Being and becoming an ESOL teacher through coursework and internship: Three teacher candidates’ identity negotiation

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Being and becoming an ESOL teacher through coursework and internship: Three teacher candidates’ identity negotiation

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ABSTRACT
Relying on the framework of communities of practice and using qualitative case study methods, this study investigated three ESOL teacher candidates’ identity negotiation as they learned to work with English language learners through coursework and internship experiences in a 13-month MATESOL program. The findings pointed out that the participants negotiated their emerging teacher identities through teacher education courses and internship in three main ways: (a) they negotiated who they aspire to become as an ESOL practitioner as they set and revised their priorities in serving ELLs, (b) they roadtested their imagined identities through guided reflective practices embedded in the teacher education program provisions, and (c) they acquired the professional discourse which helps them make sense of and engage in the practices of the community of ESOL teachers. This study contributes to the growing research on language teacher identity by illuminating the intertwined nature of teacher learning and identity in shaping the contours of teacher identity negotiation. The study implicates that teacher education should incorporate teacher identity as an explicit goal that serves as an interpretive frame for teacher candidates’ ongoing professional learning and growth as practitioners.

Earlier work in the broader literature of teacher education has emphasized the crucial role of teacher identity not only in teacher candidates’ learning and growth, but also in enacting their professional knowledge in their classroom teaching (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Olsen, 2011). As they learn to teach and grow as professionals, teachers’ identities form and inform their dynamic self-conceptualizations of “how to be,” ‘how to act,’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society” in relation to the others (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). In second language (L2) teacher education, scholars have identified teacher identity “as a critical component in the sociocultural and sociopolitical landscape of the language classroom” which is central to explore the endeavors of L2 teaching and learning in various educational contexts (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 22). Therefore, teacher identity offers an important area.
for “pedagogical intervention” across all L2 teacher learning activities and “an explicit focus” of attention in L2 teacher education (Morgan & Clarke, 2011, p. 825). As teacher candidates learn to teach L2 learners, they concomitantly negotiate the kinds of teacher they are and aspire to become during preservice teacher education, which marks the significant phase of transforming into an L2 teacher.

Preservice teacher education is a formative and transformative process in which teacher candidates imagine, fashion, and enact their identities as teachers (Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001). As they traverse the provisions of preservice teacher education, construct their professional knowledge and competences, they concomitantly negotiate who they are (not) as L2 teachers, which is influenced by their significant past experiences and future aspirations. Therefore, scrutinizing teacher candidates’ experiences during this process is integral to apprehending their teacher identity negotiation and transition into being a teacher. Although scholars have pointed out that initial teacher preparation is influential on ESOL teacher learning and growth (Freeman, 2016), there is little research on K-12 ESOL teacher candidates’ identities during an intensive teacher education program. To address this, the present article reports on a qualitative case study which examined how three ESOL teacher candidates negotiated their teacher identities through teacher education courses and a teaching internship in an intensive MATESOL program with K-12 ESL certification.

**Literature review**

Prior research explored and apprehended various dimensions of teacher identity in the context of L2 teacher candidates’ preservice teacher education. Scholars explored teacher candidates’ professional legitimacy and identity with regards to their understanding of critical pedagogies through teacher education courses (Nuske, 2015; Peercy, 2012), race and gender (Motha, 2006; Vitanova, 2016), “(non)nativeness” in English (Aneja, 2016; Huang & Varghese, 2015; Park, 2012; Rudolph, 2016), negotiation of professional discourses and identity in the teaching internship (Dang, 2013; Ilieva, 2010; Kanno & Stuart, 2011), legitimate peripheral participation when seeking membership to communities of practice (Clarke, 2008; Martel, 2015), positioning and agency assertion in the teaching context (Trent, 2017; Uzum, 2013), and emotional development and identity as part of teacher learning processes (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Reis, 2015; Wolff & De Costa, 2017; Yazan & Peercy, 2016). These studies have conceptualized teacher identity as an inseparable part of professional learning, growth, and practice, although some of them particularly studied language teacher candidates’ identity negotiation.
Earlier work has found that teacher identity is an interface between individual teachers’ investment, expectations, values and priorities and the social, cultural and institutional demands and expectations (Ilieva, 2010; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Martel, 2015). For example, relying on past, present and future narratives, Kayi-Aydar (2015) investigated a Spanish teacher candidate’s (Janelle), negotiation and reconstruction of identities as a language learner, user, and teacher through her undergraduate and graduate studies. Janelle grappled with the discourses of race, ethnicity, and nativism in her interactions in the teacher education program which denied her the discursive space to negotiate her identity as a Spanish teacher. In another study focusing on teacher agency and identity, Martel (2015) examined a Spanish teacher candidate’s (Anna) experiences in a teacher education program, and found that Anna negotiated the ways of being a Spanish teacher discursively provided in the program and her identity and agency shaped her learning outcomes in the program and durability of learning in her career. Ilieva (2010) had a similar finding in her study examining 20 nonnative English speaker teacher candidates’ professional identity construction in their culminating portfolios. The study found a distinct variability in the ways teacher candidates negotiated the discourses provided in the teacher education program, which confirmed the complex, unpredictable, and multidirectional nature of discourse appropriation.

Some studies specifically focused on language teacher candidates’ early teaching experiences in the classroom to understand their identity development (Dang, 2013; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Trent, 2010). For example, in Kanno and Stuart’s (2011) longitudinal study, two teacher candidates (Amy and John) experienced a transition from being a graduate student to a teacher as they engaged in teaching practice. Their learning-in-practice, which included using teacher authority and negotiating relationships with students, was a significant part of their identity development. In a related study, Dang (2013) conceptualized learning to teach as constructing a teacher identity and utilized activity theory to understand two teacher candidates’ (Hien and Chinh) identities in a paired student teaching placement. Hien and Chinh negotiated and constructed their teacher identities through their pair interactions and interactions with their supervising teacher which involved tensions and contradictions in the system of relations. Lastly, Trent (2010) used the concepts of identity-in-practice and identity-in-discourse and investigated eight teacher candidates’ identity construction during their practicum experiences. His study concluded that teacher candidates adopted, resisted, and rejected various identity options presented in their practicum schools and teacher education program and their identities were influenced by “multiple and potentially contradictory discourses” (p. 11) and the tension between the teacher education program and local school settings.
As reviewed here, the growing research on language teacher identities provided empirical evidence to illuminate teacher preparation and growth from an identity perspective. However, there is a paucity of research on the identities of K-12 ESOL teacher candidates in the U.S. context. The exceptions are the studies by Kasun and Saavedra (2016), Park (2012), and Peercy (2012). To briefly review these studies, Kasun and Saavedra (2016) examined the ways in which eight K-12 ESOL teacher candidates experienced “shifts and cracks” in their understanding of identity during a 4-week study abroad program in Mexico. Their study found that after having engaged in decolonizing spaces, these teacher candidates became more socially aware, grew as empaths seriously practicing “deep personal introspection,” and conceived themselves as constructors “of a loving learning space,” rather than “classroom managers” (p. 695). In another study, Park (2012) investigated the intersection of language learner, linguistic, and professional identities of an ESOL teacher candidate (Xia) in the narratives of her academic and professional experiences in China and the United States. Park found that Xia transformed from self-perceived powerlessness and marginalization “to the celebration and acceptance of her identity as” a nonnative English speaking ESOL teacher, which was facilitated and validated during her teaching practicum with her mentor teacher’s support (p. 129). Lastly, from a sociocultural perspective, Peercy’s (2012) study specifically focused on ESOL teacher candidates’ teacher education coursework experiences and explored how two teacher candidates (Roberta and Jason) interpreted the usefulness of the coursework in terms of theory-practice dialectic. Her study showed that Roberta and Jason made sense of what is provided in the courses and learned to teach ELLs in relation to the teacher identities they constructed as ESL teachers.

K-12 ESOL teacher identity constitutes a distinct area of research focus because of the political, cultural, and educational particularities of the K-12 ESL context in the United States, and the complexities of their students’ experiences in constructing their cultural and linguistic identities (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016; Reeves, 2009). Not only ELLs but also ESL programs and teachers are marginalized, racialized, and colonized in the U.S. public schools (Motha, 2006, 2014). That is, most ESOL teachers “are marginalized members of the wider community” not only “because of the particular learners that they serve,” but also “because of the subject matter they teach – language – which can itself serve both to empower and to marginalize” (Hawkins & Norton, 2009, p. 32). Because teacher identities constantly interact with student identities (Morgan, 2004; Reeves, 2009), it is critical to explore how ESOL teacher candidates are negotiating their identities. Yet, the identities of the typical group of ESOL teacher candidates in this context, White, female, “native” English speaking teachers in their twenties, has not received adequate attention in the research. Therefore, the
present study adds to the knowledge base of language teacher identity by focusing on this group of teacher candidates’ identity negotiation.

Additionally, what makes this study novel is the nature of the MATESOL teacher education program in which the three teacher candidates learned to work with ELLs. This MATESOL program has a model with concurrent coursework and two semester-long internships in elementary and secondary schools during a 13-month period. As an alternative model attractive to the teacher candidates, this program grants eligibility for K-12 teaching certification in the state and a Masters degree. Thus, the current study addressed the following research question: How do three ESOL teacher candidates negotiate their teacher identities through teacher education courses and teaching internship in an intensive MATESOL program?

**Theoretical framework**

This study used Wenger’s (1998) concept of the dual process of identity formation involving “identification and negotiability.” With an emphasis on the forms and trajectories of participation, the constructs of identification and negotiability provide a coherent explanation of relational, experiential, social, and personal aspects of identity formation (Tsui, 2007). These two constructs explicate the dynamic interplay between individuals’ aspirations and community’s demands and requirements as they seek membership to the community. They provide a lens to theoretically capture both individual agency and the impact of the community’s legitimation and recognition in their conceptualization of identity. Since becoming a teacher involves growing as a competent member of the professional community of teachers through participation, identification and negotiability are instrumental concepts in explaining teacher candidates’ identity formation as they navigate the activities of initial teacher preparation and enter the community of teachers.

Wenger (1998) stated that identification is one half of identity formation and refers to the process through which community members create “bonds or distinctions in which they become invested” (p. 191) through engagement, imagination, and alignment, also known as modes of belonging. To explicate the role of three modes of belonging in identification, engagement functions as a double source of identification. First, participants invest themselves in what they do, and second, they concurrently invest themselves in their relations with other people, which in conjunction lead individuals to “gain a lived sense of who they are” (p. 192). Imagination provides the process of identification with the sort of image(s) of the world and of participants, which they can build, as well as “the connections [they] can envision across history and across the social landscape” (p. 194). It is through alignment that
participants become associated with the community and construct their identities by coordinating their energies, actions, and practices in line with broader enterprises.

Although identification determines the meanings that are significant for new participants, they also need to negotiate these meanings through their legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1998). Negotiability is “the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration” (p. 197) by using three modes of belonging. It makes several key actions possible for participants: generating meanings germane to novel conditions and situations, calling others to cooperate, explaining surrounding events, or claiming membership. They can also assert ownership of meaning, that is, they “can make use of, affect, control, modify, or in general, assert as [theirs] the meanings that [they] negotiate” (p. 200). This ability concerns the following: (a) the varying degrees of currency meanings hold, (b) the varying degrees of control that participants can have over the meanings produced by a community, thereby, “differential abilities to make use of and modify [meanings]” (p. 200). While negotiating the meanings, the participants need to be able to use the shared styles and discourses produced by the community. Functioning as resources for participants, styles and discourses constitute material for meaning negotiation and identity construction.

In the case of L2 teacher learning, teacher candidates are legitimate peripheral participants when they enter the teacher education program, and they seek to become a competent member of the professional community of ESOL teachers. They negotiate and construct their ESOL teacher identities as they learn about the practices of this community in teacher education courses, and interact with more experienced members and engage in teaching ESOL in school internship. Thus, they construct novel images and relations of the world and themselves and connect lived experiences with their future aspirations and envision alternative meanings and perspectives. At the same time, as they align their practices with the styles and discourses of teaching ESOL and the contextual expectations and demands, they invest in serving ELLs and establishing relations with their coworkers and administrators in the school. Through their imagination, alignment, and engagement, they negotiate meanings about various ESOL issues, such as use of students’ L1, supporting content instruction, integration of L1 culture, assessment, advocating for ELLs, and communicating with ELLs’ parents. This negotiation will likely include contestation and tensions between what matters to them and what matters to their mentor teacher, supervisor, and school administrators. Because they are still teacher candidates and do not have a full-time teaching position, asymmetrical power relations might impede teacher candidates’ negotiability.
Methodology

This study used a multiple case study design (Merriam, 2009) and drew from qualitative data sources to investigate the teacher identity negotiation of three ESOL teacher candidates – Zoe, Leslie, and Elizabeth (all pseudonyms) – during a 13-month intensive MATESOL program (IMP). Housed at the College of Education at a research-intensive state university in a metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic United States, the IMP is an alternative teacher education program for individuals who have completed a baccalaureate degree and intend to teach at the K-12 levels. It grants a Master’s of Education degree in TESOL and eligibility for K-12 state certification to work with English language learners (ELLs). In the IMP, teacher candidates complete 42 hours of coursework and two semester-long practica (in which they assume 50% of their collaborating teachers’ teaching load): one in an elementary setting, and one in a secondary setting. Please see Table 1 below for the program of study that the participants of this study followed (not exact course names).

Participants

Zoe, Elizabeth and Leslie, all self-identified White females, were in their twenties at the time of the data collection and had various experiences in teaching prior to starting the teacher education program. Zoe worked with high-needs students with learning disabilities or academic probations in public schools. She believed these experiences particularly with regards to students’ need for individual attention transferred to the field of ESOL. Elizabeth changed her career to education after working in the health sector for three years. She decided to move to Costa Rica where she attended a one-

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<th>Table 1. Required courses and internship for the IMP.</th>
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month program to receive a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificate. After completing this program, she taught adults and young adults English in a language center for 5 months and later worked with younger English learners at a bilingual high school in Costa Rica for more than a year. Leslie informally taught English to seventh and eighth graders during her yearlong stay in Israel, tutored fifth and sixth grade ELLs in a largely Latino community in the United States, and taught seventh and eighth graders Hebrew at a local Jewish congregation during and after college.

Data collection and analysis

Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice guided my data collection and analysis procedures in this study. Since ESOL teacher identity construction involves identification and negotiation of meanings, I focused the data collection on the teacher candidates’ accounts of their experiences as legitimate peripheral participants seeking membership to the ESOL teaching community. More specifically, I was interested in how they identify themselves and are identified as teachers by others in their courses and internship, how they made sense of and negotiated the theories and practices they were introduced, and how this sense-making informed and was informed by their identification. Therefore, I chose to use semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to observe teacher candidates’ identity negotiation in the program.

Oriented by the theoretical framework, the data analysis focused on the teacher candidates’ identification as an ESOL teacher and negotiation of the meanings that pertain to teaching ESOL (e.g., assessing ELLs). Particularly, I looked for evidence of identity negotiation in the instances in the data when participants (a) invested in serving ELLs and collaborating with others, (b) aligned their practices with what they learned as effective practices of the ESOL community and what is expected from them in the school, and (c) shared the kinds of ESOL teacher they envision becoming. Those instances counted as evidence of identity negotiation if the participants explicitly defined the kinds of teacher they are or aspire to be, or expressed their opinions, described a situation or event, and explained an issue or a solution in relation to ESOL teaching in general, themselves as teachers, or their imagined practices.

To describe the data collection procedures, I interviewed the three participants twice, once after the beginning of their secondary school placement in January, and once after their graduation from the program in July. These interviews sought information about (a) the participants’ earlier experiences of learning languages and teaching, (b) decision to teach ESOL, (c) whether and how they view themselves as an emerging teacher, (d) whether and how their students, mentor teachers, university supervisors, and professors view
them as an emerging teacher, (e) what qualities and values they believe ESOL teachers should have, and (f) what significant incidents they encountered and how they interpreted these incidents as an emerging teacher. Each interview took approximately 75–90 minutes. Between the two interviews, I observed each participant’s teaching three times in their practicum setting, with each observation spanning 40–50 minutes. My field notes from these observations allowed me to customize primarily the second interview questions. Also, since teacher education classes are ecologically complex spaces where emerging teachers negotiate their identities (Nuske, 2015), I conducted observations in the three sessions of the following courses: Special Education and TESOL and Elementary ESOL Literacy. Communicating with the research participants and the professors of these courses, I chose to observe the sessions in which all three participants were present and had the most opportunities for group work and learner-to-learner interaction. Additionally, I analyzed the artifacts and online interactions from the courses (see Table 2) that the participants took. This analysis looked for the ways in which teacher candidates explained or challenged the theories of L2 learning and teaching, made sense of them with their field experiences, interpreted their observations of others’ teaching, reflected on their own teaching, discussed the issues about ELLs’ education, and responded to peers’ comments and questions. I considered teacher candidates’ preparation of course assignments and participation in online interactions as potential evidence for their identity negotiation.

In the data analysis, I followed Corbin and Strauss’s (2014) constant comparative method involving open and axial coding. During the data collection, I immersed myself in the data by listening to the recorded interviews and taking notes, transcribing the interviews verbatim, reading the documents (e.g., course assignments, discussion board conversations), and observation field notes. In the open coding stage, I re-read the entire data to identify initial codes by taking marginal notes as part of the preliminary analysis. Some of the codes emerging were “getting to know ELLs,” “building on ELLs’ L1,” “caring for ELLs’ achievement,” “compassion for ELLs,” “future aspirations,” “the language of ESOL,” “socializing into the profession,” “examining practice through theory,” “reflective engagement in classroom

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<td>Elementary ESOL Literacy</td>
<td>Observation report</td>
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conversations,” “externalizing personal beliefs,” “praxis through concurrent coursework and practicum,” and “positioning through reflection.”

In the axial coding, I continued analyzing the data by focusing on the relationships amongst the open codes and clustered them into categories. For instance, the following codes were bundled into the category of “setting priorities in teaching ESOL”: “getting to know ELLs,” “building on ELLs’ L1,” “caring for ELLs’ achievement,” “compassion for ELLs,” and “future aspirations.” Depending on the codes in each category, I constructed finding statements that are empirical, evidence-based responses to the guiding research question. For example, the finding statement for the category of “setting priorities in teaching ESOL” is: teacher candidates negotiated and enacted their teacher identities as they set their priorities that (will) inform their practice as ELL teachers. In the remainder of this article, I present and discuss each finding with illustrative examples from the data.

Findings

This study found that the three ESOL teacher candidates negotiated their emerging teacher identities through teacher education courses and internship in three main ways: (a) they negotiated who they aspire to become as an ESOL practitioner as they set and revised their priorities in serving ELLs, (b) they roadtested their imagined identities through guided reflective practices embedded in the teacher education program provisions, and (c) they acquired the professional discourse which helps them make sense of and engage in the practices of the community of ESOL teachers.

Setting priorities in teaching ESOL: “I don’t want to be that teacher”

As teacher candidates who were seeking membership to the professional community of ESOL teachers, the three participants negotiated what kinds of teachers they were and envisioned becoming as they considered what they viewed as priorities and what was at stake for them in teaching ELLs. Aligned with the demands of the community, these priorities largely influenced what Elizabeth, Zoe, and Leslie invested themselves in, but they had the space to negotiate what matters to them as ESOL teachers. For instance, the influence of the community was manifest in Elizabeth’s case. She negotiated what she needs to prioritize and value for the ELLs’ education in her new teaching context. She recounted how she questioned and challenged her views that oriented her previous English teaching practices in Costa Rica as she learned about contextual demands and refined her theoretical understanding. She narrated:
we [team of English teachers] had to set grading requirements and one of the grading requirements is that you spoke English all the time in the English classroom [in Costa Rica]. We were not allowed to speak in Spanish or were not allowed to speak in your native language. We actually had a bunch of Chinese students that immigrated to Costa Rica... So they couldn’t use Chinese in the classroom either. It was very strict and I was supposed to take points off and I was supposed to grade them on that and I was very strict about it and I thought that’s that, I mean they only had an hour to utilize that time to learn English so you need to communicate and speak in English. That was how I felt, I don’t know. Then I got to this graduate program. They’re saying no, L1 is very important. I need to teach the content, it needs to be content oriented and you know, all these things. I was like oh, my gosh. It’s like I screwed with these kids’ heads. . . .They didn’t learn anything from me. (Elizabeth, Interview 1, February 1, 2013)

During her teaching in Costa Rica, Elizabeth enforced the institutional English-only policy with which she aligned her practice because she thought she could efficiently use students’ limited time for exposure to target language by making the entire classroom communication in English. Teaching ELLs in the U.S. context was a new endeavor for Elizabeth, and she had to redefine her instructional priorities through the IMP provisions (i.e., “They’re saying no, L1 is very important. I need to teach the content”). Elizabeth seemed to have started aligning her practices with her new professional community and what it values and underscores as important which is the use of language learners’ first language and the ultimate goal of teaching content and language simultaneously.

Zoe’s observations and experience in the school settings played a significant role in her envisioning of an alternative perspective to classroom management. She evaluated some experienced teachers’ (old-timers’) practices against her priorities and came to know what kind of teacher she wanted to become and what approach was required of her to achieve it. She described some classroom incidents that demonstrate the intricate relationship between her identity and emotions, and how her emerging identity shaped her responses to these incidents.

I didn’t have behavior issues with the elementary school, but when I was at my high school internship, I had those issues come up because they’re high schoolers and they’re going to talk back to you. I had to really reflect and say ‘how do I want to be in this situation and how do I want them to feel at the end of it?’ I don’t want to be that teacher that just yells at the kid in the front of the class, or I don’t want to be that teacher who is constantly pulling kids out in the hallway and coming in and the same actions still occur. I had to think of a way to best do that. I took a lot of human development classes at undergrad, the parenting styles came to mind. There’s the compassion and the strict and you want to have both. You make it clear to students of the rules and the expectations, but then you also say what you’re feeling is okay. It shows me you care or I want you to be in my classroom, I want you to stay here. That’s why I’m talking to you now because if you do this again, I’m going to have to send you out and I don’t want to... It really makes the
Zoe’s vision of herself as a teacher centered on two characteristics: being both compassionate and strict. She negotiated and extended that vision as a framework when she approached classroom management issues emerging in her classes in high school placement. She was certain about the kind of teacher she did not want to be. Distancing herself from the old-timers’ practices, she framed herself with “the identities of both participation and non-participation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 191). Her observations provoked her into not imagining herself as a “teacher that just yells at the kid in the front of the class” although this was a common practice amongst the teachers in her school. Searching for “a way to best” deal with behavioral issues, she generated and tested her own approach, and it confirmed and validated her as a competent teacher. Guided by her goal of balancing compassion and strictness, she negotiated the instructional priorities that mattered to her when managing her classroom, which reflected the teacher image with which she identified.

**Guided reflection: “to see your entire self”**

Zoe, Elizabeth and Leslie participated in the instructional activities of an ESOL teacher during their professional preparation in the IMP and reflected on these activities and their participation with regards to their future practice. Through coursework and internship, they interacted with the old-timers and other newcomers of the ESOL teaching community, and negotiated what a competent member should be and act like. During their (non)participation in what they believe matters to the community, they reflect on their engagement and competence (or lack thereof) as a legitimate peripheral participant. This reflection is part of their identification as a member and negotiation of full membership. For instance, Leslie focused mainly on the continuous process of reflecting and others’ instrumentality in facilitating her reflective process. She explained:

There is always so much you can see about yourself when you’re teaching .... without anyone telling you what’s going on, it’s very hard to see your entire self. There are things about yourself you can’t see, good or bad. There are questions that other people ask you that you might not be asking yourself. ...having the outside opinion and view of yourself as the program provides through its mentor teachers and through supervisors and through the dialogue that the program tries to create in general within the classwork, it really helps you talk things out and figure things
out. Because we would bring in our classroom experiences to our evening classes and also in our meetings with [the university’s professional development school coordinator] every other week. And I think bringing those things in and talking about them with other people, having that team of people to work with is very important. (Leslie, Interview 2, August 22, 2013)

Leslie seemed to believe that she could obtain a better understanding of her own teaching through experienced others’ guidance, feedback, questioning, and comments. She valued the reflection mediated through her interaction with the established community members and the other legitimate peripheral participants, like herself. This reflection mediated her vision and revision of her “entire self” as an emerging competent member of the ESOL teaching community. Such reflection promoted Leslie’s engagement in the community’s activities, alignment with the community’s values, and imagination of herself as a potential competent member.

Leslie’s teacher identity negotiation is also evident in her edTPA Task 5 submission in which she responded to the following prompt about her videotaped lesson: “what would you do differently to improve the learning of your students?” Leslie deliberated as follows:

Students were able to understand the word “details” when they worked on the graphic organizer and provided details about the person they were writing about. We talked about how details answer questions. To improve their understanding I would have the students ask one another questions about what they are writing and encourage the students to add the details that arise from these conversations about their writing. The idea that writing does not have to be an individual task and can be improved by conversation with others fits into the way they are taught in class and in many real life experiences. (Leslie, edTPA Submission)

Leslie pondered what her ELLs would need in their mainstream classes and in real life experiences with writing and concluded that students’ writing should include details from conversations with others. She negotiated her conceptualization of the role and scope of writing tasks in ESOL classes and what she needs to invest in as an ESOL teacher. Thus, she framed her identity as a teacher who stresses ELLs’ preparation primarily for their real life experiences in the U.S. schools and beyond. This identity and corresponding investment will shape the forms and trajectories of her (non)participation in the practices of ESOL teaching community.

Zoe also gave an example of how reflection was becoming part of her repertoire as an ESOL teacher.

Reflecting is, honestly, I hear teachers say it all the time, you always think about your lesson, what you could’ve done better, or you’re changing on the spot, you’re like “oh this is going in a horrible, horrible way, this is going down and this is gonna be a disaster” or “oh this is going really well, quicker, and slower than you think” and you are adapting all the time. Then after that lesson is over, you can reflect and adjust for the next group, or adjust for a different proficiency level. Like
with...the unit that...I videotaped with my students, I’d actually done about 2 weeks prior with the different group, they were little bit of a higher proficiency level. You know, I was like, “ok, this is what I’ll do differently” I won’t ask as much detail or I won’t give them so many tasks to do during the lessons, but then when I actually went in there and started teaching them, I was like “oh this certain aspect is taking a lot longer than I thought” and then other things were, they had the story done so much quicker than the first group that I did, but it took so much more scaffolding and guided practice than the first group did, so it was changes that I made after the first group and I was also making changes constantly during, so, [smiling] reflecting is great. (Zoe, Interview 1, January 23, 2013)

Zoe learned that reflection in and on action (Farrell, 2015; Zeichner & Liston, 2013) was what experienced members of the professional community do, and she needed to have it in her skill kit as she sought access to membership in the ESOL teaching community. Regular and guided reflection, and thus refinement of her teaching philosophies and competencies aligned with what matters to the community, was one of the main foci of the teaching practica. In her example, Zoe described some of her thinking processes while she was reflecting during and after the lesson and what she learned about the teaching of a particular lesson with a particular group. She took responsibility for her students’ learning, assessed their needs, and made decisions to tailor her lessons for her ELLs’ proficiency level. In this reflective process, she enacted her identity as an ESOL teacher who considers her students’ language abilities and adjusts her teaching to best serve them accordingly. Thereby, this example points out how reflection involves identification and negotiability in teacher identity construction.

**Acquiring the professional discourse: “to be an educated part of this field”**

As Zoe, Elizabeth, and Leslie emerged as prospective members of the professional teaching community of ESOL, they acquired proficiency and fluency in this “community’s language” (Wenger, 1998, p. 164) which include “the shared references that participants use” (p. 153). Becoming a competent member of a community of practice and engaging in its activities entails “the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles in which they express their forms of membership and their identities as members” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). The IMP introduced the three teacher candidates to the language of ESOL profession which they needed for their peripherality and legitimacy when engaging in the practices of the profession. For instance, Leslie explained that the language of ESOL helped her gain access to the membership of the ESOL academic community:

> Without the terminology and the understanding of the concepts, it would be really hard to partake in the academic discourse surrounding TESOL and reading the academic literature, if you don’t understand the terms and what they mean.
I think, with any field there is a language and understanding specific to that field . . . to be an educated part of this field. (Leslie, Interview 2, August 22, 2013)

The professional field-specific language constituted a resource that Leslie could utilize to understand the academic conversations in the ESOL teaching community. Although the “terms” and “concepts” she alludes to could be conceptualized differently, learning the ESOL-specific language granted her access to the academic literature she could draw upon to sustain her membership as an “educated part” of the professional community. Because the community’s discourse is “a source of widespread identification” (Wenger, 1998, p. 209), Leslie seemed to believe that knowing this language afforded her recognition in the community as a potential competent member.

In the same vein, Elizabeth viewed ESOL “language” as one of the prerequisites for her discursive apprenticeship into (Morita, 2000) the ESOL professional community and perform in it successfully. She remarked:

It [terminology] is helping me become part of ESOL community, speaking as an ESOL teacher, I have to have this different sets of languages, I’m learning the language of ESOL, I’m learning the vocabulary that goes with ESOL, I’m learning the jargon, I’m learning the academic language of education . . . I’m learning all the terms and how to use them, that comes with any job, like when I worked in public health field, I needed to learn all of the acronyms, and all of the terminology, fieldwork and all the different things that go with that, you pick it up as you go, and you incorporate that into everyday language, and to become part of professional community, you do need to know the terms that are used in that professional community, so it helps me become part of the community as an ESOL teacher. (Elizabeth, Interview 2, August 11, 2013)

She was aware that competent membership in a community requires access to and use of a field-specific language. Similar to her experiences in the field of public health, she needed “the language of ESOL” to engage in the practices of the ESOL teaching community and to explain the events that surround these practices. By integrating the ESOL language into her everyday language, she had the discursive tools (i.e., terms, concepts, acronyms) to negotiate her membership by aligning herself with the community and understanding her practice through the lens of the community’s language.

Moreover, Elizabeth’s reflective response to a question in her edTPA Task 4 submission included instances of her appropriation and application of some professional language use when explicating how she could modify her lesson to enhance her ELLs’ learning. She reflected:

In reviewing my video recordings and student work, there are three major changes I would make to the lessons to improve the learning of my students. One is the timing of the lessons. I attempted to squeeze a full lesson with a warm-up, guided activity, independent activity, and wrap-up in 20 minutes. . . . A second improvement would be to revise the rubric I used for the BCR assessment and begin with these indicators to guide and focus my instruction. . . . I should have scaffolded writing in a
way to support students’ production of formal, academic writing. Finally, I would introduce new conceptual ideas by engaging with students’ deductive reasoning skills … According to Arthur Hughes (2003), assessments can produce positive backwash by encouraging teachers to realign their instruction with the achievement indicators of the final assessment. (Elizabeth, edTPA Submission)

While reflecting on her instruction, Elizabeth used such field-specific concepts as “warm-up, guided activity, independent activity, wrap-up, BCR (brief constructed response), scaffolding, deductive reasoning, and positive backwash.” They provided linguistic material through which she evaluated and made sense of her teaching and imagined alternatives for future practices. Also, because language use is a visible way of aligning with the community, her strategic use of these concepts would help her become recognized by edTPA reviewers as a teacher who can competently use the professional language in making sense of her instruction. She was aware of her peripherality, but she needed to show her competence as a potential legitimate member and negotiate a corresponding identity by integrating the field-specific language in her reflection.

As another example, Zoe employed some ESOL concepts when articulating her instructional reflections on her mentor’s teaching in a classroom observation assignment for her Elementary ESOL Literacy course. In what follows, she describes her observations in an elementary ESOL lesson with two six-year old first graders (L and H).

Both students are around the same proficiency level; they are both low level 4 language learners (based on WiDA2). They can read simple texts, they can write sentences, and produce written items after modeling. …it is their reading and writing proficiency that is being focused on. The female first grader’s L1 is Vietnamese and the male first grader’s L1 is Arabic. The educational backgrounds of both students are that they have been in formal schooling in their native countries and have had instruction in both English and their L1s.

L and H worked on a page in their phonics packet… This particular worksheet did not really involve a lot of writing, but maybe served as some sort of formative assessment. . The main purpose of the sentence was to check for reading comprehension and connection to previous lessons (rhyming, plurals, etc.).

The techniques that Mrs. M. used were that she modeled, used scaffolding, tapped into their prior knowledge, and reinforced new vocabulary. (Zoe, Observation Report, Elementary ESOL Literacy)

In this snippet from her assignment, Zoe mediated her reflective and critical thinking in academic discourse by means of varying concepts like “WiDA, writing and reading proficiency, modeling, phonics packet, formative assessment, scaffolding, tapping into prior knowledge, and reinforcing new vocabulary.” She utilized them as discursive material embedded, valued, and utilized in the professional community of ESOL (Morita, 2000; Wenger,
1998) to make sense of the instructional events she observed and to organize her thoughts, comments, and interpretations. She aligned her language with the language of the ESOL community. Besides, like in the example of Elizabeth, Zoe’s use of field-specific discourse in her assignment was strategic in seeking legitimacy as a competent member from her professor, a more knowledgeable and experienced member of the ESOL community. This also points to the power relations between teacher candidates as newcomers and teacher educators, supervisors, and mentor teacher as old-timers. The latter is positioned as power holders whose legitimation of the former as competent enough members impacts the newcomers’ identity negotiation.

**Discussion**

From Wenger’s (1998) perspective, new members of a professional community form their identities as they construct professional knowledge, participate in the activities of the community, negotiate meanings that matter to the community, and interact with emerging and established members. Learning to engage in the practices of a community as a member means constructing a professional identity as a competent member of this community. Although what is important for the community tends to lead the processes of identification and negotiation through its discourses and practices (Wenger, 1998), individuals have the capacity and investment to direct the contours of their identity construction at varying degrees. They can take action to change their practice or imagine doing so when they have received social recognition and legitimacy. With these theoretical considerations, the current study extends two conversations in the earlier research: (a) the conceptualization of teacher learning as identity negotiation and (b) nonparticipation as teacher identity negotiation.

**Teacher learning and identity negotiation: one and the same**

The findings of this study support the argument that becoming a teacher means constructing a teacher identity and suggest that teacher learning and identity negotiation should be conceived as one and the same, rather than two separate processes (Danielewicz, 2001; Kanno & Stuart, 2011). The three teacher candidates in this study engaged in negotiation of their understanding of teaching and learning in relation to ESOL, as well as their own conceptions about being a teacher, acting like a teacher, and understanding their teaching and their place in social and professional contexts (Olsen, 2011; Sachs, 2005). As legitimate peripheral participants of the ESOL profession, they enacted teacher identities while constructing their theoretical and practical knowledge and implementing it in actual teaching settings. When they participated in learning activities (coursework and internship, broadly)
as part of the IMP provisions, they actually were going through “a process of coming to be” and “forging identities” (Lave, 1992, p. 3) as ESOL teachers.

For instance, Elizabeth’s case evinced how she “adjust[ed] the conceptions on which [her] professional learning rest[ed]” (Olsen, 2011, p. 261) and her learning to teach ELLs involved “negotiating and mediating multiple (often conflicting) identity sources” (p. 261). When she entered the IMP, she brought in a self-image or vision as an English language teacher which she built through her experiences as an EFL teacher in Costa Rica. More specifically, the discourses of the TEFL program led her to take on a teacher identity which placed significant emphasis on language accuracy and error correction in teaching English. This image was in conflict with what she was exposed to in the IMP coursework and the roles she needed to play in her placement schools. In other words, this image was unimaginable in the community to which she was seeking membership. In the IMP program, Elizabeth’s role was defined as one of providing instructional support for ELL students’ development of communicative competence and integration as well as preservation of their home language. She needed to negotiate her identification as a teacher in relation to the practices the ESOL teaching community values. Therefore, her teacher learning in this case was negotiation and mediation between these conflicting “identity sources” (Olsen, 2011, p. 261) to become an ESOL teacher who would be effective in her current context. This negotiation and mediation were an evolving outcome of the dialectic between her ideas and ideals, and the demands and requirements of the professional community and setting.

**Nonparticipation as teacher identity negotiation**

The members of a community of practice are not homogeneous in terms of their engagement, alignment, and imagination, and this is observable in their participation and nonparticipation in the community’s activities, both of which are “constituents of their identities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 171). Teacher candidates, as the newcomers of the profession, do not necessarily adopt all the practices in which they observe experienced teachers, as old-timers, participating. Although teacher candidates seek recognition, legitimacy, and access, they have the space to choose not to participate in certain activities they do not value. This choice involves reflection on their practices and negotiation of their emerging teacher identities (Mantero, 2004). As Wenger (1998) noted, “When the formation of newcomers is an integral part of the learning of a community of practice, generational encounters engender a process of reflection” (p. 249).

In Zoe’s case, her critical observations of teacher behaviors in her high school placement led her to define her identity in “contrast with others that are part of what [she is] not” (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 315) and through her decision
not to participate in certain practices (Wenger, 1998). During her experiences in her internship school, she observed a certain type of aggressive teacher behavior, namely yelling at students, which she did not believe was useful because it did not align with her ideal of being a compassionate teacher. Her reflection included this question: “how do I want to be in this situation and how do I want them to feel at the end of it?” Then, she adhered to being both “the compassionate and the strict” teacher when handling classroom management issues. She was happy with the results as she noted: “It really makes the difference. I did it a few times at [high school placement] and it worked.” Negotiating what mattered to her, she enacted the kind of teacher she aspired to become. This negotiation and conscious choice of nonparticipation (i.e., not yelling at students) was primarily steered by “how [she] locate[d] herself in a social landscape” and “what [she] care[d] about,” valued, and prioritized (Wenger, 1998, p. 171). Considering her observations of teachers and interactions with students, she took an active role in defining her meaning of being an ESOL teacher.

**Conclusion**

Resting upon Wenger’s (1998) conceptualization of learning and identity, this study contributes to the theorization and exploration of L2 teacher identity. The findings corroborate the argument that preservice teacher education is a formative and transformative phase in teachers’ professional lives (Alsup, 2006; Clarke, 2008; Danielewicz, 2001; Mantero, 2004). Danielewicz asserts that becoming a teacher “requires engagement with identity, the way individuals conceive themselves so that teaching is a state of being, not merely ways of acting or behaving” (p. 3). In the cases of three teacher candidates in this study, “engagement with identity” involved identification as an ESOL teacher and negotiation of being an ESOL teacher as teacher candidates interacted with others, invested in teaching practice, constructed their own images of being a teacher, and aligned their practices with the community’s demands and expectations. While bearing the role of a legitimate peripheral participant in the ESOL teaching community, they negotiated their definitions of what an ESOL teacher should be, act, and think like. They set and reconsidered their priorities in teaching ESOL, apprenticed into the professional language of ESOL, and took on their imagined identities while reflecting on their teaching practice. During this transitional phase of becoming, teacher candidates negotiated their teacher identities as they participated in the activities of the ESOL teaching community to which they were seeking membership.

These findings are related to critical issues in language learning and teaching in three ways. First, both ESL programs and teachers in public schools are marginalized and racialized in the United States, because the students they serve come from different cultural, linguistic, and racial
backgrounds (Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Motha, 2006). Second, there is an ongoing interaction between ESL teachers’ and students’ identity negotiation (Morgan, 2004) and investigating ESL teachers’ identities contributes to understanding their investment in how ELLs are constructing their cultural and linguistic identities during socialization into an environment in which they are not deemed as “mainstream.” Third, the findings point to the formative and transformative potential of preservice teacher education for teacher candidates’ identities. Thus, this also means a potential for fostering critically-minded language teacher identities with the ideals of social justice and advocacy for their students, themselves and their programs in the schools.

Notes

1. edTPA is a preservice assessment process designed by educators to answer the essential question: “Is a new teacher ready for the job?” edTPA includes a review of a teacher candidate’s authentic teaching materials as the culmination of a teaching and learning process that documents and demonstrates each candidate’s ability to effectively teach his/her subject matter to all students (http://edtpa.aacte.org/).

2. WiDA stands for World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment which is “a consortium of states dedicated to the design and implementation of high standards and equitable educational opportunities for English language learners.” WiDA standards refer to the English language development standards designed by the consortium to assess K-12 ELLs’ English proficiency. For more information, refer to: https://www.wida.us/.

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