data	Data Follow-up
Research journal	<p>Where: kept in an online file</p> <p>When: throughout the data collection time period</p> <p>Who: researcher</p> <p>How: researcher writes memos and thoughts of research activities for the time period of data collection</p>	Journals to be kept by researcher to record research process	<p>Data to be thematically analyzed</p> <p>Analytic memos</p>	Data to be used to create follow-up questions for interviews based on responses given
Individual interviews	<p>Where: Via telephone and videoconferencing</p> <p>When: by appointment with participants</p> <p>Who: 5 selected teacher participants</p> <p>How: Individual interviews with each participant</p>	<p>Interviews to be audiotaped</p> <p>Interviews to be transcribed</p>	<p>Data to be thematically analyzed</p> <p>Discourse analysis</p> <p>Analytic memos</p>	Data to be used to create follow-up questions for interviews based on responses given

## **Timeline of Study**

It was necessary to apply to The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B) for approval to conduct the study before data collection could begin. Data collection spanned May through August 2020 and consisted of conducting interviews (see Appendix A for interview protocol). After collecting the data, analysis data and project completion occurred over two months.

## **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Qualitative research is “fundamentally interpretive” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 2) in its epistemology. The interpretivist epistemological approach suggests that researchers, participants, and readers find their own significance to the study. Because of these beliefs, evaluation of qualitative research occurs based on credibility and trustworthiness.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability indicate the trustworthiness of a study. Credibility requires the truth of the findings, study’s validity, and representation of the “multiple constructions adequately” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Lincoln and Guba suggested several methods for establishing credibility, including triangulation and member checking; other qualitative scholars also support these methods (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Triangulation is “the act of bringing one source of data to bear on a single point” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 262). Creswell (2013) described triangulation as using “corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 251). In this study, triangulation commenced with the data sources of interviews and document analysis. Member checks consisted of sending interview transcripts, field notes, and portions of the dissertation to the participants for feedback. Dependability

requires establishing credibility, so the methods used to ensure credibility are also a sufficient means of establishing dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability is another aspect of a trustworthy study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) described transferability as how the findings of a study are “useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice” (p. 262). In this study, achieving transferability entailed documenting thick, rich descriptions of the research’s setting, sampling, data collection methods, and data management and analysis. Including an interpretation of the results so that other researchers could find the findings useful in similar contexts or topics was another means of achieving transferability.

Confirmability is another aspect of a qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described confirmability as the neutrality of a researcher. An audit trail, which indicates the steps a researcher takes during the interview process, is a way of ensuring confirmability. Reflexivity is another process of achieving confirmability, as achieved in this study with a researcher journal to track the decisions made during the research process. Cho and Trent (2006) argued for transformational validity, which addresses the multiple perspectives that affect the research process, including the researcher. Therefore, researcher reflexivity is a key part of trustworthiness, but it still suggests that a researcher is interested in the research.

### **Researcher’s Role**

While conducting research with classroom teachers, personal and professional background had an effect on the research and my role as a researcher. I have taught ESL for over a decade, and my experiences during those years have significantly influenced my views of teaching ELs. As a doctoral student and a full-time ESL teacher, I immersed myself in both the theory and the practices influential in how classroom teachers should support and teach ELs.

Additionally, I have been an adjunct instructor who has taught classes related to TESOL instructional practices. These roles enable me to position myself as an expert in ESL instruction, which could have affected how the participants described their identities as EL classroom teachers.

Although viewed as an expert in those areas, I have only been a classroom teacher for 4 of my 17 years as a teacher. Besides preparing ELs for the yearly English proficiency test, I have not faced the pressure of high stakes testing or planning or differentiating instruction for students in multiple subjects with multiple educational needs. Therefore, I remained sensitive to the possibility that the participants might have assumed that I did not fully understand the multiple pressures that they faced as classroom teachers.

My relationship with the participants was another critical consideration. In my role as an ESL teacher with the school system, I did not supervise these teachers. They did not report to me in any way. My role was one of support and collaboration. However, the participants could have withheld information about their experiences or their ELs in their classrooms.

Personally, I have lived in countries where I did not speak the dominant language, and professionally, I have seen firsthand the challenges that ELs face in school, and I have helped them through some of these challenges. I understand and acknowledge that these experiences could have influenced my role as a researcher and my positionality. I did not conduct this study as a disinterested observer because I wanted to understand how the classroom teachers constructed their identities to support the academic success of ELs.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are an essential part of conducting research that require awareness of the complexity of a wide variety of aspects, such as privacy and rights (Creswell, 2013;

Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Neuman, 2011). The Editorial Advisory Board of the *TESOL Quarterly* provided guidelines for ethical research on TESOL subjects (Chapell & Duff, 2003). Rossman and Rallis (2017) described three ethical issues in qualitative research: privacy and confidentiality, deception and consent, and trust and betrayal. Addressing privacy and confidentiality occurred with an official consent form. The consent form indicated to the participants of the maintenance of their privacy in all written work and presentations of this study, the confidentiality of the records via pseudonyms, and the sole use of the data for this study.

The informed consent indicated that the participants could leave the study and refuse to share any information at any time. The informed consent also presented the purpose, procedures, time commitment, and possible risks and benefits of the study. The third issue of ethical research raised by Rossman and Rallis (2017) is building trust between the researcher and the participants. Due to my work in the Muscogee County school system, I had existing, long-standing relationships with the participants. There was a desire to avoid exploiting them or making them feel uncomfortable; therefore, the participants received parts of the study draft to check the interpretations and negotiated meanings. I obtained IRB approval from the University of Alabama before collecting data to comply with research ethics. I also obtained permission from the school system and the principals at each site before data collection commenced (see Appendix C).

Beyond the three ethical issues, ethical standards in qualitative research require a focus on the relationships between the researchers, participants, and stakeholders. Davies and Dodd (2002) described ethics as part of “our actions, and in our ways of doing and practicing our

relationships” (p. 281). In this view, ethics is a flexible, integral, ongoing part of the entire study and research process.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the rationale for selecting qualitative methodology to answer the research question. There were descriptions of the study setting and participants’ backgrounds. The chapter included the research process, including data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter addressed the methodological concerns, including trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

## CHAPTER IV:

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore how classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees construct their professional identities to include being teachers of ELs. Whether learning English as a second, third, or perhaps fourth language, ELs are among the fastest-growing student populations in the United States. Between 2003 and 2013, there was a 60% increase in the EL population (Breiseth, 2015). More recent estimates show that ELs under the age of 8 comprise almost one third of the student population in rural and urban schools in all 50 states (Breiseth, 2015; Park et al., 2017).

The changes in student populations have caused problems at several levels. ELs and their family members, especially recent immigrants, often struggle to adjust to a new country, new school, and new language. Many monolingual English-speaking teachers also struggle due to inadequate teacher preparation, as preservice and in-service teachers rarely receive the extensive professional development on the pedagogical and social techniques needed to effectively teach ELs (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Bunch, 2013; de Jong & Harper, 2005), as suggested by evidence in this chapter. Some teachers struggle from a lack of personal experience with linguistically diverse neighbors of any type, as suggested by evidence in this chapter. Without previous exposure, teachers may view ELs as “linguistically deficient” (Lucas & Villegas, 2010, p. 303) individuals who must catch up to their peers. Moreover, many teachers may either ignore ELs or

do their best with them but express little interest in learning how to cope with their linguistic and academic needs (Lucas et al., 2015; Lucas & Villegas, 2010; Walker et al., 2004).

Due to the burgeoning breadth of academic and linguistic needs caused by the influx of ELs, teachers can cope effectively by developing expertise to go beyond “general good teaching practices” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 137). Many teachers struggle with shifting away from monolingual English-speaking students, which is a paradigm shift for the study’s setting of Muscogee County Schools. Coping with any paradigm shift could result in possible identity shifts. The problem that led to this study was that most teachers resist embracing the necessary shifts in their professional teaching identities required by ELs’ influx. However, some teachers have embraced the change. This study sought to understand the journey of teachers who embrace the new shift and how they reshape and reconstruct their teaching identities.

The participants were five teachers who, in addition to their teaching credentials, had completed TESOL graduate degrees. The overarching research question was, how do K-12 classroom teachers who have completed TESOL graduate degree construct their professional identities? The study goals were to characterize teachers’ professional identities; determine how they constructed their identities from negotiations with their histories, students, communities, and colleagues; and evaluate how they positioned themselves in regard to others in their communities. The means of addressing the goals consisted of an identity-in-discourse and identity-in-practice framework. The analytical framework addressed how the teachers situated, negotiated, and developed professional identities in shifting contexts, particularly in relationships with other people.

This chapter has eight sections, beginning with the research questions. The second section presents an explanation and illustration of the thematic summary, followed by the third

section addressing the qualitative data analysis approach. Individuals negotiate identities in context, and identities are constantly shifting and constructed discursively. A classroom teacher who completes a graduate TESOL degree encounters new students, learns new teaching methods, and acquires new duties, affecting the teacher's professional identity. The guiding question resulted in four subquestions of how teachers construct their identities in discourse and practice. As the participants and the researcher are practicing teachers, many acronyms and teaching jargon was used in the interviews. An explanation of terms used by participants is in Appendix D.

The fourth section presents the results for subquestion one and has four parts (personal and professional background; initial exposure to foreign languages, gaps in teacher training, and teaching ELs; TESOL impacts on professional identities; and the answer to subquestion one). Subquestion one addressed the different professional identities that classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees might construct. ELs often experience marginalization in schools and communities; thus, classroom teachers might take on the roles of protector, supporter, or promoter. Teachers may have conflicting professional identities due to their aspirations and relationships with their students, colleagues, families, and communities. Answering this question required exploring the participants' experiences and motivations for becoming a teacher to how they described their professional identities. Exposure to other languages, gaps in their preparation for ELs, and their initial experiences with ELs also underwent consideration in how they constructed their professional identities.

The rest of the chapter addresses further influences in the development of their teacher identities as active advocates. The fifth section presents the results for subquestion two and has six parts (Andrea, the bold advocate; Callie, the exasperated advocate; Blake, the agile advocate;

Lily, the undervalued advocate; Denise, the enthusiastic advocate; and the answer to subquestion two). Subquestion two addressed how classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees talked about their professional identity construction. Discursive resources, such as subject positions and the positioning that the teachers accessed to talk about themselves and their students, families, and communities, showed that the classroom teachers were active agents in their professional identity construction. Discursive resources can be the subjects or narrative positions teachers access to describe themselves (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Søreide, 2006). Søreide (2006) studied the resources that elementary teachers can use to describe themselves. The teachers had only certain subject positions and discursive resources available. Exploring these discursive resources provided a better understanding of how classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees see themselves and the new subject positions open to them.

The sixth section presents the results for subquestion three. It has four parts (negotiations with the students; negotiations within the school; negotiations with the community that influenced teaching identity; and the answer to subquestion three). Subquestion three addressed how teachers negotiate teaching identity in context. The participants existed in many different contexts, including their classrooms, schools, and communities. Having ELs in their classrooms and expanding their roles in their schools due to their TESOL graduate degrees caused the participants to negotiate their identities in various ways to meet ELs' academic and cultural needs. They negotiated their identities through their engagement and interactions with other people, especially their students and community members.

The seventh section presents the results for subquestion four and has three parts (role changes, cooperation and conflict with colleagues with an influence on teaching identity, and the answer to subquestion four). Subquestion four addressed how teachers construct their identity-in-

discourse with other teachers. The participants used positioning in how they spoke about themselves and their students in relation to other teachers. They positioned themselves as caring teachers, subject experts, and student advocates; they positioned their students as needing help or extra support. Positioning linked the poststructural and sociocultural approaches in the study, as the positioning occurred in context and through language. The participants' changes in responsibilities and their positioning correlated to their colleagues' cooperation and conflict. The final part of this chapter is the summary and conclusion.

### **Thematic Summary of Positions in Teaching Identity**

This section presents a summary of the overarching and main themes to enable readers to navigate the detailed evidence presented in the rest of this chapter. Figure 1 includes the themes and positioning of teacher identities in four layers, or the various facets of constructing professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Empathy and self-awareness are the foundational layers because the participants' other experiences and EL advocacy are grounded in these emotions. The participants' experiences and teacher knowledge contribute to that layer. Although EL advocacy stemmed from these experiences, the participants' identity construction differed given the contexts of the classrooms' microculture or the school's mesoculture. Therefore, two columns present the identity constructions that the teachers manifested within those contexts. Two of the participants, Blake and Denise, had unified identities in both contexts; the other three participants constructed identities that shifted given the context.

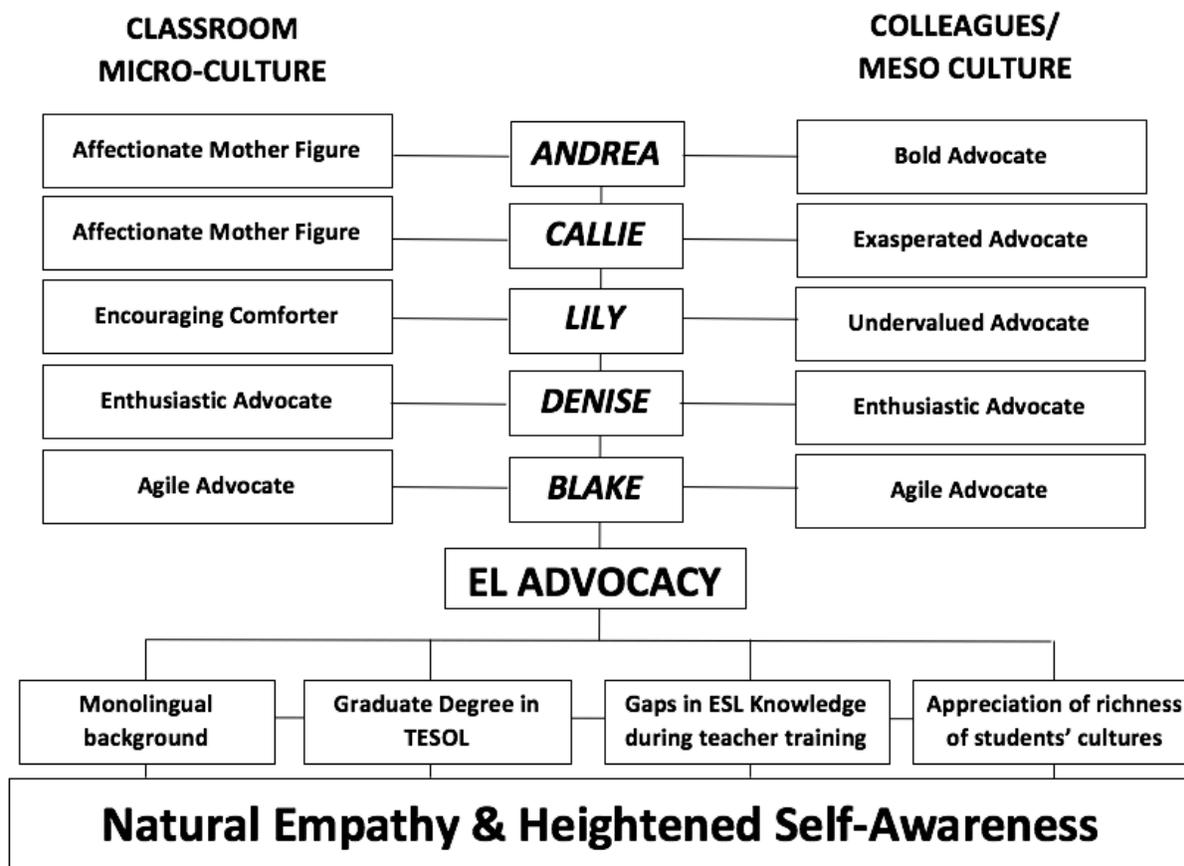


Figure 1. Thematic schematic of the positioning of teaching identities

The first layer at the bottom of the thematic schematic is *empathy and heightened self-awareness*. The overarching emergent theme was the empathy of the participants. There was abundant evidence of empathy in the interviews such that references to every indication of empathy would have exceeded the capacity of this report. However, although there was evidence of empathy, compassion, and concern for their ELs, the periodic use of signal phrases, such as “an indication of her empathy was...” appears throughout this report.

The participants’ intrinsic empathy richly presented with evidence of a heightened sense of self-awareness (see Figure 1). The passages indicative of heightened self-awareness in this chapter suggests the teachers’ keen awareness of needs: their needs, strengths, and weaknesses

and ELs' needs. The participants remained alert and responsive to the professional lessons they received from interacting in academic contexts.

Empathy and self-awareness were the overarching themes, as both were pivotal emotional dimensions. These themes contributed to the construction of teacher identities. Due to these emotions, the teachers resisted positioning themselves too distantly from other people. Finally, empathy and self-awareness were means of buoying attitudes when teachers felt burdened by ELs in their classrooms due to corresponding expectations to utilize distinct teaching methods, simplify lessons and homework, offer opportunities to redo assignments, and provide individual oral assessments instead of standard written assessments. Although added expectations caused more work, the teachers with TESOL graduate degrees embraced these expectations as a regular part of their role. The participants remained alert and responsive to their students' needs.

Empathy and self-awareness were also evident in the participants' careful choice of words. Many participants showed deliberate and diplomatic word choice. For example, in explaining her reasons for going back to graduate school for her TESOL degree, Lily noted that she "would continue to have students who would need help." The phrase "need help" could have been a gentle euphemism for students struggling in her classes and in school; it is one example among countless instances of how the participants' word choice showed judicious, impartial language. The careful choice of words likely emerged from the combination of culture (as a reflection of the classic understatement of teachers with backgrounds in the American South) and of professional reinforcement (as a reflection of the tact expected by members of academia). Their professionalism in discussing students was an important part of their interviews.

The second layer in Figure 1, directly above the bottom layer, presents the four main themes of *monolingual backgrounds*, *TESOL degree*, *teacher training gaps in TESOL techniques and strategies*, and *appreciation of diversity*. The horizontally aligned themes indicate the collaborative effect of these components on each participant's teaching identity or identities. For example, the participants had similar backgrounds of exposure to a single culture and single language, with equal exposure to other cultures. Their common backgrounds also appeared to contribute to realizing the gaps in their formal training about teaching ELs. Self-awareness enabled them to recognize their teacher training gaps, the empathy caused their desire to help students, and their growing appreciation of diversity contributed to their decisions to earn TESOL graduate degrees. Their self-awareness thus contributed to their appreciation of other cultures and ethnic diversity. Over time, they developed empathy from exposure to students, particularly ELs. They supported their empathy development with the understanding and tools they obtained from the TESOL program. These themes served to answer subquestion one.

The third layer in Figure 1, directly above the second layer, is *EL advocacy*. Advocacy consists of behavior in which an individual supports, encourages, promotes, and/or defends a person, group, or ideology. In this study, the imbrication of empathy, self-awareness, monolingual upbringing, TESOL degree, gaps in formal training, and an appreciation of diversity enabled the teachers to become EL advocates. The teachers made EL advocacy part of their identities after they completed their TESOL degrees. There is evidence of these themes presented in subquestion two.

EL advocacy resulted in developing complex identities, as shown in the fourth layer in Figure 1. The top layer consists of three columns radiating off the main theme of *EL advocacy*. The middle column presents the five participants by pseudonym. The two flanking columns

show the two broad sets of contexts influential for teaching identity. The left flank on Figure 1, labeled *classroom microculture*, indicates the influences from interactions with students in the classroom. Evidence of interactions within this microculture showed that each teacher had developed a specific teaching identity in the classroom that resulted in a matching classroom character or microculture. For example, Andrea and Callie developed the teaching identity of affectionate mother figure to create warm and reassuring classrooms for the youngest students. In contrast, Denise developed her identity of enthusiastic advocate to create a lively and interactive classroom for her high school students. Evidence of these themes was apparent in response to subquestion three.

The right flank of the fourth or top layer in Figure 1, labeled *colleagues/mesoculture*, indicates the contexts comprised of influences from colleague interactions. Although the participants shared the EL advocate identity, this evidence also suggested distinct roles. For example, Andrea developed the identity of a bold advocate in defense of ELs, Lily developed the identity of an undervalued advocate, and Blake developed the identity of an agile advocate. There is evidence of these themes presented to answer subquestion four.

Finally, there is a comparison of each participant's teaching identity among students in the *classroom micro-culture* with teaching identity among *colleagues*. Figure 1 shows that the teachers' EL advocacy resulted in layered teaching identities. Some teachers constructed one identity for the classroom context and another for the colleague context; other teachers had similar identities in both contexts.

Three of the participants developed complex, shifting identities given their contexts (see Figure 1). Andrea's teaching identity shifted between affectionate mother figure to her students to a bold EL advocate to her colleagues. Callie's teaching identity varied between an affectionate

mother figure to her students to an exasperated EL advocate to her colleagues. Lily's teaching identity also shifted into an encouraging mentor to her students, but a regrettably undervalued EL advocate to her colleagues. The shifting identities suggest that teachers position themselves differently than their colleagues. In contrast, two participants developed more fixed identities. Blake evolved his teaching identity into an agile advocate for both his students and his colleagues. Denise evolved her teaching identity into an enthusiastic advocate for both her students and her colleagues.

### **Results for Subquestion One**

Subquestion one was, what are the professional identities of mainstream teachers in Muscogee County Schools who have a graduate degree in TESOL? This results section includes the five participants' professional identities and the experiences that contributed to the construction of their teacher identities. The first section presents each participant's personal and professional background. The second section highlights the participants' initial exposure to languages other than English, gaps in their teacher training on ELs, and preliminary experiences with ELs. The third section addresses their impressions of the TESOL graduate program.

#### **Personal and Professional Background**

This section's basic personal and professional information shows that all five participants felt attracted to teaching as a career due to unique experiences. Three participants (Andrea, Callie, and Lily) knew as children that they would be teachers as adults. The other two, Blake and Denise, gravitated to teaching careers as young adults. Otherwise, the five participants had similar upbringings. They all grew up in the South, had little to no exposure to cultures outside their own, spoke only English, interacted only with other English speakers (i.e., had monolingual

backgrounds; see Figure 1), and studied other languages for brief periods in high school or college without achieving fluency.

In addition to sharing a similar culture and natural empathy that grew as they constructed their teaching identities (see Figure 1), the participants had another socioemotional feature in common. At the time of this study, they all lived and worked as adults in the same area in which they were raised. Their lifelong connection with their communities, combined with their empathy, suggests that the participants might have been particularly sensitive to the disruption of moving to a new country. This section presents some of the participants' fundamental experiences that could have caused them to empathize more ardently with children confronted by unfamiliar places that look, sound, and even smell different from their former homes. Although none of the participants had similar experiences to their ELs, they empathized with students thrust into another culture, where people exhibit perplexing behavior and where they are exposed to a new language that obstructs their initial efforts to communicate.

Table 2 shows the five participants' demographics and background. The educators represented the reshaping of teaching identity in five different classroom contexts, ranging from the earliest school years (Andrea taught kindergarten and Callie taught first grade) through the middle school years (Blake taught the fourth and fifth grades and Lily taught sixth through eighth grades) to high school (Denise taught the ninth through 12th grades).

Table 2

*Summary Table of Personal and Professional Background*

Pseudonym	Currently teaches	Birthplace	High school (year graduated)	College (year graduated)
Andrea	Kindergarten	Tensaw <sup>2</sup>	Tensaw	Community College, MSU <sup>3</sup>
Callie	Grade 1	Army base	Panola <sup>2</sup>	Community College, ESU <sup>3</sup>
Blake	Grades 4–5	Panola	Panola	ESU
Lily	Grades 6–8	Hillabee <sup>2</sup>	Panola	ESU
Denise	Grades 9–12	Tensaw	Sipsey <sup>2</sup>	Community College, SUU <sup>3</sup>

*Note.* <sup>2</sup> = see footnotes for explanation of pseudonyms used for communities; <sup>3</sup> = see footnotes.

***Andrea's Background***

Andrea was a kindergarten teacher (see Table 2). She grew up in Tensaw from the age of 4 years, when her parents moved back to “where my mom’s family lives,” and she “stayed in Tensaw<sup>2</sup> my whole life.” She married right out of high school and stayed home for 10 years to raise their five children. Andrea readily described herself in the interview as “a mother at heart. I wanted to be a mother. I stayed home with my kids for that reason.” However, before her two youngest children started school, she needed to find work to support her growing family. Her husband was a teacher, and Andrea decided to go to college for teacher training, too. With her husband’s full backing, Andrea did “all of my schooling online from home” and happily claimed that “it has just all worked out.”

According to Andrea, finding a job was not difficult. Andrea noted that when she went back to school, “I knew from the beginning that I was supposed to be a kindergarten teacher at Cusseta<sup>2</sup>.” There were no openings when Andrea started looking for work. She was, however,

“very biblical” and distributed her résumé freely on faith. One day, perchance, she dropped her children off at Cusseta and told a staff member, Miss J, “I know you don’t have an opening right now, but I want to leave my résumé.” She said that Miss J “almost started crying” because she had a 2-week teacher leave of absence to fill immediately and considered Andrea’s timing a godsend. That occurrence resulted in 2 years of substitute teaching for Andrea, including short stints in first grade and high school (which she called “ridiculous”). These experiences resulted in a permanent job teaching kindergarten, which she found fitting for her maternal identity because it made her “feel like I’m a mother to a lot of other kids.” She described teaching as her calling, noting, “I’m supposed to be working with children.” That gave her teaching identity its first bloom, which subsequently resulted in her close fit to the niche of early childhood education. The evidence in this chapter suggests that Andrea’s teaching identity had more shifts, as she evolved into an affectionate mother figure to her students but a bold advocate on behalf of her ELs to her colleagues (see Figure 1).

### ***Callie’s Background***

Callie was a first-grade teacher (see Table 2). A self-described “Marine brat” born on a U.S. Army base, she moved back to Panola<sup>2</sup> when she was a toddler “so we could be back with our family.” She had lived in Panola ever since. Although she did not have any children at the time of the interview, Callie went into education and became a teacher because she felt that teaching was her calling. She said, “I love babies. [I’ve] always been a kid person.”

Callie did her student teaching with kindergarten students. She obtained her first job in education upon graduating from college, explaining, “The recession hit, [but] Miss C. called me and said she had a job opening.” Callie started working as a teacher’s aide for ELs, a happy circumstance to which she returned throughout the interview to describe the myriad benefits of

an entire year of watching and helping in the classroom rather than taking on direct responsibility for ELs' education without knowing what to expect. Like Andrea, Callie formed her teaching identity from a strong foundational feeling of destiny. She said, "I always knew that I was going to be a teacher, ever since I was a little girl. I've never thought of doing anything else but teaching." She found her niche in early childhood education and flourished. The evidence in this chapter suggests that Callie shifted her teaching identity depending on context, moving between an affectionate mother figure to her students to an exasperated advocate on behalf of her ELs to her colleagues (see Figure 1).

### ***Blake's Background***

Blake was a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher (see Table 2). Vulnerable as an infant, Blake was a premature baby born 3 months early who spent his first months in the hospital in a major city about an hour away from his hometown. He grew up in Panola<sup>2</sup> and attended Panola High School. However, a rupture occurred in his stable childhood in 11th grade, when his parents divorced. After the divorce, Blake and his father lived in the house where he had grown up. However, this new situation soon included several stepsiblings, most of whom he described as "strung-out on drugs and doing all sorts of crazy stuff." Blake moved in with his mother because he "was trying to finish [college] and couldn't handle the 2- and 3-year-olds running crazy."

Blake admitted that, during college, his career plans were "all over the place." He considered animal medicine and aviation. Although he kept teaching in the back of his mind, he did not know "if I could deal with kids." During this tumultuous time, he joined a church group on a mission trip to Nicaragua, which provided an introduction to teaching. He recalled,

We went to a school and built them a shed over their well pump. We went back the next day. The teachers literally shut down the school and let us just do what we wanted with the kids. I had to sit down and teach a Bible class with a translator. It was just one of those things. I was like, "Yep that's what I wanna do." I mean, it just hit me.

Thus, one of Blake's first teaching experiences was with children who did not speak English as their first language; this contributed to his budding teaching identity. He returned from the enlightening mission trip and completed his teacher training at college. After graduation, Blake worked as a substitute teacher in two counties and taught several different grades, which probably contributed to his instructional agility. Teaching students who ranged from 5 to 13 years of age provided him with a wealth of pedagogical experience that contributed to the initial shaping of his teaching identity. Through these experiences, Blake learned to embrace and exhibit flexibility in teaching ELs, managing his emotional reactions to the challenges they presented and handling his colleagues' responses. Blake mostly substituted for fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. After gaining a job covering leave for a fifth-grade teacher through the end of the school year, he had to call and cancel all of his future substitute jobs. Blake described this experience as "horrendous. Have to call 20 teachers to tell them I had a job. I mean, they were supportive, but it was just a nightmare trying to track down all the people." Blake disliked disappointing his colleagues. After covering the leave, he worked for a year under Title II. His boss, Ms. N, told him bleakly, "I have no clue what we'll do after that. Just do your job." Again, he learned a lesson about remaining flexible. After that, Blake taught sixth grade and was laid off because of the then-typical standard of classroom reduction. His early teaching experiences required flexibility that contributed to plasticity in developing his teaching identity, which in turn enabled him to serve his future ELs. The evidence in this chapter suggests that Blake evolved his teaching identity to become an agile advocate for his EL students and to his colleagues on behalf of his ELs (see Figure 1).

### ***Lily's Background***

Lily happily taught sixth- to eighth-grade science (see Table 2). She said, “I was born to teach science” and that she “wanted to [teach science] from the time I was in the seventh grade.” Like Andrea and Callie, she had strong feelings of pedagogical destiny. She noted that she had lived in Panola<sup>2</sup> “my whole life” and “went all the way through Panola schools, kindergarten through 12th grade.” Like other participants, she attended local schools. She earned a bachelor’s degree in biology and later a master’s in TESOL.

Lily’s interest in science caused her to consider careers other than teaching, but only briefly. She said, “I went to nursing school for a year, but it was not my calling. I just love science! I thought, ‘You know what? I’m going to teach science!’” Lily “felt comfortable” with the idea of teaching because “my mom was a teacher. Everybody I knew growing up was a teacher. I could relate to it.” As further reinforcement, she said that her mother “always told me that that’s what I would end up doing anyway. She’s like, ‘You’ll never be a nurse.’ [I was like]. ‘What? Okay, thanks.’ [*laughs*] She knew me better than I knew myself.”

Lily’s teacher training occurred at three different schools, only one of which had ELs. The process of finding a job after graduation was a combination of preparation and luck. Lily worked as a substitute teacher for a semester before she found a job. She applied for everything that she could while she worked as a substitute teacher. Lily reported, “Then I met a lady at a church retreat who said that there was a job opening at Highpoint. She talked to the principal on my behalf. That’s how I got the job at Highpoint.”

Lily started at the school by teaching four different subjects to sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students. She did not get the chance to focus her skill set by teaching one subject until her fifth year of teaching. Lily changed jobs to work at Eastside Middle School. However,

the new school was a culture shock because she shifted from working the smallest school in the county to one of the largest, with “sports and all kinds of extracurricular activities.” Similar to Blake’s experiences of being moved from grade to grade, juggling disparate responsibilities, the jolt likely had an influence on Lily’s empathetic understanding of her future ELs. However, her colleagues tended to overlook her efforts on behalf of her EL students. The evidence in this chapter suggests that Lily had a shifting teaching identity, as she shifted into an encouraging comforter to her students but was a regrettably undervalued advocate on behalf of her ELs to her colleagues (see Figure 1).

### ***Denise’s Background***

Denise taught literature at the same high school (see Table 2) that she attended and from which she graduated magna cum laude. The community and school’s size had since increased, producing the need for teachers trained in EL teaching techniques. However, Denise noted that the school’s essential qualities remained the same: “It’s the same very close-knit community, [with] lots of parent involvement and lots of help with everything that we need. Everybody seems to always pitch in. So, [a] good school community and good place to work and live.”

Denise did not have early plans to be a teacher. Somewhat similar to Lily, she considered a medical career. She started college as a premed major, and she noted that she loved her lecture classes but hated the labs: “I dissected a pig and a cat and didn’t want to sign on to do [that] the rest of my life.” Instead, she earned an associate degree in general education and transferred to one of Alabama’s largest public universities. It was an intriguing revelation that Denise loved lectures but hated labs. The evidence in this chapter shows that Denise developed her teaching identity to forgo lectures and indulge in the direct hands-on activities characteristic of labs; however, instead, she dissected literature. She took different classes in college, but her mother

urged her to take an education class, saying, “I’ve always felt like you would be a really great teacher.” Denise loved school, tutored her fellow students, and graduated second in her high school class. She said, “I loved doing homework. I loved everything about school.” Her friends often visited and asked for help studying. Denise did not want to be a teacher and considered her mother’s suggestion “crazy;” however, she signed up for an education class anyway.

In the class, she met a memorable and “amazing” mentor, Dr. M., who left a lifelong imprint on her. He had a unique social style of teaching and introduced her to the magical combination of a love of learning, helping others learn, and talking about it. Denise emulated and later amplified Dr. M.’s teaching style as she constructed her identity as a teacher of ELs. Denise described her natural empathy and intensely social nature:

I really love group work and group interactions, and [I had] never had a class like that before. In high school, it was very straight rows, [the teachers] lectured, and you wrote down notes and memorized them. [But] Dr. M.’s classroom had tables instead of desks. We were all in groups immediately. It was very hands-on. He was constantly having us create something, constantly asking what we thought about things. I thought, “This is how a teacher should be.” I wanted to be a teacher like him because I thought, “Kids need this. Kids need to be able to know that somebody thinks what they think is important.” He really brought that out.

After two class meetings, Denise realized that education was “where I’m supposed to be.” She “fell in love with [education]” and changed her major. Her university had “a wonderful education department,” which she described as “a great experience.” She also met her husband shortly before starting university. Pregnant when she graduated from college, Denise planned on staying home with their daughter before looking for a job. The family’s financial security enabled her to stay home for 5 years after her degree. She said, “I was happy staying home and being a mom. I wanted to do that.” However, when a neighbor told her about an opening for an English teacher at Sipsey, Denise applied for the job. She received an offer on the condition that she also serve as a girls’ sports coach. The evidence in this chapter suggests that Denise evolved

her teaching identity to become an enthusiastic advocate for her students and to her colleagues on behalf of her ELs (see Figure 1).

### **Lack of Experience**

Similarity among the participants was a lack of experience in teaching ELs. None of the participants had experiences during teacher training or early classroom teaching that included ELs, which resulted in a large gap in their teacher training on EL teaching techniques (see Figure 1). Thus, the five participants had equal footing and shared a lack of knowledge and experience of ELs' impact on their initial teaching identities.

The next section indicates how the participants experimented with languages other than English without achieving fluency, identified considerable gaps in their college education about EL teaching techniques, and reacted to their first students who either did not speak English or did not speak it very well. Regarding the latter experiences, each participant had a unique introduction to ELs, but all shared the experience of initial befuddlement.

### **Initial Exposures to Languages, Gaps in Teacher Training, and Teaching ELs**

This section presents the participants' exposures to languages, gaps in their college education about EL teaching techniques, and reaction to teaching their first EL. Regarding the latter experiences, each participant had a unique introduction, but all shared the experience of initial befuddlement. All of the participants grew up speaking only English, although each studied one or two languages in high school, college, or both (see Table 2). None of the participants spoke a second language fluently. This section presents evidence of three important, triangulated contributions to the development of each participant's teaching identity: fleeting exposure to other languages besides English, gaps in their formal teacher training on techniques

for teaching ELs, and bewildered reactions to their initial experiences with ELs that caused them to grow their natural empathy.

### *Andrea's Initial Exposures*

Growing up, Andrea learned a few basic words in other languages from watching TV, and she took 3 years of Spanish in high school and college. Andrea experienced the shock of a foreign language immersion approach, as her first Spanish teacher inadvertently triggered the strong empathy that contributed to Andrea's future approach to teaching 5- and 6-year-old ELs. Andrea recounted how her Spanish teacher walked into class on the first day and said, "This is the last time you'll hear me [speak] English." Indeed, the teacher spoke only Spanish for the rest of the term. The intimidating unfamiliarity of the language caused Andrea to feel "very scared" and, importantly, showed that the technique did not contribute to her learning Spanish. Although she learned little Spanish, she did learn a crucial lesson. According to Andrea, her Spanish teacher "would get onto you in Spanish, and [I was] just looking at her like, 'I have no idea what you're saying to me.' So, it was a very opening experience for me." Still in high school and planning on full-time motherhood, Andrea had no idea that she would become a future EL teacher. However, this nerve-racking immersion contributed to her natural maternal empathy toward ELs because it enabled her to understand the mystification and lonely detachment that non-English speaking ELs feel in classrooms where everyone else speaks English. The next year, Andrea had a different Spanish teacher, and although she learned more Spanish, she never achieved fluency.

The intimidation she felt in her early, confusing experience with language immersion was a formative influence on the development of her bold advocate teaching identity. During her formal teacher training at college, Andrea did not learn "much at all" about teaching ELs.

However, her recollections of her first experiences with ELs as a student teacher show her empathy:

I had two students in kindergarten that first year who actually could not speak any English at all. I was really at a loss. I don't know what I would've done had I not had another little girl who translated for me. I really used that translator, but I know we did a lot of flashcards. That's what opened my eyes. I was like, "I've got to figure out how to help these kids," because I didn't know what to say to them [because I was] still not fluent enough to talk to them. I wanted to be able to help them more.

Student teaching resulted in further exposure to ELs and the realization of a phase of language development called the silent period. Andrea said,

I did see several [ELs] at Clear Lake and Anderson Primary and learned [about] the silent period because there was a little boy in the kindergarten [who] still had hardly talked to his teacher. After Christmas [was] when he really started talking. He just kind of sat there and watched the other kids most of the time.

Andrea recognized other gaps in her undergraduate teacher training about teaching ELs:

I don't think they ever really talked about having [English] language learners much. I don't remember learning much at all about ELs, but it's because most places don't have very many. But in our area, it's very needful. I'm not sure why we didn't do much on that.

### *Callie's Initial Exposures*

Callie had a little more exposure to other cultures than the other participants because her father, a Marine, had friends with wives from other countries. Such an experience provided Callie with an early, albeit fleeting, experience with different cultures and languages. One family friend taught Callie a few Japanese words and dazzled the little girl with authentic kimonos, something exotic to life in the South. Callie took Spanish in high school, which she enjoyed, and took more Spanish courses in college. Although she was "really pretty good at [Spanish]," she did not know anyone with whom to converse in the language and understandably "lost it all." Callie liked and developed a positive attitude about learning another language, which she

brought to her EL teaching career; these experiences caused her to appreciate diversity (see Figure 1).

Callie also recognized that her teacher training contained gaps regarding ELs. She said that her instructors rarely mentioned ELs, and when they did, they referenced them with students with learning needs or disabilities:

They didn't really talk a lot about ELs. They talked a little bit about special [education], but there just wasn't a whole lot talked about when I went to school. I was aware of [ELs], but there wasn't really an emphasis put on it. I really didn't learn a lot about ELs until I started at Jacobs.

Callie did her student teaching at Jacobs Elementary with kindergarten students, which provided her first exposure to ELs. "They put me with them for extra practice," she said with a wink. She also encountered ELs at her first teaching job, where she worked as an EL aide. She mentioned not knowing what to expect, but she knew that she wanted to teach kids. She felt predestined to teach and said, "I just knew that that's what I was supposed to do. That's where God led me and told me where I was supposed to be." As an EL aide, her natural empathy and initial experiences with ELs contributed to Callie's compassionate and affectionate teaching identity of a mother figure, as they enabled her to put herself "in the kids' shoes." She said,

I just watched the first few weeks, almost kind of like I was an EL myself. [laughs]. As we got to build our relationship[s] with each other, they could come to me and tell me what they needed help with. I just feel like it really made me a better teacher because I [taught] kindergarten through fifth grade, and I was able to see that ELs struggle with many of the same things that American children struggle with.

Callie noted that she did not have overly challenging early exposure to ELs during teacher training "because it was kindergarten." Her first impressions were that ELs were "all super sweet, nervous, really shy, and eager to learn. They thought a lot of their teacher[s]." Callie's words show how the young EL children sparked her natural empathy, revealed her self-

awareness, and directed the construction of her teaching identity. Like Andrea, Callie's EL students showed the need for intermediaries who could help other teachers understand them:

I really didn't have any of [the ELs who] were difficult to work with. It was an eye-opener to see the things that we take for granted. [What] we think everybody knows, they didn't know. I really had to take a step back and be like, "Oh, okay. All right, so we've got to start here." It helped that I had some higher level EL [students] so I could kind of bounce off of them with the ones who weren't as high [level]. I felt like that showed me a lot in my teaching, and it helped as well because they learned more [from one another] than they probably [learned] from me.

Callie's teaching experiences indicated the gaps in her teacher training about ELs and provided the opportunity to carefully use words to position herself relative to her training. She said, "I don't want to put any college down. But I really feel like there was so much that I didn't learn in my undergraduate [studies] that I learned that first year that I was an [EL] aide."

### ***Blake's Initial Exposures***

Like the other participants, Blake spoke only English from childhood through adulthood. Although he took 2 years of Spanish in school, he did not remember learning much besides vocabulary. However, he conceded that his Spanish teacher "did a good job, [considering] the general unwillingness of 90% of 16- and 17-year-olds to learn another language." During his mission trip to Nicaragua, Blake taught a Bible class with a translator, which was a fleeting but deeply memorable first exposure of teaching students who did not speak English. Later, as a student teacher split between kindergarteners and fifth graders, Blake did not teach any ELs.

After Blake secured a teaching job, his first experience with ELs was of three Latino students whose harsh reality caused a surge in Blake's natural empathy. One of his students came to class and "slept the first week of school, [and] just fell asleep in the middle of class. I wanted to hit the roof about it." But when Blake asked the sleeping student about it, "She told me that she'd [been] working and picking tomatoes [to] help pay for school clothes. All that summer, she was up at dawn and worked 'til dark." Blake told his boss, Ms. N., about his error in seeking to

chastise the girl for sleeping in class because “When I talked to the kid and got to the bottom of it, this is what’s going on. I said, ‘And if she falls asleep, I’m gonna let her sleep.’ Yeah, and I did.”

Blake did not know how to teach ELs at the beginning of his career because, like the other participants, there were gaps in his training about EL teaching techniques. Blake chose his words carefully as he positioned himself against his teacher training:

I don’t mean to run down [my college alma mater] because it is an extremely good school for preservice teachers and [in] incorporating more special [education] training, more ESL training. But when I went through, we never had any special section [where teachers said], “Hey, you’re gonna have ESL learners. These are some of the things that you need to do and be looking at.” Basically, how it was given to us was when we were writing one of our 16 million lesson plans for the year for [our] middle-of-the-road group, we would have a modification of the assignment for special [education] students, for gifted students, and then we would have, like, if you have an EL student, what would you do? It was just like one little section in the lesson plan. That’s all we did. We would talk about if that was effective or not. That was it.

Fortunately, Blake initially had ELs who spoke English reasonably well. However, they directed the construction of his identity as a teacher of ELs and showed him a crucial distinction: Although they could speak English proficiently, ELs might not read or write English with equal proficiency. The lesson learned was that oral language proficiency often does not indicate literacy skills. Blake’s comments about this showed his tendency for self-deprecation:

I’ll be honest with you. All three of those students were already completely bilingual, had no issue, and did extremely well. But once again, hindsight being 20/20, now that I’ve taken more courses, there were some things that I should have done better with them. Because those students developed their English to a proficiency, I didn’t really view them different[ly] than the other students. That shows my ignorance. I didn’t see a need to reach out and do anything additional for them at that time, especially like helping [them] with comprehension and vocabulary.

### ***Lily’s Initial Exposures***

Like the other participants, Lily grew up speaking only English and had limited exposure to other languages. Lily’s dry description of the 3 years of Spanish she took in college sounded

as uninspired as Blake's experience. She said her Spanish classes consisted of "lots of vocab memorization" and, not surprisingly, "I didn't learn how to speak Spanish." She also did not encounter people from other countries or other languages. Like the other participants, she proffered evidence of the theme of teacher training gaps in EL teaching (see Figure 1). Lily said that she "learned nothing about teaching ELs." Again, her teachers made fleeting references to ELs during her preservice training, putting them on par with students with specific educational needs or learning disabilities:

I just had one special [education] class. So, in terms of any kind of special population, I mean, it was just like... You know, we read a book and talked about very little, really, but nothing about second language [learners]. I don't remember that even ever being discussed in any class I took.

Lily had her first experiences with ELs when she moved to teach middle school after teaching at an elementary school. Lily recalled her first encounter with a vivacious EL who moved with his family to the United States from South America. According to Lily, Student C stood out for a few reasons:

He was such a character. He cut up all the time. He was funny, and we loved him. But he stands out in my mind as needing the most help. He was a pickle to deal with because he would work hard and translate, but he also wanted to entertain. So that was a unique experience. I didn't want to get on to him because the kids liked him. Of course, he was cutting up and being a little silly, which I don't have a problem with anyway. As long as we're still moving along, there's room for that. I've never had a student like him that was so outgoing, maybe, or just wanted the spotlight.

Lily's attempts to accommodate ELs, such as Student C, contributed to the encouraging, comforting side of her professional identity. For example, Lily tried to ensure that her ELs had the computer support they needed to translate material "because I didn't know how to do that at first. I didn't know anything about Google Translate. And even that's come a long way in the last few years." Like the other participants, Lily reduced the number of written work and reading assignments so that "they [could] get my content in the simplest way that I [could] get it across."

Student C was not the only EL Lily recognized as surprisingly confident, an experience in her early exposure to ELs that contributed to the encouraging, comforting side of Lily's shifting teaching identity. Lily described herself as shy and reserved, so she saw ELs' relative laissez-faire about their difference from their monolingual English peers with surprise and more than a little admiration:

It's amazing to me to watch them. I've never had [an EL] who appears to be frustrated with having to use the phone to translate or feeling like they stand out in class or like, "Everybody's looking at me." They'll get out their phone, and they'll take their little picture and translate if they need to, or ask for help, even. I think maybe that's a testament to [the] kids that we have at Eastside Middle. I've never felt that [students] were singling out our EL kids or making them feel different. I think our kids have been good about including them. I would feel awkward, I think, as a student. And I'm not saying that they probably don't [sometimes feel awkward], but they don't appear to. And I think that's been surprising.

### ***Denise's Initial Exposures***

Like the other participants, Denise grew up speaking English and having little to no contact with other languages or people from other cultures. She said, "We all spoke English and didn't have any ELs in school at the time." Although Denise took 2 years of French in high school and one semester of Spanish in college, her first opportunity to work with people who spoke other languages occurred when she became a teacher. Studying other languages provided a strong precedent that likely contributed to constructing her enthusiastic teaching identity, as she demonstrated the fascination and frustration of exposure to other cultures. Her words showed her empathy and self-awareness. Denise enjoyed her French class and "loved my French teacher; she was a really great woman." However, the Spanish class she took in college was "a complete disaster because it was so rushed." Also, it was a very confusing quarter because her older, multilingual teacher was "really kind of struggling. A lot of times, she would be teaching us things and [say], 'Don't write that down. That's German.'" Her teacher spoke more languages

than Spanish and would “kind of get them mixed up sometimes.” With a chuckle, Denise admitted that she did not take more language courses after that.

Further evidence of the theme of gaps in teacher training about teaching ELs was apparent in Denise’s description of instructors who only occasionally spoke about ELs or students from culturally diverse backgrounds. When her instructors mentioned such students, Denise noted that they grouped ELs with students who qualify for educational support due to learning needs or cognitive disabilities. However, an endearing instructor was a strong part of the construction of her teacher identity. This instructor warned teacher-in-training students to prepare for ELs:

We had one course focused a lot on special [education] students, but in that course, they talked about ELs. And one instructor, specifically, was wonderful. She talked a lot about ELs as something that we were going to really have to start acknowledging and dealing with in the next few years. She really kind of got me set up for that. She was great.

It was one of those things where you don’t really think about that until somebody kind of says, “Hey, there’s going to be kids in your class that don’t speak the same language as you,” especially when you’re from a small town like [where] I was from [that] didn’t have any ELs at the time. So, it was really great in a way that she made us realize that the world’s a lot bigger than what you think when you live in little bitty, tiny Sipseey.

Another feature that contributed to Denise’s developing teacher identity was her cheerful open-mindedness about other cultures and appreciation of diversity, a trait that she shared with the other participants (see Figure 1). Her student teaching provided her with experiences with Black students who spoke English but presented themselves as members of different ethnic cultures. Denise noted that she felt intrigued:

[Student teaching] was a very cool experience for me because the school was 99% Black, and I was White. That was a new thing for me because, at the time, Sipseey was definitely all White children, no anybody of color. So, that was great. I loved getting to meet those kids and talk[ing] to them about their culture and the things that they found to be important. And I got to even actually talk to some of the parents, and that was wonderful. So, that was different, but no ELs, no one [who] spoke a different language there.

Despite teaching for 14 years, Denise had reasonably recent exposure to ELs. She said, “It’s really been probably in the last 5 or 6 years that I really started having ELs in my class.” The challenges approached her slowly because her first linguistically diverse students were exchange students from China and Germany who arrived academically equipped to pursue an American education and were not classified as ELs. The first EL she remembered in her English class was also a student highly proficient in English, “so it wasn’t like I had to really do that much to accommodate for him.” That did not last. She began teaching more ELs who needed assistance. However, such students did not trigger her natural empathy, love of school, or love of helping; they triggered dismay and detachment:

A few years after that, we started getting ELs as first-year students. That’s when I really felt like I needed to do something to be able to help them because it was very daunting when they walked in, and they could not speak to me at all. *[laughs]* When I first started having ELs, I’ll be honest, I was not very sympathetic to them. It was almost as if I just thought, “Well, they should be able to do this.” I wanted them to be able to do more than they truly were capable of doing. I didn’t connect with those students. I didn’t understand how *[they]* would feel.

Then, life presented challenges that enabled Denise to empathize with ELs. After a series of small strokes, she had to relearn to speak and read. Surmounting such a profoundly personal struggle contributed to Denise’s reconstruction of her teaching identity. One ramification of the construction of her teaching identity was that it caused her to redirect her natural empathy toward ELs into an endearing, heartfelt scaffold:

My whole life, I could read a book in 15 minutes and tell you everything about it. I never had any kind of reading comprehension problems or any trouble speaking. What really brought it around to me is *[that]* I have a genetic problem that causes my arteries to not be right, so I ended up having a couple of strokes. And the part of my brain that was affected by the strokes was the part that had to do with my reading comprehension and my ability to speak. After I had the stroke, I had to basically reteach myself to read. I can code great, but I *[could]* read the same page 10 times and *[not]* get it. That *[was]* the first time I had ever felt that way.

So, I started making that connection between, “Wow, this is how those kids feel in my class when I’m sitting there going, ‘Just read it. Just read it again. Just look at that

again?” I said, “It doesn’t help if you don’t have those skills; you need to be able to comprehend it.” It just blew me away. I thought, “Well, I have just been unfair to these kids by not understanding how they felt whenever they couldn’t speak to me or whenever they couldn’t understand something that we were reading in class.”

For the first time, really, I felt so connected to my struggling learners because when you’ve never been a struggling learner...I don’t mean that arrogantly, but I had never struggled at anything education-wise. But when you finally and really feel it, you don’t want to make anybody else ever feel that way. You don’t want to be responsible for that.

As she slowly relearned to speak and read, Denise extended her natural empathy to the ELs in a new way because she realized how they felt. She said, “I need to be able to help them. I need more things to do with them to help them. I don’t want them to feel like this ever again because of me.” When Denise heard about other teachers’ enthusiasm about the TESOL program, she realized, “This is the connection I need.”

### **TESOL Impacts on Professional Identities**

The next section presents how the participants heard about the TESOL degree program and the salient impacts of the program on the construction of their teaching identities. This section addresses subquestion one, what are the professional identities of mainstream teachers in Muscogee County Schools who have a graduate degree in TESOL? Specifically, the topic is the construction of teaching identity and the TESOL degree program’s salient influences on the participants. The evidence in this section suggests that the participants based their primary reasons for pursuing the TESOL program on empathy, as they wanted to provide more help to their ELs. Additionally, their self-awareness caused them to seek improvements in their teaching that they could not foresee (see Figure 1). Most participants mentioned the importance of the financial support provided by the grant. Still, they appeared divided on exposure to their colleagues who completed the program and the extent to which each had preconceived ideas and expectations about the degree program.

Lily heard about the TESOL degree program from her mother, one of many teachers in her family. Lily decided to pursue the degree because her school had several ELs, and she explained, with a careful choice of words, that she would “continue to have students who needed help” if she stayed at that school. She felt intrigued by the degree and felt that “just being with ELs at school has enriched my life some way,” perhaps because “I don’t have a lot of experience with people from different cultures or different language backgrounds.” Such feelings contributed to her teaching identity. Admittedly, getting help paying for the degree was also a “big draw.” Whereas financial aid is usually an attractive component in pursuing a degree, all five participants returned to school because they appreciated their students’ diversity (see Figure 1). Exposure to ELs and the TESOL program contributed to their teacher identities.

Before pursuing graduate studies, Lily did not know anyone who had completed the program and did not have any ideas what her experiences would be. However, she expressed surprise at how much the program caused her to change. She recalled the shock of language immersion similar to Andrea when she described how a teacher spoke only Spanish for the entire term. Lily recalled,

I think it was in the very first TESOL class. They do that shock lesson, where they’re speaking in whatever language the professor’s speaking and you sort of get a feel for what it’s really like. You always think that you understand [that ELs] can’t understand what you’re saying, and they’re sitting here all day going to every class. I think that [shock lesson] changed my perspective of the overwhelming feeling that you would get all day long, having to filter through both of your languages, if you could even do that.

The TESOL program showed all five participants the confusion of incomprehension and the expectations to perform academically in an unfamiliar language. Lily spoke for all participants when she said, “The program opened my eyes. You just get in your little world, and you don’t think about what other people really have to go through.” The TESOL course caused Lily to change her perspective in innumerable ways. She said, “Even my feeling on immigration

and just everything [changed].” Lily said she had always believed in immigration but thought immigrants “sometimes get a bad rap” because people automatically assume they have arrived in the United States illegally. Lily considered a student’s legal status immaterial. She said, “They’ve got to come to school, and they deserve a good education. Doesn’t matter where they’re from, if they’re legal or illegal. That’s how I treat them.”

Like the other participants, Lily approached the degree program with empathy and a keen desire to learn how to meet ELs’ academic needs to minimize her feelings of helplessness. She stated, “I have felt at times almost like I was at my wit’s end, just kind of grasping at straws, trying to figure out some things.” Lily wanted more practical guidance, as did Denise. The participants found the degree program difficult because it had strongly theoretical material. Lily understood from her general teaching experience that the students who felt comfortable in her classroom were more likely to learn than those who felt uncomfortable; she said, “I was already on board with that.” However, as if reinforcing the construction of her identity as a new teacher, she stated, “I have felt like it’s been hard to really find some practical things. I’ve had to just figure a lot of things out. I just feel like there was a lot of theory and not a lot of practical [material].” She noted, “Maybe that’s just the way it is,” an echo of the undervalued advocate part of her shifting teaching identity, in which she neither sought help nor received consideration from colleagues. Denise also felt that the TESOL class should provide more practical guidance.

Whereas Callie found some of the TESOL classes beneficial, she said that some of the other coursework made her want to “pull my hair out with all the busywork. I am more a learner who likes to come to class and likes to talk about it instead of reading 10 chapters and reflecting about those chapters.”

Callie taught first grade in a school where a substantial number of ELs arrived unexpectedly. She said, “It was like one day we came to school, and bam! There were kids from all over the country at our school overnight.” She noted that Miss C, the administrator, sought to help those children succeed and prepare teachers for teaching them. Callie said that Miss C “was really adamant that we needed to reach all of the students.” Since Callie was the first EL aide at her school who continued teaching ELs, she knew the TESOL program was an important step in her teaching career.

In contrast to Lily, Blake found his way into the TESOL program after several episodes of unintentional neglect. One example of this was failing to realize that his ELs who spoke English fairly well might not have had the ability to read and write English well or at all. The number of times he mentioned this repeated misunderstanding in his interviews suggests that this experience contributed to his identity of teaching ELs. For example, three years of teaching high-functioning fifth grade ELs (i.e., good verbal output) led him to feel that “there’s nothing for them to work on. Completely not true.” Blake gave examples of his willingness to frankly examine this varied EL teaching challenge and respond flexibly as the agile advocate. He noted that some students

Would make straight As on reading tests, but you look at their vocabulary skills [and] writing production, and it’s a completely different world. I really should have been doing enrichment things and working on writing and grammar forms and vocabulary with them, and I wasn’t.

He added with characteristic self-awareness, “I’m showing you how naïve I was.”

Although he earnestly wished to avoid repeating these and similar practices, Blake’s candor about his teaching shortcomings remained in his thoughts about participating in the TESOL degree program. He noted that “I was still trying to get my feet under me as a teacher” because he had switched grade levels 3 years in a row, which was “kind of hard.” Another issue

was that Blake had heard about the TESOL program from other teachers and felt alarmed. He said, “I was scared to death that I couldn’t pass it.” The second time a colleague who had completed the TESOL program talked to him, he decided to give it a try. The following passage shows that the goal of the degree is not fluency in ELs’ first language. The participants provided more insights into the teacher training gaps about teaching ELs when discussing the TESOL degree. Primarily the passage shows that Blake’s natural empathy provided the final prodding and that the TESOL program enabled him to further channel his empathy. Still, Blake felt intimidated:

Honestly, I was really nervous initially [about] anything attached to a master’s program. I was scared to death I was just gonna bomb like crazy. I was worried that I would have to know more of a second language than I do to pass it, and that’s absolutely not what it was. What made me wanna do it so bad was that group of kids that I had. I had Student E and Student T and Student G, [and] I knew I was gonna have their siblings, eventually... That group of kids really tugged on my heartstrings. I cried so hard when they graduated. That really opened my eyes to “Here are these group of kids [who are] stinking smart. There’s these brilliant kids that do everything in the world.” And I think I wanted to be able to help them better the next year. That was my driving force to do well in my classes.

Blake had heard the degree was tough and braced himself to “really struggle.” The degree program and coursework were hard. Alternatively, another unexpected influence on his developing teaching identity was the encouraging support of the faculty. These colleagues could have also influenced Blake’s development of his teaching identity as the agile advocate:

I’m not gonna tell you that it was easy ‘cause it wasn’t. But [what] I wasn’t really prepared for [was] literally how supportive the teachers were. If I had an issue, any instructor was there to help. As a student, I’m used to making high grades. So, when I hit something that I struggle with, I get frustrated really quickly. I argued with Dr. S about one of my exams because it was the only thing I missed all year, and I was so mad about it. She immediately drew a drawing and showed me the difference. We called her Grandma S because literally, she treat[ed] you like a kid [but] not in a bad way. She [would] correct you in a way that shows you, like, “Hey, this is where you got this wrong.”

Blake noted that due to the changing dynamic of schools and education, teachers must receive TESOL training even if they cannot complete the entire TESOL program. He remarked, “Because, like I said, [teacher training at my alma mater] is not preparing teachers for ESL students.” On the other hand, he noted that the TESOL degree “completely changed my thought process on the situations that the kids come in with that they have no control over.” It also “absolutely” made him a “better teacher,” a sentiment echoed by all five participants. The TESOL program did not cause him to drastically change his teaching style because many of the TESOL techniques were “things that you are already doing for your students.” The difference was, “Now you know why you’re doing it.”

Like Blake, the TESOL degree program contributed to the construction of Andrea’s developing teacher identity. She noted, “I now know so much more [about how] to help my kids.” Andrea found the program self-fulfilling because her first reaction to reading about it was, “This is going to help me with these students.” She read a notice of the grant hung on the break room wall and knew “it was a way to go back to school” because “they’re going to pay for this.” Because of her strong sense of pedagogical predestination, Andrea did not initially give the commitment much thought. She said,

As I said with everything else, I was supposed to go back then. I went with my sister-in-law and had friends there from Cusseta Elementary. And I knew if I could do it, that’s the only time I was ever going to do it. So, I decided to go on through it, and they helped me. [laughs]

Andrea chose to pursue the ESL program for practical reasons (“I needed more money for my family”) and because of her self-awareness and empathy, which she attributed mainly to one student:

It all goes back to Student W so much of the time. Just really seeing her and seeing that I didn’t know enough to help her always motivates me [to help] my kids, my students. I need to tell her that she’s my reason for going back to school. So, everything I think about in any of my education is how can I do better to help these kids.

Both Andrea and Denise enrolled in the program as part of a cohort. Denise completed the degree as a member of a strong cohort of teachers who stayed in touch and created a strong learning community for themselves and other classroom teachers. Denise noted that she did not want to sound overly dramatic in her interview but said that she felt sure that she finished the program because her cohort members “really kept each other going. And I love that our group really hasn’t [gone] away.” The cohort members created a “silly nickname” for their group and continued to support one another via group text messages. The members of her learning community taught within the feeder school pattern; thus, they often shared advice about incoming students to provide ELs with continuity and support. Denise showed her teaching identity as a strongly social, enthusiastic advocate, saying, “Our group was probably one of the best things out of my degree: that we had that group, and we’ve all stuck together.”

As with the other four participants, the TESOL degree had a fundamental influence on the construction of Denise’s teaching identity as an enthusiastic advocate. Earning a TESOL master’s degree enabled Denise to “feel really empowered to be the kind of teacher [that] I always really had wanted to be.” There is further evidence of her in the rest of this chapter, with some of her many insights about the TESOL program in the following sections.

Like Lily, Denise “wanted real-life strategies” to take back to her classroom. She said, “When you sign up for TESOL, you think of teaching English as a second language, but it included so much more than that.” Like Blake, Denise found the TESOL program initially intimidating, and she felt overwhelmed by “all the educational theory that we started with.” She initially wondered about the benefits of educational theory. However, as she progressed through the course, she started to make sense of the material, realizing, “We needed theory [first] to understand the things that came later.” She learned about the theories of basic interpersonal

communication skills (BICS; see Appendix D) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP; see Appendix D), theoretical frameworks that addressed the familiar behavior at the high school that she could not explain. Denise said,

I feel bad about it now. But seeing that kid in the hall chattering away to his friends in English [who] wouldn't speak to me *at all* in my classroom, I thought, "Well, if he can talk to them, he can talk to me." But you learn pretty quickly that there's a big difference in the type of language that we want them to use in the English classroom [academic language] versus hanging out in the hall and talking to [their] friends [social language]. It was just very eye-opening.

The TESOL coursework focused on many of the aspects needed to teach ELs effectively. One of the most salient courses addressed the importance of understanding ELs' cultures and home lives and suggested that the teachers pull such information into the classroom and allow the students to share it among themselves. The TESOL training also included strategies for teaching lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) students. Lily recalled a memorable TESOL culture class that inspired her to try different strategies from different classes to keep her students focused, such as having them get up and move around. She said, "Our classes are 55 minutes long. That's a long time to keep middle school students focused." She suddenly remembered the current social distancing restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic and laughed ruefully, saying, "Of course, I can't do that probably anymore, either."

Denise and the other participants noted that they liked that the TESOL graduate program provided training for more effectively teaching ELs. Denise stated, "[The program] helped all my students. I wasn't just a [way to be] better teacher for my ELs. I was a better teacher for all of my kids, no matter what kind of struggle they were having." The other participants expressed similar sentiments.

A phonology course was the most salient experience of the TESOL program for the participants who taught younger students. Andrea loved the course because "[the instructors]

showed us the mouth and [where] to put your tongue to make the sounds. That has helped me so much because I did that with all my students.” Andrea recalled feeling surprised at the realization that different languages require different sounds and impressed by the positive effect of showing ELs how to move their mouths to make various sounds. A mother at heart, she let herself be the guinea pig so her students could have a bit of fun with her:

I’ll say a word and ask them to tell me the word in Spanish. They get tickled at me because I can’t roll my Rs. They’ll start laughing because I can’t make that sound. They can make that sound like it’s nothing. So, it helps me to know that there are sounds that they don’t know that they can’t do, so I have to try to show them how to make that sound. You might grow up with your tongue never moving that way. *[laughs]*

Callie also used phonology “a whole lot” with her young students. She said, “Being able to learn all the articulation and really focus on my mouth and tongue placement helps ESL and regular students. So, I still do that a lot.” Callie said phonology caused her to change her teaching practices. She stated, “[Phonology] would be the thing that I’ve implemented the most [for] my entire class,” as it was a fundamental component of speaking and reading. She said, “As you know, first grade is the foundation of reading. Teaching the students to read is the biggest thing. I do that every day.” Blake perceived phonology as his “‘big aha’ because it made me understand the kids more.”

### **Summary of Subquestion One**

Subquestion one was, what are the professional identities of mainstream teachers in Muscogee County Schools who have a graduate degree in TESOL? The answer to subquestion one was that the mainstream teachers with graduate TESOL degrees built their professional identities from natural empathy and heightened self-awareness. They exponentially increased their empathy and self-awareness after exposure to ELs and the educational theories and techniques learned from the TESOL degree program. All five participants agreed that they were stronger teachers due to the TESOL program, primarily because they learned educational theory

for teaching ELs. The educational theory showed them why targeted EL social and classroom techniques were successful approaches in practice.

### **Further Developments in Teacher Identities as Active Advocates**

The fresh depth of understanding that resulted from their graduate degrees enabled the participants to reconstruct their teaching identities as they put their new set of practices to work. Further developments came from the participants' new views of themselves as teachers based on their degrees and the resulting series of successes and failures as they negotiated interactions with students, community, and colleagues. The successes and failures contributed to one another and enabled the participants to construct their identities as EL teachers.

The specific structure of professional successes and failures differed for each participant due to the differing ages of their students (e.g., kindergarteners have different academic and language needs than high school students). However, all the teachers based their identities on a strong foundation of empathy and heightened self-awareness that contributed to the dominant element of advocacy (see Figure 1 and results for Subquestions 1 and 2). Denise underscored that, after the program, graduates could recognize and strive to meet ELs' needs:

It is super important to understand where they're coming from. Especially when they're in a school where they don't speak English, and everyone around them is speaking English, they need somebody to connect with them. We had a student this year. He seemed almost depressed. But then, I told Ms. T, "Why would you not feel depressed when you walk around all day, and you don't understand anything anyone is saying to you?" A lot of times, he would come into the classroom and just lay his head down on his desk, exhausted. And I said, "He probably is exhausted. How exhausting would it be to have your whole day a struggle?"

So, I guess the big thing that stuck out to me is that they need someone at the school that they can come to and just say, "I'm exhausted. I'm tired. This is hard for me," and [for that person to] acknowledge how hard they're working. When giving feedback to an EL, I think it's very important to always acknowledge how hard they're working because they really are working really hard, even if they didn't really comprehend the task that you asked them to do. So, I try hard to always help them realize "I understand how hard you're working and how hard this is for you," because it *is* hard.

The evidence of the forces that caused the teachers to reshape their teaching identities suggests that the participants actively constructed their advocacy from three interrelated sources: self-perceptions, breadth of experiences, and results of navigating colleague encounters. Their perceptions of themselves as teachers stemmed from pivotal pedagogical experiences illustrated through wording, as presented in the subquestion two results section. They also gained a breadth of experiences by negotiating the contexts of relationships with their students, colleagues, and communities, as shown in the subquestion three results section. Additionally, they constructed their advocacy due to navigating encounters with colleagues associated with the new skills and responsibilities they had learned in the TESOL program, which the subquestion four results show.

### **Results for Subquestion Two**

Subquestion two was, what are the resources teachers use to construct their identities as classroom teachers who have a graduate degree in TESOL? The intention of this question was to understand how the participants saw themselves as teachers through the words they used to describe themselves. The evidence suggests that the teachers actively constructed their main identity as advocates through their perceptions of the discursive resources available for them to describe themselves. The participants revealed these resources in how they spoke about their pedagogical experiences and themselves as teachers. For discursive resources, each teacher's table of terms (see Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) presents direct quotes of their perceptions in context for analysis. Following the tables are descriptions of the participants' pivotal pedagogical experiences that existed parallel to their discursive resources and contributed pivotal experiences to constructing their teaching identities.

### **Andrea: Affectionate Mother Figure and Bold Advocate**

Andrea had a shifting teaching identity; one was her identity of being a mother at heart. She saw her kindergarten students as her children and her role as a kindergarten teacher in the light of an affectionate mother figure. Seemingly correspondent to her maternal nature, her interview data also aligned with comments that showed her other identity as a feisty, opinionated defender of ELs' rights. She synchronized the two sides for a candid yet controlled version of a mother resolutely protecting her young. Andrea stated, "I think the main thing about being an EL teacher is that you care about them and that you're an advocate for them."

#### ***Discursive Resources***

Andrea described her teaching identity in terms of her students as a teacher whose students "all know she loves them"; however, she noted that "too much of the time," she was more of their mother than their teacher. She said, "They may not get very much education, but they leave my classroom knowing that I care." The self-descriptive words and phrases in Table 3 suggest that Andrea described her teaching identity in terms of colleagues as that of the bold advocate. Evidence of her resoluteness in her discursive resources shows that she felt less afraid to address sensitive topics than the other participants.

Andrea described herself in maternal ways, as "a mother at heart" who "buil[t] connections" with her ELs. She fiercely defended ELs when she felt their other teachers did not meet their academic needs. Andrea used the imagery of burning a bridge with another teacher, suggesting an EL advocacy unafraid to be confrontational with colleagues. She did not fear challenging administrators. She told her colleague "to find out what's going on and make sure it never happens again." Andrea did not hesitate to describe herself as a bold advocate for ELs. In

her interviews, she comfortably described herself as exhibiting ferocity with her colleagues and her maternal interactions with her students.

Table 3

*Andrea's Table of Terms Reflecting Her Teacher Self*

Participant	Self-descriptive words and phrases
Andrea	<p>Biggest cause of racism is that the kids are not educated; they are scared of what's different.</p> <p>Burned a bridge with a teacher who was requiring so much. I e-mailed the principal about it; teacher is really mad at me.</p> <p>Encourage parents to join us on field trips.</p> <p>I am a mother at heart.</p> <p>I can't imagine anybody being ugly to a kid, no matter what.</p> <p>I do many pictures in teaching my students.</p> <p>I feel like I'm a mother to a lot of other kids [as a teacher].</p> <p>I had a Hispanic this year who scored really low but was making perfect class progress. Had I not stood up for her, they would have put her in intervention. They listened to me on that.</p> <p>I have built connections with the families.</p> <p>I may have to fight that again this year.</p> <p>I really do step in and give advice to other teachers; worrying if ELs aren't doing the level the teacher thinks because of language, they'll put them in special ed. That happens a lot at our school.</p> <p>I said to administration, "You need to find out what's going on and make sure it never happens again."</p> <p>I try to explain things to parents that first year, so they know from now on.</p> <p>I wanted to be a mother; I stayed home with my kids for that reason.</p> <p>I wanted to be able to help them more.</p> <p>I'm really excited about training.</p> <p>I'm very comfortable because they're only 5 years old.</p> <p>I've used a lot of those same techniques with every kid I've got.</p> <p>Knew from the beginning that I was supposed to be a kindergarten teacher. God sent me in that direction, and it worked out.</p> <p>Learning the culture was huge for me. I never knew that people were different like that.</p>

Participant	Self-descriptive words and phrases
Andrea	<p>My biggest responsibility is to encourage my students to not give up their culture.</p> <p>Need patience and guidance in teaching a baby; see my 5-year-olds same way.</p> <p>Really connect with the families.</p> <p>She's the one I have to fight.</p> <p>Stayed home 10 years with my own kids, everything, from the beginning.</p> <p>Step in and give advice.</p> <p>Teach me as I'm teaching you.</p> <p>Teaching is my calling.</p> <p>The other teachers know how I feel.</p> <p>Tutored several of my Hispanic kids after school.</p> <p>Use more than just one sense when teaching.</p>

### ***Andrea's Descriptions of Pivotal Pedagogical Experiences***

Andrea constructed her shifting teaching identity of affectionate mother figure and bold EL advocate from a foundation of natural empathy and self-awareness, appreciation for teaching young children due to a decade devoted to raising her children, and her strong maternal response to students. Andrea laughed when she said, "My kids call me a Mexican lover because they're always my favorites. I'll say, 'They're not Mexican. They're Hispanic.'" Andrea perceived "this [as] funny." However, her laugh did not indicate humor but irony, as Andrea grew up with a grandmother "very prejudiced and afraid" of Hispanics. Usually forthright, Andrea faltered as her voice trailed off in the following passage:

Grandmother couldn't understand Hispanics, and so she felt scared by them. So, I think it really helped me. Growing up like I did and then now being such good friends with the families, it's just... Yes, they're my favorites. [laughs] And I hate to be that way, but I want to help them in all the ways I can because they're so sweet, they're such good kids, and the parents want them to succeed. That makes me want to help them.

Her grandmother's prejudice was a pivotal experience in Andrea's teaching identity, though not a pedagogical one. Andrea grew her identity to become a fierce advocate on behalf of

ELs. She recounted numerous pedagogical battles, a few of them included here. Note her liberal use of terms associated with confrontation, such as “battle,” “fight,” and “getting into it.”

Examples of Andrea’s outspokenness emerged from her frank declaration that “I have had to battle our reading coach” over the debate of whether to put all the ELs in one kindergarten classroom or divide them across several classrooms. This passage further shows Andrea’s evident empathy for the children. She was the most forthcoming participant about the fact that not every faculty member embraced ELs with open arms:

Ms. G is the one I have to fight. She wants it split up [because she says], “When we put them all together, it makes a minority in the White.” I still disagree with her. That’s not right. It’s new to the ELs. That’s the very first time they’ve left their home. They’re scared. That’s not fair to put them by [themselves] if they can’t speak English. They should at least have that one year where they’re all together. I may have to fight that again this year because I just feel like they should be together.

Logically, having all of the EL kindergarten students in Andrea’s class would have enabled her to identify the ELs in need of the first-grade teachers who had completed the TESOL program and the ELs who did not need the same level of support. She noted, “We’ve got so many [ELs] now that are coming in [that maybe] there should just be a Hispanic kindergarten.”

In addition, teaching the ELs in one kindergarten classroom could enable them to learn English while embracing their mutual Hispanic culture; Andrea felt strongly about this. Her stance presented more evidence of her identity as a bold advocate because she did not shy away from addressing sensitive matters. She noted a heated discussion about ELs with a colleague on social media that resulted in accusations of racism. Andrea explained,

I’ve had a lot of issues. That’s how I ended up getting into it with a friend on Facebook because I’m big on that, and she was making me sound like I was racist [toward nonLatino students], and I’m not racist.

In my classroom, I feel like the biggest responsibility is to encourage my students to not give up their culture. It’s like the parents just want them to just melt in, I guess, [and] embrace the American culture, and they don’t keep theirs. I don’t feel like we should all melt in. I really want to encourage my ELs to continue learning their language.

I would like parents to teach their children to write in their language [and] not let that go. They could do that at home [while] I'm teaching them English in the classroom. I see a lot of kids going on through. My personal kids have even said [that] Hispanics don't know how to read and write Spanish. They speak it, but they're never shown that at home. They can't read it and write it.

As evidence of her identity as the bold advocate, she noted that “probably the biggest thing with me” was her fellow teachers who “just didn't want to fool” with the work of helping ELs. She felt the opinion of such teachers was that “it is too hard. I'm just going to push them on through.” Andrea also saw teachers push students with learning needs who received additional services to the next grade, as well. Andrea said, “That's not fair. You've got to try with them all.” Andrea noted another struggle with class size: “Our biggest problem is that we've ended up with too big of classes too many times. This past year, I had 23 kindergarteners.” She added with a note of concern, “That's too many.”

### **Callie: Affectionate Mother Figure and Exasperated Advocate**

There were two sides to Callie's teaching identity. When positioning herself to her students, she emphasized, “[I'm] the bubbly, happy person for the kids to see. At school, I am always trying to smile.” Mostly, she saw herself as a caring teacher. She said, “I know they're babies, but babies know if you care. They can feel it.” Callie expressed her teaching identity as a teacher whose “baby” students could go to her with anything, knowing she would keep them safe and that she cared about them. She stated, “We have so many [ELs] that don't have [a caring environment] at home. School should be a safe place for them. I see myself keeping up that loving, caring, family classroom where learning is fun so that my students love school. One can't expect students to perform academically if they do not trust their teacher, if they do not know that the teacher is there for them.”

### *Discursive Resources*

The commentary in Table 4 shows Callie's differing experiences as a teacher and shifting teaching identity as the affectionate mother figure to students and exasperated advocate to colleagues. On the one hand, Callie created a warm and inviting classroom where "the littles" could laugh and learn during first-grade lessons with their "happy sweet teacher who just wanted to love on everybody." On the other hand, she endured faculty meetings where teachers argued instead of respecting and supporting each other as colleagues. Her divisive descriptions suggest that Callie saw herself as contentedly maternal in the classroom but simultaneously torn and exasperated with colleagues and administrators. Callie shifted her identity depending on the context. She was "happy" and "sweet" with her students; however, she noted that her colleagues "[blew] her off." She described her frustration in meetings.

Table 4

*Callie's Table of Terms Reflecting Her Teacher Self*

Participant	Self-descriptive words and phrases
Callie	<p>All my students need support.</p> <p>Assessments: One of my biggest problems with being the EL person is I just feel like none of the assessments (Star, Lexia, Dibbles) show an accurate reading of what any of the kids can do.</p> <p>ELs learn quicker from their peers than they do from us.</p> <p>ELs learn so much more from talking to each other.</p> <p>EL aide makes you stronger in classroom management.</p> <p>First grade is one of the hardest grades to teach because the kids are learning to read, have real tests, and get real grades; that is a lot for them to take in.</p> <p>I am the bubbly, happy person for the kids to see.</p> <p>I am the happy sweet teacher that just wanted to love on everybody.</p> <p>I am the teacher who likes to sit on the carpet together because it brings a feeling of home and trust into the classroom.</p> <p>I am very explicit.</p> <p>I can see all different teaching procedures.</p> <p>I change my routine, so teaching is not routine.</p> <p>I explain everything.</p> <p>I feel blown off by colleagues a lot of times.</p> <p>I make it more personable.</p> <p>I want my students to remember being loved, respected, and obtaining life skills they can use forever.</p> <p>Meetings: very frustrating, my butt stayed clenched, have nightmares.</p> <p>More confident now.</p> <p>My classroom is hearing laughter, kids' reading, acting things out.</p> <p>Not taking anything for granted.</p> <p>Practice what you preach.</p> <p>Practicum students hit the refresh button and keep teachers from becoming stale.</p> <p>Sing a song they can dance to.</p> <p>Standard assessments cannot provide an accurate reading of what the kids know.</p> <p>Students know I respect them, and they respect me.</p> <p>Supposed to be the voice for the kids.</p> <p>The school has made it harder; meetings are very frustrating.</p> <p>When students have fun learning, they love to learn.</p>

### *Callie's Descriptions of Pivotal Pedagogical Experiences*

The data suggest that Callie constructed her shifting teaching identity through a combination of empathy and self-awareness, strong maternal response to students, deep familiarity with educational challenges (coming from a family of teachers), and the dismissive influence of recalcitrant colleagues. Callie did not have such exasperation when she first began developing her teaching identity as an EL aide, where her duties were to watch, learn, and intervene with the ELs as best she could without formal TESOL training. Such a gentle introduction to teaching contrasted to the trial-by-fire experiences of the participants who found themselves thrust into their first classrooms with sole responsibility for classroom management and student academic achievement.

Callie called her time as an EL aide “her practice round.” That position allowed her to revel in the opportunities and growth that the job presented and acknowledge the intimidation of all that she had to learn. In her “practice” year, she constructed her teaching identity as a pivotal pedagogical experience. She suggested every teacher should have that pivotal experience due to the burgeoning challenges in student populations:

Honestly, if I was an administrator, I feel like everybody should have to be an [EL] aide their first year. I had such a chance to grow as a teacher with the kids that it just made my teaching even stronger than what I could have ever imagined. The growth and knowledge that I've gotten from all of my students is just tremendous.

However, the intimidating or “nerve-wracking” expectation that Callie's provides advice to veteran teachers on techniques for teaching ELs was juxtaposed by her own pride in her growth. Such an intimidating expectation was an early experience that may have contributed to her reluctance with colleagues. Callie found the expectation of advising veteran teachers intimidating, despite her EL aide experience. She said, “I didn't feel like I had any kind of expertise in EL. I knew that I'd had a whole year under my belt, but I just didn't feel confident, I

guess.” This was an understandable comment from a woman whose focus had “always been as a kid person [who] never thought of doing anything else but teaching.” She developed her teaching identity and noted, “Now, I am way more confident” in coaching other teachers. Still, she remained modest, saying, “From my first year to now, I know I still don’t know it all, and I will never know it all.”

Callie saw herself as “a stronger teacher because I started teaching the children who struggle the most,” another likely connection to her strong maternal response to students. As evidenced in her comments in Table 4, Callie pointed out that the first grade is one of the most challenging grades to teach. She noted that “the littles” in first grade face the challenge of learning to read, as well as real tests and real grades. “That is a lot for them to take in,” Callie added empathetically.

The affectionate mother figure was one side of Callie’s teaching identity (see Figure 1). Her other side was her exasperation about conflicts with colleagues. She emphasized that first grade is “a lot” for students to take in, and she believed that many students need more than one year of it, especially ELs who struggle with two languages instead of one. The topic of student retention also provided pivotal pedagogical experiences in Callie’s development of her teaching identity, primarily obstructing and only later enabling it. Callie developed her exasperated advocate identity over several years in which her colleagues disregarded her expert opinion of her ELs’ needs. Specifically, her colleagues ignored her recommendations for retaining first-grade ELs not developmentally ready for the academic material of second grade. She continued to advocate and told her administrators of the need to retain Student J in first grade. She reasoned that Student J had substantial weaknesses in his speech and language processing skills in his first language that resulted in struggles with learning English as a second language. At the time Callie

advocated to retain Student J, there were more teachers on staff also trained to teach ELs, and they advocated for Callie as she advocated for Student J. Finally, her school administrators listened to her and retained the student in first grade, something she had not yet encountered.

The positive results of the retention contributed to Callie's sense of herself as an advocate:

It's his second time in first grade with me. A lot of times, when the kids repeat, we give the parents the option for them to have the same teacher again, a big plus because you've already [had] a year with that child to build a relationship. He was a different kid. He was smiling. He was laughing. He was trying to interact with the kids. That second year, they already felt comfortable. They already know your expectations. To me, it just gives them a bigger and better chance to flourish. I guess that was kind of my "aha" moment, I hate to say. But I was like, you could see the difference. [If] he would have gone to second grade, I think he would have gotten so down on himself and would have lost all confidence that he would have just sat in that corner and not have said a word.

### **Blake: The Agile Advocate**

Blake described himself as struggling in "survival mode" as a new teacher who bounced from grade to grade and taught reading, although his "strongest suit is math." He picked up confidence along the way from these experiences. Mostly, however, he saw himself as "a teacher who connects personally with my kids," which fit with his teaching identity as the agile advocate (see Figure 1).

Blake described himself as a teacher who cared about his students individually, pushed them into "that productive struggle," and encouraged them to go beyond what they expected of themselves because he wanted them to succeed. He saw his pedagogical efforts as success tools and tried to encourage his students to find and pursue their niches. Blake said, "Even if they fail, I hope that I've prepared them to find something that they care about and be resilient enough to stick with it." Blake wanted his students to find their niches and become self-confident, saying, "They have everything they need to be successful." In his characteristic self-deprecating style, he related,

I don't think I'm the greatest math teacher [who] ever walked. I don't think I'm the greatest reading teacher [who] ever was. I've got a lot to learn in all subjects for all my kids, but I just feel like as far as making a connection and really getting to know my kids personally, that's probably the most natural thing for me: building a relationship and rapport and respect with my students.

### *Discursive Resources*

The self-descriptive phrases in Table 5 suggest that Blake had a teaching identity of agile advocate because he switched freely between whatever was required, whether pedagogical techniques to help his ELs or arguments to defend his ELs to colleagues. He said, "You really have to change the ways that you approach different things because otherwise, kids get burnt out." Blake's table of terms shows his empathy, self-awareness, alertness to students' needs, quick responsiveness, and tendency for frank self-deprecation. Many of the words and phrases that Blake used to describe himself suggest that he values his learning as a teacher. He explained how he felt unprepared or misjudged a situation or did not understand how to help students. He told stories about how he learned more information, tried to help his students, or tried a different approach to meet his students' needs. Blake did not directly use many words or phrases to describe himself as a teacher, but he constructed an image of himself as a quick-thinking, agile instructor willing to learn and help students.

Table 5

*Blake's Table of Terms Reflecting His Teacher Self*

Participant	Self-descriptive words and phrases
Blake	<p>A lot of kids will have you fooled.</p> <p>Cannot expect mastery the first time through.</p> <p>Comfort level teaching ELs depends on their level of proficiency.</p> <p>Felt unprepared to teach ELs.</p> <p>I do a lot more formal and informal assessments like conferencing, walking by more, realizing some discrepancies.</p> <p>I look for any way that I can bring in something that they can put their hands on or relate to.</p> <p>I made students feel more comfortable.</p> <p>I wouldn't say that I'm an ESL expert in their eyes because we've all had the same level of training.</p> <p>If I can come up with something that is not an original assessment of some sort, I do.</p> <p>Important knowing a student's family history, what's going on at home, knowing the situation that your student is in and responding to that.</p> <p>It's completely changed my planning.</p> <p>It's not a cookie-cutter because kids change, so you have to tweak assignments, too.</p> <p>I've tried everything I can outside of standing on my head.</p> <p>Just bridging the gap.</p> <p>Just trying my best to keep my head above the water.</p> <p>Kids that started living in other countries have no clue about reading, social studies, science, all sorts of things when they come here.</p> <p>Not every single day can you get around to every activity; certain activities just go with certain things.</p> <p>Reaching out and letting them know, "I've got your back."</p> <p>Taught kindergarten, first, third, fourth, fifth, sixth grades: I went from "You're responsible for this" to "Okay, I can't dump that much responsibility off on the kids."</p> <p>That's my big thing: How am I asking them to show proficiency?</p> <p>Verbal output and written output and comprehending text are completely separate things.</p> <p>You can tell when a kid's not working: Find a way to link whatever you're doing to some sort of experience that they have.</p> <p>You have no choice but to put myself on the side to advocate for, but just making sure not only the kids felt comfortable in my room around the students, but to make sure that kids were getting what they need.</p>

In revealing intermediary contexts, Blake further constructed his teaching identity of agile advocacy by defending ELs to other students. However, he advocated in several ways. He said, “My advocacy for those ESL kids moving up to the next year is to never say anything that would negatively reflect on the kid.” Another example was his advocacy beyond the classroom, which was a reflection of negotiations with the community at large:

Bad, but absolutely realistic: Where we live currently is a divide. If I was at a gas station and heard somebody griping about another culture, I would absolutely get in that conversation. It infuriates me more and more [to hear] people tear down [people from other cultures], especially kids. I have no problem talking to people. If you don’t like me for it after that, so be it.

### ***Blake’s Descriptions of Pivotal Pedagogical Experiences***

Blake constructed his teaching identity of agile EL advocate through a combination of empathy and self-awareness, epiphany, perception that oral fluency does not indicate zero struggles with literacy, and learning to do what is academically necessary even if it “breaks the mold.” Unlike the four female teachers who discussed their pedagogical and emotional approaches to ELs during the interviews, Blake focused on pedagogical techniques. Pedagogical techniques contributed to his pivotal experiences, as well. Despite teaching English to fourth- and fifth grade ELs fairly proficient in oral language, Blake applied his pedagogical responsibilities and agile responses to all students:

It’s my same responsibility for all kids. I’ve got to make sure that I’m teaching them the standards, like, to fidelity. I’m not watering it down just to help them through it. It’s my job to make sure that the assistance and support that I’m giving them is correct. I don’t want to go too far and not make them work and show effort. That’s with all kids. You also don’t want to get to the point that you’re not assisting them enough to truly help them. That’s the way it is with all students, but ELs especially. Are you keeping them in that zone of proximal development where they can get something? You’ve got to constantly be reassessing what’s going on with you and what’s going on with them.

Nonetheless, each student’s uniqueness was another of Blake’s pivotal pedagogical experiences. He often felt misled by skills and noted students’ uniqueness as central to the

development of his teaching identity, as it caused him to remain alert and responsive. He explained, “Something I key on is [that] it’s a different situation for each kid. The next thing probably kind of falls under knowing I got really tricked for a while by kids’ verbal output.”

Blake said,

I mentioned this earlier, but verbal output and written output and comprehending text are completely separate things. You have that with even English-speaking kids, like, they’re very well-versed. They know all the idioms because their grandma talks [and] uses idioms in everyday speech. Then they fail a reading test, and you go, “What in the world? This kid will talk your ear off.” They’ve got all the language skills and more, but [they are] two completely different things.

### **Lily: The Undervalued Advocate**

Lily perceived herself as a teacher who saw students as people and tried to make middle school “a little bit better” for them than it was for her. She searched for ways to keep herself engaged and passionate about teaching. Lily’s perceptions of herself as a teacher tended toward the student side of her teaching identity (see Figure 1). She called herself a “laid-back teacher” who made her students comfortable and had fun despite her resolute focus on the course of study because she remained conscious of time. She loved the middle school age group, although she described it as “tough.” She noted that she felt “worn out every day” because teaching middle school required plenty of energy. Lily saw herself as a teacher whose students walked away interested, maybe not loving science, but seeing the world differently because of it.

### ***Discursive Resources***

The words, phrases, and other discursive resources in Table 6 show Lily’s focus on the social experiences of her students in the classroom but her colleagues’ relative disregard of her EL expertise. She described herself as “caring and compassionate.” During the interviews, Lily repeatedly emphasized the importance of ELs feeling comfortable in her classroom. However, she did not want to be seen as her students’ friend while maintaining soothing relationships. With

her colleagues, she felt reluctant to describe herself as an expert and to give advice without being asked. Such a finding indicates her teaching identity as an encouraging comforter to students but an undervalued advocate to colleagues. Correspondingly, Lily commented more frequently on her students and her teaching identity than her role as an EL advocate. Her table of terms shows a responsive and professional science teacher who focused on her students' comfort in her classroom. She believed that the students who felt at ease in a classroom learned and that uncomfortable students did not learn. Evidence of her role as the undervalued advocate emerged from her pivotal pedagogical experiences.

Table 6

*Lily's Table of Terms Reflecting Her Teacher Self*

Participant	Self-descriptive words and phrases
Lily	<p>A lot of them can't read or write.</p> <p>But I try to make everything we do, even if it's boring—if it can't be fun, at least let's make it interactive somehow.</p> <p>Caring and compassionate.</p> <p>Colleagues: Sometimes take my EL advice; sometimes they don't. It may just be differences in teaching strategy. My advice may not work for them. That's just the way I take it. I just don't think they think about it.</p> <p>Curriculum: You have to figure out what works and what doesn't.</p> <p>Diversity exposure: Grateful. I'm just maybe not a different teacher, but just a different person, just looking at the world not with my shelterd [eyes].</p> <p>I am seen as an ESL expert only at times.</p> <p>I enjoyed having ELs together and not having to worry about anybody else; it took some pressure off of them.</p> <p>I feel like I had to scrounge for technology, but I solved that, and I wound up with a computer cart in my classroom, and I'm going to fight to hang on to it.</p> <p>I feel like my comfort level has really grown, especially over this past year.</p> <p>I feel like my responsibilities are to make my content area as accessible to them as I can.</p> <p>I have had kids tell me that they like to come to my class, while hitting the science pretty hard at the same time.</p> <p>I hit the coursework pretty hard and things on the test pretty hard.</p>

Participant	Self-descriptive words and phrases
Lily	<p>I like to make my kids comfortable in my classroom.</p> <p>I never try to be their friend; it's easier to sort of maybe cut it with them a little bit more.</p> <p>I reflected a lot about everything that I did.</p> <p>I take more of the responsibility off of me and put it onto them.</p> <p>I think more about each individual kid than I did previously, and not just a, "Let's all do the same thing, the same way, at the same time," cookie-cutter kind of thing; just a little bit more individualized, maybe.</p> <p>I want the kids to be comfortable in my class.</p> <p>I want to have fun with it.</p> <p>I've had to just figure a lot of things out.</p> <p>I'm fairly laid back.</p> <p>It is not worth getting frustrated.</p> <p>It took me about, oh my gosh, probably 6 good years to really feel comfortable, just like feeling like I had my feet under me enough that I felt competent about my course of study and knowing how to.</p> <p>It's been hard to really find some practical things.</p> <p>Labs are good preparation for high school and the ones going on to college.</p> <p>The most important part is socialization and just making sure they're comfortable at school, because some of them are not used to school like we do it; they will learn when they feel comfortable.</p> <p>You just accommodate for ELs however you need to, just like you would for any kid.</p>

### ***Lily's Descriptions of Pivotal Pedagogical Experiences***

Lily constructed her teaching identity through a combination of empathy and self-awareness, intense dislike of school as a middle school student, determination as an adult to provide an opposite classroom environment than what she had experienced, and love of the logic and orderliness of science. Lily's first pivotal pedagogical experience was her unhappy memories of middle school, which provided a catalyst for her teaching style. She noted that she did not base her identity on "want[ing students] to like me." She wanted her middle school students to feel comfortable because she never was:

Middle school is crappy. I hated middle school when I was in middle school. I remember the classrooms that I hated going in. I think about when I was in school [and the] classes I hated going to because I hated the teacher or hated how I felt when I was in that class. I don't want to be that teacher. So, I guess I have tried to set my class up [the] total opposite of that. I just want them feeling comfortable coming through the door. I feel that way about all my kids. I'm not saying I'm always nice to them. But I want to make an environment where they're comfortable doing what I'm asking them to do. That's important.

Feeling comfortable for most people requires a pleasant social environment, particularly for middle school students in the developmental stage of encroaching puberty and the social stage of seeking approval and acceptance. Correspondingly, Lily based her teaching identity on learning amid soothing moments of student socialization. Her insistence on making her students feel comfortable was a paradoxically poignant finding, given her self-proclaimed reserve and relative discomfort. She said, "This is going to be my 14th year, and I still get nervous sometimes up in front of all these kids." Nonetheless, drawing from empathy for her students, Lily worked hard to remain aware of and to fulfill her ELs' social needs as she delivered her content. Lily found socialization crucial "because some of them are not used to school, and just making sure they're comfortable at school" was a way to help ELs learn. She explained,

Of course, I want them to learn my content. That's my job. But I do a lot of group work while hitting the science pretty hard at the same time [because] a group with kids who are helpful and good to them maybe helps them make some friends and maybe socialize with our classwork. I think that's more important. They will learn when they feel comfortable.

Lily revealed the encouraging, comforting side of her identity and generosity of spirit as she described how she created classroom equality: "I just want to tell them, 'This is not my class. There's one of me. There's 30 of y'all. Y'all set the tone. If I'm snarky and griping and yappin' at y'all, that's a reflection of your behavior.'" There are also days when a teacher might not feel good or might be in a "snarky" mood, and she said, "It makes you stop and be like, 'Okay, that's not what they want from me.' So I have to think about it as much as they do." Lily's classroom was not a benevolent dictatorship in which the class belonged to the teacher, and the students

appeared to pay dutiful homage. Lily said, “I’m not a dictator. I don’t like that.” She noted the success of her teaching style even though they “hit the course work pretty hard.” Lily stated,

I don’t want to fight. I’m not going to fight with [the students]. I’ll say, “I’m going to respect you. You come through my door; I already love you. You’re my kid from this day forward. I’m going to be respectful to you as long as you’re respectful to me and you’re respectful to everybody else.” That’s how we get along. I don’t have a lot of behavior problems. I don’t have parent problems.

Lily established a comfortable, encouraging social setting and classroom equality based on respect. She also described another tactic of reinforcement: entertainment. Lily conceded the importance of creating a spectacle in middle school science classes:

I hate to use the word “entertaining,” but in middle school, you have to. It’s like a little bit of drama is involved. You have to sort of—especially when we do labs or whatever, promote it as a big deal: “This is the biggest deal that you’re ever going to see!” So there’s drama involved. I feel like I act all day sometimes! [*laughs*]

Lily exhibited dramatic flair regularly, created a comfortable social setting, and encouraged classroom equality. Another component of her pivotal experiences was her reticent nature. Unlike her pedagogical approach to the classroom, her reticence influenced how she advocated for ELs to her colleagues. She described herself as “shy and reserved” and said teaching was a good career for her because it forced her to put herself “out there” in a way not always enabled by her social timidity. Lily said, “Because it’s kids, I don’t feel as self-conscious.”

Most of Lily’s natural reserve appeared to exist in relationships with fellow faculty members and thus contributed to the undervalued advocacy side of her teaching identity. For example, Lily indicated her years spent learning to be an effective teacher and differentiating before starting the TESOL degree program. Through the TESOL degree program, she felt reaffirmed in her actions and tailored material to students to a greater degree. She said, “They talk to us a lot about differentiation, but [then] again, I don’t feel like anybody’s ever really

showed me how to do that. So, that's part of just figuring out what works in my class and what doesn't." Lily learned to depend on herself, which had benefits for the early construction and the later reshaping of her teaching identity. She said,

When I started teaching, I was the only science teacher, and [I] taught all three grade levels of science (sixth, seventh, and eighth). It was all on me. I didn't have a science coworker [who] I could go to and ask. I just had to figure it all out, what works and what doesn't work. I just had to experiment a lot on my own because I was the only science teacher there. So, I thought that was good for me, and it was good for my personality, too, I think. I mean, I had good people [who] I could reach out to for other things, but not necessarily science-related things. I had to figure it out on my own.

Though Lily was "more comfortable" and "more relaxed" now, her colleagues did not appear to recognize these developments; this was a pivotal pedagogical experience that resulted in the moniker of the undervalued advocate. Lily described the reaction to her proffered expertise as relative unresponsiveness:

I'm not one [who's] going to push myself on another teacher. I have tried to be more vocal this past year. Because I was teaching that [EL] class, I had more reason to be a little bit more vocal about it. I try to be helpful when I'm asked. I try to give people helpful tips when I know that our kids are in their class. People do come [to seek EL student advice] at times. [Colleagues] know that I have more knowledge with working with the [EL] kids. I've gone to the teachers [who] I know. I have e-mailed some resources out, [but] I haven't gotten any reactions back.

Gentle Lily expressed an indirect desire for more responsibilities: "I really would like the opportunity to share more things. I wish I would be given the opportunity to do more at school, maybe become more of a resource." She noted, however, the need to fall back on her philosophy: "It is not worth getting frustrated" (see Table 6).

### **Denise: The Enthusiastic Advocate**

Denise primarily saw herself as a teacher working to instill a lifelong love of learning and reading in all her students. She was a teacher whose students would continue enjoying reading for the rest of their lives because she had taught them that it is a fun and engaging activity.

Harkening back to the community stability that Denise (and the other participants) enjoyed and

that she taught at the same high school that she had attended, she also saw herself as a teacher who remained accessible to her students across the years. This accessibility enabled her to develop her teaching identity as the enthusiastic advocate after completing her TESOL graduate degree (see Figure 1).

Another aspect of constructing her teaching identity was a relatively new focus on high school ELs. Denise realized the importance of developing good relationships, which she saw as the doorway to communication. She tried to get to know her ELs and have them get to know her “so we could talk about everything” and so she could tailor her help. She saw herself as a teacher who tried to connect with her students by providing help that ranged from English proficiency and classwork to feeling part of the school through pep rallies and homecoming dances.

### ***Discursive Resources***

As evidence of the enthusiastic advocate identity, Denise’s self-descriptive discursive resources (see Table 7) showed abundant use of superlatives, such as “happy,” “loved,” “hated,” “fell in love,” and “wonderful,” all of which suggest a lively and engaged teacher. She described herself as the teacher most involved with ELs at her school because she felt the “most comfortable” with them. This was an interesting assertion because there were three other teachers with TESOL graduate degrees who taught with Denise. She positioned herself as more comfortable teaching ELs than the other instructors who had also completed the TESOL graduate degree. She described herself as a “little different” from the other teachers at her school.

### ***Denise’s Descriptions of Pivotal Pedagogical Experiences***

Denise constructed her teaching identity of a highly socially connected teacher and enthusiastic EL advocate through a combination of empathy and self-awareness. Her humility and appreciation of regaining the ability to speak and read after her strokes, love of literature,

strong maternal response to students, and intensely social nature also contributed to her teaching identity. Denise developed her teaching identity as she recognized that ELs are the children of parents who have moved here to live the American dream. Denise included empathy and maternal concerns in her teaching identity:

Think about what you would do to provide and take care of your own children. If you knew their future was in a drug cartel or gang, but you could change that, then their whole li[ves] could change. I read an amazing book recently called *American Dirt*. I've been telling everyone, "You've got to read this book because it could change people's minds about immigration." It's a perfect story about how this woman does whatever she can to save her kid's life. And I just think, what would I do to save my kid's life? I would do whatever I needed to do. I would get where I needed them to be to save their lives. So a lot of times, I think people don't take into consideration of where [immigrants have] come from, what they've been through to get here, and that most of them are here just because that was the only hope for their famil[ies], that was hope for their children.

Denise had another pivotal pedagogical experience in her first year of teaching when she taught a seventh grade class of 60% to 70% of students with learning needs or disabilities and ELs. She said,

The first time I think I remember feeling that I [didn't] know what I'm doing [or] how to handle this. That really changed me as a teacher because I had to rally and pull myself together and figure out how to help these kids and how to meet their needs. That's close to the same time that I decided to do the TESOL program.

Table 7

*Denise's Table of Terms Reflecting Her Teacher Self*

Participant	Self-descriptive words and phrases
Denise	<p>Always helped all the kids in my class.</p> <p>Best student comment: Your class always made me feel really happy and comfortable.</p> <p>Did not want to be a teacher.</p> <p>Diversity is a very cool experience; great.</p> <p>Fell in love with education.</p> <p>Happy to stay home as a mom.</p> <p>Happy with training.</p> <p>Hated premed.</p> <p>I have got to cover these standards; wish I could really focus on language acquisition.</p> <p>I'm a little different.</p> <p>I am the most comfortable teacher with ELs at our school.</p> <p>Kids need to know that somebody thinks what they think is important; this is what teaching should be.</p> <p>Lecturing makes a horrible boring day for me; I love my students to talk more than I talk.</p> <p>Love group work and interaction.</p> <p>Loved biology.</p> <p>Loved homework.</p> <p>Loved school.</p> <p>TESOL initially overwhelming but made sense and was very eye-opening.</p> <p>The world is a lot bigger than you think it is coming from a small town.</p> <p>Touchy-feely teacher.</p> <p>Try hard to get ELs into school culture.</p> <p>Tutoring made me happy.</p> <p>Very daunting when they cannot speak to you.</p> <p>We could be doing more than we are for ELs.</p> <p>Weird to bounce between highest- and lowest-functioning students in one day.</p> <p>Wish I could speak their language.</p> <p>Wonderful education department.</p>

Denise developed into a highly social enthusiastic advocate who strove to know her students personally. Her identity differed from the model of a teacher respected by students from an emotional distance. Denise emphasized her connectedness and repeated it several times:

My daughter is like, “Mom, you’re one of those [touchy]-feely teachers [because] you start every class by talking to us and asking us how our day’s been, and you always want to know what’s going on, and you try to find out what we’re doing besides what we’re doing in class.” I guess that kind of sums it up. I really feel like it’s a whole experience. I want to know them and how things are at home and how their [lives are] before I worry about, “Okay, now, let’s do this literature.” If they don’t know me and I don’t know them, then we’re really not going to be able to have a good enough relationship where I can get through to them and teach them what they need to know in the literature classroom. I guess that’s my big thing with the ELs this year. I really tried to connect with them. I try to help them with their English, and I [tried] to help them with their classroom work, but then I tried to talk to them about just being a part of homecoming and going to the prom and doing the fun things in school. It is so important that they feel like it’s their school too.

### **Summary of Subquestion Two**

Subquestion two was, what are the resources teachers use to construct their identities as classroom teachers who have a graduate degree in TESOL? The answer emerged from the participants’ perceptions of themselves as teachers based on discursive resources and pivotal pedagogical experiences that contributed to constructing their teaching identities. Each participant used different discursive resources to construct their professional identities. Andrea’s teaching identity consisted of a combination of an affectionate mother figure to her students and a bold advocate to her colleagues. She developed these identities from viewing her kindergarten students as her children and standing up for them as a bold defender of ELs’ rights the way a mother stands up for her children. Callie’s teaching identity consisted of a combination of an affectionate mother figure for her students (a bubbly, warm teacher who made learning fun) and an exasperated advocate to her colleagues (a frustrated teacher whose coworkers did not heed her campaigns to support ELs). Blake’s teaching identity as an agile advocate emerged from his willingness to do what ELs needed on their behalf, from nimble pedagogical techniques to

advocating for ELs regardless of the opponent. Lily's teaching identity was a combination of an encouraging comforter for her students (by making school and science engaging) and an undervalued advocate among her colleagues. The encouraging, comforting approach she used with students, combined with her natural reserve and unwillingness to impose her beliefs upon colleagues, caused her to restrict her EL activism to the rare occasions when others sought her advice. Finally, Denise's teaching identity as an enthusiastic advocate emerged from medical issues that required her to relearn how to read and speak. This grueling personal experience caused her to desire to help ELs with their struggles in her classroom and collaborate with colleagues to make advocacy a reality.

### **Results for Subquestion Three**

Subquestion three addressed how the participants negotiated teaching identity in context: How do teachers negotiate their teaching identities as they expand their teaching roles from classroom teacher to classroom teacher of ELs? The evidence in this section suggests that the participants built their teaching and advocate identities by negotiating their relationships with students, colleagues, and families within the contexts of classroom, school, and community. This section presents evidence in three parts. First, select stories show the participants' negotiations with students. Second, there are negotiations within the school presented with teaching techniques that appeared to be key components in the reshaping of the participants' post-TESOL teaching identities. Third, the section includes the participants' negotiations with their communities with select perspectives of the participants' families and community members toward ELs. The active construction of teaching identity through negotiations with colleagues (see Figure 1) is a topic addressed below for subquestion four.

The discursive resources in this section contained only hints of the difficulties that could result from increased numbers of ELs and the related changes to the status quo. These hints appeared to occur in the participants' generally upbeat descriptions of negotiations within the contexts of classroom, school, and community and indicated the subtheme of the careful choice of words associated with empathy and heightened self-awareness. For example, despite her outspokenness on behalf of ELs, Andrea felt that her best efforts and similar efforts by her colleagues to help ELs did not result in progress. She said, "Because we've had so many more new students move in, we feel like we're just treading water and that we're barely keeping our head above water with these students. We feel overwhelmed." The primary difficulties were that the limited resources could not provide for the needs of the many ELs ("I wish that we did have more resources for our students"). Thus, the participants felt stretched thin in their efforts; despite this and overall, they kept their language upbeat.

### **Negotiations with the Students That Influenced Teaching Identity**

The literature review in Chapter II indicated that teachers grow their identities based on what they have and have not accomplished with their students. As such, there are wide-ranging stories about negotiations with students in this section. By way of introduction, Blake spoke for all five participants when he said that the confidence from completing his master's degree and gaining EL experience enabled him to reshape his teaching identity. He said, "It has been a huge, huge confidence booster for me." Blake's confidence increased as he grew to understand

Why we look so hard at the standard, why am I giving them this graphic organizer, why are we going over it again, and [why we're] making t-charts for comparisons. I have more of the reasoning behind what I do to [and can] defend myself.

Blake also spoke for all five participants when he said that he felt more able to make appropriate choices for each of his students, "not just my ESL kids." He believed that his new knowledge caused him to put more thought into all of the elements of his work as a teacher. He

stated, “Confidence comes along with knowing that what I do is right. The strategies in one lesson are different than the next, but I know why, and I can tell you why.” Moreover, Blake could defend his pedagogical choices with data. He said,

I have a lot more confidence in my ability to risk-take [and] try new things and my ability to tweak things to make them work or to dismiss things on the basis that I can look at data and dismiss things that are ineffective.

Similarly, Lily also felt more confident and relaxed after obtaining her TESOL graduate degree and more EL experiences. She overcame her shy nature, and the students in her classrooms began to bustle with activity. For example, she incorporated “a whole lot more” activities by partitioning a class period into different segments, such as having students accomplish a specific activity in small groups and reassemble to discuss what they had learned. She said, “I’m more apt now to not just spend the whole class time doing one thing. I like to either do two or three [things] and then come back and talk.” Other than that, Lily felt that she stayed true to her standard style of interacting with students. She said, “I never try to be their friend [because that way] it’s easier to cut it with them.” However, she stated, “I’m more comfortable with it. I’m older now, too. I’m more relaxed.”

Callie told a memorable story about negotiating a student dilemma that caused her in her identities of the affectionate mother figure and exasperated advocate (see Figure 1) to provide explicit instructions about using certain language. She said, “I’ll never forget!” One of the little girls in her first-grade classroom used a swear word. “Of course, in her language, it wasn’t a bad word. Cussing didn’t mean anything to her, but some of the other kids knew what it meant.”

Such an experience caused Callie to address the situation. She approached it this way:

Her crayon broke, she got mad and said, “Oh, shit!” I pulled her to the side and said, “We don’t say that word. That’s not nice. We just say nice words.” The student went back to coloring, and something else happened, and she said, “Oh, shit” again. [*laughs*] I said, “Sweetheart, we don’t say those words.” And she said, “But I say it nice!” She took me literally: It’s okay to say that word as long as I say it in a nice voice! I always make sure

that I'm *very* explicit and that I explain everything, and I show them what I'm talking about and what I expect so that way I don't have that again. [*laughs*]

Denise fondly recalled the results of negotiating a dilemma presented by “one of the most motivated students that I've ever had.” As a result, Denise developed specific study aids, which she used to great effect. This student represented all highly motivated students who try to do everything perfectly and sometimes miss critical academic activities as a result. The student was a perfectionist and had beautiful handwriting, diligently copying everything Denise wrote on the board with her impeccable penmanship. However, the problem was that she tended to focus meticulously on her handwriting to the degree that she often stopped listening to the information flow. Denise solved this problem and simultaneously taught students what to emphasize (i.e., recognizing major versus minor points and later differentiating them to study for the major points on a test) by developing structured notes, a version of fill-in-the-blanks, that required students to complete the entries.

One of Blake's student stories was of a student dilemma less about reshaping his identity and more about a final exam undoubtedly etched in his students' minds that could have caused them to reshape their ideas of school. This example showed Blake's identity of agile advocate to students and colleagues, as it illustrated the parallel between teacher support and pedagogical philosophy. He said, “If I can come up with something that is not an original assessment, I do.” His innovative way of testing reading and math skills resulted in the real-world action of his “big summative assessment” that required Blake's students to create restaurants. Blake assigned tasks of writing menus, taking orders, receiving payment, and making change. He remained flexible and varied the requirements according to student ability. He discussed the assignment:

They name it. They draw it. They color it. They flip it over and make a menu on the back. Kids that are flying [get to] do 10 menu items; others just need a minimum of five. I'll stop them on a time limit, so [the] kids that are flying don't have 643 items on their menu when other kids have six items. Then I'll make them take orders from their classmates

and total up the orders. Classmates pay them in whole dollar amount. I probably could take it a step further and give them monopoly money so they can count it out, but I haven't. They have to pay in a whole dollar amount to total their orders and subtract to make change. We haven't lined up our decimal points. That gives me time to be going around the whole room. A, they've got somebody they're talking to, which always helps. B, they get to do their own thing, so they've got some ownership in what they're doing. I have time, while they're taking orders, to walk around and watch my kids that I'm targeting—in this case, my [ELs]. I can watch them taking orders and working stuff out. I can give them feedback right then, or if I see a major issue, I'll let them finish what we're doing. My next small group, I'll pull them, and there we go. I'm already loaded for what we need to work on.

Teaching middle school students is one thing. However, teaching science to middle school students presents the challenges of students' physiological changes approaching puberty and the youth's preconceived notions about science. Lily addressed some of these issues by learning to negotiate with her students, an approach that contributed to her encouraging comforter identity. Each year, she gave incoming students the choice of structuring their class to enable them to take ownership. Allowing the students to build the class showed that she respected their opinions and, with great diplomacy, held them accountable for their classroom behavior. She also gave them the choice of revealing personal details about their lives or homes if they cared to share. She provided this choice with the assurance that she would keep the information confidential and would only use it to "look out for them" over the term, such as providing additional homework time for students with divorcing parents. In the first week of class, Lily and her students draw up a contract and post it in the class for easy reference throughout the term. In this respect, she positioned her students on the same level as herself:

I let the kids talk about how they want their class to be every period. I call them science norms. This is what first period is going to be like, second period, [et cetera]. I do several activities where they tell me some things or write things personally to me that I read. They have an opportunity to talk to each other about the things they like [about] being in a class or that their classmates are doing things that they don't like. We make charts and PowerPoints. Then, by Friday, we condense it all, and we make our poster of things that we absolutely need for this class to run smoothly and be a happy place. We put it up on the wall. I've been doing that for 2 or 3 years now. I think that really works, yeah. I

mean, you can say, “Alright, this is what we said that we wanted our class to be like. Are we upholding that today or not?” And that expose[s] a lot of behavior problems, too.

Denise positioned the ELs as more engaging students than monolingual English speakers at the high school because of apparent differences in motivation. According to Denise and other participants (e.g., Andrea), the ELs were especially eager students. Naturally, Denise “really enjoyed that,” and this caused ELs to be her favorite students. Choosing her words carefully, Denise suggested that many students did not find school fun or exciting, and she cited the hard work done by teachers to motivate them. On the other hand, she said, “I never have to work to motivate my ELs; they’re always just ready to go. They’re always really excited to learn and very appreciative when [I] help them.” Denise did not know why ELs showed so much more motivation to learn and wondered if it was related to a lack of formal education in the past, family values of treasuring education, or “a cultural thing.” What resonated with Denise was that “they’re very respectful. They see the teacher as an expert. They are not afraid to ask the teacher a question. It’s good.”

As such, the direct experience of teaching ELs and the TESOL graduate degree program were a powerful combination with a significant influence on Denise’s teaching identity of enthusiastic advocate. Denise established good relationships with her students and positioned herself evenly with them:

I’ve always been, like my daughter said, more [of] that touchy-feely teacher who wants to really connect with their kids. After the TESOL program, I realized that not only was it okay, it was *necessary*. We had all the classes that talked about how important it was to understand their culture[s] and their home li[ves] and allow them to pull that into the classroom and share it with the other students. It just really kind of instilled in me this—I don’t know if pride is the right word—but like maybe the kind of teacher that I really wanted to be, and I thought, “Well, it’s okay to be that kind of teacher. They’re *telling me* to be that kind of teacher.” It gave me, I don’t know, courage. It made me bolder to be able to say we’re going to spend some time in class doing this because this is just as important as learning how to write this essay. In the past, it’s like we talked about all the tests and all the things [we] have to get them ready, [and] there were things that I think I wanted to do my whole teaching career, where I said, “I can’t take time out to do that.

We've got to get ready to write this essay." So, afterward, I really felt empowered, I guess, to be the kind of teacher I always really had wanted to be, I think.

A classroom activity called the diversity wheel had an influence on Denise's identity because it showed her something that she felt she lacked in her classes: "Really looking at the background[s] of my students and trying to realize that [their backgrounds] affected how they could learn and their educational progress in my classroom." She said,

It was almost like I was going to teach them the way that I had been taught and the way that I had been teaching for the last 10 years and [thinking] they should be able to get it. But then, all those classes made me realize that in order for them to connect with me and be able to learn from me, I need to connect with them.

Denise began using the diversity wheel as a first-day activity. The students colored the diversity wheel, which presented several questions never before acknowledged by Denise in her classroom: How do you like to learn? Do you think you're an introvert or an extrovert? Denise saw herself as a "better teacher" as she realized that

Each kid had a different learning style, and each kid had struggles that they were bringing to the group, but they also had wonderful things about their culture[s] that they could share with the group. So, it helped me to realize that all that had a place in my classroom.

Stories about inevitable gaffs by well-meaning but culturally naïve teachers contributed to Denise's enthusiasm for learning about ELs' cultures. Ever the pedagogical adventurer, Blake the agile advocate attempted to put theory learned from his TESOL education into practice by using Spanish to teach English. Blake said, "I learned in the TESOL program that fostering one language can help build the other. I didn't realize having kids write and talk to each other in Spanish helps their English language acquisition." So one day, Blake tried using Spanish to teach English.

In this case, Blake reshaped his identity due to the repercussions of a cultural misunderstanding. He realized not only the unanticipated reluctance of ELs to speak Spanish in

an English-speaking classroom but also their reluctance to talk to each other. Blake made such a mistake only once, and it enabled him to significantly improve his teaching identity:

This is an absolutely powerful tool, so I'm not mocking this. One day, I asked Students I, J, and P to talk in Spanish to each other. That was the first time that I saw the reluctance between Student J and Student I to work together and the first time that I realized that students from Guatemala and from Mexico don't always get long. After I finally got them to kind of move on from being reluctant, they talked like crazy for like 15 to 20 minutes. I stood with them, not that I understood a word that they were saying, but just because I'd asked them, "Do something different." I should have gotten them to write in Spanish, but I made them write in English after that, and, hey, very little production came out. When they went to write, I got hardly anything. Honestly, I think those two were a little bit irritated at me for asking them to speak Spanish. I don't know why. I hate that we've kind of...given kids the idea that it's not okay to speak in a different language at school because people don't understand them. Sometimes they don't want to because they feel like they're sticking out, they're drawing attention to themselves.

Blake also hinted at the criticism aimed at ELs. Such episodes contributed to teaching identity and produced more empathy and help for ELs. One day, Blake saw one of his straight-A students, Student H, struggling to understand English idioms. Idioms are a challenge to learn because individuals cannot determine their meaning by directly translating the words. Monolingual English students sitting nearby saw Student H's struggles and taunted him. Seeing that, Blake sprang into action and "negotiated" with the taunting students from the higher position of teacher and sat down to help Student H learn idioms:

It was one of those things [that] just flew all over me. I sat him down, talked about context clues, wrote some example sentences. I pointed at a pretty girl nearby and said, "Oh, you know that girl over there? She's as cute as a button." And he said, "Oh, she's hot." And I said, "Yes, in essence, you got it." He sat down and wrote it when I put it in context.

### **Negotiations Within the Classroom That Influence Teaching Identity**

Regardless of age and grade level, every EL who enrolls in school brings a unique understanding of speaking, reading, and writing English. Teachers reveal their identities by how they approach teaching. The participants in this study coped with the challenges of ELs' varying comprehension levels by developing vastly different or strikingly similar approaches to teaching

ELs across the grade levels. This section presents the specific techniques the participants mentioned that contributed to their teaching identities.

The techniques presented in this section resulted from the participants' empathy and self-awareness that they augmented with the knowledge from the TESOL program (see Figure 1). The evidence suggests that participants lectured the students in front of the classroom less frequently than they used other pedagogical strategies. Instead, the participants emphasized techniques that included the use of pictures and actions. The comments included in this section include the techniques effective for teaching ELs and monolingual English speakers, enabling the participants to become better teachers.

Andrea taught kindergarten. Because of the inadequacies of her college-level teacher training about EL instruction, she "didn't have much to go with" for teaching kindergarten ELs until she completed the TESOL graduate program. She pointed out all kindergarten children's uniqueness, ranging from young people who can read to youth who have never colored in coloring books or held pencils. Andrea was empathetic but frank and said, "My biggest thing is that you can't compare kids," and "you have to individualize all your teaching." Andrea expressed the affectionate mother figure side of her teaching identity when she said she remained "very, very patient with everyone." Like an encouraging mother, she also saw herself as a cheerleader. Young children are concrete thinkers, so Andrea embraced techniques that included the use of "almost all of your senses" (see Table 8).

Callie taught first grade. As an affectionate mother figure, she strove to make her classrooms fun "because they're babies." She said, "[We] can learn and have fun at the same time, [so] we implement things like dinosaur day, dress-up days, and Christmas around the world because it's not all about a test" (see Table 8). Plus, expressing her empathy, she noted that all

students faced increased pressure to perform academically, with the first graders having to perform some second- and third-grade work. Regarding the late birthdays of the children, she said, “You would not believe...I had 4- [and] 5-year-olds this year.” Callie has plenty of pedagogical challenges with first graders, including ELs, but she considered reading the most difficult ability to learn. She stated, “One of the hardest things for CVC words is trying to sound it out. I had a little flipbook to do one letter at a time [because you can’t] take for granted that they can say *cats*, because it is English. I would hold up a picture of the cat and do it that way.” The teaching techniques for the youngest students showed the similar approaches of Andrea and Callie (see Table 8). There were more techniques used in the first-grade classroom because there was more content to learn.

Table 8

*Teaching Techniques for Early School-Aged Students*

Andrea’s Kindergarten Techniques	Callie’s First-grade Techniques
Assessments would be the same	Anchor reading
Clips on the Promethean board to see it visually	Break down the academics better
Give many chances	Can contact EL teachers for help
Going slower, giving them time to think	Community of teachers is available to help
Hand gestures, almost like sign language to get them to understand	Computer programs, Lexia, and other programs
Make connections	Explicit instructions
Online translators to communicate with ELs and their parents. “I use my phone a whole lot	Find a connection for them; otherwise, they couldn’t get it
Pictures	Hands-on, especially with math
Pointing at the word and phonology	Linking cubes
Putting things up on the walls that they can see	More time to process
Remain very positive	Morning meeting (“So ELs get a time to shine and share what they did over the holidays; they might not have had turkey for Thanksgiving, you know.”)
Repeating myself	Multiplication

Andrea's Kindergarten Techniques	Callie's First-grade Techniques
Showing them (e.g., if we're learning the word jump, jump up and down)	Not taking for granted that they know anything
Songs to sing and dance to (e.g., spelling the color word, they're watching it, they're listening to it)	One-to-one correspondence
Touch. Something we can pick up	Partner talk so they can talk to each other and find out different things
Translator app ("If they look like they don't understand something, I pull up the translator app a lot.")	Patience
Using pictures and putting the words together	Peer helpers
Videos	Providing a visual is huge ("A lot of people think it's just for ELs or the littles, but they need it through high school.")
	Reach out in the community: home visits, make them feel welcomed, teachers stay in contact with parents, always looking for translators for the parents
	Read-aloud, reading program
	Scaffolding
	Small group instruction ("because they learn quicker from their peers than they do from us")
	Special events
	Structural support, especially in reading (e.g., let them just read one line and then I read the next line so they wouldn't get stressed out)
	They need to have meaning to a lesson
	Think about my presentation of how I teach them
	Visuals, visuals, visuals; visual cues, and visual aids
	Whole group instruction

Callie used a favorite technique of singing with her first graders:

I always tell them [that this] is how their brain's going to grow and how they've got to learn these things and put these sounds together because all words are made out of sounds because you got to read so you can go to high school and go to college and get that job so you can make that money, honey. And we all do the "make it rain" dance. That's one of the things all year long, is when they get something and that light bulb comes on, they'll tell me, "We're going to make that money, honey." Because I tell them, "You want these things. You want a car and a house, and you want to be able to do things, and that is one

of the reasons why we're learning this, is so you can have all that." Because even though I know they're just 6, it's fine to think about, "Oh..." Because they don't really understand the value of a dollar. [laughs]

Callie explained making her approach (see Table 8) more personable; whereas this pertained to her students, she also extended it in her interactions with the community. She often used the term "real world" in reference to her negotiations with the classroom (the classroom microculture that she created [see Figure 1]) because the real world makes it personable, as in, "Making the money, honey." Her Student J laughed especially loudly whenever they sang about making the money, honey, because he knew, "That's what my dad does. My dad does that. I'm going to do that." Callie would reinforce him, saying, "Of course you are."

With respect to negotiations in the classroom and school, the TESOL graduate program enabled all five participants to move away from a cookie-cutter teaching mentality. For example, Blake developed his teaching identity and dug deeper by reviewing students' test responses to discover precisely what a student missed (see Table 9). He said, "I started pulling the reading tests answer keys and looking back over [them]. Was it craft, structure, key ideas, details?" When he found the reasons, he set students to work together in pairs "to hammer things home." New aspects on the encouraging, comforting side of Lily's teaching identity indicated a switch to a versatile set of techniques and increased awareness of how students struggled in different ways. She said, "You just really don't know what to do, and a lot of that has come with experience and really thinking about it more strategically." In the process, Lily became aware of all her students, which contributed to her teaching identity because "the ELs have helped me." The teaching techniques in Table 9 show the similarities and differences in the approaches between Blake and Lily.

Denise taught high school students. She said that many of her negotiations in the classroom and at school caused her to revise the pedagogical techniques she used for students

who received additional services for learning disabilities for her ELs. Several participants indicated that early training enabled the ELs to achieve on par with students who received other services for learning needs; however, Denise was the only participant who identified techniques effective for both types of students. The methods she described included using a lot of images, “things that I could show them and let them see it,” and understanding that “I had to slow down, work on their level, and not expect them to be able to just blend in and function on the level of the rest of the class.” Before her stroke, this “came as a surprise”; thus, part of the reshaping of her teaching identity was developing a deep understanding that her ELs wanted to blend. However, she recognized that they could not function on the same level as the rest of the class due to their stage of language acquisition.

Table 9

*Teaching Techniques for Middle School–Aged Students*

Blake’s 4th and 5th-grade techniques	Lily’s 6th–8th-grade techniques
Completely changed my planning	Academics are secondary
First, know the kid: their situation, background, family history, what’s going on at home	Assessment: Tough figuring out what they know, so modify my tests
Giving breaks because kids get overwhelmed	Build their English skills
Giving wait time	Chemistry is so abstract: We watch videos, draw pictures, look at the pictures, google pictures and have them try to explain it in their own terminology.
Graphic organizer	Class is comfortable and fun, but I move forward pretty rapidly
Homophones lessons (e.g., current and currant)	Classes on campus structured to break it up into two or three different activities and then talk about them
Jot journal	Different activities
One-on-one for struggling students	Do things in smaller pieces
Productive struggle	Flexible
Reasonable expectations (“I have caught myself expecting way more than a kid was capable of, and expecting a lot less.”) The universal teacher challenge	Frustration: You can tell when they get frustrated, just like any kid; sometimes I’ll just take their paper and be like, “We’ll just do this later.”
Same responsibility for all the kids	Group work
Scaffolding	Hands-on
Self-assessment rubrics	In my content class, I teach what they’re going to be assessed on and hit them hard.
Small groups (“There is so much power in small group, in close proximity.”)	Lecturing: I’ve never been a big lecturer
Spelling words reviewed every single week	Like as adults, when you know that you’re going to talk or create something in a few minutes, you think deeper about your answer
Summarize key points of the day so the kids can help monitor themselves	Many labs as I can because I believe in hands-on
Teach to the test (e.g., look at the standards, establish how are we will ask them to show proficiency, and load up on those lessons. “If I’m asking them to describe something, then I need to load them up with describing words. We need to be practicing describing things.”)	More interactive

Blake's 4th and 5th-grade techniques	Lily's 6th–8th-grade techniques
Teach to the test (e.g., look at the standards, establish how are we will ask them to show proficiency, and load up on those lessons. “If I’m asking them to describe something, then I need to load them up with describing words. We need to be practicing describing things.”)	More interactive
Tie into personal experiences (e.g., “ease that load of them learning a content area and a second language at one time”)	Patient
Visual aids: Use a picture for topics that the students do not have experience with	Provide basics of the content that I’m trying to teach but content is secondary; you get it across but that’s not the most important thing
Zone of proximal development	Review whatever concept we’re working on several times over and over in different ways right then Socialization Visuals

All teachers have memorable moments with students who have shaped their teaching identities. One of Denise’s positive memories (see Table 10) included two ELs in their first year in U.S. schools who were “very, very early English learners.” At first, she could not teach them class content, but she extended enthusiastic overtures to help them feel comfortable. In class, Denise would hold something up in front of the students and ask them to tell her what it was. If they knew, they told her; if they did not, they would talk about it. Denise said, “We just had a great time. I would walk around the school and point at stuff, and they would talk to me about it. We would talk about what they ate for lunch that day.” She enjoyed a rare opportunity to “do the beginning part” as opposed to trying to help ELs “[catch] up to where they needed to be,” which was her typical interaction with ELs. With those beginning students, Denise could develop “a good relationship with them and really help them.”

Table 10

*Teaching Techniques for High School Students*

Participant	9th–11th-grade techniques
Denise	Classroom participation Conferences at my desk (e.g., We discuss their thoughts about a novel the class is reading) Face-to-face (see if they're grasping the lesson) Focus on content of standardized testing, bubble content, and on the ICT Groups with a support system ("almost always") Love the advanced grammar Loved when we diagram sentences, over the moon, great for me Loved when we read books and talked about how the kids probably feel when they come here ("because I had never really thought about that") Peer-partnering ('peer buddy' partner is someone a bit above their level) Redo some assignments Review ILP Start with formative assessment to see where we're starting from Structured notes ("fill in the blank kind of thing; not writing down everything but writing down key terms") Talk to me (e.g., "Tell me what you understand about this book") Visuals: really important that you give them a visual; find an image or a movie clip Writing is less advanced than speaking, so oral assessments work

**Negotiations with the Community that Influenced Teaching Identity**

Negotiations with the community members covered a broad expanse of social territory. The communities included family members' feelings about the participants going to graduate school and investing in degrees for teaching English to non-English speakers. Their expanded communities incorporated staff members at the school with indirect connections to the classroom, the students' parents, and community attitudes about ELs.

The participants reported their family members as unilaterally supportive. For example, Denise enrolled in and completed the TESOL program with her sister-in-law. One of the many ways that Denise's husband showed his support for her TESOL work was when, returning from their family vacation, he drove across the country while Denise assembled her large portfolio in the back seat.

One element in the reshaping of Andrea's teaching identity was her renewed view of culture, which resulted in commentary that ultimately caused her to position ELs and their families higher than other students and their families. Andrea developed a strong appreciation of other traditions through the TESOL graduate program's cultural awareness courses, which she described as "some of the most useful" classes. For example, she had been surprised to learn that an element of some Hispanic cultures was that "sometimes kids don't want you to touch their head." She felt gratified to learn another aspect of the Hispanic culture because it addressed a perplexing interaction in which Student D. called Andrea "teacher" all year but never her formal teacher name, Miss M. One time, she asked the little boy if he knew her name, and Student D said he did (and he did). Andrea learned that, in his culture, the term "teacher" was not a generic or dismissive moniker but rather a show of respect, similar to that shown when addressing a courtroom judge as "Your Honor." Student D's father hugged Andrea spontaneously when they ran into each other at a department store because his son loved his teacher, reassuring the father about his son's experiences at a new school. These and similar episodes caused Andrea to change how she viewed ELs' cultural norms because she saw "how they value[d] a teacher." For example, Andrea positioned her ELs as more respectful than monolingual English speakers. The ELs' high degree of respect contrasted with the low levels of "a lot of our kids from this area whose parents don't value education like some of my Hispanic families do."

Another example of the mutual influence of students and teachers was how the influence extended to the child's parent. The parents of Student J, who particularly loved Callie's song "Make the money, honey," positively contributed to her teacher identity. During a teacher conference, the parents said their son was

Always so excited to come to school. I'll never forget when his dad and mom came in for a conference, and they were like, "He just loves you. He's just so excited every morning to come to school," and they're like, "He wakes up on Saturday." "No school today." "No, no..." I think just making it personable on their level with them makes a difference that others might not.

In another story, Andrea positioned ELs above a school staff member. One of the bilingual students took a new student who could not speak English to the lunchroom and explained the layout in Spanish as they stood in line for food. She said that an "older lady who worked in the lunchroom" yelled at the girls, saying, "We speak English here! You can't speak Spanish!" Bothered by the confrontation, the girls reported the incident to the administrators, and the older lady who worked in the lunchroom "got in trouble" as a result. Andrea expressed empathy: "When I heard that story, it broke my heart. I can't imagine anybody being ugly to a kid, no matter what. So, I want to be an advocate for my kids." True to her identity as the bold advocate (presented in greater detail in the results for subquestion four), Andrea went to that administrator and declared, "Look, you need to find out what's going on and go make sure that [it] never happens again."

In contrast, Denise exhibited her identity as the enthusiastic advocate (presented in greater detail in the results for subquestion four) during the same incident. Denise said,

So we had [the lunchroom worker] in here and had a talk with her about how [the student] can't speak the English language that they wanted. She was very understanding about it, to the point that now, she's so funny, she almost is like going the other way with it. Whenever she sees him in the line, she'll hug [his] neck [*laughs*] and tell him that she loves him! All the time! [*laughs*]

Denise characterized her community as “the same very close-knit community, parent involvement, and lots of help with everything that we need” that she knew growing up. She perceived the community as “overall very welcoming” the ELs and their families. She felt that people based their concerns about speaking another language on the misconception that they were doing so because “they’re saying something bad they don’t want you to know.” Laughing, Denise said that “99.9% of the time, they’re just talking to their friends and having a good time. I haven’t really seen a lot of bad vibe[s] about that.”

Denise’s resistance to “bad vibes” may have been the result of the company she kept. During her school’s closure to enact the social distancing required by the COVID-19 pandemic, each teacher received a list of students they needed to check periodically during the spring quarantine. Denise’s list included many ELs and former ELs. Denise checked on her students regularly, which reminded her that she took many things for granted, such as plenty of food. She said, “One of the families was keeping everybody’s kids because everybody else was still going to work. They were keeping and trying to feed 15 to 20 kids every day.” She spoke to members of her church about expanding their Backpack Blessings program so those children could pick up extra food at the school. She stated, “That helped, I think.”

### **Summary of Subquestion Three**

Subquestion three was, how do teachers negotiate their teaching identities as they expand their teaching roles from classroom teacher to classroom teacher of ELs? The answer to Subquestion three was how the participants negotiated their teaching identities from their interactions with their students, classrooms and schools, and communities. Their negotiations with students contributed to their teaching identities by presenting them with a new understanding of social interaction standards or educational materials. Their negotiations within

their classrooms and schools enabled them to reshape their teaching identities and refine their teaching techniques. Additionally, their dialogs with their communities contributed to their teaching identities by showing the teachers that their influence extended past the classroom. There were reciprocal negotiations; as the participants reshaped their teaching identities via their interactions within all three contexts, they, in turn, reshaped the people with whom they interacted.

#### **Results for Subquestion Four**

Subquestion four was, how do teachers position themselves and their students in ways that reflect their identity formations? The results for this question addressed the active construction of teaching identity through negotiations with colleagues. The findings suggested that all five teachers constructed their primary identities as EL advocates by positioning themselves in favor of their ELs (see Figure 1). However, in practice, positioning themselves as such caused them to shift their identities depending on their contexts. Blake and Denise, the two participants with unified identities, worked with supportive colleagues. Andrea, Callie, and Lily, the three participants who shifted their identities depending on context, often found themselves positioned against their uncooperative colleagues.

Colleagues are integral to reshaping teaching identities. The previous section presented evidence of the participants' negotiations with their colleagues. For example, the evidence that showed Andrea as the bold advocate suggests that her negotiations with her colleagues on her students' behalf significantly contributed to her teaching identity. In contrast, evidence of colleagues who operated in the distant background suggested Lily's positioning as the undervalued advocate. Colleagues seemed very distant to Blake, the agile advocate; nonetheless,

during his interviews, he focused on his pedagogical successes and failures and did not expound on his interactions with his colleagues.

Thus, this section presents only the highlights. However, these are important highlights because they show how the participants positioned themselves with their colleagues, a topic of fundamental interest to this research. There are highlights presented in two parts. The first part is role changes. The second part is specific information about cooperation and conflict with the colleagues who influenced their teaching identities.

### **Role Changes**

Earning the TESOL graduate degree resulted in changes to the formal roles of the female participants but not the male. Andrea's expanded role included tutoring ELs after school and participating in the annual ESL summer camp. Callie took on duties with anything that "communicated the school's embrace of diversity" or required assurance "that we're showing all cultures and all ethnicities," such as PTSS secretary, bicentennial grant committee, and yearbook committee. Lily had somewhat changed roles, as she was more likely to have the ELs in her class; however, this suggests the undervalued advocate side of her identity, as no one spoke to her about having these students in her class. As the enthusiastic advocate, Denise changed her role because her colleagues increasingly approached her for advice on everything related to ELs, from direct intervention and turnaround training for a faculty meeting to EL-related funding through Title III. She welcomed the increased responsibility and said, "Finally, ELs had some representation." Blake did not indicate any changes in his role. The agile advocate had been and remained on the robotics team but did not receive requests to serve and did not serve on any of the committees that provide EL services. He said, "I guess my job within the school really hasn't changed from that aspect."

## **Cooperation and Conflict with Colleagues Who Influenced Teaching Identity**

This final section presents the participants' perspectives on positioning themselves to their colleagues. The evidence of the participants' cooperation or conflict with their colleagues suggests that the participants placed themselves in different ways. The participant with the most combative negotiations with colleagues, Callie positioned herself based on the cooperation or conflict she encountered from her colleagues. For example, Callie set herself slightly above new teachers due to their compassion for their struggles with ELs. She positioned new teachers positively and said, "I love them. They are very hard workers who came straight out of college into a classroom." She also empathized with the "so many days" when they approached her "almost in tears" because they did not know what to do with ELs. Callie expressed her compassion and empathy, saying she had learned valuable lessons from the TESOL program and her inaugural "practice round" as an EL aide. She said, "That's why I feel like [my experience] made it better for me."

Otherwise, Callie reported dealing with exasperating colleagues. She expressed intense frustration at the different speeds at which her colleagues did or did not acknowledge and accept the reality of ELs. She positioned herself as an advocate frustrated with colleagues who did not listen. The increasing quantity of ELs required a bigger part of teaching. On the other hand, their influence had been a small part of teacher training, and many personnel members continued to position ELs and students with specific learning needs as having similar academic needs. When thinking back to the students she wanted to retain in first grade (e.g., Student A because of his heart surgery and Student J because of his significant delays in his first language that produced delays in learning English), Callie "was thinking about frustration." She often cogitated on the

self-doubt that dismissive colleagues imposed on her by repeatedly dismissing her suggestions for the students' welfare:

That was done to me three times in a row, [when] I said that a child needed to stay with me [in first grade], and they sent him onto second grade anyway. No one administration-wise was behind me because it was just like, "Well, he's EL," so he just needs to go on.

It made me feel dumb. It made me question myself. Am I not doing what I should be doing? We're supposed to be the voice for the kids. When the people who are in charge of your school don't listen to that voice when you're with them every day, it just...a big frustration. ELs [have] been around for a while, [but] it's just so new to so many people that they just blame it all on EL stuff and not on the other things.

As anticipated, the unready students promoted to second grade returned to first grade when they did not succeed. Callie recalled a student who attended second grade for only a week before returning to her classroom. She said, "This was very detrimental to him because it made him feel like a failure. I had to work even harder to boost [his] confidence. I was just like, 'If [the administrators] would have just listened...'"

Callie's advocacy for ELs in meetings about testing contributed to her development as an exasperated advocate. Again, her colleagues circumvented her attempts; thus, she was the most vocal participant about her frustration with the school system and her colleagues. Callie believed the school system remained mired in outdated practices and anachronistic assessments that were either patently unfair by inaccurately presenting ELs' capabilities or were a waste of valuable academic time due to the imposition of "gibberish" (i.e., learning nonsense words) on students struggling to learn a new language. Callie did her best on behalf of ELs to address this concern but to no avail. She endured faculty meetings that felt like actual battlegrounds:

It's very frustrating. When I attended meetings, my butt stayed clenched. I had nightmares, [I would] wake up in the middle of my sleep. One of my biggest problems with being the EL person is all the assessments. We have the Star assessment, Lexia, DIBELS. None of them [are] an accurate reading of what any of the kids can do.

Callie gave an example of how one of her more capable first grade ELs could not read at the speed set as a grade-level benchmark at the school. Callie's student was just 6 years old and was learning English as her second language:

Student K wasn't one of my fastest readers, but I showed them her test. I said, "Well, she read these questions cold all by herself." I said, "Do you see where she circled? She went back and reread and circled the answer and read it." I was like, "She's an EL. For her to read that, process that, go back and reread..." I was like, "She's golden." I mean, so what she can't read 60 words in a minute? She's comprehending, and she's understanding it, and she got all the answers right.

A lot of times, I feel like I'm just kind of blown off because they're just going to keep doing it. It's just kind of like the wheel until something else comes up. I just wish they would stop, you know, the state, everybody. The whole time I'm defending the kids and the good that they're doing versus this—because like I said, for her to be able to do all that, a test on a cold read, to me, that should be like a wow moment, and it's not a wow moment because it's taken away because she didn't benchmark on nonsense words.

More positively, Callie said that the situation had improved somewhat of late, which enabled her to position herself more in alignment with some of her colleagues. The school had recently received "a community of teachers" who had completed the same TESOL graduate degree. The other teachers with TESOL degrees started to back her up on EL-related issues. She also noted that "everybody in the entire school has become more knowledgeable." For a while, Callie had been a lone pioneer in completing her TESOL graduate work and lacked someone who could back her up until her other colleagues pursued and completed the same program. She anticipated more positive changes in the future.

In striking contrast and in line with her teaching identity as the enthusiastic advocate, Denise's social nature with students generally produced harmonious working relationships with her colleagues. Denise positioned herself as slightly above other teachers because she saw herself as the "most comfortable teacher in the school with ELs" who reached them when other teachers did not. She noted that many ELs "seemed almost depressed because they walked around all day not understanding what anyone was saying, and no one was really making the effort to bridge

that gap.” One of the more vocal advocates, Andrea tended to position herself slightly above the other teachers; unlike the other teachers, she encouraged her ELs to use their first language, learn more of it, share it with others, and retain their connections to their home cultures. An understandable part of her identity as the bold advocate (see Table 3), the philosophy of maintaining culture was a significant part of Andrea’s teaching identity.

Denise noted that her fellow teachers sought her EL expertise fairly often; thus, as an enthusiastic advocate, she tended to position herself a bit above or at their level in terms of EL teaching expertise. Denise said her colleagues sought her out because she had a TESOL degree and an intervention-type Lion period (see Appendix D). Most of the 11th graders used the Lion period for ACT prep, while some ELs used the time for remediation. This was one of the first times when she had a class period when she did not focus on teaching course content. She and the remediation students used the time to discuss science, history, or any other subject. She stated, “We talked about everything they were struggling with.” The students even talked with Denise about going to the prom, and she helped them fill out the Google prom form. According to Denise, other teachers of the students in her remediation class approached Denise because they “kind of realized that I had a close connection with them, and they would come to me a lot about them this year.” However, Denise admitted that most of the teachers who sought her expertise with ELs were her friends. Another type of collegial negotiation constituted non-negotiation: Denise taught at a high school with many male teachers who “don’t seem to ever ask questions or ask for help. Maybe they just don’t need help” with ELs. Perhaps, those teachers did not realize their need for help with ELs.

Denise did not have entirely seamless dealings with her colleagues. For example, she reported a “constant need” to remind teachers to tell her, the RTI coordinator, when students

were failing. One time, a failing student was an EL, and Denise asked if the teacher knew that the student had an individual language plan (ILP), similar to an IEP for a student with a learning disability. Denise asked the teacher if she engaged in everything on the ILP. She said that the teacher “just kind of looked at me like she didn’t know what I was talking about.” Denise recalled taking a deep breath and telling the teacher, “If you’re grading [ELs] at the same level you’re grading all your other students, and you’re trying to make them do things that are way above their level, then you’re not following their plan.” But Denise quickly recovered her enthusiasm. She said that the teacher “was actually really good about it and let the students redo some assignments.” Denise and the teacher discussed ways to make assignments more accessible for ELs. She stated, “But, sometimes, it’s almost like people just forget ELs have a special plan. They need a special plan.”

In general, Denise positioned herself slightly above or equally with her colleagues regarding her knowledge of EL teaching strategies. However, her careful choice of wording did not clearly indicate how she positioned her colleagues:

Everybody in education works so hard that I feel like it might be one of those things where they don’t want to make you do something that’s not your job. Or, I don’t want to put this on them, it’s not their job, that kind of thing. Whereas if you formalized it, they might think that’s their job, and I can ask them to do it.

Commensurate with the undervalued advocate side of her identity, Lily admitted that colleagues rarely sought her EL advice. She said, “I have not had a lot of people asking questions. I wish they would. This year, probably more than ever, I would e-mail some things that I thought might be helpful, but I didn’t get a lot of responses back.” Lily continued,

I don’t know. I think there’s some apathy. We just don’t know what to do, so we just pass them on. I don’t know. I hate to go back to special [education] all the time, but they put that on us all the time. I think sometimes the EL kids just get bumped to the back of the things to remember to do. Maybe there’s just so much to remember, and [teachers] accommodate [ELs] the best they can. From the questions that I’ve gotten, I think a lot of teachers just don’t know what to do sometimes, so they don’t necessarily do anything.

I've not been in everybody's classroom, but I get the vibe that they just kind of slide them on through sometimes. And that's not good.

#### **Summary of Subquestion Four**

Subquestion four was, how do teachers position themselves and their students in ways that reflect their identity formations? The subquestion addressed the participants' negotiations with their colleagues. Earning the TESOL graduate degree resulted in changes to the female participants' formal roles but not the male's formal roles. The expanded roles included more duties. The evidence of the participants' cooperation or conflict with colleagues suggests that the participants positioned themselves differently. Blake and Denise tended to position themselves equally with their colleagues. Andrea and Callie positioned themselves somewhat above their colleagues. Lily was removed from her colleagues. A comparison between the participants' teaching identities with their students, classrooms and schools, and communities (see Figure 1, Classroom Microculture) and teaching identities with their colleagues showed that EL advocacy resulted in shifting teaching identities depending on context and relationship.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how the teachers who had completed TESOL graduate degrees embraced the new paradigm by constructing new teaching identities. The goals of this study were to characterize teachers' professional identities; determine how they constructed their identities by negotiating with their histories, students, communities, and colleagues; and identify how they positioned themselves to others in their immediate academic realms. The participants were five teachers who had earned TESOL graduate degrees. Thematic and discourse analysis of the data collected from 15 interviews and an analytical framework was the means used to explore how the participants negotiated and

developed their professional identities in shifting contexts, particularly through their relationships with other people.

The overarching theme was that the participants had empathy and heightened self-awareness. The combination of these features with their monolingual backgrounds, recognition of gaps in formal teacher training for ELs, appreciation of student diversity, and completion the TESOL degree program enabled the participants to become EL advocates. Advocacy resulted in shifting teaching identities.

Subquestion one was, what are the professional identities of mainstream teachers in Muscogee County Schools who have a graduate degree in TESOL? The answer to subquestion one was that the participating teachers with TESOL degrees built their professional identities with empathy and heightened self-awareness and increased those qualities after exposure to ELs and the educational theories and techniques of the TESOL graduate degree program. All five participants agreed that they were stronger teachers due to the TESOL graduate experience, primarily because the educational theory showed them the reasons for their classroom techniques' success.

Subquestion two was, what are the resources teachers use to construct their identities as classroom teachers who have a graduate degree in TESOL? The answer to subquestion two emerged from the participants' accounts of the discursive resources and pivotal pedagogical experiences that contributed to their teaching identities. These were the discursive resources that they felt comfortable using to construct their identities. Andrea's shifting teaching identity enabled her to be an affectionate mother figure to her students and a bold advocate for ELs to her colleagues. She saw her kindergarten students as her children, and she stood up for her ELs as an opinionated defender, much like a mother stands up for her children. Callie's shifting teaching

identity was of an affectionate mother figure for her students (a bubbly warm teacher who made learning fun) and an exasperated advocate with her colleagues (a frustrated teacher whose coworkers did not heed her campaigns to support ELs). Blake's teaching identity as an agile advocate emerged from his willingness to do what he needed to on behalf of the ELs. He engaged in nimble pedagogical techniques and was a strong EL crusader, regardless of the opponent. Lily's shifting teaching identity was of an encouraging equalitarian for her students who made school and science engaging and an undervalued advocate with her colleagues. Her equalitarian approach to her colleagues, combined with her natural reserve and unwillingness to impose her beliefs upon others, largely caused her to restrict her EL activism to the rare occasions when others sought her advice. Finally, Denise's teaching identity as an enthusiastic advocate emerged from medical issues that required her to relearn to read and speak, a grueling personal experience that made her want to help ELs with their struggles and collaborate with her colleagues to make advocacy a reality. None of the participants wanted to assume the identity of being a TESOL expert; therefore, the identity of TESOL expert was not one that the participants felt was available to them.

Subquestion three was, how do teachers negotiate their teaching identities as they expand their teaching roles from classroom teacher to classroom teacher of ELs? The answer to subquestion three was that the participants negotiated their teaching identities from their interactions with their students, colleagues, and community members within the contexts of classroom, school, and community. The negotiations with their students enabled them to reshape their teaching identities as they gained new understanding of standards of social interaction or scholastic materials. The negotiations with the classroom and school contributed to their teaching identities by providing key refinements to their instructional techniques. Additionally, their

negotiations with their communities contributed to their teaching identities, as they learned that their influence extended beyond the classroom. There were reciprocal negotiations; as the teachers shaped their teaching identities via their interactions within all three contexts of classroom, school, and community, they also reshaped the people with whom they interacted.

Subquestion four was, how do teachers position themselves and their students in ways that reflect their identity formations? Subquestion four addressed their negotiations with their colleagues. Earning the TESOL graduate degree resulted in added duties to the female participants' formal roles but not the male participant's role. The evidence of cooperation or conflict with their colleagues suggests that the participants positioned themselves differently. Blake and Denise tended to position themselves equally with their colleagues. Andrea and Callie were more likely to position themselves somewhat above their colleagues. Lily was removed from colleagues. A comparison of the participants' teaching identities with students, classroom and school, and community (see Figure 1, Classroom Microculture) and each teaching identities with colleagues showed that EL advocacy resulted in shifting teaching identities.

## CHAPTER V:

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

The study's overarching research question focused on how K-12 classroom teachers who have completed TESOL graduate degree constructed their professional identities. Interviews with five classroom teachers from Muscogee County Schools, a small county in North Alabama, provided data to answer the guiding research question. The participating teachers had earned TESOL graduate degrees and had new EL students placed in their classes. As they began teaching ELs, the participants often had new responsibilities and relationships with their colleagues and students. This study addressed how these teachers constructed and negotiated their identity-in-practice and identity-in-discourse in the varied classroom, school, and community contexts. The participants' identities shifted depending on the context and their relationships with others.

The preceding chapters presented the background for the topic and the theoretical framework used to explore how the teachers constructed their professional identities through context and relationships. There were details of the theoretical framework and literature relevant to the study, followed by a detailed presentation of how five classroom teachers with graduate TESOL degrees constructed their professional identities. This chapter focuses on the findings and implications of the research on professional identities, teacher knowledge, EL advocacy, and the shifts in participants' identities depending on their contexts and relationships. The chapter also presents the strengths and limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

## Summary of the Results

This study focused on how classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees constructed their professional identities in practice and discourse. The five participants were teachers at Muscogee County Schools who had earned TESOL graduate degrees. The participants answered interview questions about their professional backgrounds, experiences in the TESOL graduate degree program, and experiences as classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees. The study showed the teachers' perceptions of their EL students, the new aspects of their professional duties, and their new ways of relating to the colleagues who needed support with ELs in their classrooms. Answering the main research question and four subquestions required focusing on how the teachers negotiated their identities in relation to others and positioned themselves and others regarding teaching ELs. Their identities often shifted within different contexts and different relationships.

Rodgers and Scott (2008) made four assumptions about identity construction. First, individuals shape their identities in contexts. Second, they construct identity in relationships and via emotional connections. Third, individuals can have multiple identities. People have different identities based on context and relationship. Identities can also shift. Fourth, identity consists of the stories and narratives that individuals tell themselves. The results of this study aligned with those assumptions. The participants shaped their identities in contexts and by relationships and emotional connections. Three of the five participants' identities shifted with context. The stories and narratives = the teachers shared showed their discursive positioning in their identity construction.

Exploring the participants' discursive positioning and discursive resources was another part of the analysis. Looking at the words and phrases that the teachers used to talk about

themselves was a way to understand identity. The findings suggested that participants used narrative positions and narrative resources to construct their identities. Søreide (2006) found that elementary school teachers used certain words and phrases to indicate available narrative resources and positions. This study used the phrase *discursive resources* to focus on how the subcultures of teachers' microcontexts, mesocontexts, and the formal organizations within those contexts contributed to their identities (see Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Studying how the teachers employed discursive and narrative resources in their identity construction provided insight into the identity positions available to teachers and the identity positions that they chose to access (see Søreide, 2006).

### **Discussion of the Results**

During the study, multiple topics emerged on how the classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees constructed their professional identities in context and through relationships. There were several connections between the literature and the participant interviews in this study. The connections with the literature included the importance of context and relationships. Prior experiences were important components in their identity construction. The knowledge they gained from the TESOL graduate program affected their professional identities. The new relationships and emotional connections with students resulted in advocacy on behalf of ELs and feelings of responsibility for the education of the ELs in their classes.

#### **Constructing a Professional Identity**

The participants had experiences that led them to care deeply about the students who needed extra assistance, such as ELs. Blake had early health problems and a family life that contributed to his empathy for students. Lily described hating being a middle school student, which was, ironically, the same grade level she ended up teaching. Denise experienced a serious

medical crisis that enabled her to understand and empathize with students who do not comprehend the material necessary for academic success. The way the participants talked about their experiences was an example of what Gee (2012) called “Discourses,” the ways of “valuing, thinking, [and] believing...that are accepted as instantiations of a particular identity” (p. 3).

The participants also had experiences with other languages and cultures that made them want to help ELs. Andrea was driven to help ELs due to an immersion experience in a beginner Spanish class that caused her to feel scared, uncertain, mystified, and lonely; this experience as a learner contributed to her teaching practices (Borg, 2003). Blake’s first teaching experience was teaching children who spoke only Spanish while on a mission trip to Nicaragua. He continued to teach similar children in his first year as a teacher when he instructed several ELs. When Lily started teaching at a large middle school with many ELs, she was surprised that they did not feel awkward in her class. Denise felt daunted but sympathetic to ELs when she first had them in class. Her experience of relearning to read enabled her to understand and empathize with them in new ways; as a result, she realized that she never wanted ELs to feel frustrated in her class.

Completing the TESOL graduate degree program enabled the participants to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses as teachers. They first understood what they needed as teachers and began to deeply understand what their students, both EL and monolingual, required from them. Regularly interacting with ELs enabled the participants to learn professional lessons about themselves as teachers and incorporate these experiences into their identities. All of the participants had deep ties to the schools where they worked and the communities where they had grown up and in which they lived. Building relationships with ELs and completing the TESOL graduate program contributed to the participants’ appreciation of the cultures their students brought with them to school.

## **Teacher Knowledge**

Completing the TESOL graduate program resulted in a fundamental shift in the five participants' teaching practices and changes in their views and opinions. The program also caused the teachers to increase and change their knowledge of instruction and their sense of themselves as teachers. The participants gained theoretical and practical knowledge and changed how they interacted with students and coworkers (Miller, 2009). They developed theoretical knowledge informed by their implicit understanding and practice (Elbaz, 1983). Teachers form their identities as they view themselves as "subject matter experts" (Beijaard et al., 2000, p. 751). Although the participants in this study did not position themselves as experts or use the phrase "subject matter expert" to describe their knowledge of ESL teaching, their descriptions of their EL knowledge and teaching practices showed an expert level of ESL pedagogical content.

Lily reported changing her views on ELs after completing the degree, including her thoughts on immigration. She expanded her teacher role to include social and global issues (Ben-Peretz, 2010). Callie's completion of the TESOL graduate degree contributed to her career growth. The TESOL program enabled Blake to develop the strategies he needed to help students academically. He reported that earning a TESOL graduate degree enabled him to be a better teacher. In the program, he learned why he used certain strategies to teach a particular topic. He also learned more about himself and his students to make informed choices about teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Denise described that she felt overwhelmed by the TESOL graduate program but found it illuminating. She especially liked the TESOL degree program's focus on group learning and cherished the connections she made with other teachers in her learning group. Denise felt empowered and described how she had become a better teacher to all her students, not just the ELs. The participants reported benefitting from the linguistics courses

in the program. Callie and Andrea especially liked the phonology coursework, and they regularly incorporated their newly acquired knowledge into their instruction. The teachers reported having knowledge of both pedagogy and linguistic content; Shulman (1987) described pedagogical content knowledge in a similar way.

The participants' descriptions of the knowledge they gained from their TESOL graduate program suggest a high level of ESL content pedagogical knowledge. Andrea questioned why school leaders did not allow the placement of additional ELs in her class to prevent them from outnumbering the monolingual English-speaking students. She created a pedagogy of difference to resist and challenge the structures that resulted in ELs' marginalization (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Keith, 2010). Callie also reflected on how the school's assessment practices did not contribute to ELs' education but instead resulted in further marginalization (see Bartolome, 1994).

The five participants also gained confidence in their teaching. Blake was proud to explain and justify the choices that he made as a teacher. He could describe appropriate instructional choices for students and explain why he selected one strategy over another (see Tsui & Nicholson, 1999). The TESOL graduate program provided Blake with the knowledge and confidence to take instructional risks and try new strategies. He also created innovative assessments to more accurately assess ELs' knowledge.

Lily shared that completing the TESOL graduate program enabled her to feel more relaxed and confident. She changed her teaching practices to include more interactive student work. She appreciated that she could identify and meet students' needs. Lily negotiated with her students on how to run the class, viewing the classroom as a shared environment with her students. She looked out for her ELs and wanted her classroom to be a "happy place for them"

because she learned that ELs learn best in environments not overly stressful for them (Tsui & Nicholson, 1999).

Denise improved her teaching practices after completing the TESOL graduate program because it enabled her to meet the individual needs of her students. Denise taught a struggling student how to take notes with the strategies she learned in the TESOL program. Denise also helped her ELs with extracurricular activities, such as prom, pep rallies, and sports. She described getting to know her students and becoming actively involved in their lives, a finding similar to how Farrell (2013) described ESL teachers' involvement in their students' lives.

The participants' knowledge was storied (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Blake's personal, practical knowledge of himself as an EL teacher emerged in a tale of helping a student understand English idioms. Blake shared the story in all three interviews, which suggests it contributed to how he knew himself as a teacher, knew his students, and conceptualized his identity (Chan et al., 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The event had contributed to his teaching identity, enabling him to become a teacher who noticed a former student struggling in another teacher's classroom. Blake not only interrupted the class to help the struggling EL but also reprimanded the students who mocked the EL's inability to understand idioms.

The participants made the learning and knowledge they gained from the TESOL graduate program part of their identities. Teacher knowledge and learning link to teachers' identities and present a holistic picture of what it means to be a teacher (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Danielewicz, 2001). The five participants were part of a community of practice with other teachers who completed the same program (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The participants engaged with ELs and with their colleagues. They positioned themselves as teachers

who had special connections to ELs and specific knowledge about how to best teach them (Varghese et al., 2005).

### **Advocacy**

The TESOL professional organization focuses on advocacy, which is one of its professional standards (TESOL International Association, 2019). The participants in this study demonstrated that they advocated for ELs in the five areas identified by Leone and Cisneros (1991): teacher relationships, school community, classroom, institutional, and professional. The care they had for the ELs motivated the five participants. For example, Andrea and Callie described their bonds with their ELs as “maternal.” Andrea and Denise made caring for their students what Suárez and Domínguez (2015) called a “central obligation and commitment” (p. 53). Linville (2016) found advocacy work one of the most important parts of being an ESL teacher. The five participants’ descriptions of how they advocated for ELs suggest that they perceived themselves and acted as advocates for ELs (Linville, 2020).

The empathy, emotional bond, and pedagogical content knowledge that the participants expressed caused them to advocate for their ELs. Callie, Denise, and Andrea were especially active advocates for the ELs who could not yet advocate fully for themselves (see Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007). Callie focused on her ELs’ needs when she challenged unfair expectations on formative literacy assessments and worked to challenge those practices (see Athanases & Martin, 2006). Andrea practiced the transformative advocacy identified by Athanases and de Oliveira (2007) because she identified the inequity of not having trained classroom teachers for ELs and challenged her school’s institutional practices.

Both Lily and Denise advocated for their students within their circles of influence as teachers. They talked to colleagues who were their friends, something Dubetz (2014) found

among bilingual teachers. They felt most comfortable advocating for ELs with the colleagues with whom they already had strong collegial bonds. The teachers seeking Denise's advice usually needed help with the ELs in her intervention class. Such a finding could indicate that those teachers saw her role as providing service to students and other teachers (see Pawan & Craig, 2011).

The participants' advocacy contributed to their shifting identities. The participants were members of multiple groups, such as the classroom teachers who had completed the TESOL graduate program, the teachers at their schools, and members of their communities. They constructed their identities through discourse and practice and shaped them relationally and individually (see Reeves, 2018; Richards, 2017; Varghese et al., 2005)

### **Shifting Identities**

The participants' descriptions of their experiences of becoming teachers suggest they viewed teaching as their calling and life's work. Their interactions with others often contributed to how they described their identities and how they shifted over time (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Andrea, who described herself as a mother at heart, expressed knowing that she was "supposed to work with children." Callie also described her career choice as a calling because she had "always been a kid person." Both Callie and Andrea described their choice of profession as the calling and destiny for their lives.

Blake, Lily, and Denise did not describe feeling predestined to be teachers, but they did have experiences that caused them to pursue careers in education. Blake went on a mission trip to Nicaragua, where his first experience was teaching students who only spoke Spanish. Lily, whose mother was an educator, felt comfortable becoming a teacher. She noted that she felt at ease in a classroom, which was a key theme of her teaching identity. Denise fell in love with her

education classes and became a teacher because the “kids need to know that somebody thinks [that] what they think is important.” The shifts in how Blake, Lily, and Denise saw themselves as teachers show the dynamic and continually changing nature of identity. The participants’ experiences influenced their shifts in identity (Sachs, 2005).

Sociocultural perspectives on identity focus on identity construction through relationships with others. A teacher develops identity through social influences and activities, such as community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wertsch, 1985). Activity theory focuses on the influence of dominant value systems on actions and how individuals position themselves and exercise agency. Individuals construct identity in the contexts of classroom, school, and community and through interactions (Clarke, 2008; Gee, 2011).

Some of the most important relationships that the five participants had to negotiate were with their colleagues. Their identities shifted due to the negotiation and contestation of identity during their interactions with other teachers (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The five participants had various ways of describing their relationships. Some presented their interactions with colleagues in positive ways, while other participants discussed having confrontational relationships. There was a close connection between how the teachers constructed their identities and the interactions of their emotions (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Identity construction was and continued to be an ongoing process of interpreting themselves as teachers who work with ELs (Beijaard et al., 2004).

The participants’ identities shifted according to the different contexts of their work, lives, relationships, and work with ELs (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Via the Douglas Fir Group (2016) framework, the teachers had the microcontext of the classroom where they enacted identities by mothering, comforting, encouraging, and academically helping their students. They had the

school's mesocontext, where they often guided, advised, or confronted colleagues about assessments or EL placement. The third level of context was the larger community, where identification as an advocate for ELs caused them to sometimes be at odds with their communities. The participants' identities were what Rodgers and Scott (2008) called "shifting, unstable, and multiple" (p. 733) because they consisted of different contexts and emotional relationships.

The literature suggests that individuals construct identities within relationships (Higgins & Ponté, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2015). The participants' relationships with their students, colleagues, family members, and communities contributed to their identity construction. These were relationships intertwined with power, negotiation, and emotion that contributed to identity construction (Zembylas, 2003). Relationships caused emotional connections and emotional reactions. The participants expressed their emotional ties to the students in how they spoke about their students. Andrea's family members even "joked" that she was a "Mexican lover." Although Andrea laughed about her family members using this phrase, her family members may have seen the depth of her emotional connection with ELs as transgressive, which resulted in their "joke."

### **Emotional Connections and Discursive Resources**

The participants had deep feelings of empathy for and developed emotional connections with their students (Kayi Aydar, 2015). They remained aware of their ELs' need to feel comfortable in class and school. Teachers of ELs often develop nurturing and caring relationships with their students (Higgins & Ponte, 2017). Andrea and Callie had mothering relationships with their students, viewing the ELs as "their kids" who needed motherly guidance and nurturing. The participants taught the early childhood grades of kindergarten and first grade. Hence, the affectionate mother figure was a narrative resource readily available for Andrea and

Callie to use in their identity construction. The affectionate mother figure is an acceptable identity construction for an early childhood teacher (Søreide, 2006).

Zembylas (2003) wrote of the embodied and performative nature of emotions. Emotions present power relationships, and individuals work out emotions through language and discursive resources. There are emotions deemed appropriate for teachers and emotions they should dismiss. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) found that emotions, discourse, and power contributed to identity construction. The participants formed their identities in social contexts either constraining or empowering to their agency (see Olsen, 2011)

The five teachers in the study used many different discursive resources to describe themselves in relation to their ELs. Andrea presented herself as loving, maternal, and caring as she described her advocacy for the ELs. Callie used words such as “sweet,” “happy,” “bubbly,” and “safe” to describe herself as a teacher to her ELs. She supported and advocated for her students in her classroom and the school. Lily described herself as caring, compassionate, laidback, and responsive to students. She focused on the course of study for her class and her students’ comfort level. Denise proclaimed herself a “touchy-feely teacher” who was the most comfortable instructor on staff with ELs. She wanted the students to know that she valued what they thought.

The participants’ identities and their emotional connections shifted due to the contexts and relationships within their jobs. Being classroom teachers who earned TESOL graduate degrees and advocated for ELs resulted in tensions and sometimes contradictions (Olsen, 2008). Callie and Andrea described themselves as having loving, maternal relationships with their students, as well as frustrations and confrontations with their colleagues. They inhabited multiple

Discourses and had various shifting identities, such as being mother figures to their students or being a bold or exasperated advocate with colleagues (Gee, 2000; Pennington, 2015).

The language that the teachers used and how they positioned themselves and their colleagues were the means used to understand relationships and how those relationships contributed to the participants' identities. Andrea and Callie positioned their colleagues and administrators in adversarial ways. They talked about feeling "upset," "battling" with coworkers, and "pushing" other teachers to help ELs. Lily positioned other teachers at her school as not meeting ELs' academic needs with words such as "apathy" and "slide through." The participants' positioning of themselves and their colleagues were examples of the discursive practices at their schools that showed social power and ways of producing knowledge (Weedon, 1987).

Andrea described herself in confrontational ways, using words such as "burned bridges," and she admitted that she made some of her coworkers "mad" at her. She frequently gave advice to other teachers and even intervened in a situation at another school when a cafeteria worker reprimanded two EL students for speaking Spanish in the lunchroom. She told her friends on staff at that school that they better "handle" the situation. Andrea wanted to have all of the ELs in kindergarten in her classroom and had to "go to battle" with colleagues who argued that the ELs would outnumber the other students.

Callie also struggled with colleagues who did not understand the specific needs of ELs. She described the stress she felt in faculty meetings trying to make her colleagues understand that ELs need accommodations for standardized tests and that certain standardized tests might not provide valid information about ELs' academic progress. Callie felt so at odds with her administration that she suffered from nightmares. She noted that she found colleague

relationships less fraught when other teachers at her school completed the TESOL program. With several colleagues at her school with the same TESOL degree, Callie felt more respected and supported because the other teachers “have my back.”

Lily did not describe having the combative or upsetting experiences with other teachers that Andrea or Callie had experienced. Lily felt that many teachers were apathetic, noting that many ELs “slid through” without learning much because their teachers did not know how to reach them. Lily did not feel that she could give advice without her colleagues requesting it. She used words such as “push” and “interfere” when describing offering unsolicited advice; thus, she avoided advising colleagues unless asked, which rarely occurred. Lily also reported that her colleagues did not see her as an ESL expert at her school.

Like Søreide’s (2006) description of teacher identity, the participants in this study only had access to a specific range of subjectivities to express their identities. They used these subjectivities as discursive resources in the construction of their identities. Andrea and Callie felt comfortable describing themselves as maternal and loving teachers. Lily described herself as an understanding teacher. The discursive resources and subjectivities indicated the power differences in the participants’ relationships with their ELs. Other teachers had different subjectivities open to them (Weedon, 1987). All five teachers refrained from describing themselves as experts teaching ELs, although they had TESOL graduate degrees. Either the discursive position of expert was not open to them, or they did not feel comfortable positioning themselves as experts. Constructing their identities in this context was a “site of disunity and conflict” (Weedon, 1987, p. 25). They had earned TESOL graduate degrees but could not access the identity or discursive position of expert. Callie and Lily were unable to perform the TESOL

role, as their colleagues did not position them as experts, listen to their advice, or seek their help with ELs.

Blake and Denise had more positive interactions with their colleagues. Interestingly, Denise taught at the school where an employee reprimanded the students for speaking Spanish that caused Andrea to intervene even though she worked at a different school. Denise had a much different, more positive reaction to the incident. She described the lunchroom worker who criticized the students as having been upset by the incident but was now treating the ELs better. Denise positioned herself as the teacher most comfortable with ELs in the school. She discussed how she “bridge[d] the gap” between other teachers and ELs. She advised her colleagues but admitted that only the teachers she considered her friends asked for her advice. She seemed to excuse the teachers who did not provide appropriate EL accommodations by saying that they did not realize how to help ELs. Blake positioned his colleagues as supportive of ELs but said that he would have no trouble confronting ones who did not meet ELs’ needs.

### **Identities as Language Teachers**

Part of having a certain identity is recognition by peers and colleagues as having that identity (Varghese et al., 2005). Lily and Andrea resisted calling themselves TESOL experts, and their colleagues did not treat them as TESOL experts. Callie and Denise resisted calling themselves experts, but they more readily took on leadership roles in their schools, both those assigned through extra committees and those they claimed by going out of their way to help other teachers (see Varghese et al., 2005). Even Blake, who did not take on any formal roles, described helping other teachers when he saw a need. They had both the identity-in-practice of being an ESL teacher and the identity-in-discourse of recognition from colleagues as people who could help them with ELs.

The participants' peers contested, resisted, and even questioned the participants' expertise. This questioning or marginalization of teachers' expertise can be part of having a language teacher identity (Barkhuizen, 2016). The participants co-constructed the identities of TESOL teacher and EL teacher. An EL must have an English teacher to be an EL (Varghese et al., 2016). ELs undergo linguistic and racial marginalization in their schools, including from their teachers (Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Varghese et al., 2016). The participants were teachers set apart from their colleagues because they advocated for their students (Varghese et al., 2016).

The participants' knowledge, advocacy, emotional connections, and discursive subjective resources enabled them to position themselves as teachers of ELs even if they taught additional subjects (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). They perceived themselves as EL advocates, and their narratives of their actions showed their advocacy for their ELs (Kamhi-Stein, 2013). The construction of the participants' identities in discourse and identities in practice often shifted with context and through their positioning and negotiation with other people.

### **Construction of Professional Identities**

In reconsidering both the main research question and the sub-questions that addressed the construction of professional identities in classroom teachers who have completed TESOL graduate degrees, the results suggest that advocacy became a key component of the participants' professional identities. After completing the TESOL graduate degree, the participants shared that their professional identities of the participants included being knowledgeable about TESOL methods of teaching (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). They used this knowledge in their own classrooms to help their ELs and other students, and they shared that knowledge with their colleagues. They advocated for ELs within their classroom, within their school, and within their communities.

In constructing their professional identities, the participants were influenced by their past experiences, their motivations for becoming a teacher, and their lack of preparation for teaching ELs (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Olsen, 2011; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). These salient influences fostered empathy and advocacy within the participants. The participants also saw themselves as stronger teachers after finishing the TESOL graduate program. Therefore, the results from sub-question 1 suggest that the participants' emotional connections to the students and their knowledge led to a shift in their professional identities (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Olsen, 2011; Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

In describing their professional identities, each participant used a variety of discursive resources (Olsen, 2011; Søreide, 2006). These discursive resources represent the ways in which they feel comfortable describing themselves and descriptions that are made available by the school or community (Søriede, 2006). Even after completing a TESOL graduate degree, none of the participants felt comfortable describing themselves as a TESOL expert (Varghese et al., 2005; Beijsaard et al., 2000). The women in the study accessed roles and resources that are acceptable for teachers, such as maternal, comforting, or bubbly. The one man in the study did not describe himself in similar ways but told stories that underscored the value he places on being a teacher who learns about students and who responds to their needs.

The participants are working in constrained circumstances in their contexts. They are monolingual English speakers teaching multilingual ELs (Motha, 2016). The participants are also lifelong members of their communities, and they expressed the tensions they feel by being an advocate for ELs (Varghese et al., 2005). They expressed feeling limited by their roles as classroom teachers to fully advocate for their ELs. They navigated those constraints in a variety of ways while negotiating their identity development within relationships with other people,

including their students, coworkers, family, and community members (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Varghese et al., 2005). Within the classroom, they negotiated their identities to include their knowledge of TESOL methods and cultural understanding to better support their ELs educational success (Kamhi-Stein, 2013; Kayi-Aydar 2015). With their colleagues, they were constrained by the context of their schools (Varghese et al., 2005). Lily did not feel able to access the role of advocate as easily in her school, whether due to her natural disposition or her positioning at the school. Even Denise, who described herself as being the teacher who was the most comfortable with ELs at her school, was not consulted often by teachers who were not already her friends (Dubetz, 2013).

The participants had to navigate contradictions in their identity development (Aneja, 2016; Varghese et al., 2005). They were empathetic and developed emotional bonds with their students, but their bonds to their family and friends were often strained due to their EL advocacy, such as Andrea's children calling her a "Mexican lover." The participants negotiated through these constraints by focusing on their classroom interactions with their ELs and embracing their strengths as teachers, which included their emotional bonds to their students and their TESOL knowledge.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study suggest that classroom teachers need to be given more training on using TESOL methods and understanding cultural differences of ELs. Including this training in undergraduate courses could be especially helpful because the participants of this study had encounters or experiences with ELs or other cultures before they became teachers that helped them become aware of their ELs' needs once they were teachers. Teachers who have completed a TESOL graduate degree might also benefit from a professional learning community of teachers

who are also TESOL graduates or teachers who might need advice on how to meet ELs' academic needs.

### **More Than Good Teaching**

This study's findings suggest that earning TESOL graduate degrees positively affected the participants' negotiation and construction of their professional identities. The participants learned about linguistics, second language acquisition, and TESOL pedagogy. They built relationships with ELs, strengthened their sense of responsibility for their ELs' education, and deepened their advocacy. Completing the TESOL graduate program enabled them to go beyond "just good teaching" (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 137) and expand their teaching identities to include expertise for helping ELs and identification as language teachers of ELs. The knowledge gained from the TESOL graduate degree program had a significant influence on how they viewed themselves as prepared to teach ELs (Lucas et al., 2015). The struggles the participants described included confronting negative colleagues or advocating for ELs when faced with educational marginalization. ELs and ESL teachers have similar struggles (Barkhuizen, 2016). This finding suggests that the participants included aspects of language teacher identities in their professional identities. They became more like ESL teachers than classroom teachers of ELs (Lucas et al., 2015; Pettit, 2011).

The shifts in identity that these teachers experienced indicates that additional training and exposure to ELs can change a teacher's identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The participants saw themselves as responsible for the education of their ELs. Creating emotional connections with ELs helped these teachers become advocates for ELs and begin to change their teaching identity as well (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Zembylas, 2004). These results

suggest that other teachers could be taught to accept responsibility for the education of their ELs and to establish emotional connections with them as well.

### **Expanding Advocacy**

The participants created deep emotional connections with their students and felt compelled to advocate for their ELs (Linville, 2016; Suárez & Domínguez, 2015). However, their individual circumstances and contexts did not make their advocacy efforts easy. Andrea had the confidence to address problems that she saw in her school but admitted that she might have “burned bridges” with colleagues. Lily and Denise only advocated with colleagues who were friends or who asked them directly for advice (Dubetz, 2014). Callie felt frustrated in her efforts to advocate on a schoolwide level. All five participants had positive experiences with their learning communities while doing the TESOL graduate coursework. Creating communities of practice within schools could be one way to expand advocacy efforts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The participants indicated that they felt most comfortable sharing their knowledge of ELs and TESOL teaching methods with their closest colleagues. A community of practice might foster a willingness to share ideas from the teachers like the participants and create more receptive colleagues to the knowledge their fellow teachers have acquired from the TESOL graduate degree. This community of practice might also encourage classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees to access the identity of being a TESOL expert.

This study’s findings indicate that administrators should engage with the classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees to consider the ways their schools constrain or encourage the teachers’ advocacy efforts for ELs. The participants differed in their feelings of comfort in advocating on a school level (Linville, 2016; Athanases & Martin, 2006). Some participants’ colleagues were receptive to suggestions about how to help ELs, but other participants faced

reluctance or resistance when they tried to advocate for ELs with their colleagues (Linville, 2020). The schools have a valuable resource in these teachers' trainings and expertise that seems to be underutilized.

All of the participants shared that the reflection and the experience of being interviewed was a positive experience because they were able to reflect on their teaching practice. This awareness of their professional identities that this study fostered suggests that teachers could benefit from activities that provide space and time for them to reflect on teacher learning, teacher knowledge, relationships, and professional identity.

### **Strengths**

This study's findings show that teachers can construct their professional identities to include new ways of teaching and relationships with new groups of students. Throughout the study, the participants reflected on how they incorporated their graduate TESOL degrees into constructing their professional identities. This study suggests that empathy and self-awareness are the foundation for interactions with ELs. Advocating for ELs and developing nurturing, caring relationships with them were key facets in how the participants positioned themselves as classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees.

This study provided insight into how midcareer classroom teachers view their relationships with ELs, school communities, and local communities and how those relationships contribute to their professional identities. Extant studies have not focused on the professional identity construction of classroom teachers who have earned TESOL degrees after becoming teachers and who teach other subjects. This study provided suggestions for further research into the influence of professional development and additional degrees or certifications on teachers' identity construction.

This study suggests the importance of TESOL training and professional development for teachers with ELs in their classrooms. The teachers in this study saw themselves as responsible for educating the ELs in their classes (see Yoon, 2008). The participants also indicated the need for more training and professional development to prepare teachers to teach ELs. This study also showed the benefits of providing tuition support for high-quality TESOL graduate degree programs. All five participants said that the TESOL program enabled them to transform their teaching and that it was the most impactful learning they had done in their careers. The study did not include a comparison of graduate programs or study student outcomes. Still, this graduate degree program could contribute to the literature on the professional development training of classroom teachers with ELs.

This study focused on how teachers constructed their professional identities in practice and discourse after earning graduate TESOL degrees. Researchers could use this study to understand how in-service teachers construct their identities after furthering their professional skills through graduate study. This study could provide a foundation for research into the various factors of developing high-quality teacher training programs at the graduate and undergraduate levels. A deeper understanding of teacher training programs could enable teachers to feel more prepared to teach the ELs in their classes and result in better educational outcomes for ELs.

### **Limitations**

Like other research studies, this study had limitations. I am an employee of Muscogee County Schools, and the participants could have felt constrained in their replies to the interview questions. The participants could have felt the need to present themselves, their schools, or the TESOL graduate program positively. An insider status contributed to the study by enabling

understanding of what the teachers meant by certain jargon; however, the insider status might have obstructed the participants' ability to speak freely.

E-mail messages and interviews that occurred via telephone or virtual meetings were the main ways of collecting data. Initially, there were observations planned of the teachers in their classrooms for triangulation and discourse analysis on how the teachers positioned themselves and their students during classroom conversations. This study and its data collection occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic, with the subsequent closure of in-person schooling in spring and summer 2020. Schools reopened for in-person schooling in August 2020; however, there were no guests or additional people allowed in the classrooms due to social distancing. Therefore, the observations did not occur.

All interviews took place in spring and summer 2020, and all participants chose to do virtual or telephone interviews. The participants' honest and forthright responses and their ability to verbally convey their thoughts indicated the quality of the data. There was limited opportunity to observe participants' body language. Additional body language observations could have resulted in a different avenue of questions or areas of investigation.

Another limitation of the study was the purposeful sampling of classroom teachers who had graduate TESOL degrees and ELs in their classrooms and had taught ELs in their classes regularly since the completion of their degrees. The participants volunteered for the study after an initial e-mail with information about the study. Because they volunteered, the participants could have been more interested in EL issues or felt motivated to participate in the study due to their affinity for ELs.

Finally, this study had a narrow scope. The goal was to answer the overarching research question; thus, there were no generalizations made to a larger population of teachers in a

different geographic area. The faculty members at the university where the teachers completed the TESOL graduate program and the administrators of Muscogee County Schools could find this study beneficial when preparing professional development or deciding on university partnerships. However, there may not be evident benefits for faculty or administrators at other universities or other school systems.

### **Further Research**

After considering the implications, strengths, and limitations of the study, future researchers could benefit from a deeper understanding of how classroom teachers who complete graduate TESOL degrees construct their identities and the effects of relationships and context on their identities. There is a need for further research into how teachers' relationships with students and colleagues shift and contribute to changing identities for TESOL program graduates.

This study suggests that the participants' empathy, self-awareness, and experiences enabled them to become advocates, mother figures, and comforters for their students. Researchers could study the experiences of teachers with TESOL graduate degrees to understand why these teachers chose to obtain graduate TESOL degrees. Future researchers could explore the factors that contribute to teachers' interest in studying TESOL. Scholars could conduct entrance and exit interviews about how the program contributed to teachers' professional identity construction, especially since effective ESL teachers view themselves as responsible for their ELs' learning (Yoon, 2008).

An area of conflict and shifting identity construction highlighted by the participants was the difference between how they constructed their identities with their students and how they constructed their identities with their colleagues. Some participants felt that their colleagues did not view them as ESL experts or did not ask them for advice. This study focused on the

participants' feelings and identity construction. Researchers could conduct studies from the perspectives of EL teachers' colleagues, including TESOL graduates' fellow teachers and administrators, for insight into why they might not position classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees as ESL experts.

This study focused on the participants' identity construction in the mesocontexts of their school and community and the microcontexts of their classroom. The third context described by the Douglas Fir Group (2016) was the macrocontext dimension of social activity. These are national spaces which shape how ELs are viewed, how language practices are conceived, and how teachers are supposed to act toward their students. The macrocontext level influences the school and community's opinions on how English Learners are included in the school (Barkhuizen, 2017). While the macrocontext influences the discursive practices and teachers' identity formation, the scope of this research was limited to the microcontext and mesocontext. Further research could examine how the mesocontext of teachers influences their identity construction

The literature review in this study indicates that many teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELs, and the participants in this study shared those feelings. All five participants reported a lack of extensive training in TESOL methods or techniques in their undergraduate degree programs. There is a need for further study into the training that classroom teachers receive on meeting the needs of ELs and language-diverse students, especially in the Southeastern United States, where there is a rapidly increasing population of ELs.

This study focused on the participants' perspectives of being classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees. Another area of interest would be the perspectives of the ELs themselves. Did they notice any differences in how these teachers interacted with them compared

to other teachers? Future researchers could study student outcomes on the yearly standardized English proficiency test. Another area of interest would be if the ELs taught by classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees have more positive feelings about school or their education than ELs taught by classroom teachers without TESOL graduate degrees. For example, do they feel that their teachers with TESOL graduate degrees invest more in their education than those without such degrees? Researching student outcomes from a quantitative approach through test scores or a qualitative approach through interviews could produce interesting results.

This study occurred over 1 year, but future researchers could study new teachers who have ELs at the start of their careers through their first few years on the job. Researching teachers for longer periods could provide more information on how these teachers construct their identities over the beginning of their careers.

Finally, because this study occurred without observations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers could observe classroom teachers with TESOL graduate degrees to learn how they position themselves, their students, and their colleagues as they construct their identities. A researcher could shadow the teachers throughout the day, including while teaching or in faculty meetings or professional development sessions.

### **Conclusions**

This research study emerged from the need to better understand how classroom teachers construct their identities after earning TESOL graduate degrees. The participants reflected on how developing new teaching skills contributed to their professional identities. They constructed their identities in discourse and practice. Their identities often shifted within different contexts, such as the classroom, school, and community. The participants also positioned themselves in relation to ELs, other teachers, and their communities.

The findings of this study showed that teachers could construct their professional identities to include new ways of teaching and relationships with new groups of students. Throughout the study, the participants considered how earning their TESOL graduate degrees caused them to change their professional identities. The participants based their interactions with ELs on their capacity for empathy and self-awareness. Developing caring relationships with ELs enabled the teachers to become advocates for ELs in their schools and communities. This study's findings showed that the TESOL graduate degree program had positive effects on the participants' identity construction. They saw themselves as responsible for their ELs' learning. All five teachers shared how they advocated for their ELs' academic, linguistic, and social needs in school.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Muscogee is an alternative name for the county under study to protect the participants' privacy. Many place names received alternative names that were taken from Native American tribes historically from these areas.

<sup>2</sup> Tensaw is a community in the county bordering Muscogee County to the Northwest. Panola is a community and high school in Muscogee County. Hillabee is a community in Muscogee County. Sipsy is a community and high school in Muscogee County. Cusseta is an elementary school in Muscogee County that is a feeder school for Sipsy

<sup>3</sup> MSU (Middle State University) is a university in the state. ESU (Eastern State University) is the closest university to Muscogee County. SUU (Southern Urban University) is a large urban university in the state.

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APPENDIX A:  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**E-mail Questionnaire**

Name:

Age:

What grade/subject do you currently teach?

How many years have you taught?

Where have you taught?

Where did you go to college?

What grades and subjects have you taught?

**Interview 1 Questions**

Demographics and early life:

- Please tell me about your background:
  - Where were you born? Did you grow up in this location? Did you attend schools in this system? Where did you graduate from high school?
- Which language did you speak while growing up?
  - If you are from a culture in which you speak English as a second language, do you speak your native language? If not, why? If yes, how well do you speak it?
- Which languages do you speak?
- What ethnicity do you consider yourself?

Educational experiences and early professional experiences:

- What were your reasons for going into education and becoming a teacher?
- Please explain what you understood about teaching ELs during your initial preservice/teacher learning experience.
- Describe the process of finding a teaching job.
  - How did you come to work for your school system?
- Describe your understanding of teaching ELs when you first started teaching.
  - Describe any holes in your learning and preparation for ELs.
- Did you have ELs in your classroom when you first started teaching? If yes, please describe your experiences.
  - How did you support ELs? If not, what did you understand about teaching ELs?

Graduate school and grant experiences:

- How did you hear about the grant partnership and TESOL master's degree?
  - Describe your initial thoughts about it. Why did you want to participate?
  - What had you heard about the program before you started?
- What are your thoughts about the classes in the TESOL master's degree program?
  - What surprised you about the program?
- What are the three most important lessons you learned about teaching ELs?
- Were you able to make connections between your learning in the master's program and your teaching practice? If yes, how? If not, why not?
- How did your classroom teaching practices change? How did your role at school change while you were in the program?

## **Interview 2 Questions**

Being an ESL-trained classroom teacher in the classroom:

- What is it like teaching ELs?
  - What is your comfort level teaching ELs?
- Do you think that ELs' needs differ from those of native English-speaking students? If so, how?
  - How do you understand the role of language in learning?
- What are the responsibilities of being an EL classroom teacher?
- What do you think is effective instruction and/or assessment for ELs?
  - How does that indicate what you do in your classroom?
- Describe a teaching scenario or situation with an EL.
- What challenges do you have when teaching ELs?

Being an ESL-trained classroom teacher at the school level:

- How do you see your role in regard to advocacy for ELs?
- How did your professional assignment and duties change with regard to ELs?
- Describe your relationships with professional colleagues.
  - Did you feel that you were seen as an ESL expert? If yes, what did they ask of you? If not, why not?
  - How did you share your knowledge of ELs with your colleagues?
  - Have you ever been in conflict with a colleague due to an ESL-related issue? If so, please explain. How did you feel?
- How do you help meet the needs of ELs in your school?
- What is your school climate in relation to ELs?

Being an ESL-trained classroom teacher in the community:

- What did your family and friends think of your decision to get a master's degree in TESOL?
  - Was everyone supportive? If so, how did they support you? If not, what did they say to you?
- What misconceptions do you think the community has about ELs?
  - Do you ever refute these misconceptions? Why or why not?
- How welcoming are the people in your community toward ELs?
  - What are ways that you advocate for ELs in your community?

Teaching identity:

- Tell me about your teaching identity.
  - How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
- Does your teacher identity have an effect on your practice?
- How would you describe yourself as a teacher of ELs?
  - Do you think your identity as a teacher of ELs has an effect on your practice?
- How have you formed or changed your teacher identity over time?
  - Have there been changes to your teacher identity due to teaching ELs?

Future teaching identity:

- Where do you see yourself in the future as a teacher?
  - Do you have any goals or plans for teaching ELs?
- How is the role of a teacher changing?
  - How is your role as a teacher changing?
- What do you see for your future for teaching ELs?
- What, if anything, do you consider necessary to continue your work with ELs?

- Imagine yourself in 5 years. How would you describe the teacher you will be then?

## APPENDIX B:

### IRB APPROVAL



April 27, 2020

Holly Hubbard  
Department of ELPTS  
The University of Alabama  
Box 870302

Re: IRB # EX-20-CM-094 "Professional Identity Construction in TESOL Trained Classroom Teachers"

Dear Ms. Hubbard:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your protocol has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.104(d)(2) as outlined below:

*(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:*

*(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).*

The approval for your application will lapse on April 27, 2021. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Director & Research Compliance Officer

Jessup Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127  
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066

APPENDIX C:

SUPERINTENDENT APPROVAL

January 31, 2020

als

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Mr. Cosby,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study in your school system. I am currently enrolled in the Instructional Leadership, Social and Cultural Studies Ph.D. program in the College of Education at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, AL and am in the process of doing my dissertation. The study is entitled The Professional Identities of ESL Trained Classroom Teachers.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit 5-6 ESL teachers from your school system to understand how classroom teachers of English Learners who have completed advanced degrees in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) construct their professional identities. Interested teachers, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to sign.

If approval is granted, participants will be interviewed 3 times at a time and place of their choosing. They will also be observed three times as they teach in their classroom. The interviews will be 45-60 minutes each, and the observations will be no longer than 60 minutes. No identifying student data will be collected, and students will not be interviewed. No costs will be incurred by either your school/center or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address: hrhubbard@crimson.ua.edu.

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey/study at your institution.

Sincerely,

Holly Hubbard, student, University of Alabama

Print your name and title here

Signature

Date

4.2020

APPENDIX D:

EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN CHAPTER IV

Term or acronym	Explanation
504	A plan for students with medical disabilities to receive the support they need for school. This might include students with medical issues that need support but do not qualify for special education. These medical needs can be short-term (broken arm/leg) or long-term (ADHD, cancer, other illness).
Access classes	Classes that are given through online format before COVID; usually for niche classes like Mandarin 1 or other foreign languages, can be more common classes when the school lacks a teacher for that subject.  There is also an ACCESS test which is the yearly English proficiency test given to all English Learners
ACT	American College Testing: the college preparatory test
Anchor reading	A style of teaching reading in younger grades
AP	Advanced placement classes
ARMT	Alabama Reading and Math Test: standardized test for Grades 3–8 formerly used in Alabama. It assessed reading, math, science, and social studies.
Backpack Blessings	Initiatives to send food home with students over the weekend or during school breaks when the schools do not serve food
BICS	Basic interpersonal communication skills: everyday language; can be acquired by English Learners in 1–3 years (cf CALP; Cummins, 1984).
Blocks vs. 45-minute classes	Block classes are 90 minutes long. There is straight block scheduling when students only take four classes each semester, or modified block scheduling, which has seven or eight 45-minute classes from one to three days a week and block scheduling the other days
CALP	Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency: academic language that is used in school and the complement to BICS; this is. Usually takes 5–7 years to acquire (Cummins, 1984).
Carousel chart	Teaching technique where the teacher puts poster paper with questions around the class and small groups travel around the room answering the questions then share

CIP	Continuous Improvement Plan, a team or individual may be on this team that makes goals for the academic progress of the school and addresses needs (higher test scores, higher graduation rates, etc.)
Cold read	When a student is assessed using a reading passage they have never read before
CVC	Consonant-vowel-consonant, e.g., words like cat. Many languages are consonant-vowel languages, so speakers of those languages often struggle to hear the final consonant in a word that is CVC.
DIBEL	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills: an assessment given to students in Grades K–2 to determine early literacy skills
EL	English learner (the term used in Alabama)
ELL	English language learner (the term formerly used in Alabama and still used in some states)
ESL	English as a second language, generally used to describe the program, teacher, or class, but sometimes the student in countries where English is the dominant language of society
Exploratory [class period]	An elective class generally in middle school, where student usually have a few weeks of art, Spanish, or music throughout the school year
Grammar trees	A tree representation breaks down a sentence into component parts, similar to diagramming a sentence. The sentence is broken down into subject and predicate and noun and verb phrases.
Graphic organizer	A way to represent information using graphics shapes instead of just standard notetaking
ILP	Individualized Language Plan; an individual student’s accommodations and supports based on their language proficiency
L1	A person’s first language, which might also be called home or native language
L2	A person’s second language
Level 1 students	Beginning language learners
Level 2 students	Slightly beyond beginner but still not very proficient in English
Level 3 students	Intermediate language learners
Level 4 students	Advanced intermediate language learner, nearing the level to not require ESL services
Lexia	Online curriculum supplement in reading and math
Lion period	Short class at a high school (lion is their mascot) for students who need intervention
Newcomers	Students who are new to the country and new to learning English
OG training	Orton-Gillingham: a form of specialized reading training

Panther period	See lion period above
PD	Professional development
Promethean board	Interactive white/chalkboard that acts as a computer screen
Pullout	A method of teaching ESL where the student is pulled from the class by the ESL teacher and taught individually or in small groups
RTI	Response to intervention; a method to identify struggling or failing students, can be a bridge to special education testing. There are three tiers to intervention. Tier 1 refers to most students, minimal intervention needed, Tier 2 students may need extra support or need to be pulled by a reading or math intervention teacher for more lessons and coaching. Tier 3 students are receiving in-class support and multiple intervention lessons weekly. When Tier 3 students do not succeed, they may be referred for further educational assessments
Silent period	When a person begins to learn a language, they go through a silent period of 6-9 months (more or less) where they usually do not speak the language and are just listening/taking in the language. Personality characteristics such as shyness or extroversion can affect this period.
STAR test	A formative test for measuring reading and math proficiency created by Renaissance Learning
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
Tested out	Scoring a high enough score on the yearly English proficiency test given to all English learners to exit and no longer qualify for ESL services
Tier 2 student	Refers to students in the RTI process; see above
TikTok videos	Short videos made by people that include music, which are found on the TikTok social media app
Title I	Federal funding given to schools as designated by the percentage of students who receive free/reduced lunch
Title II	A program to hire teachers on a 1-year contract to reduce class sizes in a specific grade/school. Generally, there is a pool of Title II teachers, and they are assigned a class/school/grade after the start of school as needed
Virtual academy	The online/remote schooling option that our school system has implemented for COVID
WIDA	World-class Instructional Design and Assessment: A consortium of states that produces the ACCESS for ELs English proficiency test given to ELs yearly
Wonders program	The reading curriculum Muscogee School System uses for Grades K–6

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