Case Studies of Teach for America Teachers’ Teacher Identity Development in Relation to English Language Learners

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CASE STUDIES OF TEACH FOR AMERICA TEACHERS’ TEACHER IDENTITY
DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

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ABSTRACT

Case Studies of Teach for America Teachers’ Teacher Identity Development in Relation to English Language Learners

by

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The purpose of this study is to examine the teacher identity development of Teach for America (TFA) teachers in relation to English language learners (ELLs) in the context of a semester-long teaching English as a second language (TESL) course. In addition, this study aims to explore primary considerations come into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. The theoretical lenses guiding this study are Wenger’s Community of Practice perspective and Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990). A multiple-case design is employed to examine TFA teachers’ teacher identity in relation to ELLs. Data collection took place approximately six months and included individual interviews, focus group discussion, artifacts, field observations and researcher’s journal.

Findings indicated that the TESL course provided context for developing new understandings for the TFA teachers and contributed to their teacher identity through improving their knowledge of the education of ELLs. The TESL course also led to some positive changes in the TFA teachers’ beliefs about the teaching of ELLs and enabled them to develop new understandings about working with ELLs as content-area teachers. However, the TESL course did not influence all five TFA teachers’ positional identities as teachers of ELLs. The TFA teachers, except one, did not take on a linguistically responsive teacher perspective and charged
bilingual or ESL teachers with the responsibility of educating ELLs. This study also found that the following five primary considerations influenced the trajectory of the five TFA teachers’ professional development as novice teachers of ELLs: (a) decision to become a teacher, (b) school culture, (c) level of content area knowledge, (d) positionings in relation to ELLs, and (e) sources of support. These considerations facilitated or hindered the TFA teachers’ teacher identity development process as novice teachers in the teaching community and played a role in their growth as teachers of ELLs.

This study contributes to the literature by examining TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs and identifying primary considerations that influenced TFA teachers’ teacher identities as novice teachers of ELLs. The findings of this study have implications for the TFA organization and teacher preparation courses on ELL instruction.
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I also owe special thanks to my husband and best friend, Brian Grisham, for his patience, love, and understanding throughout the course of my graduate studies and dissertation writing process. You have been my great motivator.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Sefika Nusret. I could not have completed this dissertation study without your love, encouragement, and support. Thank you for your unconditional love and supporting me throughout my life.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

English Language Learners (ELLs) are a growing demographic, reaching 9.3% of K-12 public school students in the U.S. During the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 4.6 million students were identified as ELL in the U.S. schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The population of ELLs has also become the fastest growing segment of K-12 students. For instance, the ELL population had grown by 51% in the decade of 1999 and 2009 whereas the total student population had grown 7.2% (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011). If the growth trend continues, it is anticipated that by the year 2030, over 40% of the K-12 population will be students whose native language is not English (Harris, 2003). This implies that, if not all, most teachers will have responsibility for teaching ELLs in their classrooms.

ELLs are generally reported as a homogenous group of students. However, ELLs are richly heterogeneous with respect to their cultural, linguistic, academic and familial backgrounds. Additionally, ELLs differ in terms of length of time in the U.S., age, prior educational experiences, socioeconomic status and living situations (Cho & Reich, 2008). Each of these characteristics plays a part in the rate at which an ELL student attains proficiency in the English language and academic success in content areas of the student in mainstream classrooms.

Nevertheless, in general, of the students identified as ELLs in the U.S. K-12 schools, the majority speak Spanish (77%) as their native language. This is followed by Arabic (2.3%), Chinese (2.2%), Vietnamese (1.8%) and the remaining students speak other languages (e.g., Hmong, Somali, Russian, Haitian, Tagalog) (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). Furthermore, contrary to the common misconception, the majority of this population were born in the U.S. and are U.S. citizens.
In the U.S., California holds the highest number of ELLs among its K-12 students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). Whereas, in the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 22% of California’s students were identified as ELLs. The state of California was followed by Nevada, Texas and New Mexico (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). Even though the aforementioned four states have the largest number of ELLs, they are not the states with the fastest growing ELL population. Other states have witnessed significant growth in their ELL student population. For instance, states such as Tennessee, Nebraska, Indiana, North Carolina, Alabama and Kentucky experienced more than a 300% increase in ELL population between 1995 and 2005 (NCELA, 2010).

Although the ELL population is one of the fastest growing student populations in the U.S., ELLs’ academic performance presents a discouraging picture compared to native English-speaking students. For example, the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores in 2013 showed that ELLs’ proficiency levels in mathematics and reading were 23 to 30 percentage points below in comparison to native English-speaking students. In the state where this research study was conducted, 90% of fourth-grade ELLs scored below proficiency in reading in comparison to 69% of non-ELLs in 2011. Additionally, 98% of eighth-grade ELLs scored below proficiency in reading compared to 71% of their non-ELL counterparts (Institute of Education Sciences, 2012).

With respect to dropout rates, students who are identified as ELL face a much greater risk of dropping out of high school. Indeed, ELLs are about four times more likely to drop out than non-ELLs (National Educational Association [NEA], 2005). Additionally, the graduation rates of ELLs for the 2010-2011 school year showed that nationally, Arizona scored the lowest at 25%, followed by Nevada at 29% and Georgia at 32%. On the other hand, the highest graduation rates
of ELLs came from Vermont (82%), West Virginia (79%) and Arkansas (76%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

**Teachers of English Language Learners**

There are a variety of instructional programs offered by some school districts to meet the academic and linguistic needs of ELLs in the U.S. Nevertheless, most ELLs spend all or most of their instructional day in mainstream classrooms because of issues such as limited funds that are inadequate for hiring English as a Second Language (ESL) specialists, the growing English-only political ideology, and increasing number of ELLs in public schools (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008).

With the increase of ELLs in mainstream classrooms, more and more teachers are finding themselves responsible of teaching academic content to both ELLs and native-English speaking students in the same classrooms. Given that many mainstream teachers are charged with the responsibility of meeting the academic needs of ELLs in today’s classrooms, it is safe to say that they play a vital role in ELLs’ academic success. Numerous research studies have shown that teachers with strong preparation can make a dramatic difference in students’ academic achievement (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Regrettably, most mainstream teachers are not equipped to address the academic needs of linguistically diverse students (Pappamihiel, 2007) and accustomed to working with native English-speaking students (Barron & Menken, 2002). Accordingly, most mainstream teachers report that they feel inadequately or not prepared at all to educate ELLs in their classrooms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; O’Neal, Ringler, & Rodriguez, 2008; Waxman & Tellez, 2002). This could stem from the fact that most preservice and inservice teachers had little or no specific training or preparation in teaching ELLs (Lucas, 2011). In the U.S., over the years, most of the attention has been devoted to
preparing ESL and bilingual teachers rather than preparing all teacher candidates to work with ELLs (Lucas, 2011). Many teacher education programs do not require all teacher candidates to complete specific coursework in working with ELLs. For example, only 20 states require that all teacher candidates have some preparation in teaching ELLs. In addition, less than one-sixth of teacher education programs include specific preparation related to the ELL education (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). As Lucas (2011) pointed out, there is “no uniformity” in the approach taken to ensure that preservice and inservice teachers are well-prepared to successfully work with ELLs in mainstream classrooms (p. 4). Yet, ELLs are a growing presence in mainstream classrooms and because of the diverse backgrounds and unique needs of ELLs, teachers and teacher candidates need specialized preparation to educate ELLs effectively.

Another issue is that mainstream teachers’ positionings of themselves in relation to ELLs in classrooms (Yoon, 2008). Most mainstream teachers believe that educating ELLs is not their responsibility but that of ESL or bilingual education teachers (Reeves, 2006; Walker, Shafer, & Iams, 2004). That is, they do not view and position themselves as teachers of ELLs and they charge bilingual or ESL teachers with the responsibility of instructing ELLs. Yet, given the growth in the number of ELLs in mainstream classrooms, it is essential for mainstream teachers to change their perceptions and view themselves as teachers of ELLs instead of teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms (Pappamihiel, 2007). As Yoon (2008) stated, the rising number of ELLs in today’s mainstream classrooms suggest that “teaching ELLs is not a responsibility of only ESL teachers but also of classroom teachers” (p. 516).

**Teach for America Teachers in Mainstream Classrooms**

One of the critical issues that have been mainly overlooked in the literature is alternatively certified teachers of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. In the U.S. K-12 schools, not
only the number of ELLs but also the number of alternatively certified teachers has been increasing. In the U.S., all 50 states offer alternate routes into teaching to those individuals who come from fields outside of education or other careers. States and school districts are using alternative certification programs to fill teacher vacancies particularly in subject areas such as science, math, ESL bilingual and special education (McCreight, 2000). In the U.S., there are more than 600 alternative certification programs, and since 2005, one-third of new teachers hired have entered the teaching profession through alternative routes (Feistritzer, Griffin & Linnajarvi, 2011). In some states, the percentage of alternatively certified teachers is higher. For instance, in Texas, over 45% of all new teachers became teachers through alternative teaching certification paths in 2010 (Zannou, 2012).

One of the alternative teaching programs in the U.S. is Teach for America (TFA). TFA is a highly competitive and well-known alternative route into teaching that aims to eliminate educational inequity and close the achievement gap by recruiting, training, and placing college seniors and recent graduates in low income and predominantly minority schools to teach for at least two years (Kopp, 2003). In the 2012–2013 school year, TFA placed more than 10,000 teachers to teach 750,000 students in low-income communities across the nation (Penner, 2016).

As a sub-set of mainstream teachers, novice TFA teachers are generally placed in schools with the highest concentrations of ELL populations in the country (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010; Hopkins & Heineke, 2013) and schools that have low socioeconomic status. However, TFA teachers, like most of the mainstream teachers, teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms without sufficient preparation. Heineke and Cameron (2013) reviewed the TFA organization’s five-week summer institute curriculum and found that ELLs were only discussed in six pages of the TFA’s 800-page, 37-chapter training guide. Furthermore, Heineke and Cameron (2013) stated that
newly recruited TFA teachers were given only a one and half an hour session on ELL instruction during the five-week TFA summer training before entering their linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms (Heineke & Camaron, 2013).

In the literature, a great deal of quantitative research investigated the effectiveness of TFA teachers on student outcomes through using standardized test scores of students as data sources (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005; Raymond, Fletcher, & Luque, 2001; Xu, Hannaway, & Taylor, 2011). However, even though the TFA organization has been growing substantially and placing newly licensed teachers in schools with the highest concentrations of ELL students, not much is known about the TFA teachers’ experiences, challenges and perceptions of their roles as teachers of ELLs.

**Teacher Identity and Teaching English Language Learners**

Teacher identity research suggests that teacher identity influences teachers’ motivation, teaching practices, instructional beliefs and decisions, teacher retention as well as their actions in and out of their classrooms (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Chong, Low & Goh, 2011; Day & Kington, 2008). According to Sachs (2005), teacher identity “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).

Regarding the importance of teacher identity, Danielewicz (2001) claimed that “what makes someone a good teacher is not methodology, or even ideology. It requires engagement with identity, the way individuals conceive of themselves so that teaching is a state of being, not merely ways of acting or behaving” (p. 3). The critical importance of teacher identity is also highlighted by Beijaard and colleagues (2000) who noted that teachers’ perceptions of their own teacher identity influence not only their effectiveness and professional development but also their
ability to overcome with instructional challenges and changes. Those teachers who enter the teaching profession without a strong sense of teacher identity are most likely to leave the profession, or if they remain in the teaching profession, they will not see teaching as rewarding and satisfying (Alsup, 2006).

A strong sense of teacher identity can impact teachers’ instructional practices with ELLs as well as their ability to overcome with the challenges they might face in teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms. In particular, given the cultural and linguistic diversity among ELLs, teaching the ELL population poses unique instructional challenges for mainstream teachers, including TFA teachers, who have little preparation in working with students from diverse language backgrounds. Those teachers who do not develop a strong sense of teacher identity as teachers of ELLs might view working with ELLs as a problem and this might adversely affect ELLs’ academic success in the mainstream.

According to Reeves (2009), all teachers need to “widen their teacher identity to include that of language teacher” in order to effectively educate ELLs in mainstream classrooms (p.35). Reeves (2009) further claimed that “Shifting teachers’ view of their instructional responsibilities from that of subject area knowledge to subject area knowledge plus language requires educators to not only adopt new instructional strategies but also to renegotiate their teacher identity” (p. 35). That is, mainstream teachers of ELLs need to view themselves as responsible for teaching both academic content and language skills to ELLs in their classrooms. However, as indicated above, researchers have found that most mainstream teachers perceive themselves as unprepared to work with ELLs (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Reeves, 2009) and believe that teaching ELLs is not their responsibility (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Walker et al., 2004). If teachers do not see themselves as responsible for the academic and
linguistic needs of ELLs; in other words, if they do not develop a strong sense of teacher identity as teachers of ELLs, this might impact their instructional decisions and practices regarding ELLs and working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

**Statement of the Problem**

The face of mainstream classrooms in the U.S. has been changing with the rise in the number of both ELLs and alternatively certified teachers. With the increase of ELLs in the U.S. K-12 schools, many mainstream teachers are becoming responsible for teaching not only native English-speaking students but also ELLs in their classrooms. Furthermore, more and more TFA teachers are entering the teaching profession. Most of the novice TFA teachers are being assigned to teach in high minority schools populated by a large number of ELLs in the U.S.

As stated above, teaching is a complex endeavor and demanding professional task. Yet, teaching ELLs, particularly teaching those ELLs at lower levels of English proficiency, can provide more complex instructional challenges for mainstream teachers. These challenges may be even more formidable for TFA teachers who enter the teaching profession with minimal teacher preparatory experience and without having completed their teacher training.

A great deal of research on teacher identity (e.g., Avalos, 2011; Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Farrell, 2012; Frierson-Campbell, 2004; Flores & Day, 2006) has been carried out to investigate the development of teacher identity of preservice teachers in teacher education programs or traditionally certified teachers in the field. However, there is a noticeable gap in the extant literature concerning the development of teacher identity of alternatively certified TFA teachers of ELLs.

Given the increase in the number of ELLs and TFA teachers who work with them in mainstream classrooms, it is necessary to focus on TFA teachers and examine in what ways they
develop their teacher identities as teachers of ELLs. As pointed out by Wenger, Dinsmore and Villagómez (2012), the increasing linguistic diversity in today’s mainstream classrooms in the U.S. makes it imperative to understand “who teachers are: their identities, and how these identities influence how they teach and learn” (p. 2).

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of the study was two-folded. First, it aimed to examine the teacher identity development of TFA teachers in relation to ELLs in the context of a graduate-level teaching English as a second language (TESL) course. According to Philipp (2007), teaching identity is an “embodiment of an individual’s knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments, intentions as they relate to one’s participation within a particular community of practice” (p. 259). In this respect, following Philipp’s (2007) definition in this present study, I examined the influence of a graduate-level TESL course on TFA teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments and intentions regarding ELLs and the teaching of ELLs. Second, recognizing that teacher identity is a dynamic and ongoing process that is influenced, (re)constructed and shaped in various contexts through interactions with others and experiences over time (Cohen, 2010; Lasky, 2005; Olsen, 2008; Zembylas, 2005), this study also aimed to explore what primary considerations came into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. More specifically, this dissertation study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. In what ways do Teach for America teachers develop their teacher identity in relation to English language learners in the context of a semester-long teaching English as a second language course?

2. What primary considerations come into play in Teach for America teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of English language learners?
Regarding capturing aspects of teacher identity development, Varghese and colleagues (2005) suggested utilizing more than one theoretical framework. Following this recommendation, I employed the theoretical frameworks of Lave and Wenger’s Communities of Practice (CoP) and the positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991) to shine much brighter light on TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to have significance in the following respects. First, although literature in the field of teacher education has focused on the teacher identity development of bilingual and ESL teachers as teachers of ELLs (Varghese et al., 2005), research on the teacher identity of mainstream teachers of ELLs is in its infancy. In the teacher identity literature, very little research (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Reeves, 2009; Yoon, 2008) has examined the teacher identity of mainstream teachers of ELLs. This research study aimed to address the paucity of research on teacher identity by focusing on mainstream TFA teachers’ identity development in relation to ELLs.

Second, the participants of this study are alternatively certified TFA teachers. Novice TFA teachers are generally assigned to teach in schools with the highest concentrations of ELL populations in the U.S. However, very little empirical research has moved beyond investigating the effectiveness of TFA teachers in comparison to non-TFA teachers in the field. The research could also contribute to the literature on TFA as the first study, to the researcher’s knowledge, dealing with the TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs drawing on sociocultural theories of teacher identity development.

Third, given the increase in the number of ELLs in mainstream classrooms and persistent underachievement of this population of students in comparison to native-English speaking
students, it is necessary to explore how teachers of ELLs understand, develop and enact their teacher identity in relation to teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The findings of this study can contribute to the understanding of how mainstream teachers’ teacher identity might impact the learning opportunities offered to ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Fourth, the study explored in what ways a semester-long TESL course influenced alternatively certified TFA teachers’ identity development as teachers of ELLs. This exploration could inform teacher educators, TESL course instructors and mentors about how TESL coursework is conducive to the teacher identity development of alternatively certified teachers of ELLs.

Last but not least, findings can reinforce the necessity for preparing all practicing teachers and teacher candidates to work effectively with an increasing ELL population in the mainstream. Given the increase in the number of ELLs in general education classrooms, mainstream teachers should be well-prepared to work effectively with ELLs just as they are prepared to teach native-English speaking students in their classrooms.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Alternatively Certified:** A teacher that earns a standard teaching certificate by means other than a traditional 4-year university-based teacher education program.

**English language learners (ELLs):** ELLs is the acronym for English language learners. In this study, this term is mainly used in reference to “a person whose home language is a language other than English. ELLs have varying degrees of proficiency in English- from none at all to native-like proficiency” (Lucas & Villegas, 2011, p. 13).

**Mainstream classrooms:** A class where English is the language of instruction and the majority of students are native speakers of the English language.
Mainstream teachers: The term mainstream teachers, also referred as content area teachers, can be defined as those teachers who teach one or more traditional content areas, such as language arts, science, mathematics, social studies in English-only classrooms. (Pettit, 2011)

Teacher identity: The notion of teacher identity can be defined as “embodiment of an individual’s knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments, intentions, and affect as they relate to one’s participation within a particular community of practice; the ways one has learned to think, act, and interact” (Philipp, 2007, p. 259).

Organization of Dissertation

In this dissertation, the current chapter is followed by four chapters. Chapter 1 introduce the study and explain the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the two theoretical frameworks that are foundational to this study and reviews the literature that is relevant to the research study. Chapter 2 presents three main areas of literature that relate to the purposes of this research. First, it begins with a general discussion of the notions of identity and teacher identity. Next, the two theoretical frameworks of the study are discussed. I then proceed to review the body of research that focuses on TFA teachers. First, I present a description of the TFA program and TFA summer institute training. Second, I provide an overview of the findings from research studies on TFA teachers. TFA teachers are sub-set of mainstream teachers of ELLs; therefore, I also present a detailed review of literature, which has focused on mainstream teachers of ELLs.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology of the study. In this chapter, I describe the research approach that I adopted to conduct this dissertation study. Additionally, I discuss the context and participants of the study, a description of the methods of data collection
and the procedures for data analysis. Next, I discuss the issue of trustworthiness, and how the ethical considerations in connection with this research is addressed.

Chapter 4 presents the findings separately for each participant TFA teacher. In alignment with the two research questions, the findings for each of the five participant’s cases are presented in two main parts. The first part delineates the influence of the TESL course on each participating teacher’s teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. The second section presents the findings pertaining to the second research question, namely what primary considerations came into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings introduced in Chapter 4 through the theoretical frameworks of the study and the extant literature. The discussion of the findings is presented in two main parts, aligned with the two research questions of this present study. In Chapter 5, pedagogical implications and limitations of this study and recommendations for further research are presented.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORATICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study aimed to examine the teacher identity development of Teach for America (TFA) teachers in relation to English language learners (ELLs) in the context of a semester-long teaching English as a second language (TESL) course. Additionally, the present study aimed to identify what primary considerations come into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. Therefore, the literature review is divided into three main parts. First, I discuss the concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘teacher identity’. As this study also aimed to identify primary considerations that played a part in TFA teachers’ teacher identity as novice teachers of ELLs, I also present a review of the literature pertaining to influences on teacher identity and teacher identity development in general. Next, I present the two sociocultural theories that have informed the theoretical frameworks of this study. First, I examine Lave and Wenger’s communities of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and this is followed by the review of positioning theory by Davies and Harré (1990).

The participants of this study were TFA teachers. Therefore, in the second part, I provide an overview of the TFA organization and present a description of its five-week summer teacher training program. I also review previous research on TFA teachers to illuminate gaps in the TFA literature.

In the third part of this chapter, I review the relevant literature on the topic of mainstream teachers of ELLs. I present the relevant research in the following three main strands: (a) mainstream teacher beliefs about the teaching of ELLs, (b) mainstream teacher knowledge of ELL education, and (c) teacher identity and teaching ELLs.
Identity

Identity is an abstract and complex concept. Although a sizeable body of research has explored identity and identity development, the notion of identity has been defined and conceptualized in a variety of ways across a number of disciplines and perspectives in the literature. For instance, from a psychological standpoint, identity is viewed as an internal sense of self or a feeling of equilibrium (e.g., Erikson, 1968). Yet, from the sociocultural perspective, identity is recognized as a fundamentally social, cultural, temporal and interactive activity influenced by one’s sociocultural contexts (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998).

Psychologist Erik Erikson is considered to be one of the first scholars to be associated with the notion of identity (Fearon, 1999). In particular, Erikson’s work has been influential in the area of personal identity development. Erikson (1968) defined identity as a process rather than a state of being and espoused that identity is something that one develops throughout one’s life span (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1980) claimed that an individual has multiple identities, including a personal identity, an ego identity, and a social identity. Particularly, in his works, Erikson presented the development of adolescent identity through the use of eight psychosocial developmental stages. For Erikson, as one successfully advances through each developmental stage, one gradually develops a sense of identity and acquires basic characteristic strengths that can be used to resolve subsequent crises. That is, from Erikson’s perspective, sense of identity is developed through maturation and certain life experiences in social contexts (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

Even though Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development is a significant contribution to the examination of adolescent identity, his approach has also been criticized as it mainly
focuses on individual identity development without adequately addressing the influence of sociocultural aspects on identity development and formation (Cô & Levine, 1988).

From a sociological perspective, Mead (1934), American sociologist and philosopher, emphasized the individual uniqueness of identity and viewed identity in relationship with self (Mead, 1934). Mead viewed the self as the connection between the individual and social settings (Malhotra, 1987) that develops through social interactions and communications. In discussing Mead’s perspective, Beijaard and colleagues (2004) argued: “Self can arise only in a social setting where there is social communication; in communicating we learn to assume the roles of others and monitor our actions accordingly” (pp. 107-108). In this respect, Mead’s perspective of identity development suggests that identity is formed and reconstructed in social situations or contexts through interactions with others.

From the sociocultural perspective, identity is viewed as an ongoing, shifting and dynamic process, which is constructed and shaped through participation in the discourses of one’s social communities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Gee, 2011; Olsen, 2008; Wenger, 1998). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) defined identity as “a relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories” (pp. 585-586). In light of this perspective, identities are constantly changing based on the interactions of individuals, and formed within, and responsive to, various social discourses. Similarly, Holland and her colleagues (1998) conceptualized identity as a flexible, ongoing process and argued that identity is formed in relation to others through social interactions within specific social contexts (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).
In his works, Gee (2001) highlighted the many-sided nature of identity and recognized the influence of participation in multiple Discourses on identity construction. According to Gee (2001), we all have multiple identities, which are not bounded but fit together to complement one another. In his works, Gee (2001) further outlined four interrelated ways to view identity, namely: (a) the nature identity (e.g., being white or black), (b) the institutional identity (e.g., being an educator), (c) the discursive identity (e.g., patient), and (d) the affinity identity (e.g., being a member of academic organization or church). Similar to Gee’s (2001) affinity identity perspective, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) viewed identity as a product of participation in social groups, or CoP. From Lave and Wenger’s (1991) perspective, identity is “long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice” (p. 53).

As discussed above, the reviewed literature on the concept of identity revealed numerous definitions and understandings of the concept. Yet, recent conceptualizations of identity suggest that identity is not a one-dimensional, fixed entity. Rather, it is a multidimensional, ongoing, dynamic, fluid continuum and constantly changes over time. Drawing from a number of definitions from sociocultural perspectives, in this present study, I view identity as a socially negotiated, dynamic, relational and multidimensional phenomenon, which is constructed in relation to social contexts and influenced through interactions with others and experiences over time.

**Teacher Identity**

In the teacher identity literature, the significant role of teacher identity in teacher development and teaching practices have been recognized by many scholars (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004; Danielewicz, 2001; Palmer, 1998; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). With the recognition of the significance of teacher identity,
the question of teacher identity development has been of interest to several researchers in the field. In particular, research on teacher identity has proliferated as a separate area of research in the teacher education literature in the last twenty years (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Accordingly, how teachers develop, form and (re)construct their professional identities have been extensively examined from a number of differing perspectives within many settings or contexts.

Although numerous research studies have been investigated teacher identity development in recent decades, according to Beijaard and colleagues (2004), the concept of teacher identity remains somewhat vague in the literature. Beijaard and colleagues (2004) in their review of the research literature on teacher identity found that over half the research studies failed to provide a clear definition of the notion teacher identity. It has been argued that the problem with defining teacher identity might be because of the various definitions of the concept of ‘identity’ in the field of psychology (Olson, 2008) and/or because of the complex and complicated nature of the phenomenon in general (Mockler, 2011). Nevertheless, although there does not seem to be a consensus among scholars regarding the definition of the concept of teacher identity, a review of the literature on the concept revealed that in education discourses, several scholars (e.g. Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Cooper & Olsen, 1996; Flores & Day, 2006; Zemblay, 2003) have agreed that teacher identity is a dynamic, fluid continuum and constantly shifting and sensitive to social contexts and interactions.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) 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. 135). Similarly, Flores and Day (2006) viewed teacher identity as a
dynamic entity and ongoing process “which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one’s own values and experiences” (p.220). According to Flores and Day (2006), becoming a teacher means the (trans)formation of the teacher identity. The scholars also suggested that teacher identity is characterized by the “interplay between different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, beliefs and practices” (p. 219). Kelchtermans (1993) emphasized the role of teachers’ conceptions and beliefs about themselves as teachers and defines teacher identity as teachers’ “conception about themselves as a teacher and a system of knowledge and beliefs concerning ‘teaching’ as a professional activity” (p.447). Drawing on previous literature, Philipp (2007) defined the notion of teacher identity as “embodiment of an individual’s knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments, intentions, as they relate to one’s participation within a particular community of practice” (p. 259).

According to Danielewicz (2001), identities are not unified or fixed, but they are always in flux, dynamic, multiple, and constantly (re)constructed. She also argued that teacher identity emerges from dialogical practices with others in an authoring of oneself. Further, Danielewicz (2001) maintained that discourse is at the core of identity development. That is, teacher identity is constructed and shaped through participating in specific discursive practices. As Danielewicz (2001) claimed, “Identities then are the result of dynamic interplay between discursive processes that are internal (to the individual) and external (involving everyone else)” (p. 11).

In their literature review of the identity of teachers, Beijaard and colleagues (2004) asserted that teacher identity “is not something teachers have, but something they use to make sense of themselves” (p.123) and proposed the following four features of teacher identity: (a) it is not fixed but rather, dynamic, ongoing process, (b) it implies both individual and contexts, (c) it
includes sub-identities that must be harmonious, and (d) agency is an essential component of teacher identity which means that teachers are involved in their identity development process.

After reviewing a number of definitions of the concept of teacher identity proposed by various scholars in the field, the following commonalities of the concept have been identified. Teacher identity is a dynamic, ongoing entity and changes continuously (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004; Flores & Day, 2006); teacher identity includes teachers’ conceptions, values, emotions and beliefs about themselves as teachers (Farell, 2011; Kelchtermans, 1991; Lasky, 2005) and teacher identity includes other peoples’ expectations and how teachers are positioned and how they position themselves (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard, et al., 2004; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Although examining teacher identity is not an easy task because of its complexity, Philipp’s (2007) definition of the notion identifies characteristics that can be examined through empirical research. Therefore, in this present study, I adopted Philipp’s (2007) definition of the concept of teacher identity to explore TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long TESL course. As stated above, according to Philipp (2007), teacher identity is an “embodiment of an individual’s knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments, intentions, as they relate to one’s participation within a particular community of practice” (p. 259). Following this definition, I examined the influence of the TESL course in the five TFA teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments and intentions with respect to teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms to shed light on their teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs.

**Influences on Teacher Identity.** In educational research, several studies have investigated influences on teacher identity development (Alsup, 2006; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995;
Dang, 2012; Danielewicz, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006; Gimbert, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Knowles, 1992). Findings indicated that teachers’ personal histories (e.g., Galindo, 2007), motivation to enter the profession (e.g., Olsen, 2008), prior educational experiences (e.g. Knowles, 1992), instructional beliefs (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2004), contexts in which they work (e.g. Danielewicz, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006), interactions within and outside of school contexts (e.g. Lasky, 2005) and emotional experiences (e.g. Dang, 2012) influence the development of teacher identity.

In this section, four noteworthy studies (Dang, 2012; Danielewicz, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006; Gimbert, 2001) that are relevant to this study are reviewed. The studies conducted by Danielewicz (2001) and Gimbert (2001) support Lave and Wenger’s CoP framework that is one of the theoretical frameworks of this present study. While Flores and Day (2006) employed symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework of their study, their work also informs this study as the researchers focused on the teacher identity development process of mainstream teachers the first two years of teaching. Lastly, Dang’s (2012) study was also included because her study highlighted the role of emotions in teacher identity development. Dang’s (2012) findings showed how teachers’ perezhivanie, lived emotional experiences, and practicum experiences influence the teacher identity development process of two English as foreign language (EFL) teachers.

In a qualitative study, Danielewicz (2001) examined the processes a group of preservice teachers go through as they learn to become teachers. In her study, the researcher traced the teacher identity development of six student teachers over a three-year period, including their coursework, student teaching, and the first year following graduation. Danielewicz (2001) collected data through in-depth interviews, journals, teaching documents and classroom observations. Based on her interactions with the six teachers and on her own reflections on the
development of teacher identity, Danielewicz (2001) suggested that teaching selves are “fluid and ever changing, labile and mutable, responsive to the forces of inner desires and outer conditions” (p. 107). Danielewicz (2001) also suggested that the process of developing a teacher professional identity is complicated and it involves an acknowledgement of one’s personal identity, values, beliefs, experiences, and reconceptions of what it means to be a teacher.

Additionally, in her study, Danielewicz (2001) identified different patterns from the experiences of teachers to affiliate themselves within the school community. She also found that the participants’ mentors played a significant role in their teacher identity development. The researcher also argued that teacher identity is developed when student teachers participate in specific discursive practices that surround the contexts of teaching.

In another study, Gimbert (2001) examined the identity development of six student teachers who were interns in a Professional Development School over a year period. The purpose of Gimbert’s (2001) phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of participants and explore the influence of collaborative reflection on the process of learning to teach. Gimbert’s (2001) findings revealed that being a member of professional CoP influenced teachers’ thinking and behavior and fostered their teacher identity development. The participant teachers reflected on their identities as novice teachers in professional CoPs and developed a new understanding of how to teach and what it means to be a teacher. Gimbert’s (2001) study supports Lave and Wenger’s framework CoP.

In a longitudinal study, Flores and Day (2006) investigated how teacher identities of 14 teachers were constructed and shaped in the first two years of teaching. The authors collected data through individual interviews, written narratives, student feedback and questionnaires. Initial data analysis revealed the first two years of teaching could be traumatic and problematic
experience for new teachers because teachers are in the process of adapting to their new teaching contexts and fulfill their responsibilities as novice teachers. The researchers found (a) previous influences, (b) former teacher training and teaching experience, and (c) teaching contexts, played a role in novice teachers’ teacher identity development and their perceptions of themselves as teachers in the teaching community. Flores and Day (2006) also discovered that whereas the new teachers’ previous experiences were very significant to their teacher identity development, initial teaching training, pre-service programs, seemed to play a weak role upon their beliefs about themselves as teachers and the way in which they approached teaching. In addition, Flores and Day (2006) found workplace contextual factors played a part in reshaping teachers’ understanding of the teaching profession and (re)constructing their teacher identities. Flores and Day (2006) ascertained that teachers working in positive and collaborative school contexts were most likely to develop positive attitudes towards the teaching profession but working in negative school contexts might destabilize teachers’ professional identities and caused the novice teachers to be more rule governed.

In a qualitative study, Dang (2013) examined the evolution of the teacher identities of two EFL student teachers in Vietnam during a 15-week paired-placement teaching practicum. Dang (2013) particularly focused on the development of teacher identity in a collaborative setting. In the study, the researcher utilized Engeström’s (2001) activity theoretical framework with an emphasis on the idea of contradiction, and Vygotsky’s (1994) concept of perezhivanie. Vygotsky’s concept of perezhivanie provides an explanation why the same situation, social context or event is interpreted, perceived and emotionally experienced differently by the persons in different manners. Data sources included interviews, observations of the lessons, field notes, and artefacts. The findings of Dang’s (2013) study revealed that both of the student teachers
confronted contradictions in their perceptions of what student teaching is, experienced unequal power relationships, and varying levels of appropriation of pedagogical tools. Additionally, Dang (2013) observed two student teachers responded to the same teaching context, that is, pair-placement environment, differently and they made different meanings out of the same teaching environment. Dang (2013) stated that the differences were attributed to the student teachers’ different identities and the varying previous elements two student teachers brought to the same situation. Further, even though the participant two student teachers experienced tensions during the practicum, the student teachers worked on the resolution of conflicts, contradictions, and tensions and that experience opened up new opportunities for the student teachers to learn and as a result, they experienced development in their teaching identities (Dang, 2013). Dang’s (2013) study contributed to the teacher identity literature by empirically testing the concept of perezhivanie as Dang’s (2013) findings revealed how two EFL student teachers paired in the same practicum “constructed different meanings of the same planning and teaching event, depending on how they each emotionally related to that event” (p.50).

The reviewed studies above contributed to the teacher identity literature by shedding light on the influences on teacher identity and teacher identity development process. The review of the previous work suggested that novice teachers and teacher candidates draw from various sources in the development of their teacher identities. The findings of the reviewed studies also indicated that the process of teacher identity (re)construction is ongoing, dynamic and sensitive to contexts in which teachers are situated in. Therefore, in this study, I also aimed to explore what primary considerations come into play in the TFA teachers’ identities as novice teachers of ELLs in order to gain a better understanding of influences of contexts in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. To be more specific, the reviewed literature guided me as a
researcher to go beyond the TESL course context and take into consideration other contextual factors that might impact TFA teachers’ identity development as novice teachers of ELLs.

**Identities in Communities of Practice**

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP framework recognizes identity as a socially legitimated process and is based on the premise that identity is a performance influenced by one’s social context. According to Wenger (1998), identity is “a way of being in the world and not equivalent to a self-image” (p.151). The scholar further explained that identity is “produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities” (p. 151). In other words, from Wenger’s perspective, identity development does not occur in isolation. Rather, it develops in conjunction with one’s community through interactions with others. Within the CoP framework, Wenger (1998) suggested the following five dimensions of the notion of identity:

1. Identity as negotiated experiences; defining who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation as well as the way others reify ourselves;
2. Identity as community membership; defining who we are by the familiar and the unfamiliar;
3. Identity as learning trajectory; defining who we are by where we have been and where we are going;
4. Identity as nexus of multi-memberships; defining who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of identity into one identity; and
5. Identity as a relation between the local and the global; defining who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and manifesting broader styles and discourses. (p. 149)
Wenger’s five dimensions above are specific to identity; however, these dimensions also have implications for professional identity development and particularly, are useful to understand the individual and group aspects of teacher identity development (Sachs, 2001).

Wenger (1998) described community as “social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence” (p. 5). The term practice refers to “shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” (p. 5). According to Wenger (1998), identity evolves through the engagement and practices in the community and suggested that the participation in a CoP “shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (p. 4).

It must be noted that not all groups of people who gather or communicate with one another form a community. Wenger (1998) pointed out that three dimensions are necessary in order to form a community and give it coherence: (a) mutual engagement, (b) a jointly negotiated enterprise, and (c) a shared repertoire (pp. 76-78). Mutual engagement involves regular interactions of the community members within the community and is considered as the basis for the relationships necessary to the functioning of the CoP. A joint enterprise can be defined as “a common endeavor in a process in which to accomplish negotiated goals” through interactions within the community; and a shared repertoire provides coherence in a community through “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83).

Wenger (1998) pointed out that CoPs exist everywhere and people are continuously involved in various communities ranging from formal (e.g. an educational program, workplace) to informal (e.g., church, hobbies) throughout their lives. Furthermore, CoPs do not exist in
isolation from other communities and when an individual actively participates in practices of various communities, no matter if they are past, current, or peripheral, contributes to that individual’s identity development and transformations (Wenger, 1998).

While Wenger (1998) suggested that an individual constructs his/her identity through participation in a CoP, he also pointed out that “identity is shaped by belonging a community but with a unique identity. It depends on engaging in practice but with a unique practice” (p.146). This implies that in a CoP, each individual experiences identity development and transformation differently because each individual’s identity development in the community is also influenced by his or her incoming identities, beliefs, personal history, social experiences and ways of knowing.

The notion of CoP is similar to the concept of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Holland and colleagues (1998) defined a figured world as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). Figured worlds serve are social contexts or communities where individuals make sense of their actions, behaviors, and understandings of themselves. That is, through participation in figured worlds, one conceptualizes and reconceptualizes who s/he is, and develops or changes his/her identity.

Learning and Identity Development. Within the CoP framework, learning is considered as a fundamentally social process (Vygotsky, 1978) and conceptualized as a process of participation in a CoP. From Lave and Wenger’s (1991) perspective, learning is an “integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” and is more than “the ‘transmission’ of knowledge or the ‘acquisition’ of skill” (p. 116). That is, learning is not merely the absorption of already known knowledge or an individual’s efforts to acquire concepts, skills, information or facts in isolation.
Rather, learning occurs when an individual actively participates in practice within the specific sociocultural settings and engages in interactions (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2002).

By highlighting that learning is the fundamental function of CoP and a constant process of identity transformation, Wenger (1998) suggested that “Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity” (p. 215). That is, through learning, an individual constructs and (re)constructs identity, acquire a new identity and thus, becomes a different person. Further, Wenger (1998) discussed learning consists of the four interconnected components, namely: (a) meaning, (b) practice, (c) community, and (d) identity. More specifically, meaning refers to “our ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Practice is defined as “the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” and the notion of community is “the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Identity refers to “how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5).

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation, that constitutes the base of the CoP framework, explains the gradual process whereby novices or newcomers of the community attain mastery of skill and knowledge through social interactions with more competent members or experts of a specific knowledge domain. That is, it is through participation in activities novices gradually assemble a general idea of what constitutes legitimate activity within the particular community and move from the periphery towards full participation in the practices of that particular community. In this process, new members are also
required to adjust their knowledge, skills, or beliefs according to the norms identified by more experienced members in that community.

Wenger (1998) further distinguished between ‘participation’ and ‘nonparticipation’ in the production of identities and suggested “We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in” (p. 164). Even though identities are formed through participation, one may also choose not to participate or not to become full member of a given community. Yet nonparticipation, equal to that of participation, also influences and shapes identity. This to say, both participation and non-participation are important sources of identity-building in a CoP and the constitution of our identities occurs “not only by what we are but also by what we are not” (Wenger, 1998, p. 164).

**Communities of Practice and Teacher Identity.** Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP perspective offers a useful lens to investigate how teachers develop, form and negotiate their teacher identities through reconciling and experiencing participation in a specific CoP and provides a framework to “understand how different forms and trajectories of participation in the community’s core practice can shape the identities formed by teachers” (Tsui, 2011, p. 33).

As discussed above, from the perspective of CoP framework of identity development, one’s identity is constructed through actively participating in a particular community and communicating with other members in that community. In the same manner, teachers develop and reconstruct their identities not in isolation but through various experiences and interacting with others in multiple communities. For instance, in a school setting, all teachers belong to the school community that influences their teacher identities. Yet, in the school community, they can be also members of different discourse communities and CoPs (e.g., elementary teachers, secondary teachers, science teachers, ESL teachers, TFA teachers). Therefore, they might have
different, potentially overlapping identities within each community. Further, each community teachers belong to and/or participate in has a distinctive identity and thus, each community contributes to constructing and shaping teachers’ individual identities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Wenger, 1998).

Within the CoP framework, Wenger (1998) recognized the importance of social context but he also claimed that identity is also related to one’s lived experiences. That is, an individual’s identity is formed by participating in a community. Nonetheless, that individual plays a unique role in that specific community because that individual also belongs to multiple other discourses or CoPs in his/her personal life that influences his/her identity development in that particular community. In light of this perspective, teachers develop and negotiate their identities and understandings through participating and engaging interactions with others in multiple communities (e.g., a classroom, a school, a teacher education program, or professional development networks). Nonetheless, while the CoPs in which teachers participate in influence and shape their identities, their beliefs, knowledge, lived experiences and histories also contribute and influence their identity development and (re)construction in that given community. Therefore, when addressing teacher identity construction, teachers’ personal histories, lived experiences, and the sociocultural contexts in which they are engaged in must be considered.

For Wenger (1998), learning is a matter of identity development. From Wenger’s standpoint, teacher learning takes place when they are actively engaged in interactions with one another. Similar to Wenger, Singh and Richards (2006) also claimed when teachers become a member of a new CoP they do not just learn new content and information yet they also acquire “new practices, values, and ways of thinking which enable particular identities to be realized” (p.
Therefore, for instance, when teachers participate in the activities of communities of teaching profession or professional CoPs such as teacher education program to pursue their Master’s degree or professional development to improve their knowledge or skills in a specific topic, they also develop and grow their professional identities through learning and interacting with the other community members (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger’s (1998) CoP framework provided me with the theoretical framework through which I explored the five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as content area teachers of ELLs in this present study. I employed the CoP framework as one of the theoretical frameworks in this present study to examine the phenomenon of teacher identity because Wenger’s work provides a coherent explanation of social and individual aspects of teacher identity development (Tsui, 2011). Furthermore, Wenger’s work enables the researcher to gain a better understanding of “how different forms and trajectories of participation in the community’s core practice can shape the identities formed by teachers” (Tsui 2011, p. 33).

**Positioning Theory**

Positioning theory, rooted in discursive social psychology and social constructivist paradigms, is a way of analyzing interactions through focusing on the fluidity of *positions* as individuals take different stances in relation to each other as well as working to locate others in specific positions during verbal or non-verbal interactions (Davies & Harré, 1999; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Positioning theory first began to emerge from Hollway’s (1984) work the 1980s. In the 1990s, social psychologists Harré and van Langenhove took up positioning theory and have made significant contributions to its development until today (Davies & Harré, 1999; Harré & Slocum, 2003; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).
Harré and van Langenhove (1991) defined positioning theory as “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (p. 1) and they defined the notion of position as “the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person’s actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific location” (p. 395). Positioning, then, reflects the way a person locates him-/herself in any given socio-communicative context.

It is important to clarify that from the perspective of positioning theory, there is a difference between the concepts of roles and positions. The concept position is a more dynamic alternative than role. Due to the dynamic nature of positions, people might take up various positions at particular contexts. Positions are fluid, defeasible, situation specific, always changing within discourses among individuals, and constantly being negotiated (Harré & Slocum, 2003; Taylor, Bougie & Caouette, 2003). Further, how one positions him-/herself or is positioned by others in a given context might result in the negotiation of new positions. On the other hand, the concept of role represents “a set of constraints and requirements” (Harré & Slocum, 2003, p. 32). For instance, in classroom discourse, simply analyzing and focusing on the roles such as teacher and student does not provide a deeper understanding of multiple positions and identities of participants within classroom discourse (Collins 2011). To label the participants simply as teacher and student is to force the participants into strict roles that might have little to do with their shifting positions in the flow of the conversations (Collins, 2011).

According to van Langenhove and Harré (1999), there are different modes of positioning, including among others, first-order and second-order positioning, self and other positioning. First order positioning can be reflexive, that is, taking on a position for oneself, while interactive positioning, can be defined as assigning a position or positions to other(s). This present study
focuses on first order positioning to investigate how teachers position themselves in relation to ELLs and how their reflexive positionings influence their identities as teachers of ELLs.

Drawing on a sociocultural view of identity, positioning theory recognizes that identity is in constant flux, open to potential change and constructed in social contexts. Positioning theory is a way to understand the process through which people “are placed into different identities (roles, categories, storylines) through situated interactions, and the way in which they respond by taking up the identity” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.744). Wortham (2004) further claimed that positioning is “an event of identification, in which a recognizable category of identity gets explicitly or implicitly applied to an individual in an event that takes place across seconds, minutes, or hours” (p. 166). Positioning is the dynamic construction of identities and people expose who they are in social interactions (Davies & Harré, 1990). As people reveal their identity in their interactions with others, analyzing one’s interactions and positionings within a specific socio-communicative context can reveal how that identity is constructed or shaped through interactions in those contexts.

According to Harré and Moghaddam (2003), a person has a degree of agency in how s/he positions him-/herself because of the dynamic and shifting nature of positions. Nonetheless, positions, as well as identities, might be facilitated or constrained by others and the context within which they are negotiated. As Harré and van Langenhove (1999) underlined “if someone is positioned as incompetent in a certain field of endeavor they will not be accorded the right to contribute to discussions in that field” (p. 1). In the same way, exploring positionings of teachers and students in classroom contexts can provide a deeper understanding of power relations and students’ participatory behaviors in classrooms. For example, Miller (2000) discussed the issues identity and power by conducting studies of a number of Asian ELL students at an Australian
high school. Some of the ELL students rejected to participate in classroom discussions because of their different accent that was not recognized as legitimate under the dominant power. The dominant mainstream students did not talk to the ELL students and did not recognize and accept them as legitimate group members in the classroom (Gee, 1996). As a result, the Asian ELL students were marginalized, positioned as ‘outsiders’ and thus, they did not participate in classroom activities and chose to remain silent in the classroom (Miller, 2000).

Positioning theory offers a useful complement to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP framework. Both of the theoretical frameworks recognize that identity is a dynamic, ongoing construct and is socially constructed and affected by interactions within communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In particular, the question of positioning is important when focusing on the topic of teacher identity development in relation to ELLs because positioning theory implies that teachers’ reflexive positionings impact their instructional decisions, behaviors, teaching practices and interactions with ELLs in their classrooms. In addition, the positional identities of teachers of ELLs might enhance or restrict ELLs’ learning, academic achievement as well as identity formation (Reeves, 2009; Yoon, 2008). In this respect, adopting positioning theory as one of the theoretical frameworks of this study enabled me, as a researcher, to better understand how TFA teachers’ reflexive positionings impacted their TESL course experiences and informed their teacher identities as content-area teachers of ELLs.

**Teach for America Program**

**Introduction of the Program.** TFA is a non-profit alternative teaching certification program that has prepared thousands of new teachers, also referred to as corps members, for more than 25 years to teach in low-income minority areas each year (www.teachforamerica.org, 2016). TFA was founded by Wendy Kopp in 1989 to produce a corps of teachers to work with
disadvantaged students in under resourced schools in the United States (Kopp, 2003). The mission of TFA is “enlist, develop, and mobilize as many as possible of our nation’s most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence” (www.teachforamerica.org, 2016). To accomplish its mission, TFA purposefully recruits and prepares academically talented college seniors and recent graduates around the nation who come from a wide variety of education disciplines. The recruited TFA teachers commit to teaching for at least two years in the nation’s most challenging urban and rural schools (www.teachforamerica.org, 2016).

As one of the most widely recognized alternative teaching certification program and largest provider of the nation’s teachers to low-income communities in the U.S., TFA has grown substantially since its inception. Whereas in its first year, TFA placed 500 teachers in underperforming schools across the nation, in the 2013-2014 school year, TFA had more than 11,000 teachers in 50 regions of the U.S. (www.teachforamerica.org, 2016). According to the data of National Education Policy Center [NEPC] 2014, Texas has the most TFA corps members at 1,206 in the field, followed by California, 782 TFA teachers, and New York, 688 TFA teachers. Additionally, the states with the largest growth of number of TFA teachers since 2010 are as follows: Oklahoma (320%), Tennessee (242%), Wisconsin 211% and Nevada (176%) (Heilig & Jez, 2014).

It is also worthy to note that in 2007, TFA expanded internationally with the birth of Teach for All. Teach for All was founded through a collaboration of TFA and has brought the TFA model of recruiting, selecting and training teachers in more than 40 countries, including Germany, France, Argentina and New Zealand.
Recruitment and Selection. On its website, TFA writes it recruits individuals “who have both the skills and passion to be lifelong leaders in the fight to give all kids an excellent education” (www.teachforamerica.org, 2016). More specifically, Farr (2010) stated that TFA recruits highly qualified individuals “who have the skills and commitment to make an impact on the academic prospects of students growing up in low-income communities and to exert long-term leadership in the effort to eliminate educational inequity” (p. 273). Therefore, the TFA organization is highly selective. For instance, for the 2015-2016 school year, TFA received more than 44,100 applications yet fewer than 15% of its applicants earned acceptance to the 2015 corps (www.teachforamerica.org, 2016).

TFA also emphasizes that diversity is one of the TFA organization’s core values. Thus, the organization aims to recruit those individuals who share the racial and socioeconomic background of the students they serve (Farr, 2010). According to the TFA website, most half of the 2015 corps are people of color; including 20% African American and 15% Hispanic. Additionally, 47% of the 2015 corps are from a low-income background and 34% are the first in their family to attend college.

In order to select its corps members, TFA employs a rigorous selection process that involves multiple rounds of interviews and screening. The selection process begins with a review of candidates’ online applications and followed by telephone interviews. The candidates also attend a day-long in-person final interviews in which they demonstrate their strengths in a five-minute sample teaching lesson, group discussions, problem solving activities and one-to-one conversations with TFA selectors (Farr, 2010). Once accepted, new TFA teachers must attend a five-week summer training program and successfully complete the training before they are placed as teachers in school districts.
**TFA Summer Institute.** Prior to entering the profession, all newly recruited TFA teachers are required to participate in a five-week summer training program, also referred to as the TFA summer institute, conducted in 17 different regions across the U.S. The summer institute curriculum focuses on the fundamentals of teaching and practice instructional techniques to prepare novice TFA teachers for classroom instruction. An outline of the TFA organization’s five-week summer training program is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: TFA Summer Institute Curriculum (2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coursework</th>
<th>Description of Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching as Leadership</td>
<td>Focuses on the principles that teachers employ to guide students to be academically successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instructional Planning and Delivery</td>
<td>Presents a standard-based approach to teaching and guides TFA teachers in lesson planning, assessing students, and delivering instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Investment, Classroom Management, and Culture</td>
<td>Aims to teach TFA teachers how to establish a culture of achievement in their classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diversity, Commitment and Achievement</td>
<td>Aims to develop the mindsets and skills needed for TFA teachers to develop relationships and work successfully with diverse students in the schools where they will be assigned to teach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Literacy Development</td>
<td>Focuses on teaching literacy skills to students across grade levels and content areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from https://www.teachforamerica.org/teach-with-tfa/your-training-and-support

**Teach for America Summer Training Components.** In addition to the TFA summer institute curriculum, newly recruited TFA teachers are engaged in many different teacher training activities during their five-week summer training before entering their classrooms in their placement schools. The TFA organization’s summer teacher training activities are summarized in Table 2 below.
Table 2: TFA Components of Summer Training (2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Component</th>
<th>Description of Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching Summer School</td>
<td>TFA teachers teach two or more hours each day observed by veteran TFA teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Observations and Feedback</td>
<td>TFA instructional coaches observe newly recruited TFA teachers and provide feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rehearsal and Reflection</td>
<td>TFA teachers meet with fellow TFA corps members in small groups to practice teaching lessons; discuss feedback etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lesson Planning Clinics</td>
<td>TFA teachers receive instruction about planning their lessons from instructional coaches. They are taught how to internalize student-learning objectives and design their lesson plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum Sessions</td>
<td>TFA teachers study the fundamentals of teaching and practice, teaching methods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from https://www.teachforamerica.org/teach-with-tfa/your-training-and-support

**Teach for America Training and English Language Learner Instruction.** As novice teachers, TFA teachers are often assigned to teach in low-income and high minority schools (Hopkins & Heineke, 2013). In the U.S., the majority of ELLs are students in low-income schools where TFA teachers are more likely to be employed (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010; Schoon & Sandoval, 2000). However, TFA has been criticized for its inadequate training related to ELL instruction (Heineke & Cameron, 2013). According to Hopkins and Heineke (2013), during the coursework titled “Instructional Planning and Delivery”, ELLs are discussed only in a six-page portion of a standalone chapter that introduces differentiation strategies for students with special needs and ELLs. Furthermore, Hopkins and Heineke (2013) claimed that the only preparation for newly recruited TFA teachers regarding teaching ELLs falls in one-and-a-half-hour training session that are taught by TFA institute members who do not have any specialized training or
expertise related to teaching ELLs. In addition, during this session, only “one-size-fits-all
tactics for teaching ELLs” are introduced without focusing on issues such as language
acquisition process, development theories, language and content integration strategies or cultural,
linguistic, social and academic needs of ELLs (Hopkins & Heineke, 2013, p. 24). Hopkins and
Heineke (2013) criticized TFA’s one-and-a-half-hour stand-alone session related to ELLs and
argued the session is “disconnected from training related to general teaching practices and
contrasts with the extant research literature on ELL teacher preparation” (p. 25). New TFA
teachers begin teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms without having adequate knowledge
and understanding of language acquisition theory or pedagogy in order to provide linguistically
responsive teaching to their ELL students in mainstream (Hopkins & Heineke, 2013).

**Placement of New TFA Teachers.** After attending an intensive summer institute, TFA
teachers are assigned to teach in high minority schools across the country by the TFA
organization. When new TFA teachers begin teaching in their placement schools, they become
teachers of record; in other words, they become a full-time, salaried employee of their school
district with sole responsibility for classroom instruction. During their two-year teaching
commitment, TFA teachers participate in training sessions through their TFA regional offices.
They attend regularly scheduled professional development opportunities such as seminars,
workshops, and graduate courses in order to be a successful teacher in low-income schools.
Additionally, during their two-year obligation to TFA, novice TFA teachers are partnered with a
TFA coach or supervisor, also referred as a Manager of Teacher Leadership Development
(MTLD) by the TFA organization. MTLDs work for the TFA organization and they have
minimum of two years of classroom teaching experience in a low-income community. MTLDs
generally work with a cohort of 20 novice TFA teachers and they are responsible for supporting
novice TFA teachers and provide them with professional feedback and mentoring. In some states, novice TFA teachers enroll university-based alternative licensure programs to receive their educator license or an educator license with a Master’s degree.

**Research on Teach for America Teachers**

Research on TFA (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005; Decker, Mayer & Glazerman, 2004; Heilig & Jez, 2014; Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, 2008; Laczko-Kerr, & Berliner, 2002; Xu, Hannaway & Taylor, 2011) has generally focused on the effectiveness of TFA teachers. Findings of the existing research regarding the efficacy of TFA teachers are mixed and contradictory. Whereas some research findings (e.g., Decker et al. 2004; Xu et al. 2011) have revealed that TFA teachers have positive or neutral effects on student achievement in comparison to their non-TFA peers, other research findings (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al. 2005; Heilig & Jez, 2014; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner 2002) have revealed the opposite. The findings of some of these studies are described below.

**Impact of Teach for America Teachers on Student Achievement.** The Mathematica study conducted by Decker, Mayer, and Glazerman (2004) investigated the achievement of students who were taught by TFA teachers versus students taught by non-TFA teachers. The researchers collected data from 17 schools in six regions of the U.S. In the study, students in elementary grades were randomly assigned to classrooms taught by TFA and non-TFA teachers. The researchers used the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in order to assess students’ knowledge of math and reading in the 2002-2003 school year. The results of the study revealed that students taught by TFA teachers outperformed those students taught by non-TFA teachers based on mathematic assessment scores. Findings, however, revealed that there were no significant differences between TFA and non TFA teachers’ student achievements in reading. Decker and
colleagues (2004) stated that “the most important question this study addressed is whether students taught by TFA teachers performed at least as well on achievement tests as students taught by other teachers, and we found that they did” (p. 29).

A more recent study conducted by Xu, Hannaway and Taylor (2011) in North Carolina also revealed similar findings. Xu and colleagues (2011) investigated the relationship between TFA and student outcomes in North Carolina high schools. In the study, the researchers used subject-specific end-of-course exams of high school students for the 2000-2001 through 2006-2007 school years as data (Xu et al., 2011). Findings revealed that TFA teachers have a positive effect on students’ standardized test scores compared to traditionally certified teachers, specifically in science and math areas (Xu et al., 2011). Even though the findings of the study revealed TFA teachers are more effective compared to traditionally certified teachers, the researchers concluded the study by highlighting the importance of teacher training and pointed out that “We should note that the findings here do not necessarily mean that there is no value to teacher training. It is possible that the teachers that TFA recruits and selects would be even more effective with more pedagogical training” (Xu et al., 2011, p. 466).

Other researchers (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al. 2005; Heilig & Jez, 2014; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner 2002) as proponents of traditional teacher certification have criticized alternative teacher certification programs, particularly TFA, for failing to prepare teachers to succeed in classrooms and highlighted the ineffectiveness of alternatively certificated teachers, including TFA teachers. For instance, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) compared the Stanford Nine (SAT 9) achievement test scores of students, grades three to eight, taught by TFA teachers, other “under-certified” teachers and traditionally certified teachers in five low-income school districts in Arizona. Results revealed that students of traditionally certified teachers outperformed
students of under-certified teachers, including TFA teachers, on math, reading and language arts tests (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). The researchers concluded that TFA teachers were less effective compared to traditionally certified teachers and not significantly different than other under-certified teachers (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Findings of the study might be problematic in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of TFA teachers in comparison with traditionally certified teachers (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). In the study, the researchers (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002) did not control for teachers’ years of experience in teaching. It might be possible that traditionally certified teachers might have more years of teaching experience compared to TFA teachers in the study that could impact the academic achievement scores of students.

Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2005) examined the effects of teacher preparation of 4,408 teachers on academic achievement of 132,071 students by analyzing student achievement data from three different standardized tests from 1996 -2002. Findings revealed that TFA teachers are less effective compared to traditionally certified, experienced teachers. However, results also revealed that TFA teachers are slightly more effective than other novice teachers. Further, on two standardized tests, results revealed that TFA teachers had a negative impact on student academic scores in math and reading. Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2005) concluded that there is a direct correlation between the amount of teacher preparation and teacher effectiveness.

Some of the existing research on the effectiveness of TFA teachers has revealed that TFA teachers seem to have a more positive effect on students’ outcomes in math and science areas, and less on reading and language arts. On the other hand, some other quantitative studies have proclaimed the negative student outcomes produced by TFA teachers. The review of the
literature on the effectiveness of TFA teachers on student academic outcomes indicates that more research needs to be conducted to conclusively determine the effectiveness of TFA teachers versus traditionally certified teachers.

**Research on TFA Teachers and English Language Learners.** Even though TFA teachers generally work in minority high schools that have the highest ELL populations in the United States (Hopkins & Heineke, 2013), there is a considerable gap on the topic of TFA teachers of ELLs. As described in the previous section, a number of quantitative research studies have examined the effectiveness of TFA teachers through the lens of standardized testing outcomes. However, although TFA teachers are an important sub-set of mainstream teachers in today’s K-12 schools, very little is known about TFA teachers as teachers of ELLs. In fact, only one qualitative study (Zannou, 2012) has focused on experiences of alternatively certified teachers of ELLs, and in TFA literature, one study, conducted by Heineke and Cameron (2013), has specifically focused on TFA teachers as teachers of ELLs. Both studies are described below.

A study conducted by Heineke and Camaron (2013) examined how TFA teachers interacted with language policy and practice in the English language development (ELD) classrooms in the Phoenix metropolitan area, Arizona. Heineke and Camaron (2013) surveyed and interviewed seven TFA teachers of ELLs. The participants reflected on their five-week TFA summer training related to ELLs and addressed their lack of knowledge and qualifications for working with ELLs. TFA teachers also shared that they faced some challenges as teachers of ELLs in ELD classrooms and positioned themselves as unprepared novice teachers (Heineke & Camaron, 2013). Even though the findings of Heineke and Camaron’s (2013) study documented that TFA teachers feel unprepared to teach ELLs, the authors did not explore TFA teachers’ experiences and challenges as teachers of ELLs in detail in the study.
The qualitative study, a dissertation by Zannou (2012), examined ELL-related teaching and learning experiences of four science teachers from an alternatively certification program, Texas Teaching Fellows, in Texas. Zannou (2012) collected data through in-depth interviews and reflective interviews and classroom observations. Findings revealed that the teachers held positive beliefs regarding teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms but also believed that “just good teaching” is enough to support the learning of ELLs (de Jong & Harper, 2005). In addition, the researcher observed that the teachers did not make any language specific accommodations for their ELLs in their classrooms. The participants of the study also indicated that the need for additional training in ELL instruction and perceived district support as unhelpful or incomplete (Zannou, 2012).

The review of literature on TFA teachers specified some gaps and clearly revealed that very little empirical research has moved beyond investigating the effectiveness of TFA teachers on student outcomes in comparison to non-TFA teachers in the field. Given the fact that more and more teachers enter the profession through alternative preparation program, such as TFA, and are generally assigned to teach at schools with high ELL populations in the nation, it is necessary to examine how alternatively certified novice teachers develop their teacher identities in relation to ELLs. However, the reviewed literature indicated that none of the research studies to date have been specifically focused on TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs. This gap creates an opportunity for my study to contribute to the literature. Hence, my study aims to address the gap by investigating in what ways TFA teachers develop their teacher identities in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long TESL course. Further, my study aims to identify primary considerations influencing TFA teachers’ teacher identities as novice teachers of ELLs.
Mainstream Teachers of English Language Learners

The majority of ELLs spend all or most of their school day in English-only classrooms taught by mainstream teachers. The term mainstream teachers, also referred as content area teachers, can be defined as those teachers who teach grade levels or one or more traditional content areas, such as English language arts, science, mathematics, social studies in English-only classrooms in K-12 schools (Pettit, 2011). After a five-week summer institute, TFA corps members are generally assigned to teach grade levels or content areas in K-12 mainstream classrooms in schools with a high number of minority students, including ELLs (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010; Hopkins & Heineke, 2013). Yet, as discussed in the previous sections, much of the existing research (e.g., Decker et al., 2004; Xu et al., 2011) on TFA teachers mainly focused on the effectiveness of TFA teachers compared to traditionally certified teachers. In the literature, there is very little research on the topic of TFA teachers as teachers of ELL. Because TFA teachers are a subset of K-12 mainstream teachers of ELLs and literature on the topic of TFA teachers as teachers of ELLs is scarce, in the following sections, the literature on mainstream teachers of ELLs is presented and TFA teachers is discussed within the context of mainstream ELL. The literature on mainstream teachers of ELLs is divided in the following three main strands: (1) mainstream teacher beliefs about the teaching of ELLs, (2) mainstream teacher knowledge of ELL education, and (3) teacher identity and teaching ELLs.

Furthermore, according to Lucas and Grinberg (2008), educating ELLs is a unique endeavor. Therefore, it must be distinguished from educating diverse students. Keeping this in mind, in the following sections, literature specifically focused on ELL students and mainstream teachers of ELLs are reviewed. The research studies focused on culturally or ethnically diverse students and/or examined teachers of culturally/ethnically diverse students were not included.
For the purpose of this review, multiple sources of information including books, professional journals, periodicals and the electronic search engines such as Education Resources Information Center [ERIC], PsycINFO, and SocINDEX were utilized. In addition, a number of additional sources were consulted, including such as data from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), Migration Policy Institute (MPI), and research resources from the National Center for English Language Acquisition (NCELA). To locate the relevant research studies, keyword searches were performed including terms such as: “teacher beliefs” AND “ELLs”, “teacher knowledge” AND “second language teaching”, “teacher knowledge” AND “second language acquisition”, “mainstream teachers” AND “ELLs”, and “teacher identity” AND “teaching ELLs”. In general, the articles were selected for the review based on the following criteria: The reviewed articles were (a) relevant to the research topic, that is, focus on mainstream teacher population of K-12 and ELL students, and (b) peer-reviewed with a full text. In addition, given the vital role of sociopolitical contexts in teaching ELLs in mainstream, the research studies that have been carried out within the United States and after the passage of NCLB in 2001 were included in the review.

**Teacher Beliefs about the Teaching of English Language Learners**

There is a considerable agreement among scholars that teacher beliefs affect teachers’ both perceptions and judgments and these, in turn, inform teachers’ behavior, instructional decisions and pedagogical practices in classroom (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Nespor 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). Given the importance of teacher beliefs in teaching and student learning, the topic of teacher beliefs has been the focus of many educational research studies in the literature. In the general education field, many scholars have researched teacher beliefs in terms of pre-service teachers (e.g. Pajares, 1992; Lasley, 1980; Richardson,
teachers’ sense of self-efficacy (Czerniak & Schriver, 1994; Kagan, 1992) and teachers’ content specific beliefs (Cronin, 1991; Lumpe, Haney & Czerniak, 1998). Additionally, in the field of language teaching, the literature pertaining to ESL or EFL teacher beliefs and attitudes regarding teaching ESL or EFL students is considerable. However, there is a noticeable gap in research pertaining to mainstream teachers’ beliefs about teaching ELLs in regular general education classrooms (Lucas, Villegas & Martin, 2015; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013, Reeves, 2006).

In the U.S. the majority of teachers are White, female, middle class, and monolingual speakers of the English language (Nieto, 2001). Their beliefs about second and/or foreign learning and teaching are generally informed by their personal experiences in White, middle class contexts and teachers often rely on their own system of beliefs and knowledge about SLA and educating ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The beliefs teachers possess about ELLs and SLA have strong implications for ELLs’ academic achievement and play a significant role in the quality of instruction delivered in the mainstream classroom (Pettit, 2011; Tellez & Waxman, 2006). Furthermore, given the fact that the majority of ELLs are representatives of less powerful, economic, racial and ethnic groups that are different from the assumed mainstream norm, ELLs might be more recipient of negative teacher beliefs in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, specific to the education of ELLs, teachers’ beliefs are deemed significant and demand serious scrutiny (Lucas et al., 2015).

Reeves (2006) examined mainstream teachers’ attitudes toward ELL inclusion and accompanying modifications of coursework for ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Reeves developed a Likert-type survey instrument due to a lack of relevant surveys that addressed the focus of her study. Participants of the study were 279 secondary teachers from a Southeastern
school district. The participant teachers were primarily female (61%) and native-English
speakers (98%); in addition, among all participants the median teaching experience was 14.5
years. The researcher (Reeves, 2016) found while most mainstream teachers indicated positive
beliefs about ELL inclusion and welcomed ELLs into their classes, they were resistant to work
with ELLs with low levels of proficiency in English. Reeves (2006) also found that
approximately 78% of the teachers had experience with ELL inclusion at some point in their
careers but the majority (90%) had not received adequate training to work with ELLs.
Interestingly, although the teachers in the study felt untrained to work with ELLs, they
demonstrated ambivalence toward participating in professional development specific to teaching
ELLs. Additionally, Reeves (2006) found that most of the teachers viewed ELL inclusion
positively but they also expressed the belief that ELLs should not be included in mainstream
classrooms until they had acquired a minimum level of proficiency in English. Regarding ELL
coursework modification, of the 217 participants, 66% of participants indicated that teachers
should not alter instruction for ELLs. According to Reeves (2006), the inconsistency in teacher
attitudes toward inclusion and the modification of coursework might be linked to a teachers’
sense of educational equity. In addition, teachers’ attitudes toward professional development
might be because of the belief that ESL or bilingual teachers are mainly responsible for
instructing ELLs, past experience with poor quality professional development, or the
misconception that no specific professional development is necessary to teach ELLs (Reeves,
2006).

Reeves (2006) pointed out that given the growth in the ELL population, all teachers of
ELLs should receive a basic foundation of SLA models and specialized ELL training. The
findings of Reeves’s (2006) study provide empirical evidence that mainstream teachers had
inaccurate beliefs about the process of SLA. For instance, most teachers (72%) believed that ELLs should be able to acquire the English language within two years of enrolling in U.S. schools. In reality, it takes five to ten years for ELLs to become comparably proficient to their native English-speaking counterparts (Cummins, 2000). In addition, contrary to research studies that evidence that using the first language can facilitate SL learning and enhance ELLs’ language proficiency (Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 2003), the teachers of the study believed that ELLs should not use their first languages at school because it may hinder SLA process.

In another quantitative study, Karabenick and Noda (2004) explored mainstream teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, practices and needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Participants of the study were 729 teachers in a Midwestern suburban school district and data were collected through a Likert scale survey that included seventy-eight questions related to teachers’ experience with ELL students. Survey findings revealed that teachers had inaccurate beliefs and misperceptions about SL learning. Findings of the study also revealed that those teachers who are familiar with SLA process held more positive attitudes toward ELLs in comparison to those who lack knowledge in the SLA research. Furthermore, the teachers with more positive beliefs about ELLs favored bilingualism and bilingual education and indicated the belief that ELL’s home language proficiency promotes academic performance and does not impede the acquisition of the SL. Karabenick and Noda (2004) suggested that mainstream teachers should have knowledge of SLA theory and an understanding of the differences between social and academic English language proficiency in order to teach ELLs effectively in mainstream classrooms.

Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll (2005) studied teachers’ beliefs about the challenges of teaching ELLs in mainstream in California. Gandara and colleagues (2005) surveyed 5,300 teachers in 22 different school districts in the spring of 2004 in California. They
identified the following five challenges faced by teachers with regard to educating ELLs in their study: communication with ELLs and ELLs’ families, insufficient time to teach ELLs both English and academic subjects simultaneously, the multiple English proficiency levels and academic levels among ELLs, lack of appropriate tools such as textbooks and other materials, and lack of adequate support from the school and district (Gandara et al., 2005). Some of these challenges were also echoed by the findings of Reeves (2006) and Batt (2008). The majority of teachers in a study conducted by Reeves (2006) also reported that they did not have sufficient time to deal with the academic needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Similarly, the findings of Batt’s (2008) study also revealed that insufficient time was one of the challenges of teachers of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Additionally, Batt found that insufficient number of ESL and bilingual educators was another challenge faced by mainstream teachers of ELLs.

In the ELL literature, there is evidence that teachers who had teacher training specific to teaching ELLs and background experience with SL demonstrate attitudes and beliefs that inform their teaching with ELLs. García-Nevarez, Stafford and Arias (2005) explored the beliefs and attitudes of 152 elementary teachers who held three different types of teaching certifications: bilingual, mainstream education, and ESL in Arizona regarding the use of their ELL students’ home languages (e.g., Spanish) in the classroom. In the study, the researchers (García-Nevarez, Stafford & Arias, 2005) utilized surveys and focus-group interviews to collect data. The researchers found that participants’ beliefs differed by type of certification, length of time in the teaching profession, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Findings indicated Latino and bilingual teachers and those teachers who had certification in bilingual education generally held more positive attitudes toward ELLs’ home languages (García-Nevarez, Stafford & Arias, 2005). While ESL teachers were more supportive toward the use of ELLs’ home languages compared to
mainstream teachers, their scores on the language attitude survey were not significantly different from the mainstream teachers’ attitudes. This study (García-Nevarez, Stafford & Arias, 2005) confirmed the recommendation of Flores and Smith (2009) that teachers of ELLs should have some SL proficiency to understand ELLs’ linguistic challenges and address their academic needs in mainstream classrooms.

To sum up, the existing literature indicates that the majority of mainstream teachers hold deficit beliefs and misconceptions about how second languages are acquired (Gandara et al., 2005; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Reeves, 2006). The literature also reveals general educational experiences, specialized training in SLA or ELL issues, proficiency in a language other than English, background experiences and contact with linguistic minority communities influence mainstream teachers’ beliefs and attitudes regarding working with ELLs (García-Nevarez et al., 2005). In addition, a review of the existing literature reveals that there is an overall lack of empirical research examining mainstream teachers’ beliefs regarding ELLs and the SLA process and more research is needed in this area (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Lucas et al., 2015; Pettit, 2011; Reeves, 2006). More specifically, the review of existing literature indicated that most of the empirical studies that examined attitudes and/or beliefs of mainstream teachers of ELLs utilized quantitative research methods to collect data. Even though using quantitative methods such as questionnaires or surveys to understand teacher beliefs about ELLs can provide useful knowledge as a starting point, these methods are not sufficient for understanding the meanings behind participants’ responses (Pettit, 2011). Utilizing various methods of analysis in qualitative research could strengthen this body of literature and provide a better understanding of teachers’ beliefs, attitudes regarding ELLs and challenges of being a mainstream teacher of an ELL student. For the purpose of addressing this issue, my study employs case study to identify TFA
teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, challenges and misconceptions with respect to working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Mainstream Teacher Knowledge of ELL Education

With the increase of ELLs in mainstream classrooms, general education teachers are charged with the responsibility of meeting the learning needs of this group of students. However, as also discussed above, several studies revealed that the majority of teachers lack the specific knowledge about the process of SLA and specialized skills to provide effective instruction for ELLs within a content area in classroom settings (Batt, 2008; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Lucas, Villegas & Gonzalez, 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). This is not surprising given the fact that throughout the years, in teacher preparation, most of the attention has been devoted to preparing ESL and bilingual certified specialists to instruct ELLs rather than mainstream teachers (Lucas et al., 2008).

In addition to a lack of specialized knowledge and skills to teach ELLs, the majority of inservice teachers and teacher candidates are monolingual speakers of the English language and therefore, they do not have the experiential knowledge coming from being proficient in a second or foreign language (Lucas et. al, 2008). Accordingly, most mainstream teachers report that they do not feel well-prepared to handle the growing linguistic and academic needs of ELLs in their classrooms (Batt, 2008; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; O’Neal, Ringler, & Rodriguez, 2008; Reeves, 2006; Waxman & Tellez, 2002) and need professional development specific to teaching ELLs (Batt, 2008). For example, the findings of Batt’s (2008) mixed methods study of 161 teachers revealed that teachers who had ELLs in their classrooms were underprepared to work with linguistically diverse students. The teachers in the study felt that they were inadequately trained to effectively instruct ELLs. In addition, they reported that there was not
enough ESL and bilingual educators in their schools to help regarding teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Other researchers (e.g., Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Reeves, 2006) found that teachers might hold false assumptions and misconceptions about the process of SLA and effective ways of instructing ELLs. Due to a lack of specific knowledge about SLA processes, teachers mostly rely on their own knowledge, experiences and beliefs about second language learning and teaching. For instance, Reeves (2006) found that teachers expect ELLs to acquire the English language within two years and assume the use of ELLs’ native language at home might interfere with acquisition of English. Yet, unlike the findings of Batt’s (2008) study, the respondents of Reeves’s study were ambivalent about participating in professional development.

**What Teachers of ELLs Need to Know.** de Jong and Harper (2005) pointed out that it is essential for mainstream teachers to understand the complex nature of the SLA process. According to de Jong and Harper (2005), there is a general misconception that the instructional techniques used for teaching ELLs are techniques that are “just good teaching” for all students (p.102). However, unlike their native-English speaking peers, ELLs must learn academic content in the different subject areas (e.g., math, science, history) and develop proficiency in the English language simultaneously in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, although good teaching strategies developed for those native-English speaking students could be effective for ELLs, only using some good teaching strategies are not sufficient for those students who are in the process of acquiring academic language proficiency (Duff, 2001; Harper & de Jong, 2004). According to de Jong and Harper (2005), mainstream teachers must understand (a) the process of SLA, (b) how language and culture is a medium of teaching and learning, and (c) the need to set language and cultural objectives in addition to content ones.
Fillmore and Snow (2000) also argued that all teachers, not only ESL teachers, need a thorough understanding of the role that language plays in education in order to promote language and literacy of ELLs in their classrooms. According to Fillmore and Snow (2000), all teaching is mediated by language and all teachers are language teachers. Therefore, teachers must gain a solid understanding of basic linguistic structure, theoretical knowledge of first language acquisition and SLA to meet ELLs’ specific linguistic needs.

**Linguistically Responsive Teaching.** Lucas and Villegas (2011) outlined the knowledge and orientations that characterize linguistically responsive teachers and proposed the linguistically responsive teaching (LRT) framework. The LRT framework that incorporates the general understandings of SLA process and sociocultural theory includes the following seven main components: (a) developing sociolinguistic consciousness, (b) valuing linguistic diversity, (c) advocating for ELLs, (d) learning about ELLs’ language backgrounds, experiences, and proficiencies, (e) identifying the language demands of classroom discourse and tasks, (f) applying key principles of SL learning, and (g) scaffolding instruction to promote ELLs’ learning (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

The first three components are the orientations or “inclinations or tendencies toward particular ideas and actions, influenced by attitudes and beliefs” (Lucas & Villegas, 2011, p. 56) and the last four components detail four types of language knowledge and skills for linguistically responsive teaching.

Developing sociolinguistic consciousness is the first component of LRT framework and entails an understanding and awareness of the interrelatedness of language, culture and identity and the sociopolitical dimensions of language use and instruction. According to Lucas and Villegas (2011), teachers of ELLs must be sociolinguistically conscious in order to be
linguistically responsive teachers. This means that teachers of ELLs must understand that language and identity are closely entwined and take ELLs’ linguistic knowledge and backgrounds into account in their pedagogy to help ELLs become bilingual and bicultural. In addition, teachers should have an understanding and awareness of the sociopolitical dimensions of language. That is, teachers need to be aware of how languages are tied to sociopolitical contexts such that “the language of wealthy and powerful groups come to be seen as superior to the languages of poor and powerless groups” (Lucas & Villegas, 2013, p. 103).

The second component of the LRT framework is valuing linguistic diversity (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Lucas and Villegas (2011) claimed that those teachers who value linguistic diversity do not perceive ELLs as linguistically deficient but show respect for ELLs’ native languages and encourage them to use their native languages and continue to develop literacy skills both in their native languages and English. Furthermore, Lucas and Villegas (2011) stated that teachers who value linguistic diversity of their ELLs and who have developed sociolinguistic and sociopolitical consciousness advocate for the academic and linguistic needs of their ELLs; that is, the third component of the LRT framework.

Regarding the pedagogical knowledge and skills of linguistically responsive teacher, Lucas and Villegas (2011) incorporated the work of SL researchers, theorists and scholars such as Krashen (1985), Cummins (2000), Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2010), and delineated the specific knowledge teachers of ELLs must possess in order to effectively instruct ELLs in their classrooms.

Learning about ELL students’ language backgrounds is the fourth component of Lucas and Villegas’ (2011) LRT framework. ELLs are not a homogenous group and they differ in terms of their oral proficiency and literacy in both English and their home language(s) and prior
knowledge of and experiences with the content-area. Therefore, Lucas and Villegas (2011) suggested that teachers of ELLs must learn about their ELLs’ academic backgrounds as well as their linguistic and academic competence in their native languages because all of these factors play a significant role in ELLs’ academic achievement in learning academic content in English. According to Lucas and Villegas (2011), learning about their ELLs’ language and schooling backgrounds also helps teachers develop understanding regarding the aspects of learning tasks that might be challenging for ELLs. This is related to the fifth component of the LRT framework; that is, identifying the language demands of classroom tasks (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

The sixth component of the LRT framework focuses on teachers’ understandings of the difference between conversational and academic language proficiency. ELLs develop basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) two years after initial exposure whereas it takes between five to seven years for ELLs to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 2000). Given the possible conversational language proficiency of the ELLs in their class as teachers might mistakenly assume that ELLs are academically capable of doing the academic tasks. Teachers of ELLs should know and understand ELLs who are proficient in BICS still need support for academic tasks that require CALP and employ appropriate instructional strategies to help ELLs master academic language in the SL.

The final component of the LRT is scaffolding instruction. Scaffolding is rooted in Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development and refers to “the metaphorical space in which a learner can accomplish, with the assistance of a more competent peer, tasks he would not be able to accomplish alone” (Lucas & Villegas, 2011, p. 65). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) also stressed the importance of scaffolding instruction in the language learning process.
Scaffolding instruction is essential to make academic content accessible for learners who are not proficient in the target language. In addition, scaffolding help ELLs expand academic skills and stretch their understanding in the SL (Cummins, 2000; Echeverria et al., 2006; Harper & deJong, 2004; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Therefore, it is essential for teachers to know how to create a variety of scaffolds in their classrooms to help ELLs in the language learning process.

To sum up, a review of research on what teachers need to know to educate ELLs effectively in mainstream classrooms indicates that it is essential for teachers to have knowledge about language, linguistics, the SLA process and SL development (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Teachers of ELLs need to understand that language plays a significant role for academic success of ELLs. Therefore, teachers need to know how to integrate language and content objectives and organize their instruction accordingly (Harper & de Jong, 2004). That is, teachers need to go beyond only providing content knowledge in their classrooms and consider the linguistic development of their ELL students. Specific to teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms, Lucas and Villegas (2011) argued that teachers of ELLs need to have a wide range of language-related knowledge and skills. Yet, they also pointed out teachers need to know more than a set of strategies and theories and outline a comprehensive framework of essential understandings, knowledge, and skills of linguistically responsive teachers. A linguistically responsive teacher, according to Lucas and Villegas (2011), have sociolinguistic consciousness, advocates for ELLs and values linguistic diversity. Although LRT framework delineated the knowledge and orientations that teachers of ELL must possess, there is not much empirical research supporting this framework. Nevertheless, Lucas and Villegas (2011) established the theoretical foundation of linguistically
responsive teacher preparation and proposed a comprehensive two-part framework to prepare future and practising teachers to address the academic needs of the population of ELLs in mainstream. The LRT framework could be used as a frame to develop specific teacher education courses and/or professional development workshops for mainstream teachers of ELLs as it highlights linguistically affirmative orientations and delineates a specific subset of knowledge, skills and teaching practices that address the academic needs of ELLs.

**Teacher Identity and the Teaching English Language Learners**

Varghese and colleagues (2005) claimed that “the teacher plays a huge role in the constitution of classroom practices” and they further noted that “the teacher’s whole identity [is] at play in the classroom” (p.22). Therefore, if we want to understand teachers’ practices and students’ learning, we need to understand teachers’ identities, that is, we need to examine “the professional, cultural, political and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). Although literature on teacher identity is vast, in the teacher identity literature, very little research (e.g., Ajayi, 2011; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Reeves, 2009; Yoon, 2008) has been focused on teacher identity of mainstream teachers of ELLs.

Ajayi’s (2011) qualitative study investigated how teachers’ ethnicity, culture, race and linguistic backgrounds impacted the teacher identities of 57 teachers of ELLs in Los Angeles, California. Ajayi (2011) utilized three instruments to gather data: interviews, a questionnaire, and teachers’ self-written perspectives. Findings of the study indicated that both African American and Hispanic teachers perceived their linguistic and cultural backgrounds as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) with value in their classrooms for linguistically diverse students. Hispanic teachers’ ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds as Spanish speakers shaped their teacher identity as teachers of ELLs and enabled them to draw on ELLs’ linguistic
backgrounds and cultures. In addition, African American teachers’ racial identities served as a source to relate to the marginalized experiences of their ELLs and promoted their commitment to provide equitable instruction. On the other hand, according to Ajayi’s (2011) findings White teachers could not acknowledge how their sociocultural identities informed their teacher identities, instructional practices, and perspectives to teaching ELLs.

Yoon (2008) conducted a collective case study to examine how three classroom teachers’ views of their roles as teachers influenced ELLs’ learning and participatory actions in mainstream classrooms. In her study, through employing the positioning theory as a theoretical lens (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999), Yoon (2008) focused on how teacher behaviors offer or limit opportunities for the ELLs’ participation in classroom activities. The participants of the study were two sixth grade and one seventh grade English language arts teachers. Yoon (2008) collected data through in-depth interviews with three teachers, informal interviews with focal students and extensive classroom observations for three months. The researcher identified that the teachers positioned themselves in three different ways. The first teacher, Mrs. Young, positioned herself as a teacher for all students. The second teacher, Mr. Brown, positioned himself as a teacher for non-ELL students and believed that teaching ELL students was not his responsibility but that of ESL teachers while the third teacher, Mrs. Taylor, positioned herself as a teacher for a single subject. Findings showed that how teachers positioned themselves in relation to ELLs (reflexive positioning) affected the teachers’ teaching practices, pedagogical approaches, and ELLs’ different participatory actions in the classroom. For instance, Mrs. Young who reflexively positioned herself as a teacher for all students provided her ELLs with many learning opportunities and allowed them to be a vital part of the classroom community. In addition, Mrs. Young created positive learning opportunities for the ELLs and encouraged the
students participate in classroom activities. For instance, the teacher invited ELLs to share their cultural experiences with their English-speaking peers and utilized many intentional approaches to help ELLs maintain their culture. Yoon (2008) also observed that in Mrs. Young class, ELLs felt empowered and motivated and participated actively in classroom interactions and activities. On the other hand, the classroom observations of the other two teachers revealed that the teachers did not play an active role in supporting their ELLs’ linguistic and restricted their instructional approaches with the ELLs in their classrooms. Yoon (2008) also observed that in those classrooms, ELLs’ native-English speaking peers mimicked the teachers’ treatment of ELLs and did not view ELLs as legitimate members, and interactively positioned ELLs as unwelcomed members of the classroom community. As a result, ELLs felt powerless, isolated and invisible. Yoon (2008) highlighted that “Teaching ELLs is not a responsibility of only the ESOL teacher but also of the classroom teacher” (p. 516). Yoon (2008) further asserted that in mainstream classrooms, how teachers position themselves in relation to ELLs in classrooms influence not only English-speaking students’ attitudes toward their ELL peers but also ELLs’ perceptions of themselves and “sense of themselves as learners” (p.499).

In a single case study, Reeves (2009) investigated the process by which a secondary English teacher, Neal, invested in ELLs’ identity as a means to negotiate his own teacher identity. In his study, Reeves (2009) employed positioning theory as theoretical framework. Data sources included interviews, writing notes from informal conversations, classroom observations and classroom documents. Data revealed that Neal positioned himself as a highly competent teacher whereas he interactively positioned ELLs like any other student. As a result, he did not make any linguistic modifications to address linguistic needs of ELLs in the classroom and treated them the same as English-speaking students. Reeves (2009) argued that by assigning this
identity to ELLs, Neal could keep his own identity as a highly competent, effective teacher for all students without addressing the unique linguistic needs of the ELLs in his class. Neal indicated the belief that he was effectively preparing ELLs for real life in the real world by positioning ELLs like any other student. Reeves (2009) asserted that “Neal’s stance on ELLs and undifferentiated instruction are indicative of an assimilative approach in the education of ELLs” (p. 39). Reeves (2009) highlighted that positioning ELLs like any other student is problematic because teachers might ignore the academic and linguistic needs of these students in mainstream classrooms. However, Reeves (2009) also pointed out positioning ELLs as “dramatically different from other students” (p. 39) might be problematic as well because teachers can lower their expectations for ELLs in their classrooms that might influence academic outcomes of ELLs. Reeves’ (2009) findings demonstrated how teacher identity influences teachers’ perceptions regarding effective ways of teaching ELLs. However, the small sample limited the author’s findings.

One of the very recent studies that explored positionings of teachers of ELLs was conducted by Kayi-Aydar (2015). The author conducted a qualitative case study to explore the identity (re)negotiations and agency of three preservice teachers who were pursuing their ESL endorsement at a research university in the U.S. Kayi-Aydar (2015) collected data though interviews and journal entries. The findings revealed that all three participants reflexively positioned themselves as teachers of all students, including ELLs, and their positionings shaped their agency and self-reported teaching practices. Two teachers positioned ELLs as students with various linguistic needs and planned their instruction accordingly. The third teacher positioned her ELLs in their sociocultural context and reflexively positioned herself as a “bridge between ELLs and the U.S. school system and culture” (Kayi-Aydar, 2015, p. 101). Kayi-Aydar (2015)
also found that the teachers assigned powerless positions to themselves with respect to their teaching ability and skills to work with ELLs in the classrooms. Kayi-Aydar (2015) concluded her study by claiming that “given its significant role in education of ELLs, teacher identity and agency is a topic that needs further investigation” (p. 102). In particular, Kayi-Aydar (2015) pointed out the participant teachers in her study recursively constructed conflicting identities for themselves in relation to ELLs and thus, she suggested that it that it is important to explore “why and how these identities are constructed” (Kayi-Aydar, 2005, p.101).

The reviewed research suggests teachers’ reflexive positionings in relation to ELLs affects their instructional decisions, beliefs and practices regarding ELLs and ELL instruction in general education classrooms. Depending on how teachers reflexively position themselves in relation to ELLs, and how they interactively position ELLs, they either take ownership of or dismiss responsibility of meeting ELLs’ linguistic needs in mainstream classrooms. The reviewed studies also demonstrate the theoretical value of positioning theory and the critical role of teacher identity in ELLs’ academic experiences in the mainstream classroom settings.

Although the reviewed four studies contributed to the literature by highlighting the critical role of teacher identity in working with ELLs, they did not specifically focus on the teacher identity development process in relation to ELLs. All four studies explore how teachers’ identities, in particular positional identities, might impact their beliefs about ELL education and instructional practices with ELLs. The reviewed studies also specified some gaps which offer opportunities for further research. Those gaps include (a) the considerations that influence teachers’ teacher identities as teachers of ELLs (Ajayi, 2011; Yoon, 2008); (b) influence of TESL coursework upon teachers’ identities in relation to ELLs (Kayi-Aydar, 2015); and (c) influence of teachers’ contexts on their teacher identity as teachers of ELLs (Reeves, 2009;
Yoon, 2008). Therefore, in this present study, I explored in what ways TESL coursework influenced teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, values, intention and commitment regarding working with ELLs to gain a better understanding of the teacher identity development process in relation to ELLs. In addition, because teacher identity development is related to contexts and teachers of ELLs engage in multiple contexts, my study also considers not only the TESL course context but also other contexts in which teachers are engaged in and identifies the primary considerations playing a part in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs in the teaching community of practice.

**Summary of Chapter 2**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has been chosen due to its pertinence to the following two research questions that guided the present study:

1. In what ways do Teach for America teachers develop their teacher identity in relation to English language learners in the context of a semester-long teaching English as a second language course?

2. What primary considerations come into play in Teach for America teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of English language learners?

In this Literature Review chapter, I first discussed the notions of identity and teacher identity and reviewed how these two notions have been defined in the field. This was followed by the review of empirical studies that investigated influences on teacher identity and teacher identity development. Next, I explained the two theoretical frameworks that guided this present study. The theoretical frameworks for teacher identity development process in relation to ELLs in this study draws on two bases: Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP, and positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). According to Wenger (1998), identity development does not occur in
isolation but it develops in conjunction with one’s community through interactions with others. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP is especially relevant to the study because the study explored the teacher identity development of five TFA teachers as teachers of ELLs not only in the context of a graduate-level TESL course but also different contexts in which they were engaged in. In order to gain a better understanding of TFA teachers’ teacher identities in relation to ELLs and how their reflexive positioning might impact their growth as novice teachers of ELLs, I also adopted positioning theory as one of the theoretical frameworks in this dissertation study.

In the second part of Chapter 2, I provided a description of the TFA five-week summer teacher training program and I also discussed the findings of research studies on TFA teachers in the literature. The review of the existing literature on TFA teachers revealed that there is a need for more research on TFA teachers as most of the existing research studies have investigated the effectiveness of TFA teachers on the academic outcomes of their students. More specifically, the review of literature indicated that many questions remain unaddressed. For instance, although TFA teachers are generally assigned to teach in schools with high ELL populations, very little is known about the intersection of TFA teachers and ELLs in the literature. We do not know how TFA teachers’ positional identities impact their instructional decisions and practices regarding teaching ELLs. We do not know how prepared TFA teachers feel with respect to working with ELLs in their content area classrooms. We do not know in what ways novice TFA teachers construct, reconstruct or deconstruct their teacher identities as teachers of ELLs. In addition, we do not know how TFA teachers reflexively position themselves in relation to their ELLs in their classrooms as content-area teachers and how their reflexive positionings might impact their teaching.
Furthermore, TFA teachers are a subset of mainstream teachers of ELLs. Therefore, the third part of Chapter 2 presented a detailed review of the existing research on mainstream teachers of ELLs. In this part, I also discussed what mainstream teachers need to know in order to work with ELLs effectively in mainstream classrooms. The review of literature on mainstream teachers of ELLs revealed that in educational research, there is an overall lack of empirical research conducted with mainstream teachers and ELLs (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). The limited empirical research studies on the teacher identities of mainstream teachers of ELLs make this an area ripe for research. The review of the extant literature indicated that only three studies focused on mainstream teachers of ELLs: Kayi-Aydar (2015); Reeves (2009) and Yoon (2008). Nevertheless, none of these three studies investigated the teacher identity development process of teachers of ELLs and factors impacting teacher identities in relation to ELLs. Thus, there is a gap in the literature as to in what ways teachers of ELLs develop their teacher identities in relation to ELLs and what primary considerations come into play in their teacher identity development. My study addresses this gap by exploring TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long graduate level TESL course and identifying considerations that influence their teacher identities as novice teachers of ELLs.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design and methodology I employed in this dissertation study. First, it presents the research purpose and research questions that guided the study. This study employed a qualitative research design using a multiple case study methodology. Therefore, I first present a short overview of qualitative research design. Next, I provide rationale for utilizing multiple-case study methodology. In the subsequent sections, I discuss the context and participants of the study, followed by a description of the methods of data collection and the procedures for data analysis. Lastly, I discuss trustworthiness and how the ethical considerations in connection with this research were addressed.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the study was to examine in what ways Teach for America (TFA) teachers develop their teacher identities in relation to English language learners (ELLs) in the context of a graduate-level teaching English as a second language (TESL) course. In addition, this study aimed to identify what primary considerations come into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. More specifically, this study explored the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Teach for America teachers develop their teacher identity in relation to English language learners in the context of a semester-long teaching English as a second language course?

2. What primary considerations come into play in Teach for America teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of English language learners?
Research Design

In this present study, I employed a qualitative approach with the understanding that qualitative research is “multimethod in focus” and “an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 2).

I chose qualitative research for various reasons. First, Hansen and Liu (1997) indicated that identity “is a dynamic phenomenon, it should be studied with a methodology that is dynamic both in philosophy and in practice” (p. 573). My purpose was to explore the phenomenon of teacher identity of TFA teachers of ELLs. In addition, I aimed to identify primary considerations that facilitated or hindered TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs. Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as it is a dynamic methodology that provides “careful description and analysis of phenomena” (Hatch, 2002, p. 43).

Additionally, the complexity of teacher identity development can be better understood through employing qualitative research methods. In contrast to quantitative research, which is a formal and systematic process and focuses on the collection and analysis of statistical or numerical data to describe, explain, or predict phenomena, qualitative research relies on nonnumerical data such as narratives, interviews, documents, observations, or focus groups to gain a rich, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Adopting qualitative research enables the researcher to obtain thick and rich data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest not amenable to quantitative research (Mays & Pope, 1995). Therefore, it yields results or findings that cannot be gathered using quantitative methods (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

Case Study Design. Case study is a qualitative approach that aims to examine complex phenomena “through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of
information” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The purpose of case study is not to make generalizations about populations. Rather, it aims to gain a rich, in-depth understanding of a given case with the intent of probing into its characteristics, dynamics and purposes (van Lier, 2005).

Yin (2003) described the five research conditions that require researchers to employ case study as a methodology: (1) “when the inquirer seeks answers to how or why questions,” (2) “when the inquirer has little control over events being studied,” (3) “when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context,” (4) “when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear”, and (5) “when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence” (p. 28). This study includes all of the aforementioned five conditions. First, this study aimed to explore how TFA teachers develop their teacher identities as teachers of ELLs. Second, as the researcher, I did not have any control over the events or the contexts under scrutiny. That is, the participant TFA teachers’ personal, educational, professional and TESL course experiences in their contexts might contribute to or hinder their teacher identity development process as teachers of ELLs. Third, the object of study, TFA teachers’ identity development as teachers of ELLs, is a contemporary phenomenon that can be examined in real-life contexts by gathering data from multiple sources. Fourth, the boundaries between TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs and their experiences and interactions with their sociocultural contexts that might influence, contribute or hinder their teacher identity (e.g. the TESL course context, school contexts or social contexts) are not a clear cut in this study. Fifth, in the study, I employed multiple data sources to explore the teacher identity development of TFA teachers of ELLs.

**Rationale for Multiple-case Study Design.** Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010) suggested that employing a multiple case study increases the depth of understanding of the phenomenon
being investigated. Duff (2008) also noted a multiple-case study design is an ideal research design where “the focus of study is the knowledge, performance, or perspectives of a single individual, such as a language learner or teacher” (p. 1). Therefore, in this study, I selected a multiple-case study design in order to gain a better understanding of the teacher identity development of TFA teachers of ELLs.

In addition, a multiple case-study methodology is an appropriate design to capture individual variations related to TFA teachers’ contexts and identify factors or influences that might impact their teacher identities as teachers of ELLs. Additionally, adopting a multiple case-study design enables the researcher to discover commonalities that are visible across cases. In this present study, employing multiple-case study design enabled me, as a researcher, to present each of the participant TFA teacher’s unique experiences and gain a better understanding of the individual differences in the process of teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs.

Another advantage of employing a multiple case study design is that multiple cases are explanatory and interpretive in nature. Therefore, they can enhance the strength and reliability of the study as it allows the researcher to examine each case separately (Yin, 2003). As Herriott and Firestone (1983) stated the evidence from multiple cases is usually perceived rich and more compelling. Thus, the overall research study is considered as being more robust as the researcher analyzes and compares more cases instead of one case.

**Context of the Study**

The context of the study was a graduate level semester-long TESL course. The TESL course, titled as ‘Methods and materials for teaching English as a second language (ESL), is offered by a large, research-intensive state university in an urban city located in the Southwest of the U.S. In the following sections, the state, university and TESL course is described in detail.
The State. The state where the university is located is ranked first for having the highest growth rate of ELLs in its K-12 school system in the U.S. From 2000 to 2010, the State experienced twice the percentage increase of nonnative English speakers in comparison to that of the country as a whole, 43% in comparison to 22%, respectively (Mokhtar, 2012).

The state ranked fourth in the U.S. in the percentage of ELLs in its school system (Mokhtar, 2012). In the state, at least, one in three children came from homes where English is not the primary language and one in seven students identified as an ELL in 2013 (Mokhtar, 2012). Furthermore, between 1998 and 2008, the state experienced more than 200% growth in the number of ELLs, nearly four times of the national average. In the state’s public school system, ELLs constitute 18% of the total student population.

It is also worthy to note that in the state in 2011, 90% of fourth-grade ELLs scored below proficiency in reading compared to 69% of their English-proficient counterparts. 98% of eighth-grader ELLs scored below proficiency in reading compared to 71% of their native English-speaking counterparts (Institute of Education Sciences, 2012).

The University. The university is an American public research university and situated in one of the most diverse cities of the U.S. and its metropolitan area. Currently the university enrolls about 28,515 students within its graduate and undergraduate programs and offers more than 100 undergraduate programs and approximately 120 graduate and professional programs in a wide range of disciplines. The university ranks among the nation’s ten most diverse universities for undergraduate students. In addition, the university has been designated as an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution and a Minority Serving Institution. On its website, the university writes, its total student body was made 56.9% racial and ethnic minority students, and
43.1% White students. Hispanic students make up the largest minority undergraduate student
group of the university at 21%.

The University and Teach for America Partnership. The university has a partnership
with the TFA organization. The university provides TFA teachers with nine credits toward their
licensure coursework requirements for successful completion of the TFA summer institute. All
TFA teachers are required to complete nine credits by the state prior to working full-time
in the state’s school districts. Those TFA teachers who enroll in the university’s teacher licensure
program also have the option of completing additional courses to earn a master’s degree in
education. That is, during the initial two-year teaching commitment, TFA teachers have the
option of completing a few additional classes beyond the teacher certification to earn their
Master’s degree in education from the university.

The Teaching English as a Second Language Course. The TESL course, titled as
‘Methods and materials for teaching ESL’ is offered by the Master of Education (M.Ed) in
English Language Learning (ELL) program. The M.Ed. in ELL program is part of the College of
Education that aims to prepare its students for positions in PK-16 and other community settings.
The program is designed for those individuals who pursue an M.Ed. degree in ELL, with a focus
in either ELL or Bilingual Education. The M.Ed. in ELL program also offers a graduate level
teacher certification program for TFA teachers who work in the state’s public school system.

The TESL course is a hybrid course, a model of course design that combines traditional
face-to-face classroom sessions, such as lecture, discussions, and course assignments, with
online or out-of-class work. Hybrid courses have varying ratios of time spent within a classroom
setting. The TESL course has nine face-to-face meetings and six online meetings through
Webcampus. The schedule is in a pattern of two face-to-face meetings followed by one consecutive online meeting for 15 sessions.

The course is designed to prepare graduate students and inservice teachers, including TFA teachers (inservice without teaching credentials) to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate instruction for ELLs in grades K-12. The course introduces students to the cognitive, academic and linguistic domains of ELL instruction, English as a second language (ESL) approaches and methods, integration of ELL strategies across content areas, ELL program models, effective instructional strategies to build background knowledge and connect to previous learning/experiences and, how to design, implement, prepare, and evaluate ESL materials. The five objectives of the course are described in the excerpts from the syllabus below:

*Objective 1*: The learner will be able to explain and differentiate between the different second language program models and identify the role of the teacher, the students, and the materials as they pertain to each program model.

*Objective 2*: The learner will be able to identify and explain myths and misconceptions related to second language programs, second language acquisition, second language methodology, and the role of the primary language in developing social and academic language in English.

*Objective 3*: The learner will be able to design, prepare, implement, and evaluate grade specific content-area lesson plans for developing social and academic language based on different ESL methods, strategies, and approaches.

*Objective 4*: The learner will be able to design instruction based on the linguistic and academic needs of second language students by recognizing the interface between social and academic language and oral language proficiency levels.
Objective 5: The learner will be able to evaluate the merits of second language instructional materials and assessment based on students’ academic and linguistic needs and varying levels and degrees of English language proficiency.

Participant Selection

The purpose of this study was to investigate in what ways TFA teachers develop their teacher identities in relation to ELLs in the context of a graduate level TESL course. Thus, the recruitment of participants was guided by the purpose of this study. I used purposeful sampling to identify participants (Merriam, 2009). More specifically, I used the following criteria to select participants: (a) they were enrolled in a semester-long graduate level TESL course; (b) they were TFA teachers at the time of the study; (c) they were teaching one or more ELLs at the time of the study, and (d) they were teaching ELLs in English-only mainstream classrooms.

I conducted the study in the spring semester of 2016. In order to select participants, I contacted the TESL course instructor via email to explain the nature and purpose of the study and obtain her permission to recruit participants and observe the course. After obtaining the permission of the course instructor, during the first day of the TESL course, I provided information regarding the study to the TFA teachers and invited them to participate in the study. I also made it clear that participation in the study was voluntary and non-participation would not carry any negative consequences. Of the sixteen TFA teachers who were teaching ELLs at the time of the study, seven of them consented and volunteered to participate in the study. I contacted seven TFA teachers and set up an interview with each teacher. After the first interviews, one teacher dropped the TESL course due to personal reasons and therefore, she did not fit one of the criteria for the study. Another teacher who also consented to participate decided
to withdraw from the study after the first interview because he indicated that he was too busy to participate in the study. This present study included five TFA teachers of ELLs.

**Participant Profiles**

The participants of this study were five TFA teachers of ELLs, four female and one male. All participants, except one, were born in the U.S. and spoke English as their native language. Davorka (pseudonym) was born in a country in Europe and moved to the U.S. at the age of five. She was a bilingual speaker of Serbo-Croatian and English.

All five participants were in their second year of teaching and taught in Title I, high minority, low income schools as full-time classroom teachers at the time of the study. Four participants worked at public schools in the school district and one of the participants was assigned to teach at a charter high school. In addition, they were all secondary teachers; four of the five were teaching at high school level and one was teaching at middle school level at the time of the study. A brief profile of the five participant TFA teacher is presented below and detailed in Table 3. More detailed information about the five TFA teachers’ personal and educational backgrounds as well as the school settings where they were teaching at the time of the study is provided in Chapter 4. To ensure anonymity of the participants, their names and schools in which they were assigned to teach as TFA teachers are pseudonyms.

**Cheryl**

Cheryl, a 24-year-old, self-identified African-American female, graduated from a public research university in the Southwest with a Bachelor’s in Political Science and Ethnic Studies. Prior to joining TFA, she took a job in politics and worked on a senate campaign for a year. After the five-week TFA summer institute, Cheryl was placed in Rose Hill Charter High school
(pseudonym) and assigned to teach high school History. At the time of the study, Cheryl had a total of ten Spanish speaking ELLs in her classes.

Melissa

Melissa, a 23-year-old, self-identified White female, majored in International Relations and minored in Arabic at a major university in the Midwest. During her senior year in college, she applied to TFA and was accepted into the program. After completing the five-week TFA summer institute, Melissa was placed in Oak Valley High school (pseudonym) and was assigned to teach math to tenth and eleventh grade students. Melissa had twelve Spanish speaking ELLs in her mathematics classrooms at the time of the study.

Patrick

Patrick, a 26-year-old, self-identified White male, graduated from a private university in the Southwest with a Bachelor’s in Political Science. He applied to TFA during his senior year of college and was accepted into the TFA corps. Patrick was placed at Midland High school (pseudonym) after attending a five-week TFA summer training institute. At Midland High school, Patrick was assigned to teach high school mathematics to ninth grade students. Patrick had a total of sixteen Spanish speaking ELLs in his mathematics classrooms at the time of the study.

Sally

Sally, a 23-year-old, self-identified White female, majored in Psychology and minored in Sociology at a private research university in the Northwest. During her senior year at university, she applied to the TFA program and was accepted into the TFA corps. After the five-week TFA summer training program, Sally was placed in Kentwood Middle school (pseudonym) and she was assigned to teach Earth Science to seventh grade students. At the time of this study, the
majority of Sally’s students in her science classrooms were Spanish speaking ELLs with a wide range of English language proficiency.

Davorka

Davorka, a 23-year-old, self-identified White female, was born in a country in Europe and moved to the U.S. at the age of five with her parents and three sisters. She had a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science from a public university in the Northwest. Davorka applied to TFA during her senior year and was accepted into the program. After the TFA’s five-week summer institute, Davorka was placed in New West High public school (pseudonym) and assigned to teach high school mathematics to tenth and eleventh grade students. At the time of the study, Davorka had a total of twelve Spanish speaking ELLs in her mathematics classrooms.

Table 3. Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Content area</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Major (BA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>9\textsuperscript{th}, 10\textsuperscript{th}, 11\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Political Science &amp; Ethnic studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>10\textsuperscript{th}, 11\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Algebra</td>
<td>9\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Earth science</td>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davorka</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>10\textsuperscript{th}, 11\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources and Data Collection

Case study researchers should employ multiple sources of data to capture the case under study in its complexity and entirety and insure triangulation of evidences that produce strong findings (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Using multiple data sources also increase the internal validity (Merriam, 1998). In this present study, I collected data through the following five methods: (1) semi-structured in-depth one-to-one interviews, (2) online focus group discussion, (3) artifacts, (4) field observations, and (5) researcher’s journal (in which I documented my
activities, interpretations and reflections during the data collection period).

Table 4 below outlines the data collection instruments and timeline. As can be seen in Table 4, data collection lasted for approximately six months beginning in January and ending in June.

Table 4. Data Collection Instruments and Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instruments</th>
<th>Time frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>• January, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• March, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>• Nine classroom observations in the TESL course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>• Syllabus of the TESL graduate course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participants’ pre- and post-course written reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Online student discussions on Webcampus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
<td>• June, 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**One-to-One Interviews**

Yin (1994) suggested that interviewing as a data collection method is “one of the most important sources of case study information” (p.84). Interviewing enables the researcher access into the participants’ world (Patton, 1990) and attain rich, personalized information on a phenomenon that cannot be directly observed. In addition, as suggested by Merriam (1998) interviewing is an invaluable qualitative research tool when the researcher is interested in past events, lived experiences or participants’ histories. In this present study, interviewing played a vital part in the creation of the database. Interviewing enabled me to discover the participant
TFA teachers’ perspectives, thoughts and intentions about their TESL course experience. Furthermore, I learned about the five TFA teachers’ lived experiences and feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about working with ELLs and the education of ELLs, which contributed to the depth and richness of the data.

Three sets of one-to-one in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five TFA teachers, the total of fifteen one-to-one interviews. I used semi-structured questions as a guide during the interview process but I also asked additional follow-up questions based on the participant’s responses in order to capture and identify individual influences that might impact the participants’ teacher identities. The interviews took place at a location of the TFA teachers’ choice and each of the interviews lasted between 75 and 90 minutes depending on the participant. The interviews were conducted in three separate phases throughout the spring semester of 2016: at the beginning of spring semester during the first week of the TESL course (Interview 1), about halfway through the spring semester (Interview 2), and at the end of the spring semester, after the completion of the TESL course (Interview 3).

The first interviews conducted in January 2016 and explored the participants’ personal and educational backgrounds, motivation for entering the teaching profession, prior language learning experiences, teaching contexts, beliefs and knowledge regarding ELLs and the education of ELLs (Appendix A). A second round of interviews was conducted in March 2016 with each of the participants. The second interview focused on the five TFA teachers’ TESL course experiences, teaching experiences working with ELLs in their content-area classrooms, challenges as novice teachers of ELLs, intentions, commitments and perceptions of themselves as teachers of ELLs as well as their knowledge and beliefs regarding ELLs and the education of ELLs (Appendix B). The second interview also explored the TFA teachers’ relationships with
their mentors, colleagues, other TFA teachers and administrators. The third interview was conducted in May 2016. The third interview explored the TFA teachers’ interactions with their colleagues in their school contexts, TESL course experiences, how they made sense of those experiences, changes in their beliefs, knowledge and intentions regarding working with ELLs and their teaching challenges and experiences as novice teachers of ELLs (Appendix C). I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews for further analysis with participants’ permission. I included the voice of the five TFA teachers in the presentation of my findings in this study by using direct quotations from the transcriptions of the interviews.

Observations

According to Merriam (1998), observations allow the researcher to acquire “firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (p. 94). Additionally, in conjunction with interviews, observations allow “for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon” under study (Merriam, 1998, p. 111).

In this study, I observed the five participant TFA teachers in the TESL course in spring 2016. I conducted nine TESL course observations, total approximately 27 hours of class observations. I recorded and documented the observations in the form of field notes without audio-recordings. The purpose of the TESL course observations was to gain a better understanding of the TFA teachers’ TESL course experiences, such as what they might have learned during the TESL course sessions. Additionally, the course observations allowed me to become more familiar with the participants, course context and build rapport with the five TFA teachers. The TESL course observations yielded data about the participants’ interactions with each other, other teachers and the course instructor and their positionings as TFA teachers of ELLs when participating in course discussions and activities. As a researcher, the observations
also helped me triangulate the emerging findings from the individual interviews and create additional questions to ask during the interviews to capture a better picture of the five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development.

During the observations, I adopted the role of observer as nonparticipant, where the researchers take no part in the activity whatsoever, although their role is known throughout (Robson, 2003). According to Adler and Adler (1994), this role allows the researcher to “observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider’s identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership” (p. 380). As a non-participant observer, I did not actively participate in any class activities or online discussions. Yet, I gradually developed some level of membership in the TESL course by being there every course session.

Artifacts

Artifacts are valuable additions to data collection for case studies (Yin, 2009) and enable the researcher to gain a better understanding of issues surrounding the case that cannot be directly observed (Stake, 1995). Yin (2009) asserted, “For case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103). In addition to in-depth one to one interviews, observations, and online focus group discussion, I used course artifacts as secondary data.

I examined three types of artifacts: (1) the TESL course syllabus, (2) TFA teachers’ online postings on discussion boards and (3) TFA teachers’ pre- and post- course written reflections. The TESL course syllabus helped me gain a better understanding of the course topics and activities. In addition, I followed the participant teachers’ online postings to the discussion board on Webcampus throughout the semester. Doing so helped me understand how the TESL
course influenced the participant teachers’ knowledge, instructional beliefs and teaching practices with respect to teaching ELLs. I also analyzed the participants’ online pre- and post-course written reflections. The written reflections provided data which supported the lines of data coming from the individual interviews. More specifically, the written reflections helped me understand how the TESL course contributed to the TFA teachers’ teacher identity in relation to ELLs. The pre-course written reflections helped me learn the teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the education of ELLs before their participation in the TESL course. The post-course written reflections helped me determine whether each teacher’s knowledge, beliefs, perceptions regarding ELL education changed as a result of participating in the TESL course.

**Focus Group Discussion**

In this present study, I also employed an online focus group discussion, the data collection process “through interviews with a group of people” (Creswell, 2013, p. 218), as a data instrument. Focus group enables the researcher to gather data from group discussions and dialogue, providing valuable insights into the phenomenon under study (Sintjago & Link, 2012). Compared to other data collection instruments, focus group offers some unique advantages (Litosseliti, 2003). One of the advantages of this type of data collection is that participants can interact with each other, respond to and build on the opinions or ideas of other participants. Therefore, focus group provides “a range of opinions, ideas and experiences and generates insightful information” on participants’ experiences, perspectives and identities (Litosseliti, 2003, p.2).

In this study, I employed an online focus group discussion to give the participants power and voice in the study. Using an online focus group discussion as a data collection instrument also helped me, as a researcher, to further explore themes that emerged from the individual
interviews. I had originally planned an in-person focus group interview but I chose to establish an asynchronous online focus group discussion because of scheduling of the participants. According to Tates et al. (2009), an online focus group discussion provides participants a convenient way of participating in group discussions, unconstrained by time and place. He further indicates that an asynchronous online focus group discussion allows participants to choose their time in answering questions or expressing their opinions, allowing more time to reflect on their experiences (Tates et al., 2009).

The online focus group discussion took place in June 2016 after the interviews were transcribed. The data collected from the individual interviews informed the development of the focus group questions. I followed a semi-structured format and developed a list of four questions (Appendix D) beforehand. Yet, I also encouraged the participants to express their thoughts, experiences and opinions on the topics that they would like to discuss. I created a folder and shared the four questions in the form of a word document in Google Docs with the five TFA teachers. The document was open to editing, allowing the participants to edit the document. The focus group discussion was available for a week, which provided plenty of time for the participants to reply the questions, respond to each other’s comments and engage in dialogue with each other. The online focus group discussion provided the TFA teachers an opportunity to interact with one another and share their challenges, experiences and perspectives as novice TFA teachers of ELLs. In addition, as the five TFA teachers interacted with each other’s responses and commented on each other’s experiences and opinions, I was able to discover more about their beliefs, values and experiences which contributed to their teacher identity.

**Researcher’s Journal**

A researcher’s journal includes reflections, ideas, and thoughts related to the
phenomenon being studied. In this present study, once I began the process of data collection, I made entries in the researcher’s journal after the course observations and individual interviews. In the journal, I also chronicled my research activities regularly during the data collection process. I also recorded my perceptions, thoughts, and issues to consider during the research process as well as notes from meetings with the committee chair. Keeping the journal allowed me to identify possible questions, themes, issues or topics that should be explored during one-to-one interviews. Additionally, it allowed me to examine my personal perceptions, assumptions and goals through reflexivity.

**Data Analysis**

The goal of qualitative analysis is to take “a large amount of data that may be cumbersome and without any clear meaning, and interact with it in such a manner that you can make sense of what you gathered” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 250). In this present study, data analysis and data collection proceeded simultaneously. This is a suggested strategy in qualitative research studies (Merriam, 2009).

Prior to data analysis, considering each participant as an individual case, I created a separate folder, both tangible and digital, for each participant. The process of data analysis began after the first one-to-one interviews conducted as suggested by Merriam (2009). I manually transcribed the digitally recorded interviews in full. Although this was a tedious task as I spent approximately 10 to 12 hours transcribing each individual interview, this transcribing process enabled me to generate a close connection to the collected data, gain a better understanding of emerging concepts or themes and develop additional follow-up interview questions.

In this present study, the data analysis process draws upon the Lichtman’s (2012) three C’s of analysis: *coding, categorizing*, and identifying *concepts* or themes, which is a content-
driven, thematic data analysis method. First, after transcribing the interviews, I numbered each line so that transcriptions were easy to refer to. As a first step, I read each transcript multiple times to familiarize myself with the data and identify initial codes. I also reviewed the artifacts (e.g. TESL course syllabus, written reflections) and notes coming from my course observations to identify the initial codes. During this stage, I also looked for codes that were consistent with my theoretical frameworks (e.g. how the participants reflexively position themselves as teachers of ELLs and how they interactively positioned ELLs). As a next step, I placed all the initial codes into categories. Additionally, I searched for emergent patterns or themes for each participant’s case. The emergent patterns or themes helped me develop additional follow-up interview questions. As I received further data from course observations, artifacts and one-to-one interviews, I returned to my initial codes and categories to revise and refine my coding scheme and preliminary categories. Throughout data collection, I also added and removed codes as new concepts and themes began to emerge. I also combined the existing and new codes into broader meaningful categories. At this stage, the categories that emerged from the interview data guided me to revise the focus group discussion questions. After I gathered data from the online focus group discussion, I returned to the codes, reformulated and reviewed the themes and removed redundancies to identify significant elements.

As the final step, I organized the key themes/concepts that reflected the meaning of the gathered data according to the research questions of this present study.

This study aimed at examining in what ways TFA teachers developed their teacher identity in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long TESL course. Therefore, I reorganized and classified the main themes according to the definition of teacher identity proposed by Philipp (2007). According to Philipp (2007), the notion of teaching identity can be
defined as “embodiment of an individual’s knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments, intentions as they relate to one’s participation within a particular community of practice” (p. 259). Accordingly, in order to understand the process of the five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development, I classified the main themes emerged from data under the following four dimensions: in what ways the TESL course influenced TFA teachers’ (1) perceived level of knowledge on the education of ELLs, (2) beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, (3) values about linguistic diversity, (4) commitments and intentions to work with ELLs.

Recognizing teacher identity is influenced by a range of influences, this present study also aimed to identify what primary considerations come into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs. In the course of data analysis, five themes emerged: (1) decision to teach, (2) school culture, (3) level of content knowledge, (4) positioning in relation to ELLs, and (5) sources of support.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of a series of qualitative analyses of multiple data sources from case studies of five TFA teachers of ELLs and in Chapter 5, I discuss and present the interpretation and discussion of findings through the theoretical frameworks of the study and the extant literature.

**Positioning Myself as a Researcher**

According to Stake (1995), “of all the roles, the role of interpreter and gatherer of interpretations, is central” (p. 99). Duff (2008), further, suggested that particularly in case studies, researchers need to clarify their roles in the research process in order to help “readers to understand the researcher’s personal investment in the case, or perhaps intimate familiarity with the context or participants” (p. 131). Therefore, in this section, I write about myself in order to describe my position as a researcher in this qualitative study.
I hold a bachelor degree of arts in English language teaching from Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Cyprus and a master’s degree in TESL from the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Before moving to the U.S. to pursue my PhD, I taught English as a foreign language (EFL) at undergraduate level for ten years in Cyprus. I have been recently working on my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on TESOL at a university in an urban city located in the Southwest United States.

As a nonnative speaker of the English language and international doctoral student in the U.S., I could empathize with linguistically and culturally diverse students, especially those newcomers, who face unique cultural and linguistic challenges in English-only mainstream classrooms. Therefore, in most of the studies I conducted as a doctoral student, I have focused on the topic of ELL issues, such as, supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms, teacher preparation for ELLs, and preservice teacher identity in relation to ELLs.

In addition, while working as a teacher assistant, I also had the opportunity to teach undergraduate level TESL courses for four years at the university where this study was conducted. Therefore, I was very familiar with the context of the study. Additionally, being a PhD student at the university provided me with easy access to TFA teachers and intimate familiarity with the study setting. My familiarity with the context of the study and background as a both EFL learner and teacher in some way positioned me as an insider. Even though there are some advantages to being an insider in the research, I was also aware of biases that I would bring to the study. Therefore, during the TESL course observations, I played a fairly minor active role and adopted the role of observer as nonparticipant. For example, in order not to interrupt the class flow, I took a seat in a remote part of the classroom where I also took notes. Additionally,
during the individual interviews, I avoided sharing my experiences as a former EFL teacher, TESL course instructor and/or nonnative English speaker.

Although I was very familiar with the context of the study, I was also an outsider in this study as the participants of the study were all TFA teachers who were teaching at schools in the U.S. As a former EFL teacher, I completed my teaching certification via a traditional route in Cyprus and all of my teaching experience has been in university settings. In addition, as a former TESL course instructor, I always taught preservice teachers, and have not worked with TFA teachers. Being an outsider brought some potential benefits to the present study. It enabled the participants to share their experiences and views without fear of judgment, and thus, enabled me, as a researcher, to “elicit detailed responses, ask comprehensive interview questions, and maintain criticality in data analysis” (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008, p. 58).

**Trustworthiness**

As with any qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness of data is an important issue to consider (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study employed a qualitative research design using a multiple case study methodology. Using multiple-case studies increases the strength and reliability of the findings as it allows the researcher to consider each case as a separate study (Yin, 2003). Additionally, I established trustworthiness by using three common techniques, namely: triangulation, member checking and rich, thick description.

Triangulation is “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of evidence, or multiple methods” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204) to ensure trustworthiness. In this present study, I employed five different sources (one-to-one interviews, course observations and artifacts, focus group discussion, researcher’s journal) to triangulate the data.

In qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that member checking is the
most critical strategy to establish trustworthiness. In member checking, researcher shares the gathered data with the participants and invites them to “review the material for accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). In this present study, I implemented this strategy to ensure the credibility of the data. During the one-to-one interviews, I asked additional questions to the participating teachers to confirm my preliminary interpretations and ensure that their opinions were represented appropriately and accurately. Additionally, after transcribing the individual interviews, I emailed the copies of transcripts to the participating teachers and invited them to review and provide further information on unclear issues.

The concept “thick description”, first proposed by Geertz in the 1970s, is one of the techniques to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. In this present study, I used multiple sources of data to create thick description in the case for each participant. I attempted to provide thick descriptions of each TFA teacher (their personal and educational backgrounds, prior language learning experiences, motivation to join the TFA organization). In addition, I provided a detailed description of the five TFA teachers’ school context (description of the schools, student demographics, their content areas, relationships with their colleagues, administrators) and TESL course context (description of the university, description and objectives of the course).

Ethical Considerations

In preparing for the study and data collection, ethical considerations were also taken into account. Before collecting any form of data, this study’s purpose and methodological framework were reviewed and approved by the IRB. I visited the TESL course and provided the potential participants with detailed information about the study and data collection methods. The TFA teachers who agreed to partake in the study received the informed consent forms, which explain
and describe the purpose of the research in detail and clarify issues of confidentiality. In the consent form, all participants were informed that they would remain anonymous throughout the study. I substituted the participants’ names and schools they were teaching at the time of the study with pseudonyms. In addition, I changed identifying characteristics to protect their privacy. In addition, all participants were given permission to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All collected data including documents and audio files was stored in a locked cabinet or in a password-protected program at the researcher’s office.

**Summary of Chapter 3**

This chapter presented the research design and methodology of this study. This study employed a multiple case study methodology to investigate in what ways TFA teachers develop their teacher identity in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long TESL course. Additionally, this study aimed to explore primary considerations come into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as teachers of ELLs Data sources included three rounds of semi-structured interviews, course observations, artifacts, online focus group discussion and researcher’s journal. Data was analyzed through following Lichtman’s (2013) three C’s of data analysis method. To establish trustworthiness, three common techniques, triangulation, member checking and rich, thick description suggested by Creswell (2013) were utilized in this study.
CHAPTER 4
FINISHINGS

Organization

The purpose of this study was two-folded. First, this study examined in what ways TFA teachers developed their teacher identity in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long TESL course. Second, recognizing teacher identity is impacted and shaped by a range of influences such as prior experiences, professional commitment, interactions with work context and with members of the school community, this study also explored what primary considerations came into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs in order to shine much brighter light on TFA teachers’ teacher identities in relation to ELLs.

In this chapter, the findings for the research questions as found for the five participants are presented. Each of the five TFA teacher’s case is presented below. Findings for each of the five cases are clustered under two main headings. The first delineates the influence of the TESL course on each participating TFA teacher’s teacher identity development in relation to ELLs and the second presents the findings pertaining to the second research question, namely what primary considerations played a role in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs.

The first part begins with participant teacher’s personal and educational backgrounds as well as a general description of school context in which each teacher taught at the time of the study. Following that, the findings pertaining to the first research question are presented. In this study, the notion of teacher identity is conceptualized as “…embodiment of an individual’s knowledge, beliefs, values, commitments, intentions… as they relate to one’s participation
within a particular community of practice” (Philipp, 2007, p. 259). Accordingly, the findings are organized under the following four dimensions: the influence of the TESL course on the participant teachers’ (a) perceived level of knowledge of the education of ELLs, (b) beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, (c) values about linguistic diversity and (d) intentions and commitment to work with ELLs.

The second part presents the findings pertaining to primary considerations playing a part in five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs in the teaching community. Five themes that emerged from the analysis of the data were found to either facilitate or hinder the development of the participant teachers’ teacher identity in relation to ELLs:

(a) Decision to become a teacher

The findings under this theme presented reasons behind the participant teachers’ decisions to become a teacher through TFA and revealed how their motives and decisions to enter teaching influenced their teacher identity development overall and in relation to ELLs.

(b) Perceptions of school culture

The findings under this theme presented the participant teachers’ perceptions of their school culture and revealed how their perceptions strengthened or constrained their teacher identity development as new teachers of ELLs in the teaching community.

(c) Perceived level of content knowledge

The findings under this theme explored how the TFA teacher’s perceived level of expertise in and knowledge of subject matter they were assigned to teach influenced their perceptions of themselves as teachers and teacher identity development process as teachers of ELLs.
(d) Positionings in relation to ELLs

The findings under this theme revealed how teachers’ reflexive positionings in relation to ELLs influenced their instructional decisions, beliefs regarding ELL instruction, ELL teaching practices and their relationships with ELLs as mainstream teachers in the classroom context.

(e) Sources of support

The findings under this theme explored the role of professional and emotional support (or lack thereof) in the participants’ teacher identity development as new teachers and teachers of ELLs in the teaching community.

Case 1- Cheryl

Part 1

Introducing Cheryl

Cheryl was a 24-year-old, self-identified African American woman who was born and grew up in a large city in the Southwest, U.S. Cheryl was raised in an upper-middle class household and neighborhood along with her younger brother, Danny. Her father worked for a film production company while her mother had been working as a high school math teacher at a Title 1 school for more than 20 years.

Cheryl valued the strong and close relationships that she had with her family and specifically, with her mother. Cheryl had a great respect for her mother and spoke passionately about her influence on her personal and academic life on several occasions during the interviews. Reflecting on her relationship with her mother, she shared, “My mother influences me in all aspects. She is my biggest supporter, my hero, my best friend and my greatest role model. Her life experiences help me find my way, overcome challenges in my life.” (Interview 1)
Cheryl indicated that education was an important part of her upbringing. Cheryl said that she felt “blessed” and “privileged” for having well-educated parents who valued education very highly (Interview 1). Cheryl further shared, “My mother had very high expectations for me, expecting me always to be a successful student and to attend a very good college.” (Interview 1) According to Cheryl, her mother knew which schools were standouts in the city as an experienced teacher and therefore, she was the decision maker at home about her and her brother’s schooling. Cheryl’s statements revealed that her mother played a significant role in her personal life.

Cheryl attended elementary school in her city’s public school system. In our first interview, she described her elementary school as “one of the best schools in the city” with little diverse student population. As far as she could remember, her elementary school was about 70% White, 20% Hispanic, and less than 10% Black. Cheryl reported that as a Black female, she was a minority student. She recalled that there were very few ELLs in her classes, adding that they were from “wealthy” parents and most had private tutors to teach them English after school.

For high school, Cheryl’s mother decided on a private school. Unlike her elementary school, the high school Cheryl attended had a more diverse student population and it was the one of the best high schools, as measured by academic achievement, in the country. She described her high school as “affluent” and “highly competitive” which only “very rich kids” (Interview 1) could afford to attend (Interview 1).

After graduating from high school, Cheryl attended at a prominent and prestigious public research university in the Southwest, where she was double majored in Political Science and Ethnic Studies. Cheryl also indicated that she studied Spanish for three years while she was studying at the university but she never felt proficient in the language. She explained, “I am not a
good language learner. I tried and tried to learn Spanish but it took me so long to learn just the basics of Spanish” (Interview 1). Although Cheryl did not become proficient in Spanish, she mentioned that throughout her Spanish learning experiences, she gained respect and empathy for linguistically diverse students in English-only classrooms in the United States.

After graduating from the university, Cheryl took a job in politics and worked on a senate campaign but she did not feel satisfied with her position and she left her job after a year. Cheryl knew about TFA from one of her friends from college. After leaving her job, she decided to become a teacher and completed the online application to join the TFA Corps. After a multipart interview process, Cheryl was accepted into the TFA Corps.

After the five-week TFA summer institute, Cheryl was placed in Rose Hill Charter High school (pseudonym) and assigned to teach history to ninth, tenth and eleventh graders. She had a total 130 students and her average class size ranged from 30 to 34 students at the time of the study. Cheryl stated that in her classes, about 95% of her students were African Americans and the rest were Hispanics who were born and raised in the U.S. but spoke Spanish as their first languages at home. At the time of the study, Cheryl had a total of ten Spanish speaking ELLs in her classes.

**General Context of Rose Hill Charter School**

The school where Cheryl was placed was a designated Title I high school and served a total of 208 students at the time of the study. In the 2015-2016 school year, 70% of Rose Hill High’s students were economically disadvantaged and eligible for free and reduced lunch.

African-Americans made up the majority of the school population at 78%. Hispanics made up the second-largest ethnic population of the school at 17%. A small portion of the population at Rose Hill High School was designated as ELLs, under 10%. However, according to
Cheryl, more than 15% of the students of Rose Hill high spoke a language other than English at home and were “second generation immigrants” (Interview 1). Cheryl added that at Rose Hill high school, ELLs were integrated into the mainstream classrooms and received afterschool support.

At the time of the study, Rose Hill High employed 24 classroom teachers, one counselor, one learning strategist, and one ESL teacher who provided instruction to students identified as ELLs during scheduled ESL classes after school.

**Influences of the TESL Course on Cheryl’s Teacher Identity in Relation to ELLs**

The TESL course seemed to have had a positive impact on Cheryl’s teacher identity in relation to ELLs. Cheryl perceived that as a result of participating in the TESL course, she acquired a new way of thinking as a teacher as evident in the excerpts below:

- The course made me rethink, think like a language teacher, reprogrammed how I approach teaching ELLs as a teacher. I am not just a history teacher anymore (Interview 3).
- The course challenged me to kind of construct lesson plans that are specifically targeted toward ELLs. I feel like I have grown tremendously as a teacher of ELLs (Post-course reflective journal).
- The course helped me reflect on my teaching and understand my ELLs and their language and academic needs. It gave me the tools and resources to be a better teacher for my ELL students (Interview 2).

Overall, Cheryl greatly valued her TESL course experience and felt that she became a more effective teacher of ELLs because the course enabled her to “think like a language teacher” (Interview 3).
The following four sections present how the TESL course influenced Cheryl’s (a) perceived level of knowledge of the education of ELLs, (b) beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, (c) values about linguistic diversity and (d) intention and commitment to work with ELLs as a content area teacher.

**Perceived Level of Knowledge of the Education of ELLs**

Cheryl perceived that her knowledge of the education of ELLs improved due to her participation in the TESL course. Cheryl entered the teaching profession without any educational background specific to teaching ELLs. She mentioned that during her training at the TFA five-week summer institute, she had some sessions focusing on cultural diversity issues; however, she did not recall having any sessions or training specific to linguistic diversity or the education of ELLs.

In her first year of teaching, Cheryl reported that she received some support and guidance from her mother, who taught ELLs for more than 20 years, to design ELL-friendly activities and modify her history lessons for her ELLs in the classroom. Nevertheless, reflecting back on her first year of teaching, she reported that in spite of her mother’s support and guidance, she did not feel “well-equipped” to effectively address her ELLs’ linguistic needs in the classroom (Interview 1). At the beginning of the course, Cheryl perceived her knowledge of the education of ELLs was “not good enough” and rated her knowledge and skills as a teacher of ELLs at a four out of ten, which increased to nine after her participation in the TESL course (Interview 1).

After participating in the TESL course, Cheryl perceived her knowledge of the education of ELLs improved in three areas. First, she perceived that she learned how to combine language and content instruction as a content-area teacher. Second, she gained a better understanding of how to integrate the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, into her
teaching practice. Third, according to Cheryl, her understanding of the importance of academic language development and knowledge of how to teach academic language as a content-area teacher was enhanced as a result of her participation in the TESL course. Each finding is explained more fully below.

**Integrating Content and Language Instruction.** Before participating in the course, Cheryl reported that she was not aware of the importance of teaching both content and language objectives as a content-area teacher in her lessons. Reflecting on her first year of teaching, Cheryl admitted that she only focused on teaching the content and she did not consider including language objectives when she was designing her lesson plans: “The course helped me see the importance of focusing on language. I realized that if they don’t understand the language, they cannot understand the content” (Interview 3).

In addition, Cheryl perceived that she learned how to integrate language and content instruction as well as how to write language objectives to support her ELLs’ language development in her classrooms: “Before the course, I didn’t think of language, or language objectives ever. The course made me realize that I have to focus on more language… I learned how to write language objectives and combine language and content instruction” (Interview 3).

**Integrating Language Skills.** Cheryl perceived her knowledge of how to integrate the four language skills into her content-area also improved as a result of her participation in the TESL course. Cheryl reported that as a history teacher, she had not focused on teaching reading and writing skills prior to the TESL course. Cheryl also indicated that the TESL course equipped her with a variety of instructional strategies that she could employ to effectively integrate the language skills into her teaching practices to support her ELLs’ language development. She described how she modified her lessons to integrate the four language skills as follows:
I try to include all four language skills into my teaching every day. I have a block schedule so I try to do all four skills in 100 minutes. I mostly start with some speaking or listening activities, then reading, and writing. Sometimes, I focus on more speaking, I encourage them to speak in pairs or groups. I also put them in circles and give them sentence frames to help them build more confidence in speaking English (Interview 2).

Teaching Academic Language. Cheryl indicated that as a content-area teacher, she came to a better understanding of how to focus more on the academic language development of ELLs in her classrooms. According to Cheryl, the course enabled her to acknowledge the importance of teaching academic language and provided her with knowledge of strategies to effectively teach academic vocabulary to ELLs. This new knowledge seemed to influence Cheryl’s teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. The following excerpt revealed how Cheryl took on a language teacher perspective and changed her instructional practices as a content-area teacher:

I teach them the language. I focus more on academic words, focus more on the parts of speech. I spend more time in class actually going through the language, focusing on key words using the smart board. I circle the words they do not know but they need to know. So, when I circle the word, they know that that word is important and they need to know, they work in pairs, sometimes in groups, they find the definitions and write it, then, I ask them use it in a sentence. (Interview 3)

Overall, the TESL course seemed to improve Cheryl’s knowledge of the education of ELLs. In addition, it appeared that the new knowledge Cheryl gained from the course contributed and strengthened her teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs. In the third interview, Cheryl
reported that she learned “how to think like a language teacher” as a result of participating in the TESL course (Interview 3).

Furthermore, Cheryl was able to transfer the new knowledge she acquired from the course into her teaching contexts to support ELLs in the classroom. As is evident in Cheryl’s statements above, she made changes in her lesson plans and teaching practice to facilitate her ELLs’ language development and she felt she became “a better teacher” for her ELLs after taking the TESL course (Interview 3).

Beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction

According to Cheryl, her beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction did not significantly change but became more affirming throughout the TESL course: “I don’t think the course has changed my beliefs about ELLs but again has affirmed what I believed already” (Post-course written reflection).

With respect to ELL instruction, Cheryl reported that she already held the view that mainstream teachers were responsible for supporting the academic development of ELLs in mainstream classrooms before participating in the TESL course. Additionally, she claimed to remain consistent in her belief that ELLs’ home languages and cultures should be valued and supported in mainstream classrooms.

Despite having reported that her beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction had not significantly change as a result of participating in the course, Cheryl’s beliefs about what constitutes an effective teacher of ELLs did seem to change after her participation in the TESL course. For instance, prior to the TESL course, Cheryl believed that effective teachers of ELLs were “welcoming and patient” and “hold high expectations for ELLs” (Interview 1). However, after the course, although she continued to argue for the importance of holding high expectations
for ELLs and being patient, she also cited the importance of having specific knowledge and skills in SLA process to effectively work with ELLs in mainstream. After her participation, Cheryl described an effective teacher of ELLs as able to “integrate effective ELL strategies”, “support ELLs’ language and content learning”, “scaffold learning” and “focus on the academic language development” (Interview 3). Furthermore, Cheryl criticized teachers who held the belief that having certain personal traits would be sufficient to effectively teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms and highlighted the importance of pedagogical knowledge and skills required to address ELLs’ unique academic needs: “When some teachers say I am an effective teacher for my ELLs because I am caring or patient, it sounds nice but if you don’t employ effective ELL strategies for them, then, I think you fail as a teacher” (Interview 3).

Cheryl’s statements suggest the TESL course seemed to have had a positive influence on her beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction. While Cheryl’s beliefs about ELLs’ home languages and the role of mainstream teachers as teachers of ELLs were intensified, it seems that she had come to the realization that personal characteristics are not sufficient to effectively educate ELLs as a result of her participation in the TESL course.

Values about Linguistic Diversity

Cheryl reported that the TESL course did not change the values she maintained about linguistic diversity. Cheryl indicated that as a teacher, she always viewed linguistically and culturally diverse students as an asset rather than an obstacle to overcome in mainstream classrooms. She also acknowledged and valued the linguistic diversity that ELLs bring as a positive feature of her classroom as a history teacher: “History is nothing but perspective, and history is different depending who you are, it’s what you see. My classroom discussions are
richer with ELLs because they bring their identities, cultures, languages and perspectives in my classroom” (Interview 1).

It is noteworthy that in the first interview, Cheryl also mentioned that she was trying to learn some basic words and phrases in Spanish to demonstrate to her ELLs that their languages were welcomed and valued in her classroom: “I try to show my ELLs I value their languages so I try to learn some Spanish words every day. I downloaded an app and use it to learn Spanish. Sometimes I ask the Spanish-speaking teacher to help me” (Interview 1). Cheryl’s efforts to learn Spanish suggested that she valued the linguistic backgrounds of ELLs before entering the course. It also suggests that as a teacher of ELLs, she valued making ELLs feel that they were part of her classroom community.

**Intention and Commitment to Work with ELLs**

The TESL course seemed to reinforce Cheryl’s intention and commitment to work with ELLs as a mainstream teacher. Reflecting back on her first year of teaching, Cheryl reported that as a minority teacher, she entered the profession with a strong commitment to teach minority students, including ELLs. She also added that she was aware of the hardships ELLs experience in English-only mainstream classrooms and that she was committed to support ELLs in their language learning endeavors as a teacher. Nevertheless, she reported that she was concerned due to her limited knowledge of ELL education prior to the course. Cheryl reported that her TESL course experiences strengthened her intention and commitment to work with ELLs in future classrooms because she felt more confident in her knowledge of ELL education:

I definitely see myself teaching in a class with a high number of ELLs in future because the exposure I gained from the course helped me feel more confident and passionate. It can be challenging to teach ELLs, you need to spend more time on
designing your activities, lesson plans, but it is my job…I care about ELLs and I want to support them. I am willing to work with ELLs because it is rewarding, inspiring to work with them. I want to help them as much as possible (Interview 3).

Cheryl’s statement above also illustrates the emotional component of her developing teacher identity in relation to ELLs. Cheryl noted that she cared about ELLs as a teacher and felt “more passionate” about ELLs. It seems important to her to support ELLs’ language development as a history teacher and she felt responsible of providing effective instruction to ELLs in future.

**Cheryl-Part 2**

**Primary Considerations Influencing Cheryl’s Teacher Identity as a Teacher of ELLs**

In the following sections, the five primary considerations that played a part in Cheryl’s teacher identity development as a novice teacher of ELLs are presented. As stated above, these five primary considerations are Cheryl’s (a) decision to become a teacher, (b) perception of school culture, (c) perceived level of content knowledge, (d) positioning in relation to ELLs, and (e) sources of support.

**Decision to Become a Teacher**

Cheryl was very happy with her career choice. She stated that she enjoys being a teacher and she had always dreamed of becoming a teacher ever since she was a child: “I always knew I wanted to be a teacher since, forever. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of students” (Interview 1).

Although teaching was Cheryl’s dream job, she reported that as a Black woman, she was very interested in African American history and Ethnic Studies. Therefore, after graduating from high school, she decided to pursue her BA degree in Political Science and Ethnic Studies instead
of education. After earning her B.A. degree, Cheryl began working on a senate campaign but she was not satisfied with her job. She decided that she did not want to work “to make someone richer and richer” and left the job after a year (Interview 1). Cheryl indicated, “I realized I wasn’t happy with my job. I had to say, ok forget it, I’m going to do what I want to do rather than this glamorous job. So, I decided to follow my dream and become a teacher” (Interview 1). Cheryl viewed TFA as “a great opportunity” to enter the teaching profession that she had always dreamed of (Interview 1). She added that she would be always grateful to TFA for opening the door to teaching and giving her the chance to be who she always wanted to be, a “difference making” teacher (Interview 1).

Additionally, Cheryl’s positive early experiences with her mother, who was a teacher at a Title 1 school, seemed to play an influential role in Cheryl’s decision to become a teacher. On several occasions during our interviews, Cheryl spoke highly of her mother and her mother’s commitment to education and the teaching profession. Cheryl reported that she grew up observing her mother’s teaching practices for many years. More specifically, Cheryl was impressed by her teaching style and eagerness to teach ELLs in the classroom: “I observed my mum a lot throughout my life, when I was a kid, after my classes at college. I was just sitting there and observing her teaching to fifteen-year-old kids who couldn’t speak English even a little bit” (Interview 1).

For Cheryl, teaching was viewed as a lifelong career. In our first interview, she emphasized that she entered teaching with the intention of remaining in the profession beyond her two-year TFA teaching commitment. Reflecting on her first year of teaching, Cheryl indicated that she was never regretful about her decision and “very happy” to become a high school teacher. Cheryl added,
I had some challenging times but I always enjoyed it. I think that’s because this was exactly what I wanted to do. I can imagine for somebody who was unsure about teaching not really seeing the reward of it, you know, long hours, tutoring, the achievement that we expect on certain things or sometimes lessons fall apart. So, I can definitely see if that’s not what you wanted to do, it might be really torturous (Interview 1).

As is evident in the excerpt above, Cheryl was optimistic about her work as a new teacher in the profession and did not have any doubts about her decision to become a teacher. Furthermore, it seems that she maintained a positive outlook in challenging times and she did not question her decision to become a teacher when she experienced struggles as a new teacher.

**Perception of School Culture**

Cheryl described the culture of Rose Hill High school as “very positive”, “familial” and “encouraging” (Interview 1). Reflecting on her first year, Cheryl said, “When I first started teaching at my school, everybody was very friendly. I felt like I belonged there” (Interview 1). Cheryl also expressed that unlike most of the other high schools in the city, the atmosphere at Rose Hill High school was “unique” (Interview 1) because the school was small and all the teachers knew each other and the students of the school well.

According to Cheryl, her colleagues and administrator were dedicated to all students, including ELLs, and genuinely worked very hard as a team to help all students succeed. More specifically, Cheryl spoke of the positive relationship she had developed with her administrator and shared how he helped her “feel supported, not isolated” as a new teacher (Interview 1). Cheryl added, “He is very approachable and welcoming. His door is always wide open! I always feel comfortable knocking on his door whenever I need anything” (Interview 1).
Cheryl also emphasized that the school was “very welcoming” for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Interview 2). According to Cheryl, Rose Hill high school provided a very positive and supportive school culture for ELLs: “Our school is a small school so many ELL students have been there since kindergarten, they know each other, teachers are inclusive, so there is a supportive and welcoming environment for ELLs. So, I believe ELLs feel comfortable here” (Interview 2).

Cheryl also reported that she loved being a teacher at Rose Hill high school: “We have a strong community at school and I love being a part of that community. I have really strong feelings towards the community I serve. I feel inspired and happy to be there” (Interview 1).

Cheryl’s positive statements about Rose Hill high school suggested that the positive and encouraging school culture and work environment provided her with a sense of belonging and enabled her to participate successfully in the teaching community of the school as a new teacher.

**Perceived Level of Content Knowledge**

According to Cheryl, having majored in political science and ethnic studies as an undergraduate student provided her with a strong foundation in her content area so that she had not had any challenges in teaching high-school history as an alternatively certified teacher: “I was fortunate to be assigned to teach history. I took a lot of history courses when I was doing my BA so I had a good knowledge of history” (Interview 1).

Cheryl also reported that she did not have to follow a predesigned curriculum at Rose Hill High school that enabled her to create and implement her own curriculum. Cheryl felt that developing her own curriculum empowered her as a teacher: “Fortunately, I don’t have a prescribed curriculum. I develop my own curriculum, choose my own topics, readings and
activities; I teach the way I want to teach. It is exciting and rewarding because it gives me freedom” (Interview 1).

Despite perceiving that she had a strong content knowledge in her area, Cheryl reported that teaching the content to ELLs in her history classrooms was a challenge for her as a new teacher. More specifically, Cheryl indicated that she struggled adapting her instruction for ELLs’ English language proficiency levels in her history classrooms. She also mentioned that teaching new vocabulary to ELLs was a challenge for her. Yet, the challenges Cheryl faced seemed to contribute to her teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. That is, Cheryl reported that because of the challenges she faced as a new teacher, she decided to devote most of her time to improving her knowledge of ELL instruction in her first year of teaching:

I was very concerned about my ability to reach out to my English language learners. I wanted to do my best for them. So, I did a lot of readings about ELLs’ needs and how to develop the units for ELLs. I used ELL strategies to modify my lesson plans. I added extra supplemental activities to make my lessons better for them (Interview 1).

Cheryl’s statements above indicated that her goal was not simply being a teacher of a specific content area but also being an effective teacher for her ELLs as a history teacher. Furthermore, it seems that having knowledge in her content area allowed Cheryl to focus more on her ELLs’ academic needs and make modifications in her lessons in order to improve her teaching practices for ELLs in her history classrooms.

Positioning in Relation to ELLs

Cheryl positioned herself as a teacher of all students, including minorities and ELLs. She believed that all students regardless of “race, ethnicity, language background and immigration status deserve good quality education” (Interview 1). In our interviews, Cheryl also positioned
herself as a “minority teacher” on several occasions and she commented on how being a minority teacher influenced her instructional decisions and teaching practices in her classrooms:

I focus more on minorities groups, minority rights, racism, Native Americans and their languages. In my classes, our topics are women in Korea, Japanese internment or the African independence movements. Last week, I dedicated a unit on Africa and it’s not from a European perspective, it’s about a real life in Africa, why Africa was paralyzed, how Africa was affected. So, instead of looking at world history from a very dominate lens, like a very Western lens, I look at it from a minority lens (Interview 1).

Cheryl’s racial identity seemed to play a significant part in her reflexive positioning in relation to ELLs as a teacher. She reported that as a minority Black woman, she could relate to the challenges ELLs might face in classrooms where the majority of students were native-English speaking students and ELLs were a minority. Thus, as a minority teacher, she viewed supporting ELLs’ learning in her classrooms as one of her main responsibilities: “I am a minority and I know how it feels to be the minority. So, teaching ELLs in my classrooms is one hundred percent my job, my responsibility” (Interview 1). Cheryl elaborated on how her racial identity, as a Black woman, affected her approach to working with ELLs as a teacher as follows:

As a black woman in this country, when I go through history, I see the struggles of my identity, being marginalized, being told that ‘You don’t belong here’, ‘This is not the space for you’, and my personal identity, my background allows me to understand minorities, immigrants, and ELLs. I apply my background, my personal, ethnic identity to my teaching identity and that’s how I approach ELLs as a teacher (Interview 1).
Cheryl assigned positive positions to ELLs by describing them as “smart”, “full of new perspectives” and “valuable” students. She further reported that ELLs enriched her classroom environment because they brought linguistic and cultural diversity in her history classrooms. Cheryl used “finding a jewel in a big pile” as a metaphor to describe teaching ELLs as a teacher and explained the reason as follows,

A lot of teachers overlook ELLs and kind of write them off, but for a teacher who takes time to really foster ELLs growth and their education, it’s incredibly rewarding because with your English-speaking students, you see growth, but with your ELLs, that amount of growth you can see in a such a short of time, it is mind blowing (Focus group).

Overall, from Cheryl’s statements, it is evident that her racial identity influenced how she defined her teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs. That is, it seems that Cheryl deployed her racial identity as a Black woman to interpret her role as a teacher of ELLs. Cheryl positioned herself and ELLs as members of minority groups and it seems that her positioning shaped her practices and approach to teaching ELLs in the classroom.

**Sources of Support**

Cheryl indicated as a novice teacher, she never felt “isolated” and “left alone” due to the professional and emotional support she received throughout her first two years in teaching (Interview 1). She reported that she received support from her mother, colleagues and administrator to navigate emotional and professional challenges she experienced as a new teacher in the teaching profession.

More specifically, Cheryl credited her mother who had more than 20 years of teaching experience in a low-income school as her main source of support. She spoke of how her mother
as an experienced teacher guided her to improve her instructional practices, design her lessons and overcome challenges: “When I face some challenges, like “Oh my God! How am I going to do this activity or teach this topic?” She always guides me, tells me step by step what to do, how to teach it” (Interview 1).

With respect to teaching ELLs, Cheryl reported that she found it difficult to adjust her teaching practice to the academic needs of ELLs and “felt lost at times” during her first year of teaching (Interview 1). More specifically, she struggled in adapting instruction for her ELLs’ English language proficiency levels. Cheryl remarked that she relied on her mother, who had taught many ELLs for years, to help her adjust her teaching practices to the ELLs’ language proficiency levels in her classrooms:

My mum helped me a lot. She gave me lots of suggestions about how to teach, design my lesson plans, activities and pacing. She was like ‘You need to give them more examples, use pictures, maps. You need to ask them to do this here, what are your expectations here as a teacher? You should explain to them like this’. I always talk to her on the phone. Last year, I called her every single day for her suggestions after planning my lessons (Interview 1).

Cheryl’s interactions with her mother seemed to have a significant impact on Cheryl’s teaching ability as a teacher of ELLs and contribute to her teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. It is evident that Cheryl perceived her mother as her source of knowledge and expert in working with ELLs. In addition, Cheryl’s statements illustrated that her mother’s ongoing guidance and support helped Cheryl cope with the challenges she experienced and contributed to the development of her teacher identity in relation to ELLs.
In addition to the support received from her mother, Cheryl felt that she received adequate emotional and professional support from her colleagues and administrator as a new teacher. Despite having mentioned that she did not receive any specific support or guidance regarding teaching ELLs from administrators or colleagues in her school context, Cheryl highlighted the emotional support from her administrator and colleagues helped her gain confidence and handle job stress:

If I have a concern, or any doubts, I feel very comfortable talking to them. They’re very positive! They are always like ‘you’re doing a great job, you’re doing fine’.

Knowing that they think I am doing a good job, it motivates me because I am super critical of myself. I know I can rely on my colleagues and administrator (Interview 2).

Cheryl described the support she received from her manager of teaching, leadership, and development (MTLD) as “not helpful” and felt her mentoring experiences with the MTLD did not provide the support she needed to become an effective teacher as a new teacher. She reported that her MTLD observed her only two times on her first year of teaching and did not provide her “much useful feedback” (Interview 2). She felt that her MTLD’s feedback was not specific and relevant to her needs. Cheryl made the following comments regarding her experiences with MTLD:

In my first year, I was just observed three or four times. Then, I opted out to be coached so I didn’t ask her to visit my classroom. She doesn’t have many years of teaching over me, I think she taught about three years. I appreciated her time but I didn’t get much support from my MTLD (Interview 2).

Overall, Cheryl felt that she had received a great deal of professional and emotional support that helped her work through the challenges she experienced as a new teacher. It seems
that the support Cheryl received helped her make the transition into the teaching profession successfully and to develop a strong sense of teacher identity, which in turn, she believed, enabled her to develop a strong sense of teacher identity in relation to ELLs. Despite reporting that she had not received any guidance and support from her colleagues, administrator and MTLD with respect to teaching ELLs, her mother as an experienced teacher of ELLs had served as a mentor for her and played a significant role in her teacher identity development as a teacher of ELLs.

Case 2- Melissa

Part 1

Introducing Melissa

Melissa was a 23-year-old, self-identified White woman who was born and raised in a small Midwestern town. She indicated that her hometown was predominantly White with very little linguistic, racial and cultural diversity and described it as “very sheltered” (Interview 1). Upon asking her about herself and her family, Melissa shared she came from a close-knit family. Her father owned his own business and her mother worked as an area extension agent at a local university. Melissa said that as the only child in her family, she received “a lot of love” and attention from her parents and was raised in “a protective family environment” (Interview 1).

Melissa’s parents placed a strong emphasis on the importance of education. Melissa indicated that being the only child, her parents held high expectations for her and supported her throughout her schooling. Growing up, Melissa reported she attended “very good” public schools with students mostly from middle to upper-middle socioeconomic families. She described the elementary and high schools she attended as “only a handful of students who were non-white” (Interview 1). During the interview, she said that she had positive experiences throughout her
school days. She described those days as pleasant, happy and “full of good memories” (Interview 1). When asked about her foreign language learning experiences at school, Melissa responded that she took some French courses for two years while she was studying at the high school however she never felt proficient in the language and did not consider herself to be bilingual.

During her high school years, Melissa’s goal and dream was to move to Washington, D.C. and work in politics. Therefore, following her graduation from high school, she moved to a large city in the Midwest to major in international relations at a public university where she also minored in Arabic. It is worthy to note that although Melissa minored in Arabic at university, she did not consider herself proficient in Arabic. When I asked her why she chose to minor in the Arabic language, Melissa shared:

My friends, my family always asked me why Arabic. My family wasn’t happy with my choice. But the general consensus among those of us who studied Arabic is that we are going to do this because we recognize that it is a step to a good relationship with the Middle East and we want to help facilitate that. We also want to break down the stereotypes (Interview 1).

Melissa also indicated that when she was a junior at college, she wanted to go to Morocco for summer study with her friends. Yet, her summer plans were not welcomed by her family. Melissa shared, “I told my family I was going to go to Morocco with some friends to study in summer and they all freaked out and thought I would be killed there. They did not let me go” (Interview 1). Instead of going to Morocco, Melissa changed her plans and decided to spend her summer in her hometown.
During her senior year at college, Melissa applied for a number of jobs in Washington, D.C. Although she always dreamed of working in politics in Washington, D.C. since her high school years, getting closer to her college graduation, she was uncertain about her future plans:

I was interested in jobs in DC. I wanted to go there. That was my dream since high school. But I don’t know. I was also unsure about what to do next. I also wanted to learn a little bit more about America. DC is a place where very privileged young people go. Before I went back into that privileged bubble, I felt like I needed to do something but I did not know what to do (Interview 2).

Melissa was drawn to TFA when she heard about the program from a friend of hers a few months before her college graduation. She completed the online application to join the TFA Corps and was accepted into the program.

After completing the five-week summer program, Melissa was placed in the Oak Valley High school (pseudonym) and was assigned to teach math to tenth and eleventh graders. She taught four classes and had a total of 114 students at the time of the study. Her average class size ranged from 28 to 30 students. Melissa described her classroom demographics as 75% Hispanics, 25% African American, and about 10% White. Melissa also indicated that out of 114 students, 18 of her students had special needs and 12 of her students were identified as ELLs. Melissa stated the ELLs in her class were all native speakers of Spanish with a range of English language proficiency skills.

**General Context of Oak Valley High School**

The school where Melissa was placed was a designated Title I public high school and had more than 2300 students in grades ninth through twelfth in the 2015-2016 school year. According to the State’s statistics, over 71% of Oak Valley’s enrolled students were
economically disadvantaged and eligible for free and reduced meal during the 2015-2016 school year. The graduation rate of Oak Valley High was 65% in 2015, that is, in comparison to the District, Oak Valley High school had a lower graduation rate by about 7%. Additionally, the Oak Valley High school had failed to meet the average graduation rate of the State in 2015.

The racial distribution of Oak Valley High School population consisted of 46% Hispanic, 32% African American, 13% White, 5% Multiracial, and 4% Asian in 2015. A typical school in the city where Melissa taught was made up of 48% Hispanic students; thus, Oak Valley High School had a very similar ethnic distribution compared to other high schools. In addition, according to the District’s statistics, at Oak Valley High School, 17% of the student population was designated as ELLs. The students designated as ELLs in Oak Valley High were integrated into the mainstream classrooms and were provided afterschool assistance and support by the only ESL teacher of the school.

At the time of the study, the school had a total of 112 classroom teachers, five counselors, one learning strategist and one ESL teacher. At the school, about 40% of teachers were in their first or second year of teaching. Melissa stated that there were eight TFA teachers at the school, including her.

**Influences of the TESL Course on Melissa’s Teacher Identity in Relation to ELLs**

The TESL course did not seem to have a significant impact on Melissa’s teacher identity in relation to ELLs. Melissa admitted that she did not make any modifications in her lesson plans and teaching practice for ELLs in her classrooms after her participation in the course. Furthermore, as is evident in the excerpt below, the TESL course did not seem to impact Melissa’s perception of her role as a teacher of ELLs in the classroom. That is, throughout the
TESL course, Melissa did not view her role to include addressing the needs of ELLs as a content area teacher:

Teaching ELLs is definitely a challenge for me. I know I don’t do a good job for them. To be honest, it’s hard for me to justify spending so much of my time on just a few ELLs in my class, which sounds really awful when I say it out loud, you know? But, I have to target the majority of my students. (Interview 3)

The following sections present how the TESL course influenced Melissa’s (a) perceived level of knowledge of the education of ELLs, (b) beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, (c) values about linguistic diversity, and (d) intention and commitment to work with ELLs as a mainstream teacher.

**Perceived Level of Knowledge of the Education of ELLs**

Melissa perceived that her knowledge of the education of ELLs improved as a result of participating in the TESL course. Melissa indicated that she entered the teaching profession without a background in ELL education. Reflecting on her five-week TFA summer training institute experiences, Melissa reported that she attended a couple of sessions that focused on cultural diversity and race issues at the TFA institute; however, she did not recall any sessions focusing on instructional strategies to address ELLs’ language and academic needs in mainstream classrooms: “We had conversations about diversity, equity and race but I don’t remember anything about ELLs. If we did have training for ELLs in the institute, it must have been really brief because I can’t remember anything like that” (Interview 1).

In the first interview, Melissa indicated that she felt ill-prepared to address ELLs’ academic needs in the classroom and she perceived herself as an ineffective teacher of ELLs: “I don’t feel like I do as good of a job teaching my ELLs as I do my other students. I am not
adequately prepared to meet their needs in a mathematics classroom” (Interview 1). At the beginning of the course, Melissa perceived her knowledge of ELL education as “very little” and rated her knowledge and skills as a teacher of ELLs at a two out of ten which increased to four after the course.

After participating in the TESL course, Melissa perceived her knowledge of the education of ELLs had improved in two areas. First, she indicated that she had learned ELL instructional strategies that she could utilize to enhance ELLs’ understanding of the content in her mathematics classroom. Second, she reported that she had gained a better understanding of the importance of focusing on academic language as a math teacher. Each finding is explained more fully in the following two sections.

**Instructional Strategies for ELLs.** Melissa perceived that her knowledge of instructional strategies for ELLs improved after her participation in the TESL course. In the third interview, Melissa reported that she learned a number of ELL teaching strategies such as using visuals, gestures, demonstrations or manipulatives to make math more comprehensible for ELLs as a new teacher. Melissa also mentioned that the TESL course introduced her to a variety of teaching techniques such as creating dictionaries and using cognates to help ELLs understand academic vocabulary in her content area. Nevertheless, despite perceiving that her knowledge of effective instructional strategies for ELLs had improved, she explicitly stated that she did not integrate any of the ELL instructional strategies she had learned into her teaching practice:

> I’ve learned a lot of strategies ELL instructional strategies. I mean if I wanted to sit down and write ELL friendly lesson plans every day, totally I could. I think the course has given me the skills and knowledge to do that, but I don’t do that to be honest (Interview 2).
Melissa’s statements illustrate that she did not translate the new knowledge into her teaching contexts and it became clear that this was for three main reasons. First, it seems that Melissa did not position herself as a teacher of ELLs. Second, as a content area teacher, Melissa had never felt well-prepared and confident to teach high-school level mathematics because of her perceived lack of content knowledge during her teaching career. Third, according to Melissa, the administrative pressure on her to raise her students’ standardized test scores led her to employ a teach to the test approach and hindered her to integrate effective instructional strategies that might benefit her ELLs in her classroom. All these three factors are discussed fully in part 2.

**Importance of Academic Language for ELLs.** According to Melissa, the TESL course enabled her to acknowledge the importance of teaching academic language to support ELLs’ linguistic development in the classroom. Melissa reported that before participating in the TESL course, she had never thought about the importance of teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs as a math teacher. Although Melissa indicated that she developed a new understanding about the importance of focusing on academic vocabulary to enhance ELLs’ language learning, she also explicitly stated that she did not integrate any academic language development practices or strategies in her math lessons. When asked to explain the reason, Melissa responded that as a new teacher in the profession, she had “so many other things to worry about” and therefore, she did not have enough time to focus on academic vocabulary development for ELLs (Interview 2). Melissa further indicated that teaching was more demanding than she had expected it to be and expressed her frustration at hearing “teachers should” sentences in most of the teacher education courses:

My head is spinning with all the things that teachers should do, but it’s just a joke.

Teachers should spend more time focusing on struggling students, teachers should
develop strong relationships with students; teachers should spend more time focusing on ELLs and special needs students. And, so it goes! Teachers should spend more time focusing on helping kids developing academic language; teachers should spend more time doing this, more time doing that! And by the end of the day, ok which one do you want me to do? Because, you know what, I don’t have time to do all of these and never will! It’s very overwhelming (Interview 2).

As is evident in the excerpt above, Melissa struggled with the demands of teaching as a novice teacher in the profession. Melissa’s statements also illustrate that she was not well-prepared for the realities of teaching. Despite acknowledging that she had gained new knowledge from the TESL course regarding the education of ELLs, she was not able to put that new knowledge into practice. According to Melissa, the struggles and stress she experienced as a novice teacher in the profession was one of the reasons that hindered her implement effective strategies for ELLs in the classroom.

Beliefs about ELLs and ELL Instruction

According to Melissa, her beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction did not change as a result of participating in the TESL course: “I can’t say that this class completely changed my beliefs about or attitudes towards ELLs… But, I struggled so hard when trying to learn Arabic and it definitely changed my beliefs about ELLs” (Interview 3). As a teacher, Melissa perceived herself as an empathetic teacher towards ELLs because of her prior foreign language experiences as a student. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that she did not utilize any practices specific for ELLs and remained consistent in her belief that she had to address the learning needs of the majority of students in the classroom throughout the course. She also perceived that
implementing good strategies would be sufficient and benefit all students, including ELLs, in her content area classrooms.

As stated above, Melissa reported that her beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction did not significantly change due to her participation in the course. However, there was one exception. The TESL course seemed to influence her beliefs and understandings about native language use in mainstream classrooms. In our first interview, Melissa expressed her belief that mainstream teachers should not allow ELLs to use their home languages in the classrooms. She also believed that ELLs’ home language could act like a barrier and slow down ELLs’ English language acquisition progress. Furthermore, Melissa admitted that before participating in the TESL course, she had not allowed her ELLs to use their home languages in her math classrooms. Nonetheless, as is evident in the excerpt below, after her participation in the TESL course, Melissa acknowledged her deficit belief and became accepting of allowing her ELLs to use their home languages in her math classrooms:

Before the course, when they were using Spanish, I was worried, I was like ‘Oh my gosh, they shouldn’t speak in Spanish cause this will hold them back. So, I told them ‘No Spanish in the class’ but after the course, I learned that it’s ok, nothing wrong, and if they use Spanish, this will not affect their learning in English. I learned not to be afraid of their first language (Focus group).

Overall, the TESL course seemed to influence Melissa’s belief about native language use in the classroom. However, she remained consistent in her belief that her role and responsibility as a teacher was to address the academic needs of the majority of students in the classroom.
Values about Linguistic Diversity

According to Melissa, the TESL course did not change the positive values she maintained about linguistic diversity. Melissa shared that she always valued linguistic diversity as a teacher and added that she viewed linguistically diverse students as an asset. However, she also admitted that she did not integrate any specific strategies to address her ELLs’ academic needs: “I have a huge respect for ELLs but I came into the profession, I don’t really know what I am doing. So, it was really difficult for me to focus on ELLs in my classrooms” (Focus group).

Despite Melissa having reported that the TESL course did not influence her values about linguistic diversity as a teacher, Melissa had not understood the value of ELLs’ home languages and perceived it as a barrier instead of a resource prior to the course. Melissa’s change of perspectives on native-language use indicated that the TESL course played a positive role in her values about the maintenance of ELLs’ home language.

Intention and Commitment to Teach ELLs

Melissa admitted that she had already decided to leave the profession before participating in the TESL course; therefore, the TESL course did not seem to influence Melissa’s intention and commitment to teach ELLs as a content area teacher. Additionally, despite perceiving that her knowledge of the education of ELLs increased as a result of her participation in the course, Melissa reported that she did not feel “confident enough” to work with ELLs in mainstream classrooms and indicated that she still did view herself as an “effective teacher” of ELLs (Interview 3).

Indeed, in our second interview, Melissa reported teaching was “the hardest thing” she had done in her life and she did not have any intention to continue to work as a teacher. She also indicated that she did not feel committed to teaching and she decided to leave the profession after
her two-year commitment. During the focus group interview, Melissa shared her emotions as follows: “I’m not a teacher anymore. I feel happier. I am leaving with huge respect for teachers. Teachers are really undervalued and have extreme amounts of demands on them. I do have more respect for teachers now” (Focus group). After Melissa left the profession, she moved to Washington D.C. to pursue her MA degree in international affairs.

Melissa-Part 2

Primary Considerations Influencing Melissa’s Teacher Identity as a Teacher of ELLs

In the following five sections, the findings pertaining Melissa’s (a) decision to become a teacher, (b) perception of school culture, (c) perceived level of content knowledge, (d) positioning in relation to ELLs, and (e) sources of support, are presented.

Decision to Become a Teacher

Melissa clearly indicated that she never dreamed of becoming a teacher. In our first interview, she reported that her dream and goal was to work in politics in Washington D.C. after her college graduation. Yet, although her strong desire to work in politics, she wanted “to do something different” before pursuing her dream (Interview 1). Therefore, Melissa decided to become a teacher through TFA. Regarding her decision to become a teacher, Melissa shared:

I was raised in a bubble and I just wanted an opportunity to do something different. For me, it was more about seeing the rest of the country, really understanding poverty, really understanding what the rest of America looks like because I hadn’t had many experiences with that ever. So, before going to DC, before applying to jobs in politics, I thought why not try to learn something more about the world? I don’t think I ever really thought I would be a teacher until TFA was standing in front of me, then I said, ‘Oh yeah, that’s a good idea’ (Interview 1).
It is also worthy to note that Melissa’s family did not welcome her decision to join TFA and they did not support her during her two-year teaching career. Melissa reported that her family was very concerned about her safety, wondering why she would decide to work as a teacher at a low-income and under-resourced school while presumably having several job opportunities in Washington, DC. Melissa shared, “When I told them my decision, my aunt freaked out and called my dad ‘you can’t let her do TFA. Her students are going to follow her home and kill her! She can’t work at a dangerous neighborhood’” (Interview 1). According to Melissa, her family was “very racist” and therefore, they did not want her to become a teacher with TFA and work at a high-minority school: “I love them but they are totally racist. My parents are not that much but my extended family is very racist and that’s why they didn’t support me doing this” (Interview 1).

Although Melissa did not have the support of her family, she was determined to break her bubble and therefore, she decided to join TFA Corps to become a teacher. These findings seem to suggest that becoming a teacher through TFA was an opportunity for Melissa to move outside of the boundaries of her home community.

**Perception of School Culture**

Reflecting on her first year of teaching, Melissa described Oak Valley High school as “welcoming” and “positive environment” (Interview 1). She reported that she felt “comfortable” with the other teachers and was easily accepted as a new teacher at Oak Valley high school (Interview 1).

Melissa had a good relationship with her administrator in her first year of teaching. However, she struggled with maintaining a positive relationship with the administrator in her second year of teaching. According to Melissa, her administrator created stress by placing more
pressure on the teachers of Oak Valley high school to increase students’ test scores which created a negative environment within the school. Sharing her frustration, Melissa explained how the tensions she experienced with her administrator overwhelmed and demotivated her in her second year of teaching:

Last year, everything was good and I enjoyed my school, I was fine, but then, the whole thing kind of changed. Now, he wants us to teach to the test, he wants us to push and test the students and collect data, teacher-centered, test-focused teaching, that’s what he wants. He wants us to meet every week just to look at test data! Data, data, data! Nothing is more important! For him, nothing you do is good enough! It’s really frustrating (Interview 2).

Melissa also indicated that working hard to increase her students’ math test scores negatively affected her morale and increased her emotional exhaustion as a novice teacher: “I don’t like the direction we are going at anymore. I feel too much pressure to try to get the scores up. I don’t know if I can deal with this anymore” (Interview 2). Melissa’s negative relationship with her administrator seemed to hinder her to develop a strong sense of teacher identity and reshaped her understanding and perspectives regarding the teaching profession. In the second interview, Melissa expressed that as a teacher, she did not feel valued in her school context because she was not “treated as a professional” by her administrator. Melissa further shared: I feel drained. I think in teaching nothing you ever do will be good enough. I don’t see myself as a successful teacher. I don’t know maybe I need to acknowledge I learned a lot and I am not going to be that amazing teacher and let it go (Interview 2).
In addition to the testing pressures and problems she experienced with her administrator, Melissa also indicated that she experienced culture shock as a White female coming from the Midwest at Oak Valley high school contexts. She stated that the student body of Oak Valley high school was demographically very different than the schools she had attended as a student. Melissa added that when she had joined TFA to become a teacher, she was aware that she would be placed in a school serving high proportions of low-income and minority students. Nevertheless, according to Melissa, the racial and socioeconomic differences were surprising and unexpected for her. Melissa described the trepidation she felt on her first day in teaching as follows:

When I came to the school and saw the neighborhood, I was shocked, I was scared, absolutely terrified! It was a culture shock for me. I was like, ‘Wait, what did I sign up for?’ That’s just a weird dream! I’m going to wake up tomorrow in my college dorm room and this was all just a very strange dream. That was just terrifying; there is not really another word to describe my feelings (Interview 2).

The demographic student composition of Oak Valley High school seemed to influence Melissa’s perception of herself as a new teacher in the profession. Melissa mentioned that she was very concerned about gaining her students’ respect and recognition as a White teacher from a very different community. Melissa also thought she would not be successful and effective for her students and she was very concerned that her students would not “trust” her because of her ethnicity (interview 1). Melissa reported that although she felt less worried about her ethnicity as a White teacher in her second year of teaching, she still felt like an outsider as a teacher in the classroom at Oak Valley High school:
The first year, I was kinda afraid of being white but the second year, I was like ok, I am white and they are not. I can’t change either one of these things. So, I accepted that and stopped worrying much about my skin color…But, sometimes I kinda feel like an outsider because I do not look like my students, I don’t come from the same background (Interview 2).

These findings seem to suggest that Melissa perceived her White teacher identity as a barrier to sustain engaging relationships with her students as a new teacher in a high minority school context. It was also apparent from Melissa’s interviews that because of her ethnicity, she was concerned about how she would be perceived by the students of Oak Valley High school. The anxiety Melissa felt seemed to influence her teacher identity development and hindered her to develop a strong sense of belonging to her school context.

**Perceived Level of Content Knowledge**

According to Melissa, teaching high school math was a major challenge for her as a new teacher due to her perceived lack of knowledge in her content-area. During the five-week TFA summer institute, Melissa had taught English to elementary students and she reported that she felt confident in her teaching ability and skills. After the TFA summer institute, Melissa had expected to be placed in an elementary school to teach English or social sciences. However, when she discovered that she was assigned to teach math at Oak Valley High school, she felt disappointed and was concerned about her level of content knowledge in math. Melissa emphasized that she did not feel passionate about her role as a high school math teacher and added,

Teaching at TFA summer institute was fun! I thought, ‘Ok, this is easy’. It’s a lot like summer camp, but teaching math was tough for me. I never wanted to teach math. I
don’t have a strong math background and I think my content knowledge is lacking (Interview 1).

During our first interview, Melissa indicated that she spent countless hours “trying to figure out math formulas, math concepts, problems” and how to design her lesson plans at home after school before going to the class. Melissa positioned herself as a “math student” instead of a math teacher and added that she never felt confident in her content knowledge as a teacher during her teaching career:

Last year, I was like just a page ahead of the kids and I think it was awful. I had no idea what was going on, I didn’t feel like a teacher at all. To be honest, math is something that I’ve been struggling with every single day. Even today we were talking about the probability of the college basketball brackets and I had to look things up and figure it out (Interview 1).

As is evident in Melissa’s statements above, she struggled with teaching high school level mathematics during her teaching career. It appeared that she entered the teaching profession without strong content knowledge in mathematics and thus, she devoted most of her time and energy to studying mathematics after school. These findings seemed to illustrate that Melissa was trying to develop a teacher identity as a teacher of mathematics. Her efforts in trying to develop a teacher identity as a teacher of mathematics appeared to hinder her teacher identity development in all respects, including working with ELLs as well.

**Positioning in Relation to ELLs**

Melissa reflexively positioned herself as a teacher of the majority students, that is, the native English-speaking students in the classroom. According to Melissa, it was more important
for her to focus on the learning needs of the majority of her students in her math classrooms and implement instructional strategies to “help the majority” as a math teacher:

I know this sounds really bad, but it is not worth my time trying to employ ELL strategies to help just a few ELLs in my class. I mean I can go and learn that awesome math technology strategies that are gonna help the majority of my students (Interview 3).

Melissa’s statements also illustrate that her reflexive positioning influenced her thinking as a teacher and teaching practices in her classrooms as a teacher. For instance, Melissa reported that she did not modify her lesson plans and instructional delivery to address ELLs’ academic needs because she did not feel herself responsible for addressing ELLs’ academic and linguistic needs in her math classrooms: “Let’s say that if I have twenty students struggling with some math problems, and some ELL kids struggling with the language, I am not going to focus on ELLs, I am going to focus on my twenty struggling kids” (Interview 3).

Although Melissa acknowledged that she did not make any adjustments in her lesson plans and instructional practices for ELLs, she positioned herself as an emphatic teacher towards ELLs due to her prior foreign language learning experiences. According to Melissa, her French and Arabic language learning experiences as a student in school enabled her to develop empathy regarding the linguistic challenges ELLs might face in English-only mainstream classrooms: “I struggled so hard when trying to learn Arabic and French. So, when I look at ELLs trying to learn English, I really have a huge empathy for them because I’ve been there” (Interview 2). Nonetheless, despite positioning herself as an empathic teacher towards ELLs, Melissa’s statements illustrate that her empathy did not enable her to provide language support and targeted instruction for ELLs in her classrooms as a content area teacher.
**Sources of Support**

Melissa reported that she received support from her TFA peers, other math teachers at Oak Valley high school as well as her MTLD during her first two years of teaching. Melissa added that the support she received helped her navigate emotional and professional challenges she experienced as a new teacher in the teaching profession. Despite Melissa having reported that she had received both emotional and professional support as a novice teacher, she noted that she did not receive any support or guidance in developing her work as a teacher of ELLs from her administrator, colleagues, MTLD or TFA peers.

Melissa cited her friendship with other TFA corps members as the primary source of professional and emotional support during her teaching career. She reported that she sought help and advice from other TFA corps members to design her lesson plans and improve her math teaching as a new teacher in the profession. Melissa elaborated on how the support from other TFA teachers helped her overcome challenges and resolve instructional issues she experienced:

I have a group of TFA teachers I turn to when I face challenges. I think that has really positively impacted my teaching because they have a strong background in math. When I have a question, I just go and ask them. We also work together to build units, homework notes, tests, all that stuff. So, I think just interacting with them and building the units, creating the lesson plans with them; that’s really how I learned how to teach math (Interview 1).

Melissa also emphasized receiving emotional support from her TFA peers in her cohort group. She stated the encouragement and motivation of her TFA peers helped her face the emotional challenges of adjusting to her new context and keep her “head above water” (Interview 1). Melissa further shared, “I feel very lucky to have such a group of TFA teachers as
my friends. They really helped me get used to my new life here and cope with emotional challenges of being away from home” (Interview 1).

Melissa also spoke of the professional support she received from her MTLD during the first two years of her teaching. She reported that her MTLD regularly observed her classes and provided her feedback and suggestions about her instructional practices in teaching math and classroom management issues. Melissa also mentioned that the support from her MTLD helped her “create more positive classroom environment and manage classroom behavior” (Interview 1). Although Melissa was observed by her MTLD regularly and received feedback and suggestions regarding her instructional practices, she indicated that she did not receive any support or guidance about ELL instruction from her MTLD. Melissa further added that she did not ask any questions or suggestions to her MTLD about teaching ELLs because she believed that her MTLD did not have specific knowledge about ELL instruction: “I never got any suggestions about teaching ELLs, just some classroom management strategies, nothing about ELLs… I don’t think that she has knowledge about ELLs or teaching ELLs” (Interview 1).

In addition to the support received from her MTLD and other TFA corps members, Melissa credited the collaboration and support from the other veteran math teachers at Oak Valley high school with helping her planning her lessons, designing her lesson plans and creating math tests for her students. Melissa also reported that the other math teachers shared their instructional resources and materials as a support to her:

They were sharing their notes, lesson plans and tests with me which was very helpful because their notes, lesson plans helped me see how they were teaching it. I was looking their lesson plans, examples and trying to understand how they were teaching it and how I should teach (Interview 3).
Melissa also reported that she received some support from her administrator in her first year of teaching. However, according to Melissa, her administrator did not provide the supportive and collaborative environment for her to become a successful teacher in her second year of teaching. Although Melissa received multiple types of support from other TFA corps members, her colleagues and her MTLD, Melissa reported that the lack of appreciation and support from her administrator contributed to her emotional exhaustion and drive her from the profession.

With respect to teaching ELLs, Melissa reported that she did not receive any guidance or support during her teaching career. Additionally, Melissa mentioned that although she constantly interacted with the other veteran mathematics teachers in her school context in order to learn how to design effective mathematics lessons for her students as a new teacher, she did not ask for help or support in ELL instruction. It seems that Melissa was trying to be able to teach high school level math and become a teacher of mathematics. Therefore, she invested in developing a professional identity as a teacher of mathematics, instead of a teacher of ELLs.

Case 3- Patrick

Part 1

Introducing Patrick

Patrick was a 26-year-old, self-identified White man who was born and raised in a large city in the Southwest. He was raised in a middle-class household and neighborhood with his younger brother, Aaron. His father owned his own business whereas his mother was stay at home mother, taking care of the household. Patrick attended both public and private schools throughout his education. For his elementary education, he attended a large public school that served more than 800 students. According to Patrick, his elementary school was located at a
good school district and had a fairly diverse student population in terms of socio-economic background and ethnicity. Reflecting back on his elementary school experiences, Patrick said that although he had good teachers during his primary schooling, he was not a very hardworking student and he was not “the smartest kid” in his classes (Interview 1). Patrick shared that after completing his elementary education, his parents decided to send him to a private school for his high school education for “better education” (Interview 1).

According to Patrick, going to a private school did not help him become a more motivated and hardworking student. He stated that school and education were not part of his goals during the early years of high school. As he reflected on his own experiences in school, Patrick shared that he found school “boring” and added, “I did not care much about school or getting good grades, I did not like reading books or studying” (Interview 1). Patrick also reported that he never planned to go to college. However, when he was in the eleventh grade, his high school teacher, whom he identified as his “best teacher”, changed his life and future:

I was kinda like a 2.0 student before I took his class and he just took the extra time. It was such a small amount of time for him but it made such a huge impact in my life. Because of him, I started reading. I started pursuing my own education and I turned around from being a 2.0 student into a 4.0 student within a year. It put me on a different trajectory in my own life. I never wanted to college before I met this teacher. I didn’t care about school or nothing and I think about where my life would be if it wasn’t for him (Interview 1).

After his graduation from high school, Patrick decided to join the U.S. Marine Corps before pursuing further education. When asked why he joined the Marine Corps, Patrick shared, “I wanted to serve my country and prepare myself for life in the future” (Interview 1). During his
service years in the Navy, Patrick deployed overseas several times which gave him the
opportunity to see and experience different countries in Europe and Southeast Asia. His first
experience with learning a foreign language was with the Thai language. During his Navy
service in Thailand, he attempted to learn Thai because he thought it was an “exotic” language.
Yet, he did not enjoy his foreign language learning experience and described it as “painful”, “not
fun” and “very difficult” (Interview 1).

Patrick served two years overseas, and upon returning to the U.S., he attended a private
university in California. He chose to major in computer science without any real career plan in
mind. After two years, he switched his major to political science and graduated with a BA in
political science. While Patrick was in college, he also took a couple of Spanish courses. He
thought Spanish was easier to learn and “a more applicable” language compared to Thai
(Interview 1). He shared his Spanish learning experience in college as follows:

I put a lot of effort to learn Spanish but I wasn’t very successful, I was very slow. I
felt lost because I didn’t understand a word in the class. All of the instruction was in
Spanish and I was there just like a lost puppy. It was frustrating and then, I gave up
(Interview 1).

During his senior year in college, Patrick heard about TFA through a friend and decided
to apply. He was accepted into the TFA corps and placed at Midland High school (pseudonym)
after attending a five-week summer training institute. At Midland High school, Patrick was
assigned to teach mathematics and Algebra to ninth graders. He taught four classes and had a
total of 127 students. He indicated his average class size ranged from 30 to 32 students.
According to Patrick, the racial distribution of his students within his classes was about 70%
Hispanic, who spoke Spanish as their home language; 15% African American; 10% multiracial
and the rest was White. Patrick had a total of 16 Spanish speaking ELLs in his classrooms at the time of the study.

**General context of Midland High School**

The school at which Patrick taught was a large public high school that boasted a population of approximately 2500 students in grades ninth through twelfth in 2015. According to the State’s statistics, 74% of Midland High’s enrolled students were from economically disadvantaged households and qualify for free and reduced meal during the 2015-2016 school year.

During the 2015-2016 school year, the students at Midland High school identified themselves as 73% Hispanic, 12% as African American, 11% as White, 2% as Asian and 2% as mixed race. A typical school in the city where Patrick taught was made up of 48% Hispanic students. That is, compared to other schools in the city, Midland High school had a drastically different ethnic distribution. According to the District’s statistics, at Midland High School, 16% of the student population was designated as ELLs. The students identified as ELLs in Midland High were integrated into the mainstream classrooms and were pulled out of class by an ESL teacher for a period each day.

At the time of the study, Midland High school had a total of 113 classroom teachers, six counselors and one ESL teacher. Additionally, about 29% of teachers were in their first or second year of teaching at the school. Patrick stated that including him, there were five TFA teachers at Midland High school.

**Influences of the TESL Course on Patrick’s Teacher Identity in Relation to ELLs**

The TESL course seemed to contribute Patrick’s teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs by introducing him to various instructional strategies to teach academic content to ELLs. Patrick
also perceived that his course experiences informed his teaching practice as a mathematics
teacher, which in turn, he believed, “benefitted the ELL students” in his classrooms (Interview
3). Nevertheless, as is evident in the excerpts below, Patrick did not construct a strong sense of
teacher identity in relation to ELLs. He positioned himself as an ineffective teacher of ELLs due
to his linguistic identity and he charged ESL or bilingual teachers with the responsibility of
educating ELLs:

Throwing in ELLs in mainstream classrooms; it makes the situation more difficult for
teachers and ELLs. So, having an ESL or bilingual teacher would make that easier or
maybe ESL or bilingual teachers should educate ELLs in different classroom, that’d be better (Interview 3).

To teach ELLs successfully, they need someone who can speak Spanish or if I am
going to teach that class, then I need someone in the classroom who could translate
(Focus group).

The following sections present how the TESL course influenced Patrick’s (a) perceived
level of knowledge of the education of ELLs, (b) beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, (c)
values about linguistic diversity and (d) intention and commitment to work with ELLs as a
content area teacher.

**Perceived Level of Knowledge of the Education of ELLs.**

According to Patrick, the TESL course improved his knowledge of the education of
ELLs. Patrick shared that although he had some experiences with studying foreign languages, he
entered the teaching profession with little experience with linguistically diverse individuals.
When asked if he had any training and preparation regarding the instruction of ELLs during
TFA’s five-week summer institute, Patrick responded he had some training focusing on diverse
learners, but he could not recall any specific training or preparation devoted to linguistic diversity or ELL instruction: “I don’t recall any specific strategies towards working with ELL students, we might have some ELL sessions, not sure. But, I think that TFA needs to focus on ELLs instruction more” (Interview 1). In the first interview, before the TESL course, Patrick indicated he had little confidence in working with ELLs as a teacher in the classroom and rated his knowledge of the education of ELLs at a three out of ten, which increased to six after his participation in the TESL course.

Patrick perceived that the TESL course improved his knowledge of ELL instruction in three areas. First, Patrick reported that as a content-area teacher, he had learned various ELL instructional strategies to help his students grasp mathematical concepts. Second, he indicated that he had gained a better understanding of the SLA process and how to identify ELLs’ proficiency levels in the English language after his participation in the TESL course. Third, he expressed that as a math teacher, he had come into the realization of the importance of integrating language and literacy into math instruction to support ELLs’ language development and math understanding in the classroom. Each of these three findings is explained more fully in the following sections.

**Instructional Strategies for ELLs.** According to Patrick, his knowledge of instructional strategies for ELLs improved as a result of his participation in the TESL course. In particular, Patrick perceived that he learned a variety of ELL instructional strategies, such as focusing on key vocabulary, using visual representations and cognates in order to help his students grasp mathematical concepts and guide ELLs to understand academic vocabulary of mathematics.

Patrick further shared that the TESL course encouraged him to “focus more on ELLs” in his classrooms and added: “I really benefitted from the course. I have putting a lot more effort
into making my instruction more comprehensible for ELLs through using visuals, diagrams and graphs. I also use cognates to help my ELLs, I didn’t know about that” (Focus group).

**Second Language Acquisition Process.** According to Patrick, he gained a better understanding of the course of second language acquisition (SLA) process as a result of his participation in the TESL course. At the beginning of the course, Patrick reported having very little knowledge regarding the topic of SLA process and the stages of language acquisition. Yet, after the TESL course, he reported having gained new knowledge and developing a better understanding about language acquisition process. According to Patrick, learning about the stages of SLA helped him identify his ELLs’ proficiency levels in the English language: “I learned some very useful things about SLA and the SLA stages. The SLA is extremely important to my instruction. I now can identify what stages my ELLs are at by looking for the list of stages and descriptors” (Interview 3).

Additionally, the knowledge Patrick gained from the course about SLA process seemed to challenge him to think differently about ELLs. That is, Patrick mentioned that before the TESL course, he used to “label them [ELLs] all in the same category” in terms of their proficiency level in English (Interview 3). However, after learning about the stages of SLA in the TESL course, he had come into the realization that “ELLs vary in their levels of proficiency in English” (Interview 3).

**Integrating Language Support Strategies into Mathematics.** According to Patrick, he came to a better understanding about the importance of integrating language support strategies into mathematics instruction to promote ELLs’ development of academic literacy skills after participating in the TESL course:
Before the course, I wasn’t focusing so much on literacy or language because I teach math. I had never thought about integrating language into math instruction. But, the course made me realize that they [ELLs] need to read and understand math problems, they need to be able to write and have that language as a part of mathematics (Interview 2).

Patrick indicted that after the TESL course, he focused more on academic language and employed language support strategies such as identifying key words in word problems and using cognates in order to meet the academic and language needs of ELLs in his math classrooms. When asked about whether he integrated four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, in his teaching practices, Patrick responded that he only focused on reading skill in his classrooms. Patrick shared that he struggled with teaching the other three language skills, speaking, listening and writing, because he “didn’t know how to teach those skills” in the context of math instruction (Interview 3). He felt that his knowledge was inadequate to target all four language skills equally in his classrooms and expressed the need for professional development specifically designed for math teachers of ELLs.

Beliefs about ELLs and ELL Instruction

Patrick perceived that the TESL course changed his beliefs about ELLs. Patrick reported that before participating in the TESL course, he believed that ELLs struggle academically because of the lack of academic content knowledge and proficiency in the English language. He also believed that students who were identified as ELLs did not have enough academic content knowledge to be successful in mainstream classrooms. Yet, he reported that the TESL course helped him become aware of different types of ELLs and understand that these students might have different linguistic needs. According to Patrick, after his participation in the TESL course,
he came into the realization that ELLs were heterogeneous with differing levels of academic skills and they could bring strong content knowledge in mainstream classrooms: “I didn’t know ELLs could have strong math knowledge. I realized that many of my ELLs might have content knowledge, but they are struggling solely from the language barrier” (Interview 3).

With respect to ELL instruction, Patrick remained consistent in his belief that ESL or bilingual teachers could provide a more effective instruction to ELLs compared to monolingual English-speaking teachers. It seems that Patrick could not reach a comfort level that enabled him to feel confident in his teaching ability and skills to work with ELLs as with non-ELLs in the classroom.

Patrick’s beliefs about what constitutes an effective teacher of ELLs also appeared to change after his participation in the TESL course. Prior to the course, Patrick believed that effective teachers of ELLs were “caring”, “speak the language of ELLs” and “understands the challenges of ELLs” (Interview 1). After the course, although Patrick continued to argue that effective teachers of ELLs speak the language of ELLs and “emphatic to the challenges of ELLs”, he also underscored the importance of having specific knowledge of ELL instruction to effectively educate ELLs in the content area classrooms (Interview 3).

Overall, the TESL course seemed to help Patrick reconstruct some of his existing beliefs about ELLs and the education of ELLs. However, the TESL course did not seem to challenge Patrick’s perception of his role as a teacher of ELLs.

Values about Linguistic Diversity

Patrick reported that the TESL course did not play a part in his positive values about linguistic diversity. Patrick said that he had valued cultural and linguistic diversity as a teacher prior to the TESL course. He attributed his positive attitudes towards linguistically diverse
individuals to his foreign language learning experiences. Patrick also admitted that he had had
“more strict perspectives about immigration and immigrants” when he first started teaching
(Interview 3). However, he shared that his experience with an undocumented ELL in his first
year of teaching had challenged his perspectives about immigrants and immigrant students in the
U.S.:

One of my students was an ELL and he was an undocumented immigrant. My
relationship with him opened my eyes to the entire different world. If you had asked
my opinions about immigrants a few years ago, I would have had different opinions
till I met him. He came here for a better life and he deserves more than an American
who just sits in the class and doesn’t appreciate the things he has. He appreciates this
country, you know what I mean. He appreciates what he has here in the States, the
opportunity here. He appreciates free school, walking down the street and not being
afraid. I have a lot of respect for that kid. I am having conversations with an
immigration lawyer to help him (Interview 3).

As a teacher of ELLs, Patrick seemed to value the maintenance of the home language of
ELLs. Despite perceiving his monolingualism as a barrier to support ELLs’ home languages in
his classrooms as a teacher, he indicated that he encouraged his ELLs to speak in their home
language with their peers during classroom activities and group discussions in the classroom.
Patrick also criticized some of the States that had passed English-only education laws and
indicated that he valued bilingual education programs: “I am fully supportive of bilingual
instruction because bilingual education has great benefits. If ELLs had a teacher who could
speak their language and English, there is nothing better than that because you can do the slow
build over” (Interview 2).
Intention and Commitment to Work with ELLs

The TESL course did not seem to influence Patrick’s intention and commitment to work with ELLs as a teacher. Patrick indicted that he benefited from the TESL course and he perceived that his knowledge of the education of ELLs improved. Nevertheless, he did not show strong commitment to working with ELL in future because he felt that he was “gonna hurt those students” as a monolingual English-speaking teacher (Interview 3). He viewed his monolingualism as a limitation to be an effective teacher for ELLs. Patrick also positioned bilingual teachers, more specifically, Spanish-speaking bilingual teachers, as being at an advantage over monolingual English-speaking teachers and believed that ELLs would benefit from being taught by bilingual teachers. He further shared, “I think mainstreaming ELLs, especially those ELLs, who do not know much English, is just very unfair for mainstream teachers and ELLs” (Interview 3).

Part 2-Patrick

Primary Considerations Influencing Patrick’s Teacher Identity as a Teacher of ELLs

In the following five sections, the findings pertaining Patrick’s (a) decision to become a teacher, (b) perception of school culture, (c) perceived level of content knowledge, (d) positioning in relation to ELLs and (e) sources of support are presented.

Decision to Become a Teacher

Patrick reported that he never had an interest in becoming a teacher until late in his college career. However, when he heard about TFA’s mission through one of his friends during his senior year in college, he was motivated and inspired by the organization’s mission and decided to pursue a career in teaching. Patrick believed that he could “make a difference” in the lives of struggling students in under-resourced schools and be a good role model for them:
“When I heard about TFA’s mission, I couldn’t get it out of my mind. It was something I needed to do. It was exactly what I was looking for. I wanted to make a difference, so I signed up” (Interview 1).

In our first interview, Patrick also stated that he viewed teaching as “paying it forward” and explained how his high school English teacher played a part in his decision to become a teacher:

Someone helps you and then, you return it by helping someone else. I had that teacher who changed my life and taught me all the things necessary to survive in the society and I wanted to do the same. I thought I could be a teacher like him (Interview 1).

According to Patrick, becoming a teacher through TFA was more than a two-year commitment. Patrick reported that he entered teaching with the intention of remaining in the profession beyond his two-year TFA teaching commitment. Patrick shared, “For me, teaching is a life-long career; more than a job. It’s an opportunity to make a difference” (Interview 1).

**Perception of School Culture**

Patrick described the Midland high school culture as “welcoming” and “collaborative” (Interview 1). He reported that as a new teacher, he never felt “like an outcast” because of the collaborative and positive culture of the school (Interview 1). Patrick also praised his administrator for creating a positive school culture and a sense of collegiality at the Midland High school.

According to Patrick, Midland high school had an “inclusive culture” that supported all students, including ELLs (Interview 1). He believed that Midland High school provided a welcoming and positive school environment for ELLs. Nevertheless, he mentioned that there was only one ESL teacher at Midland High school and he felt that the school needed more ESL and
bilingual teachers to work collaboratively with content-area teachers to support ELLs’ learning in mainstream classrooms. Patrick further stated: “I’d like to see a bigger ELL department in our school, working with the teachers. We have special education teachers coming in, checking on special ed students. I don’t see why we shouldn’t have more ESL teachers checking on ELLs” (Interview 3).

Overall, Patrick perceived that the school culture was welcoming and collegial. On several occasions during our interviews, he expressed that he was happy and felt fortunate to be a teacher there. It appears that the positive environment of the school enhanced Patrick’s teacher identity development as a new teacher in the profession. It is also evident that Patrick developed a sense of belonging to the school as he expressed that he felt a “part of the team” (Interview 1).

**Perceived Level of Content Knowledge**

Patrick reported that he felt himself fortunate to be assigned to teach mathematics at Midland High school because he had strong content knowledge due to his educational background: “I feel confident in my ability to teach math. I studied computer science for two years, so I do have very high level of mathematics under my belt” (Interview 1).

Patrick viewed himself as a successful content area teacher and indicated that he enjoyed teaching mathematics at Midland High school. Additionally, Patrick stated that as a mathematics teacher, his primary aim was to inspire his students to love mathematics. Therefore, he volunteered to teach extra mathematics classes after school to motivate students love mathematics and help the students who struggled with mathematics: “I want my students to be confident in math. I tell them ‘math can be hard so you have to put the extra mile in. Come to my class after school. I’ll be there willing to work with you” (Interview 1).
Despite Patrick having reported that he entered the profession with strong content knowledge in his content area, he admitted that he struggled with addressing ELLs’ academic needs in his classrooms as a new teacher. Reflecting on his first year of teaching, Patrick explained: “There was one classroom and there were more ELLs in it than I had collectively of all other classes I taught. It was extremely challenging and I didn’t feel like I was doing a good job in the class” (Interview 1). Patrick reported that he was aware of his lack of knowledge of ELL instruction and realized that he needed to find ways to “reach his ELLs” (Interview 1). In order to help the ELLs in his classrooms, Patrick reported that he spent his free time reading articles online to learn more about ELL instructional strategies in his first year of teaching. He perceived that he learned a number of instructional strategies such as pairing up ELLs and non-ELL students, using more visuals and translation applications. Nevertheless, he mentioned that he did not feel successful in teaching ELLs because he perceived language differences between him and ELLs as a “huge barrier” that prevented him from providing effective mathematics instruction to ELLs in the classroom (Interview 1).

Positionings in Relation to ELLs

Patrick took on three different positions that informed his behaviors and practices as a teacher of ELLs in his content area classrooms. First, he positioned himself as a “welcoming” teacher (Interview 1). He believed that as a teacher, his main responsibility was to create a welcoming environment and inclusive culture in his classrooms for all students, including ELLs. Patrick believed that building positive relationships with his students was essential to create a welcoming classroom environment. Therefore, as a new teacher, he prioritized building strong relationships with his students:
It is very important to provide a welcoming classroom for student learning. To do that, I put relationships above everything else and I have worked hard to build good relationships with my students. If I notice that my students and I weren’t getting along, I would put off a little bit of teaching to build strong relationships with them (Interview 1).

Patrick also reported that he integrated a number of the strategies (such as pairing up ELLs, using bilingual math dictionaries and online websites in Spanish) to make ELLs feel welcomed and build personal connections with them.

Second, Patrick positioned himself as an emphatic teacher towards ELLs. According to Patrick, his previous experiences with the Thai and Spanish languages gave him insight into his ELLs’ language learning experiences and enabled him to understand the challenges ELLs might face in English-only classrooms. Reflecting on his Spanish learning experiences as a student in college, Patrick shared:

I took a Spanish class in college. It was taught all in Spanish, and I didn’t know any Spanish. The teacher would give instructions out and she’d be like oh, talk in Spanish now. And I literally didn’t know anything to do. So, I know exactly what’s going through my ELLs’ head (Interview 1).

Third, Patrick positioned himself as a linguistic outsider as a monolingual native speaker of English. He also interactively positioned bilingual teachers as being at an advantage over monolingual teachers regarding teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms. On several occasions during the interviews, Patrick expressed his belief that he would not be a successful and effective teacher for ELLs because of his linguistic identity as a monolingual English speaking teacher: “I’ve come to realize that the only way my ELL students will succeed is if I learn Spanish. I
think all teachers need to speak Spanish fluently if they want to teach in schools with high populations of ELLs” (Interview 3). He perceived that being monolingual hindered his teaching ability and skills to work successfully with ELLs in the classroom. As is evident in Patrick’s statements, his linguistic identity seemed to influence his reflexive positioning as a teacher of ELLs and hindered him to develop a strong sense of teacher identity in relation to ELLs.

Sources of Support

Patrick reported that he did not receive any support or guidance with respect to working with ELLs. Therefore, he struggled with modifying his instruction and addressing the learning needs of ELLs in his classrooms in his first year of teaching. He reported feeling helpless and discouraged on many occasions because he “just didn’t know what to do” to adjust his teaching practice to teach mathematics to ELLs effectively as a new teacher in the profession (Interview 1). Patrick viewed teaching ELLs as a challenge and voiced his concerns as follows:

Teaching ELLs is difficult because I don’t always know if I am being successful in many efforts and I don’t know if I have all the resources to be successful. No one observed me or gave me feedback about ELLs. So, no one is really holding me accountable of doing it then (Interview 3).

Despite Patrick having reported feeling inadequately supported with respect to teaching ELLs, he perceived that he was well-supported to navigate emotional and professional challenges he experienced as a newcomer to the teaching profession.

Patrick cited his administrator and colleagues at Midland High school as his primary sources of professional support. Reflecting on his first year in teaching, Patrick reported “I had a good first year. Everybody was very supportive. I would have struggled without their support but they helped me a lot” (Interview 1). Patrick stated that the support he received from his
administrator and colleagues helped him overcome challenges with ease in the profession: “If I ever needed anything, I could always go to people for it. I felt very comfortable asking questions or bringing up issues because I knew they would do their best to help me” (Interview 1).

Furthermore, Patrick highlighted that the team meetings provided him the opportunity to collaborate with other veteran math teachers and improve his teaching skills in his content area as a new teacher in the field. Patrick mentioned that his team members provided him support and feedback on creating his lesson plans during their meetings: “The team meetings were extremely helpful for me. We met once a week and talked about math strategies, assessments, our needs, goals. I learned a lot about how to plan my lessons from my teammates” (Interview 1).

Patrick also attributed his professional growth in his new profession to his MTLD and the other TFA corps members. According to Patrick, the professional support he received from his MTLD improved his confidence level as a teacher and helped him grow as a teacher: “I got a lot of support from my MTLD. Her feedback, observations helped me overcome challenges I faced in my teaching…She really helped me immensely, I am a much better teacher because of her” (Interview 2). Patrick also spoke of the emotional support he received from other TFA corps members. According to Patrick, the emotional support from other TFA corps members helped him “feel like I can make it” and lowered the stress he experienced due to the workload of teaching (Interview 2).

Patrick’s statements above illustrate that the professional and emotional support he received during his teaching career helped him adjust to his new role as a mathematics teacher and improve his teaching practices in his classrooms. It also seems that the support of his colleagues helped him grow as a teacher in his new community. Nevertheless, with respect to teaching ELLs, Patrick did not receive any guidance or support and felt “isolated” and “helpless”
(Interview 2). It seems that Patrick’s teacher identity in relation to ELLs was not encouraged by his colleagues, administrator, MTLD and TFA peers.

Case 4- Sally

Part 1

Introducing Sally

Sally was a twenty-three-year-old, self-identified White female who was born and raised in a predominantly White, middle-class small town in the Northeast. Sally grew up with her younger sister, Nancy, and both her father and mother worked for a marketing company. She attended predominantly White, public schools for her elementary and secondary education in her area. Sally described the elementary and high schools she attended as “only a few Black and some Puerto Rican students” and reported that the majority of students were native speakers of English (Interview 1). Reflecting on her high school experiences, Sally stated that she was a “very responsible” and “hardworking” student and had a good academic performance (Interview 1).

Sally felt that she lived “a sheltered life” growing up (Interview 1). Therefore, after graduating from high school, she decided to travel to Europe and explore a new culture before going to college to pursue her BA degree. Sally stated that she always wanted to learn Italian and she was very eager to learn how to cook Italian food. Therefore, she decided to join a culinary tour in Italy. Sally described her trip to Italy as an “enjoyable” and “wonderful” experience; however, she mentioned that she struggled with communicating in Italian and sometimes felt “overwhelmed” (Interview 1). Sally shared, “I stayed with an Italian host family for about three months. They spoke only Italian, no English at all! It was so hard for me” (Interview 1). This was Sally’s first experience with a foreign language and first interaction with cultural others.
After returning from Italy, Sally enrolled at a highly selective, private research university in the Northwest where she majored in Psychology and minored in Sociology. She reported that as she was getting closer to her college graduation date, she was feeling more concerned about “what to do next” in her life (Interview 1). One of her college friends advised Sally to join the TFA program and become a teacher. During her senior year in college, Sally completed her online application to join TFA corps and was accepted into the TFA program.

After earning her BA degree, Sally travelled to the Southwest to participate in the TFA’s five-week summer institute. After the summer institute, she was placed in Kentwood Middle school (pseudonym) and assigned to teach Earth Science to seventh graders. Sally had a total of 124 students and her average class size ranged from 28 to 32 students at the time of the study. Sally reported that in her classes, about 80% of her students were Hispanics, 15% was African American, and about 5% was White. Sally also stated that more than 60% of her students were identified as ELLs. According to Sally, ELLs in her classes were all native speakers of Spanish and had a range of English language proficiency skills.

General Context of Kentwood Middle School

The school where Sally was placed was a Title I public middle school and had 1,021 students enrolled for the 2015-2016 school year. The racial distribution of the school population consisted of 87% Hispanic, 7% African American, 4% White and 2% classified as two races.

According to the school’s website, during the 2015-2016 school year, 95% of student population was in the free and reduced lunch range. Additionally, Kentwood Middle school had a high percentage of students who spoke a language other than English at home. In the 2015-2016 school year, 44% of the student population was identified as ELLs. The school offered an
after school program for ELLs. The ESL classes were taught by the ELL teacher who was also a TFA teacher at the time of the study.

The instructional staff of Kentwood Middle school consisted of 57 regular education classroom teachers, one speech therapist, one learning strategist and one ELL teacher. At Kentwood Middle school, more than 45% of teachers were in their first or second year of teaching. Sally indicated that including her, there were five TFA teachers at the school; three of them were on their second year of teaching when she started teaching. The fifth TFA teacher was newly hired to work with Sally as an ELL teacher.

**Influences of the TESL Course on Sally’s Teacher Identity in Relation to ELLs**

The TESL course seemed to contribute Sally’s teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs by improving her knowledge regarding the population of ELLs and ELL instruction. However, Sally’s course experiences did not enable her to take on identity position as an effective teacher of ELLs. She felt that she did not become a “more effective” teacher for ELLs after her participation in the TESL course: “Now, I am more aware of some ELL strategies but I do not believe that I am more effective in teaching ELLs” (Interview 3). After the TESL course, Sally also reported that she still felt anxious to teach ELLs and she did not have confidence in her teaching ability to work with ELLs:

I really liked the course because half of my students are ELLs. I have to know at least a little bit about them. I would have had no idea about ELLs or teaching ELLs if I had not taken the course. Now, I am more aware of some ELL strategies but I do not believe that I am effective in teaching ELLs… I still do not feel confident in my ability to reach my ELLs (Interview 3).
The following sections present how the TESL course influenced Sally’s perceived level of knowledge regarding the education of ELLs, beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, values about linguistic diversity and intention and commitment to work with ELLs as a content area teacher.

**Perceived Level of Knowledge of the Education of ELLs**

Sally perceived that her knowledge of the education of ELLs improved after the completion of the TESL course. Similar to the other participants, Sally also entered the teaching profession with no prior training or educational experience in the area of ELL instruction. During the TFA five-week summer institute, Sally attended some sessions devoted to diversity issues. However, she did not recall any sessions focused on linguistic diversity or the education of ELLs: “We didn’t learn anything at all about ELLs. We were more talking about racial issues or cultural diversity. They focused a lot on racism and just being aware of differences but I don’t remember anything about teaching ELLs” (Interview 1).

At the beginning of the course, Sally perceived her knowledge of the education of ELLs as “little” and rated her knowledge level as a teacher of ELLs at a one out of ten which increased to four after the completion of the TESL course (Interview 1).

Sally perceived that the TESL course improved her knowledge of the education of ELLs in two areas. First, she indicated that her knowledge regarding the population of ELLs improved as a result of her participation in the TESL course. Second, she perceived that she had learned a number of ELL instructional strategies to make the content comprehensible for ELLs as a content area teacher. Each of these two findings is explained in detail in the following sections.

**Increase in Knowledge of the Population of ELLs.** Sally’s statements revealed that she entered in the TESL course with limited knowledge and misconceptions about the population of
ELLs in the U.S. schools. For instance, Sally reported that she was surprised to learn that ELLs might be at different levels of English language proficiency because she had thought that ELLs were “students who can’t speak any English at all” before participating in the course (Interview 2). Additionally, she shared that prior to the TESL course, she had thought that all ELLs were born in other countries and moved to the U.S.: “I always thought that ELLs were born outside of the States. I just never thought that most ELLs were born here” (Interview 2). Sally also shared that she was unaware of the growing population of ELLs in mainstream classrooms and described herself as being “shocked” by the percentage of ELLs in the U.S. public schools (Interview 2).

The new knowledge Sally gained from TESL course seemed to challenge her misconceptions and improved her knowledge about the population of ELLs. In addition, the new knowledge seemed to help her develop new understanding regarding the characteristics of ELLs in the U.S. public schools.

**Instructional strategies for ELLs.** Sally perceived that her knowledge of instructional strategies for ELLs improved after participating in the course. More specifically, Sally reported that she learned a number of strategies such as the use of pictures, videos and diagrams to make the content comprehensible to ELLs in her science classrooms. However, she also mentioned that she had difficulty in employing the instructional strategies regularly in her classrooms because of the classroom management issues she experienced:

ELL strategies are good but you really have to have really a solid classroom. If your class is a little out of control, it is hard to implement ELL strategies. The classroom management challenges I face in my classroom definitely affect my teaching. That’s
the biggest barrier for me. I focus on more keeping my students under control so I can’t use ELL strategies (Focus group).

When asked about her the most effective instructional strategy she employed for ELLs as a teacher, Sally replied “I usually pair my ELLs up with each other and have them translate” (Interview 2). Regarding the strategies for supporting the language development of ELLs, Sally admitted that she did not plan language objectives when preparing for instruction because she felt pressured to cover the curriculum. In addition, she stated that she was struggled with teaching science as a new teacher due to her perceived lack of content knowledge and therefore, she focused on teaching the content, instead of utilizing effective strategies for ELLs in her classrooms.

Beliefs about ELLs and ELL Instruction

The TESL course seemed to influence Sally’s beliefs about the population of ELLs. However, findings revealed that her beliefs about ELL instruction were not disrupted as a result of participating in the course. As discussed in the previous section, early in the semester, Sally had not recognized ELLs’ heterogeneity and believed that all ELLs were immigrants and newcomers to the U.S. Yet, the new knowledge she gained seemed to challenge Sally’s prior beliefs and misconceptions about the characteristics of ELLs in U.S. public schools.

On the other hand, Sally’s belief about the characteristics of an effective teacher of ELLs did not seem to change after the TESL course. Prior to the course, Sally defined that the characteristics of an effective teacher of ELLs as “caring and patient” and indicated, “effective ELL teachers are also confident in themselves and very positive” (Interview 1). After the course, Sally continued to believe that effective teachers of ELLs should possess the characteristics of being caring, patient and confident. In the third interview, Sally described the characteristics of
an effective teacher of ELLs as follows: “teacher who cares and emphatic to the situation of ELLs, and patient” (Interview 3). In addition, Sally remained consistent in her belief that good instructional strategies would be enough for teaching ELLs effectively in mainstream classrooms. In the first interview, Sally mentioned that implementing good instructional strategies, such as using hands-on activities, scaffolding, would benefit ELLs and enhance their learning in the classroom. As is evident in Sally’s following statement, after her participation in the course, Sally’s reflected the continued belief that the education of ELLs was simply a matter of using “good teaching strategies”: “I think if you are just implementing very strong and good teaching strategies, you can reach ELLs (Interview 3). Sally’s belief about ELL instruction seemed to lead her to overlook the specific language knowledge and skills teachers should possess to meet the linguistic needs of ELLs.

**Values about Linguistic Diversity**

According to Sally, the TESL course enhanced her positive values about linguistic diversity. Sally indicated that she entered the course with positive attitudes towards immigrants and linguistically diverse individuals. She attributed her positive attitudes to her previous language learning experiences in Italy. She stated that as a teacher of ELLs, she allowed her ELLs to use their home language in her classrooms during pair and group work activities. She also indicated that she encouraged her ELLs to use their home languages at home:

I don’t want them [ELLs] to lose their first languages. I want them to be bilingual.

Some of my ELLs are telling me they are losing their Spanish and I think that’s terrible. I encourage them to use their native languages at home and in class. I tell them read books in Spanish and speak in Spanish with their parents (Interview 2).
Sally perceived that as a teacher, she valued linguistic diversity and expressed the acceptance of native language use in her classrooms. However, she also reported that she was challenged to integrate her ELLs’ home language and culture in her science instruction. According to Sally, her monolingual identity and limited experiences with linguistic and cultural diversity hindered her to incorporate ELLs’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds in her teaching practices and lesson plans. Sally further shared: “I am not very familiar with the Hispanic population. It’s different than what I get used to…It’s difficult to tap into my ELLs’ experiences, background, culture… To be an effective teacher, I need to understand their culture and language” (Interview 2).

Overall, Sally’s TESL course experiences and previous foreign language learning experiences in Italy seemed to enhance her values about linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, it seems that she was challenged to build on her ELLs’ native language and struggled to find ways to work with the cultural and linguistic differences as a science teacher in the classroom.

**Intention and Commitment to Work with ELLs**

In our third interview, Sally reported that she did not have any intention to continue to work as a teacher because she did not feel passionate about and committed to teaching anymore. Thus, the TESL course did not influence Sally’s intention and commitment to work with ELLs as a content area teacher. Sally indicated that as a teacher, she had always felt “depressed” and “unsuccessful” during her two-year teaching commitment and described her teaching experiences as “overwhelming and exhausting” (Interview 3). Reflecting on her two-year teaching career, Sally also reported, “I was stressed all the time, very depressed. I cried myself to sleep most nights but I feel happier now because it is over. I am no longer a teacher” (Interview 3). As is evident in Sally’s statements, she experienced emotional burnout that led her to leave
the teaching profession. At the time of the third interview, Sally was looking for a career outside of education.

Part 2- Sally

Primary Considerations Influencing Sally’s Teacher Identity as a Teacher of ELLs

The following sections present the findings regarding Sally’s (a) decision to become a teacher, (b) perceptions of school culture, (c) perceived level of content knowledge, (d) positioning in relation to ELLs, and (e) sources of support.

Decision to Become a Teacher

Sally reported that she did not grow up dreaming of becoming a teacher. She indicated that she wanted to become a teacher through TFA because she did not want to “worry about” job searching after her college graduation: “I just needed a job and TFA gave me one! I never dreamed of becoming a teacher, to be honest. I never really aspired to it. It was not my childhood dream or anything” (Interview 1). Furthermore, Sally admitted that she had thought TFA experience would look good on her resume and enhance her future job prospects. Sally also mentioned that she had no intention of making teaching a career and she “just wanted to try it” (Interview 1).

As is evident in Sally’s statements, she had decided to join TFA because she did not feel ready for job market. Sally’s statements also illustrate that she did not imagine her future career trajectory as a teacher. She viewed TFA as a stepping zone to another career and she hoped that TFA experience would make herself a stronger candidate for future job opportunities. Sally also expressed she was not “happy” about being a teacher because she discovered that teaching was not as easy as she had expected (Interview 1). It seems that Sally experienced a mismatch
between realities of the classroom and her expectations of teaching. During our third interview, she shared “Before starting to teach, I thought I was going to be really patient and all the students would like me. I thought I would be super positive, smiling teacher every day but I couldn’t be that teacher” (Interview 3).

**Perception of School Culture**

Sally described Kentwood Middle school’s culture as “depressing” and “dysfunctional” (Interview 1). Reflecting on first year in teaching, Sally reported that as a new teacher, she did not feel welcomed and experienced many stressors at the school: “Last year was really difficult. There was nothing good I can tell you. It wasn’t a welcoming environment. I was so confused, overwhelmed and depressed all the time” (Interview 1).

As a new teacher, Sally stated that she had many negative experiences at Kentwood Middle school. She attributed her negative experiences mainly to her administrator. She described her administrator as “very condescending” and “not trustworthy” and believed that the administrator was “setting up the teachers for failure” (Interview 1). According to Sally, her administrator did not want to work with her and therefore, she often degraded her in front of her colleagues and her students in the classroom. Reflecting on her first year in teaching, Sally described a situation which led her to feel “disrespected” and “powerless” as a teacher:

It was my first month in teaching. I had 38 students in that class and some were acting up. My administrator came in, observed my class. Then, she talked to me at the end of the class. She told me ‘your classroom management is so bad, you are not good. I see zero standards in your lessons’ in front of my students. I felt so helpless and incapable (Interview 1).
The early negative experience Sally had with her administrator in her teaching career seemed to influence Sally’s perspective on the teaching profession. She also stated that she often questioned her commitment to teaching and shared her feelings as follows, “I felt like I was working really hard for something that I was not fully committed to” (Interview 1). Sally added that after the administrator’s observation of her teaching, she believed that her teaching was “unsuccessful” and she was not “a good fit” for teaching that led her to feel hopeless and more depressed: “After that, I started to cry every day after school at home. I felt like a failure as a teacher. That just turned me off teaching” (Interview 1).

Sally also struggled with building working relationships with her colleagues in her new school context. When asked to describe her relationships with her colleagues at Kentwood Middle school, Sally reported that she never saw herself as a member of the faculty at Kentwood Middle school. She indicated that she distanced herself and did not engage much with the other teachers: “I would sometimes talk with the other teachers but I didn’t feel like any connections with them. We could not be able to work together coherently” (Interview 1). In addition, Sally mentioned that she did not want to interact with the other teachers at the school due to the stress and exhaustion she felt as a new teacher. Sally found the workload to be overwhelming and struggled to balance her professional life with her social life. She explained that she spent many hours writing lesson plans and grading homework assignments after school at home and therefore, she did not have enough time to socialize with her colleagues: “I was so exhausted from work all the time. I didn’t have time to go out and do stuff. I had no energy to interact with anyone” (Interview 1).

According to Sally, the negative school culture also influenced her instructional practices as a teacher of ELLs in her classrooms in a negative way. Sally reported that it was a challenge
for her to focus on ELLs because she was emotionally distraught due to the problems with her administrator in her school context. She further indicated: “I was depressed all the time. I was just counting the days; I didn’t want to be in the classroom. I just focused on keeping my students under control. So, I didn’t think much about ELLs in my classes” (Interview 3).

**Perceived Level of Content Knowledge**

According to Sally, teaching earth science was one of the major challenges for her during her teaching career. Sally reported that she entered the teaching profession without the content knowledge necessary to teach earth science effectively in her classrooms. Sally shared that during the TFA five-week summer institute, she taught math to fifth graders and she enjoyed working with elementary level students. Nevertheless, when she discovered that she was assigned to teach earth science to middle-school students, she recalled feeling “anxious” and “heartbroken” because she had little confidence in her science content knowledge (Interview 1). Sally further shared: “When I learned I was going to teach earth science and I was like ‘How am I going to teach this?’ I had no idea! I hadn’t taken any earth science or anything since I was in middle school” (Interview 1). Furthermore, Sally criticized the TFA’s summer training program and held TFA responsible for her struggles in teaching science to middle school students: “TFA claims that it doesn’t matter what age you teach or what content, you are going to learn the skills that are transferable but I disagree with that. It was a struggle for me! I was so frustrated” (Interview 1).

Reflecting on her first year in teaching, Sally reported that she often lacked sleep because she worked many late nights to improve her content knowledge in science and design her lesson plans: “Last year, I was just learning all about my content. I used internet a lot to learn more about earth science and prepare my lessons. It was really stressful for me” (Interview 1).
Additionally, Sally was the only grade seven earth science teacher at Kentwood Middle school which contributed to her emotional exhaustion as a new teacher: “I was running seventh grade science and so there was no one to ask questions. It was overwhelming” (Interview 1).

With respect to teaching ELLs, Sally reported that she focused more on improving her content knowledge in Earth Science during her teaching career. She admitted that addressing her ELLs’ academic needs in her classrooms was not a concern for her. Despite Sally having reported that she employed “some ELL strategies” such as using visuals or pairing up ELLs (Interview 3) in her classrooms during her second year of teaching, she perceived that her lack of content knowledge in Earth Science hindered her to focus on her ELLs and implement effective strategies to address ELLs’ linguistic needs in her classrooms.

**Positioning in Relation to ELLs**

Sally could not assign a position to herself in relation to ELLs because it appears that she struggled with developing a sense of teacher identity as a novice teacher in general. When asked her role as a teacher of ELLs, Sally responded “Role? I don’t know what my role is. I would just say I just try to teach something. Do they learn? I don’t know. I don’t think much about it” (Interview 2).

As is evident in the excerpts below, throughout our interviews, as a novice teacher in the teaching community, Sally assigned powerless positions to herself as a teacher, which affected her role as a teacher of ELLs and reflexive positioning in relation to ELLs:

- I don’t think I was a successful teacher at all. I don’t think that teaching is my passion. Teaching stresses me a lot…I am not doing a good job (Interview 1).
- I felt like very unsuccessful as a teacher every single day… I cannot say that I was a good teacher (Interview 3).
It is worthy to note that although Sally could not position herself as a successful teacher, she assigned positive positions to her ELLs. She viewed ELLs as “bright” and “motivated” students and believed that ELLs brought cultural and linguistic diversity to the U.S. classrooms (Interview 2). Nevertheless, she reported that the struggles she experienced in the teaching profession as a novice teacher hindered her to implement effective instructional strategies to address her ELLs’ linguistic needs in her classrooms: “I do not believe that I was effective in teaching ELLs. I was just so stressed out all the time, teaching was a challenge for me” (Interview 3).

**Sources of Support**

Sally perceived that as a new teacher in the profession, she was not supported to be a successful teacher, she further shared, “If I had someone to support me, I would be a successful or better teacher. I would need someone helping me because I had no idea what I was doing but I did not get any support at all” (Interview 3). With respect to teaching ELLs, Sally reported that she did not receive any support or guidance from her MTLD, colleagues or administrator although more than half of the students in her classrooms were identified as ELLs.

Sally reported that she did not receive any professional or emotional support from her administrator, principle or her colleagues in her school context. According to Sally, her administrator “wasn’t helpful and didn’t set up her staff to be successful” (Interview 3). Sally also added that she had fears of reaching out to her administrator for guidance or support when she struggled with student behaviors in the classroom and added: “I knew she would have blamed me if I had asked her to help with the students” (Interview 2). Additionally, Sally could not develop supportive working relationships with her colleagues in her school context. Sally
stated that her colleagues were not “the most reliable” and she “struggled to work with them coherently” (Interview 2).

Sally noted that she received some professional support from her MTLD. However, she reported that she was not satisfied with the support from her MTLD because she believed that it was not enough for her to succeed as an inexperienced teacher in the profession:

I am not satisfied with the support I received from my MTLD. I think TFA needs to support us more. The problem is people who were supposed to support you they have like between 20 and 30 teachers to support. So, they do not have enough time to go to everyone’s school all the time. I mean just seeing your MTLD four times in a year is not enough. (Interview 2)

When asked Sally if she had received any support from other TFA corps members, Sally reported that she did not ask for support from her TFA peers because she could not “click” with them (Interview 2). She also mentioned that she did not want to socialize with other TFA corps members because she did not want to be involved in the social life of the city: “I haven’t participated in their social meetings because they have different values than I do. I was focused on work but they were more focused on social aspects of living in [the city].” (Interview 2).

Sally’s statements illustrate that she did not have any emotional and professional support experiences during her teaching career. It also seems that the lack of support from her administrator led her to feel frustrated and isolated in her school community. In addition, Sally seemed to struggle with developing supportive, positive relationships with her colleagues and TFA peers to cater her emotional and personal needs which might contribute to her emotional exhaustion as a new teacher in the profession.
Case 5- Davorka

Part 1

Introducing Davorka

Davorka was a twenty-three-year-old, self-identified White woman. Davorka was born in a country in Europe and lived there until the age of five. Davorka shared that after the civil war in her home country, both of her parents lost their jobs and therefore, they decided to move to the U.S. for a better life. Davorka spoke Serbo-Croatian and English fluently and she was the only participant of the study who identified herself bilingual. Davorka reported that Serbo-Croatian was the only language that was spoken in the context of her home. Davorka learned English as a second language at school after she moved to the U.S.

Davorka indicated that she grew up in a middle-class home with her three sisters in a large predominately White city in the Northwest of the U.S. Reflecting on her childhood, Davorka shared, “We lived in a small apartment and my parents really worked hard for us. They worked long and hard days doing blue-collar jobs to give us a good life in America” (Interview 1).

Davorka indicated that growing up, maintaining their ethnic identity was very important to her family. Davorka reported that she traveled to Europe with her family every two to three years to connect and maintain relationships with the extended family members and her home country. Reflecting on her childhood, Davorka also shared that she and her sisters went to the Orthodox Church to learn how to read and write in their native language every Sunday.

According to Davorka, her parents valued education and had very high expectations for her and her sisters. Davorka reported that she attended elementary and high schools that were
racially and linguistically diverse. She indicated in the public schools she attended, there were “a lot of immigrant kids” who spoke languages other than English (Interview 1).

Davorka also shared that when she started school, she could not speak any English. Davorka was identified as an ELL and placed in an ESL classroom at the age of seven. Reflecting on her experiences as a student, Davorka said: “When I was a student in ESL class, I was very lucky because a very close friend of mine, she was an ELL too and she was also from Bosnia. So, we had each other, helping each other” (Interview 1). Davorka also mentioned that she loved the schools she attended because she always had very “welcoming”, “patient” and “caring” teachers. She further shared,

When we would go to teacher-student conferences, I would have to translate for my dad and so my teacher would just kinda sit there and wait for me to finish translating. I remember how patient my teachers were with me when I was translating to my dad. I was really lucky to have great teachers throughout my education! I admired them (Interview 1).

After graduating from high school, Davorka went on to major in business at a public university in the city where she grew up. During her second year, she took a political science course as an elective that led her to change her major from business to political science: “I felt in love with that political science course, it opened up my perspective! Then, the idea of going to Law school popped up in my mind. So, I took more political science courses and changed my major” (Interview 1).

Davorka reported that during her junior year at college, she heard about TFA from her friends who were in the TFA program at that time: “I had a few friends and they started to teach as TFA teachers. I was always talking with them about their experiences, they were all positive
so I ended up applying” (Interview 1). After the TFA’s five-week summer institute, Davorka was placed in New West High school (pseudonym) and assigned to teach high school mathematics to tenth and eleventh graders. She taught four classes and had a total of 125 students. Her average class size ranged from 30 to 32 students. Davorka reported that in her classes, about 70% of her students were Hispanics who spoke Spanish as their first languages, 20% was African American, and the rest was White. Davorka also indicated out of 125 students, 12 of her students were ELLs who were born and raised in the U.S. According to Davorka, ELLs in her classes spoke English well but they struggled with the academic language.

**General Context of New West High School**

Davorka’s placement school was a designated Title I public school and served more than 2650 students in grades ninth through twelfth in 2015-2016 school year. According to the District’s statistics, the racial distribution of New West High School population consisted of 60% Hispanic, 29% African American, 5% White, 3% Multiracial, and 2% Asian in the 2015-2016 school year. In the school population, 72% of the students were economically disadvantaged and eligible for free and reduced lunch during the 2015-2016 school year.

About 16% of the students attending New West High school were classified as ELLs in the 2015-2016 school year. At New West High school, the students identified as ELLs were integrated into mainstream classrooms and were provided afterschool assistance and support by the only ESL teacher of the school.

At the time of the study, New West High school had a total of 110 classroom teachers, seven counselors, two learning strategists and one ESL teacher. At the school, about 22% of teachers were in their first or second year of teaching. Davorka indicated that there were four TFA teachers, including her at New West High school.
Influences of the TESL Course on Davorka’s Teacher Identity in Relation to ELLs

The TESL course did not seem to have a strong impact on Davorka’s teacher identity in relation to ELLs. Davorka appeared to have developed some knowledge regarding the education of ELLs as a result of taking the TESL course. However, she did not reflexively position herself as an effective teacher of ELLs after the TESL course. As is evident in the excerpts below, Davorka positioned Spanish speaking bilingual teachers as effective teachers of ELLs:

ELLs bring some challenges to teachers. As much as I can try to be a good teacher for ELLs, I have other students who need me in the class. I think ELLs need the support of bilingual teachers or ESL teachers who speak their language (Focus group).

Even though I took the TESL course, I don’t feel that effective. So, I wouldn’t want to work in a class with high number of ELLs because I don’t believe that I will provide them effective teaching (Interview 3).

The following sections present how the TESL course influenced Davorka’s (a) perceived level of knowledge of the education of ELLs, (b) beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, (c) values about linguistic diversity and (d) intention and commitment to teach ELLs as a mainstream teacher.

Perceived Level of Knowledge of ELL Education

According to Davorka, the TESL course improved her knowledge of the education of ELLs. Similar to the other participants, Davorka also entered the teaching profession without any educational background or specific training in the education of ELLs. When asked whether she had participated in any training sessions regarding ELL instruction in the TFA five-week summer institute, Davorka responded that she had participated in some sessions focusing on cultural diversity and race issues but she had not had ELL-specific training: “I don’t remember
anything about ELL students. We talked about racism and cultural diversity but I don’t recall any specific strategies towards working with ELL students” (Interview 1).

Before her participation in the TESL course, Davorka reported that she felt underprepared to address ELLs’ academic and linguistic needs in the classroom and she perceived herself as an ineffective teacher of ELLs: “I don’t think I am very effective teacher for my ELLs. I am not well-prepared to teach them effectively. I feel like I am not doing a very good job for my ELL students” (Interview 1). At the beginning of the course, Davorka perceived that her knowledge of the education of ELLs as “not much” (Interview 1) and rated her knowledge level and skills as a teacher of ELLs at a one out of ten which increased to four after the TESL course.

After participating in the TESL course, Davorka perceived her knowledge of the education of ELLs improved in one area. Davorka reported that she learned various instructional strategies for ELLs to make the content more comprehensible for ELLs in her mathematics classrooms. This finding is discussed in the following section in detailed.

**Instructional Strategies for ELLs.** Davorka credited the TESL course with providing her the instructional strategies to make the content comprehensible for ELLs in her math classrooms. According to Davorka, she acquired “useful ELL strategies” such as pairing ELLs with a more fluent or proficient peer, using visuals supports and creating word walls, as a result of her participation in the TESL course (Interview 3). She also indicated that the TESL course led her to make a more conscious effort to slow down her rate of speech and provide clear and more detailed instructions in the classroom so that her ELLs could understand what they were expected to do in the classroom tasks and activities.
Davorka was able to take the new knowledge she gained in the TESL course and apply it to her teaching context. In the following quote, Davorka described how she integrated the ELL instructional strategies into her teaching practice:

When I do word problems, I always use some visuals to make them more understandable. For example, if I am talking about ladder and measurement of the ladder distance from the house, I show a picture of a house and a ladder because it is easier for them to understand what the story problem is really asking. Also, I make sure that I introduce more than one way of stating something. For example, when talking about heavy math vocabulary like intercepts, I break the definitions down and show synonyms for those words (Interview 3).

Although Davorka perceived that the TESL course enhanced her knowledge of ELL instructional strategies, she perceived herself as an ineffective teacher of ELLs because she did not know how to overcome the language barrier. She reported that the ELL instructional strategies she acquired from the TESL course did not help her work through the language barrier. Therefore, she indicated that teaching the language of mathematics and word problems to ELLs who had low-proficiency levels in English was a struggle for her on a daily basis:

It is very difficult to teach ELLs because of the language barrier. I still experience that barrier in my class. I can’t really explain some math concepts to them. I also have trouble to explain to them the steps of solving math problems, or why they should follow some steps to solve some math problems. It is just because they don’t understand. It is a language barrier. If I spoke Spanish, teaching ELLs would be so easy but I can’t speak Spanish (Interview 3).
After her participation in the TESL course, Davorka also reported that she did not feel confident in her teaching ability as a teacher of ELLs because she felt that she “needed to learn more” in order to deliver effective instruction for ELLs in the classroom (Focus group). In particular, she perceived that she lacked the theoretical knowledge of the ELL education and linguistic knowledge. For instance, she shared that she had no understanding about how children learn a second language, how ELLs’ home languages might influence their second language learning or how to integrate instructional practices into her math classrooms to promote English language development of ELLs.

**Beliefs about ELLs and ELL Instruction**

According to Davorka, the TESL course did not impact her beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction: “I learned some techniques teachers can use to reach ELLs but as a teacher, my beliefs about ELLs have mostly stayed the same this semester” (Focus group).

With respect to ELL instruction, Davorka’s beliefs appeared to remain unchanged throughout the semester. For instance, in our first interview, Davorka expressed her belief that Spanish speaking bilingual teachers could provide more effective instruction to ELLs and thus, ELLs should not be placed in mainstream classrooms. As is evident in the excerpt below, after participating in the TESL course, Davorka continued to argue that ELLs should not be integrated into mainstream classrooms, especially if they do not have high levels of English proficiency. She also charged bilingual Spanish-speaking teachers with the responsibility of instructing ELLs:

ELLs need the support of bilingual teachers in ESL classrooms. I don’t think that it’s a good idea to put ELLs, especially those who cannot speak English well, into the mainstream classrooms. They should be in a classroom that is more supportive, more focused for ELLs rather than any math class (Interview 3).
Davorka was also the only participant who was bilingual. She believed that her bilingualism allowed her to be more aware of emotional needs of ELLs in her math classrooms. Yet, with respect to teaching ELLs, she remained consistent in her belief that the language differences between her and ELLs to be the most significant barrier for her to provide effective math instruction to Spanish-speaking ELLs:

The language barrier is the biggest thing. They don’t understand my directions, they don’t understand my lesson, and they don’t understand the content. So, one thing I did was I had some Spanish speaking students and I paired them because at least they hear some of my lesson, understand some directions (Interview 3).

Although Davorka reported that the TESL course did not change her beliefs about ELLs and the education of ELLs, it seems that her beliefs about what constitutes an effective teacher of ELLs changed after the TESL course. Before participating in the TESL course, Davorka believed that effective teachers of ELLs were “caring”, “welcoming” and “patient” (Interview 1). Yet, it seems that after the TESL course, Davorka became cognizant of the importance of having specific knowledge and skills regarding the ELL education and SLA process. In the third interview, Davorka described the characteristics of an effective teacher for ELLs as a teacher who “employs good teaching strategies”, “knows how to scaffold instruction” and “knowledgeable about second language acquisition process, how languages are learned” (Interview 3).

Values about Linguistic Diversity

The TESL course did not seem to play a significant role in Davorka’s values about linguistic diversity. Davorka shared that she had always valued and appreciated cultural and linguistic diversity and mentioned that she entered the TESL course with positive attitudes.
towards linguistically diverse individuals. In the first interview, Davorka stated that being “a child of immigrants” and her first-hand experience of being positioned as an ELL during her schooling years in the U.S. enabled her to appreciate and value cultural and linguistic diversity.

Furthermore, Davorka highlighted that she viewed ELLs’ home languages as an asset and commented that ELLs’ home languages should be maintained and supported at school context: “Teachers shouldn’t bury their ELLs’ home languages. I believe that ELLs should be encouraged to maintain their home languages and culture because their home languages and culture are part of their heritage” (Interview 1).

During our interviews, on several occasions, Davorka also indicated that she was a supporter of bilingual education and expressed her belief that ELLs should be taught by bilingual teachers: “I think bilingual education is wonderful, the best model for ELL. Inclusion is important but just throwing them in mainstream classrooms, that’s not inclusion. That’s just sink or swim. ELLs need the support of bilingual teachers to be successful” (Interview 3).

Davorka also seemed to be cognizant of the interrelatedness of language, culture and identity. In the first interview, Davorka shared: “I think their home languages are a significant part of their identity so I hope my students maintain their language and culture. If they lose their home language, then they become like everyone else, you know. It’s important to be unique and different because it brings diversity” (Interview 1) Although Davorka valued ELLs’ home languages, she admitted that as a teacher of ELLs, she did not utilize any specific instructional practices to support her ELLs’ native language development in her own classroom. However, she indicated that she valued her ELLs’ language backgrounds and tried to show this value by allowing her ELLs to use their home language in the classroom. Davorka also reported that she
shared her personal experiences with her ELLs in order to show them their languages and cultures were valued in her math classrooms:

I always talk to them about my language, my culture and my family. So, I hope that talking about it openly they feel comfortable and proud of their home language and culture. I don’t want them to embarrass of their backgrounds, family, language and culture so I always talk to them about my background, experiences as an ESL student so I hope this will help them see their languages and culture as part of their identity and are welcomed in my classroom (Focus group).

**Intention and Commitment to Work with ELLs**

The TESL course did not seem to influence Davorka’s intention and commitment to teach ELLs as a content area teacher. Davorka perceived that the TESL course improved her knowledge of ELL instructional strategies; however, she felt that she would not be an effective teacher of ELLs due to the language barrier. Therefore, she indicted that she preferred not to work with ELLs in future as a math teacher: “I don’t believe that I will provide them effective teaching. I don’t speak Spanish and I don’t know how to use effective practices to work with them successfully in a class. I cannot be the best teacher for them” (Interview 3).

Overall, Davorka seemed to have a firm commitment to the teaching profession as a math teacher. She indicated that she would choose the teaching profession if she was to consider choosing it again and expressed commitment to continue with teaching. Nevertheless, she did not seem to have a strong commitment to and interest in working with ELLs in the classroom as a teacher. Her statements illustrated that she was concerned about the language differences between her and ELLs. In addition, it seems that she realized that she needed to develop more specific knowledge and skills as a teacher of ELLs to provide effective math instruction as she
stated: “Teachers play a huge role in ELLs’ achievement but we are not well-prepared to teach them effectively. I need to learn more…ELL specialists or experienced ESL teachers should guide or teach us how to teach ELLs.” (Interview 3)

**Part 2- Davorka**

**Primary Considerations Influencing Davorka’s Teacher Identity as a Teacher of ELLs**

In the following sections, findings concerning Davorka’s (a) decision to become a teacher, (b) perception of school culture, (c) perceived level of content knowledge, (d) positioning in relation to ELLs and (e) sources of support are presented.

**Decision to Become a Teacher**

Davorka reported that she joined TFA because she was inspired by the organization’s mission and wanted to “make a difference” in low-income students’ lives: “First, it was my political science classes that introduced me to the educational inequity and the troubles specific to low-income schools. Then, I heard about TFA and I was inspired by its mission. I wanted to make a difference” (Interview 1). When Davorka was accepted into the TFA program, she was at the beginning of her senior year in college. Davorka reported that after discovering she was accepted to TFA, she took teacher education courses to prepare herself for her new profession: “I started to take some education courses to make myself ready teach. I really fell in love with the educational classes that I was taking and at that point, I realized that it was a right step for me” (Interview 1).

Regarding her decision to become a teacher, Davorka also highlighted that she was always interested in the possibility of becoming a teacher: “It was not something that like I always dreamed of becoming a teacher but in the back of my mind, it was something I thought
that I might do and I’d be good at” (Interview 1). Additionally, Davorka’s personal experiences seemed to play a part in her decision to become a teacher through TFA:

My parents always stressed the importance of education, coming to America as immigrants, not speaking the language and having to work on hard jobs. I consider myself fortunate because I had good education, I had good teachers. And, the idea of being a teacher and play a role in helping those students who come from really tough circumstances rally connected me as a child of immigrants (Interview 1).

Davorka stated that she viewed teaching as a life-long career and she entered the teaching profession with the intention of remaining in the profession beyond her two-year TFA teaching commitment. Davorka further shared, “I do see teaching as a lifelong career and I am very happy with my decision. I really enjoy teaching math. I really like my school, my coworkers I have and I really like my students” (Interview 1). Davorka’s statements illustrate that she imagined her future career trajectory as a teacher and entered the profession with the intention to stay.

**Perception of School Culture**

Davorka reported that she loved being a teacher at New West high school and used words such as “encouraging”, “comfortable” and “like a family environment” to describe the school culture (Interview 2). According to Davorka, as a new teacher in the profession, she became more confident in her teaching skills because of the “very positive and motivating” school culture (Interview 2). Davorka also mentioned that she considered herself fortunate to be placed in New West high school and added “I know many TFA teachers who had really bad first year and they didn’t come back for their second year. I felt very lucky and happy TFA allowed me to do that, being here and teach” (Interview 2).
According to Davorka, her colleagues and administrator were very motivated and dedicated to students and worked as a “big team” to support the learning of students at New West high school (Interview 2). Davorka also spoke of the positive relationship she had developed with her administrator and her colleagues: “Everybody was very friendly. I never felt isolated here. I do have very good relationships with my administrator and colleagues. We work like a team, and we are not a group of individuals” (Interview 2).

According to Davorka, New West high school was welcoming to all students, yet she highlighted that the New West high school should “do more” to support ELLs’ learning and prepare the faculty to work effectively with ELLs (Interview 3). She also suggested that New West high school should provide its teachers opportunities to interact with each other regarding ELL instruction:

My school should do more to better prepare us to teach ELLs. I think ELLs are left behind. We don’t talk about ELLs in our classrooms during our team meetings. But, I think it is time for us to discuss how to better teach ELLs in our team meetings. We definitely need to have conversations about our ELLs because their number is increasing (Interview 3).

Overall, it seems that the positive culture of the school enabled Davorka to see herself as a part of the teaching community of New West High and facilitated her teacher identity development as a novice teacher. Davorka perceived that she became more motivated and confident in her teaching ability because of the positive and collaborative school culture.

**Perceived Level of Content Knowledge**

Davorka perceived that she had a strong content knowledge in mathematics due to her educational background: “I had a major in Business, so I took a lot of math classes at college. I
have strong knowledge in math” (Interview 1). Davorka further shared that she was fortunate to be assigned to teach mathematics at New West High school because she always loved “numbers” and math was one of her “favorite subjects” when she was a student at school (Interview 1).

Although Davorka reported that she had strong content knowledge in math and perceived herself as a capable and effective math teacher, she perceived herself as ineffective and unsuccessful as a teacher of ELLs: “I see myself as an effective math teacher but I don’t think I am very effective teacher for my ELLs. I think I can’t teach ELLs successfully in my classrooms” (Interview 3). Davorka felt that she lacked specific knowledge and skills to address her ELLs’ linguistic and academic needs in her math classrooms. She expressed that as a math teacher, she needed specific professional development focusing on teaching high-school level math to ELLs in order to be able to “deliver the content effectively” to ELLs in her classrooms: “I need to learn more content specific teaching strategies to teach ELLs math effectively. I wanna be a better teacher for my ELLs but I have a lot to learn” (Interview 3).

Positioning in Relation to ELLs

Findings revealed that Davorka’s positive schooling experiences and having “welcoming”, “patient” and “caring” teachers as a former ELL student affected her positional identity as a teacher of ELLs (Interview 2). Davorka reflexively positioned herself as a caring and emphatic teacher as a teacher of ELLs and sought to replicate the positive relationships she had with her teachers with her ELLs: I had great teachers during my entire schooling. They were very patient and caring and I’m hoping to be that same kind of teacher for my ELLs. I think being caring, emphatic and patient to the situation of ELLs is important (Interview 2).
Davorka’s reflexive positioning seemed to influence her classroom practices as a teacher of ELLs. Davorka commented on the strategies she employed to make her ELLs feel cared and comfortable in her math classrooms:

I always ask them ‘how are you doing?’ ‘how is your day?’ because I want them to see that I care about them. Also, I pair them up with another ELL who speaks the same native language to make them feel more comfortable (Interview 2).

Furthermore, Davorka added that “being a daughter of immigrants” herself contributed to her ability to understand the challenges ELLs might face in English-only mainstream classrooms:

“I was an ELL student so I know how it feels to be alone in a classroom in which everybody speaks the majority language. It’s hard, really hard. So, being patient and understanding is important” (Interview 2). As is evident in Davorka’s statements, her prior schooling experiences as an ELL positioned Davorka as knowing rather than predicting what it feels like for ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

Although Davorka felt that her schooling experiences as a student allowed her to be more aware of what her ELLs might feel in mainstream classrooms, she viewed teaching ELLs as a “difficult and daunting” task and positioned herself as “unsuccessful” with respect to teaching ELLs. She further reported, “I believe that I am more aware of their [ELLs] challenges but I don’t feel confident in teaching ELLs. I think it is hard to teach ELLs” (Interview 3).

Sources of Support

Regarding ELL instruction, Davorka indicated that she did not receive any professional support or guidance to help her become an effective teacher for her ELLs. Davorka also shared that she was observed several times by her administrator, university supervisor and MTLD; however, she was not observed specifically about her teaching of ELLs and she was not provided
any feedback regarding teaching ELLs. When asked if she had asked any guidance regarding teaching ELLs, Davorka responded that she did not ask for support or guidance because as a new teacher she was “in survival mode” as a new teacher and therefore, she “didn’t much think about ELLs” in her classrooms (Interview 2). Furthermore, reflecting on her first year of teaching, Davorka mentioned that she was not even aware of ELLs in her classrooms: “I don’t even remember how many ELLs I had last year. I don’t know if I had any. If I had ELLs, probably they could speak English” (Interview 2).

Despite Davorka having reported that she did not receive any specific support or guidance on ELL instruction, she perceived that she received a great deal of support and assistance from her colleagues, administrator as well as other TFA corps members to navigate personal and professional challenges during her first two years of teaching as a novice mathematics teacher: “I have had some rough times but what really made these two years so good for me the support I get from my colleagues, school and my fellow teachers. As a new teacher from day one, I felt so supported” (Interview 2).

Davorka had very positive comments about the professional support she received from her administrator: “Having that support from your admin really makes a big difference whether you want to stay at that school or not. I am very lucky because I have a very supportive admin who I work with every day” (Interview 2). Additionally, Davorka perceived that as a teacher, her effectiveness in the classroom had been improved because of the support and guidance from the administrator: “I began to feel more confident in my teaching abilities because of her feedback… If you have an idea and you are not sure how to implement it, she is like ‘let’s figure out how to implement it” (Interview 2).
Davorka also spoke of the professional support she had been given by her colleagues at New West high school. She felt that the professional support she received from her colleagues helped her make the transition to the classroom successfully as a new teacher: “I have very supportive colleagues. They made my first year teaching much easier! They helped me about teaching, gave me tips about classroom issues. Such as when you face some discipline issues, they gave me advice and supported me” (Interview 2).

Davorka also described the support she received from veteran TFA teachers at New West High school. Davorka shared that on her first year of teaching, she found developing good lesson plans and grading to be a challenge. Yet, she indicated that there were four veteran TFA teachers at her school that helped her figuring out how to develop lesson plans and grading her students’ work: “My closest friends are 2013 TFA teachers here. They are a year ahead of me so they have more experience. They gave me some good tips about grading my students’ work…They were great helping me with lesson plans” (Interview 2).

Davorka also spoke of the emotional support she received from other TFA corps members outside of her school context. Davorka reported that she developed strong friendship with other TFA corps members in her new context. According to Davorka, her friendship with other TFA corps members helped her endure the challenges of her first year of teaching. Davorka further shared “It’s so important to have a community here; we all go through the same things, same challenges, and similar experiences. We understand each other, first year was challenging for us in a new city but we supported each other” (Interview 2).

**Summary of Chapter 4**

In this chapter, the findings for the two research questions as found for the five participants were presented. The next chapter presents a detailed discussion of the findings.
through the lens of reviewed literature and the theoretical frameworks of the study. In addition, the next chapter presents the implications, limitations of this study and recommendations for future research directions.
CHAPTER 5

Organization

This qualitative multiple-case study examined the five Teach for America (TFA) teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to English language learners (ELLs) in the context of a semester-long teaching English as a second language (TESL) course. In addition, this study aimed at exploring primary considerations that came into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs.

In this chapter, I present a discussion of the findings introduced in Chapter 4 through the theoretical frameworks of the study and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The discussion of the findings across cases is clustered under two main headings with reference to the two research questions that guided this inquiry. Next, I present summary of the discussions, implications for the study, and limitations and recommendations for further research.

In what ways do TFA teachers develop their teacher identity in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long TESL course?

In the following four sections, in what ways the semester-long TESL course influenced the five TFA teachers’ (a) perceived level of knowledge of the education of ELLs, (b) beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction, (c) values about linguistic diversity and (d) commitments and intentions to work with ELLs is discussed.

Knowledge of Education of ELLs

All five participating teachers began the TESL course with little knowledge of issues pertaining to the education of ELLs. Similar to the participants in Heineke and Camaron’s (2013) study, the participants felt that the TFA’s five-week summer institute did not adequately prepare
them to work effectively with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The participating teachers also reported that during their TFA five-week summer training, they had participated in sessions devoted to diverse learners mainly focusing on cultural diversity or issues of cultural understanding. However, they did not recall any sessions or instruction specific to the educational and linguistic needs of ELLs. This finding reflects the current status of teacher preparation and supports research in the area of ELL education (Coady, de Jong & Harper, 2011; Lucas, 2011). In most of the teacher preparation programs in the U.S., most attention has been devoted to preparing mainstream teachers to teach in ways that incorporate students’ cultural backgrounds and generally little attention has focused on language-related preparation (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Although specific courses focusing on cultural diversity issues might help teachers develop empathy and cultural understanding, teachers of ELLs cannot support the learning needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms if they do not have specific discussions regarding the academic and linguistic needs of ELLs which they typically do not receive in their diversity courses (Lucas & Villegas, 2010).

All five participants perceived that participation in the TESL course led to changes in their knowledge regarding the education of ELLs. In particular, the TESL course enabled the participating teachers to develop an awareness of the vital role of language in working with linguistically diverse student populations. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Clark & Medina, 2000; Torok & Aguilar, 2000; Turgut, Adibelli &Huerta, 2016; Xu, 2000) which found that courses focusing on ELL instruction lead to increased and more accurate knowledge with respect to ELL instruction. In addition, each of the five participating teachers reported growth in their knowledge of instructional strategies for ELLs as a result of participating in the TESL course. These findings indicate that unlike courses on diversity issues,
courses on ELL instruction contribute to the teachers’ knowledge base with respect to ELL instruction and equip them with specific instructional strategies required for teaching ELLs.

Three participants (Patrick, Davorka, Cheryl) reported that their learning from the TESL course also facilitated changes in their teaching practices. Nevertheless, two of the participants (Melissa, Sally) indicated the TESL course did not impact their teaching practices. Findings of this study revealed that Melissa and Sally’s reflexive positionings and existing beliefs hindered the implementation of new knowledge into practice. For instance, Melissa reflexively positioned herself as the teacher of the majority of students and therefore, she rejected making changes in her mathematics instruction for ELLs. She believed that as a mathematics teacher, it would be unfair for her native-English speaking students to have to change her practice and focus on language development in order to accommodate “a few” ELLs’ linguistic needs in her classrooms (Interview 2). On the other hand, Sally believed that the strategies for teaching ELLs are strategies that are “just good teaching” for all students (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p.102); therefore, she did not implement specific strategies to address the linguistic needs of ELLs. These finding supports Davis’ (2003) claim that a teacher’s existing beliefs might function as filters “as to how one views new knowledge and whether one considers and/or incorporates it into one’s practice or whether it is disregarded” (p. 5). The cases of Melissa and Sally also confirm Reeves’ (2004) claim that content area teachers might resist altering their instructional practices for ELLs because of their existing beliefs.

The TESL course improved all five participating teachers’ knowledge of the education of ELLs; however, the course did not improve the participating teachers’, with the exception of Cheryl, perceived level of confidence to teach ELLs in the content area classrooms. Cheryl was the only participant who perceived that her confidence as a teacher of ELLs improved due to the
new knowledge she acquired from the course. She also perceived that the growth in her confidence and knowledge enabled her to “think like a language teacher” and helped her improve her teaching practices for the ELLs in her classrooms (Interview 3). This finding suggests that the positive influence of the TESL course on Cheryl’s fledgling identity as a teacher of ELLs. It also confirms Wenger’s (1998) claim that identity shapes practice and they are interrelated, that is, change for one affects the other (Kanno & Stuart, 2011).

Unlike Cheryl, the other participants did not feel more confident in their ability to work with ELLs after their participation in the TESL course. One explanation for this could be the lack of support and guidance from experienced others. Of the five participants, Cheryl was the only teacher who received ongoing support and feedback from her mother who had taught ELLs for more than 20 years. That is, Cheryl had the opportunity to refine her teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs based on the suggestions, support and feedback from an experienced other and “reconceptualize and recontextualize” (Johnson & Golombek, 2003, p.735) her knowledge and beliefs with respect to teaching ELLs. This finding suggests that it was not only the involvement in course activities, but engagement and constant interaction with an expert which enhanced Cheryl’s confidence in teaching ELLs contributed to her emerging teacher identity development in relation to ELLs.

**Beliefs about ELLs and ELL Instruction**

Both teacher candidates and inservice teachers bring their knowledge, beliefs, and experiences to new learning contexts, and their beliefs play a crucial role in how they interpret new information (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008; Johnson, 1994). The participants of the study brought to the course a wide range of beliefs regarding the population of ELLs and ELL instruction. Their beliefs had been indirectly shaped or mediated by their personal biographies,
backgrounds, educational experiences as well as the contexts in which they worked as teachers. Findings revealed that the existing beliefs of participants served as filters to make sense of the course content, respond to course activities and drive their knowledge about ELLs and ELL instruction, which in turn, influenced and reshaped their beliefs about ELLs and ELL instruction. For instance, Sally had the belief that all ELLs were immigrants and newcomers to the U.S. Yet, the new knowledge she gained from the course challenged Sally’s misconception about the characteristics of ELLs. In addition, through her participation in the course, Sally became aware of the fact that not all ELLs were Hispanics. Melissa, on the other hand, brought to the TESL course her concerns and deficit beliefs about native language use in class. Integrating ELLs’ home language in the classroom is often recommended as a pedagogical strategy for teachers of ELLs in English-only mainstream classroom settings (Echeverría, Vogt, & Short, 2007; Walqui & Van Lier, 2010). Yet, Melissa had viewed ELLs’ native language as a negative force which might slow down ELLs’ learning progress in the classroom. She mentioned that before participating in the TESL course, she had not allowed her ELLs to use their home language in her math classrooms because she had believed that ELLs’ home language could act like a barrier to develop proficiency in the English language. Nevertheless, by the end of the course, Melissa stated her belief in favor of allowing ELLs to use their home languages in the classroom. Melissa’s case demonstrates that there is clear link between teacher beliefs and teaching practice and suggests teachers’ language beliefs might affect teachers’ instructional decisions and teaching practices in the classroom (Borg, 2003; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). The case of Melissa also supports the value of TESL coursework in improving teachers’ deficit beliefs about the second language learning process (Markos, 2012; Peter, Markham & Frey, 2012).
The TESL course also appeared to change three participating teachers’ (Cheryl, Davorka, Patrick) prior beliefs about the characteristics of effective teachers of ELLs. Lucas (2011) suggested that effective teachers of ELLs have an understanding of second language acquisition (SLA) theories and knowing about specific instructional strategies for ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Before their participation in the TESL course, Cheryl, Davorka and Patrick had the belief that having personal traits, such as patience and empathy, would be sufficient to effectively work with ELLs. However, after course experiences, they realized that teachers of ELLs should also possess specific knowledge and skills to facilitate ELLs’ academic language development and content area achievement. Sally and Melissa, on the other hand, remained consistent in their belief that teaching ELLs was essentially “just good teaching” for all, leading them to overlook the specific language related knowledge and skills teachers must possess in order to address the linguistic needs of ELLs and provide them effective instruction (de Jong & Harper, 2005, p.102).

Although the participating teachers’ language beliefs changed as a result of participating in the TESL course, their beliefs about their roles as teachers of ELLs remained unchallenged. For instance, Cheryl remained consistent in her belief that content area teachers are responsible of educating ELLs. Her belief was central to how she positioned herself and viewed her teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs. In addition, when I asked her expectations from the TESL course, she expressed that she wanted to develop expertise in teaching ELLs as a content area teacher. It appears that by positioning herself as a teacher of ELLs, Cheryl entered the TESL course with an identity goal (Pizzolato, 2006) and expectations for her future teacher-self, which contributed to her teacher identity development in relation to ELLs.

On the other hand, the other four participating teachers remained consistent in their belief that ELLs should be in classrooms with bilingual or ESL teachers. That is, they charged bilingual
and/or ESL teachers with the responsibility of educating ELLs, in particular, those ELLs with low proficiency levels in English. More specifically, throughout the interviews and written reflections, Melissa continued to reiterate that her responsibility as a mathematics teacher was to teach the content, not language in the classroom. This finding confirms previous studies’ (Reeves, 2006; Valdes, 2001; Yoon, 2008) findings that content area teachers are reluctant to work with ELLs, particularly those ELLs with very low proficiency and they assume that teaching ELLs is the responsibility of ESL or bilingual teachers. These findings suggest that courses on ELL instruction should include opportunities for mainstream teachers to explicitly and critically examine their incoming beliefs about their roles as teachers of ELLs to engage them in a process of identity development.

Values about Linguistic Diversity

Lucas and Villegas (2011) suggested that learning a number of strategies, methods and techniques is not sufficient in order to work effectively with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Effective teachers of ELLs value linguistic diversity by respecting ELLs’ home languages, viewing linguistic diversity as an asset instead of a problem that must be fixed and allowing ELLs to use their home languages in their classrooms (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

In this study, the participating teachers’ attitudes toward cultural and linguistic diversity and ELLs were generally positive. This finding contrasts with the findings of other studies (e.g. Hollins & Torres-Guzmán, 2005; Sleeter, 2008; Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004) that indicated that teachers generally bring somewhat negative attitudes towards diversity to teacher education courses. Regarding the influence of the TESL course on the participating teachers’ values, findings of this study revealed that the course did not seem to influence three participating teachers’ (Cheryl, Patrick, Davorka) values about linguistic diversity significantly but it appeared
to play a positive role in two participating teachers’ (Sally, Melissa) values. For instance, Cheryl, Patrick and Davorka expressed that they had always appreciated cultural and linguistic diversity. They also reported that they valued ELLs’ home languages and allowed them to use it in their classrooms with others.

On the other hand, although Sally entered the course with positive values and attitudes regarding linguistic diversity, she mentioned that her course experiences improved her attitudes and values as a teacher of ELLs. In particular, she expressed that the TESL course enabled her to value bilingualism and develop positive attitudes towards bilingual individuals and bilingual education. Melissa, on the other hand, felt that the TESL course did not influence her values about linguistic diversity; however, change in her perspectives about the use of native language in class indicated that the TESL course played a positive role in her values for linguistic diversity. As stated above, before the TESL course, Melissa had not allowed her students to use their home languages in the classroom; however, her course experiences seemed to help her recognize the value of ELLs’ home languages.

It is also necessary to note that all five participants had had diversity training during their TFA summer training. Nonetheless, throughout the interviews, rather than their diversity training experiences, all participating teachers reflected on how their personal experiences, such as foreign language learning experiences or experiences with ELLs, or TESL course experiences helped them develop value for linguistic diversity. This supports Lucas and Villegas’ (2011) claim that courses focusing on general diversity issues might help teachers develop cultural understanding. However, those courses cannot be sufficient to challenge teachers’ misconceptions about second language learning process and help them develop value for linguistic diversity.
Commitments and Intentions to Work with ELLs

With the exception of Cheryl, the TESL course did not seem to influence the four participating teachers’ (Patrick, Davorka, Melissa, Sally) commitment and intention to work with ELLs as content area teachers. Cheryl was the sole participant who felt that her course experiences improved her knowledge and confidence regarding working with ELLs, which in turn, seemed to play a role in her commitment and intention to teach ELLs as a content area teacher in future.

On the other hand, the other four participating teachers (Patrick, Davorka, Melissa, Sally) reflexively positioned themselves as ineffective teachers of ELLs and indicated that they preferred not to teach ELLs in their future classrooms. It appears that the participants’ positional identities affected their images of their future selves, which in turn, influenced their commitment and intention to work with ELLs as content area teachers. For instance, although Patrick reflexively positioned himself as an empathic teacher in relation to ELLs, he also assigned non-powerful positions to himself with respect to his teaching ability in instructing ELLs. More specifically, he was entrapped by the misconception that he would fail in teaching ELLs as a monolingual English-speaking teacher. The fear of failure was evident in Patrick’s statement in which he expressed that he was concerned to teach ELLs in future because he was “gonna hurt those students” (Interview 3). Despite believing himself to be a successful mathematics teacher, Patrick’s positional identity in relation to ELLs seemed to negatively impact his future intention and commitment. This finding supports Kayi-Aydar’s (2015) claim that in teacher identity development, “when non-powerful positions become more dominant, teachers may simply avoid teaching ELLs” (p.101). Thus, it is important for teacher educators to help teachers “feel
empowered by recognizing and highlighting their strengths as teachers of ELLs” (Kayi-Aydar, 2015, p.101).

On the other hand, the TESL course did not influence two participating teachers’ (Melissa, Sally) intention and commitment to work with ELLs because both participants were not able (or did not want) to develop a strong sense of teacher identity as novice teachers in the teaching community. Both participants explicitly stated that they did not have any intention to continue to work as teachers because they did not feel passionate about and committed to teaching anymore. This finding suggests that teachers’ sense of teacher identity in general or commitment to the teaching profession plays a role in their positional identities as teachers of ELLs, which in turn, might affect their commitment and intention to work with linguistically diverse students in content area classrooms.

What primary considerations come into play in TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs?

Teachers’ teacher identity as teachers of ELLs is closely intertwined with teachers’ perceptions of themselves and their sense of teacher identity as novice teachers in the teaching community. Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of TFA teachers’ teacher identities as teachers of ELLs, I explored what primary considerations facilitated or hindered the five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. I found five primary considerations to be involved in the development of the participants’ teacher identity: (1) decision to become a teacher, (2) school culture, (3) level of content area knowledge, (4) positionings in relation to ELLs, and (5) sources of support. Each is considered below.
Decision to Become a Teacher

All five participants entered the teaching profession through TFA and committed to teach in high-need schools for at least two years. Yet, each joined TFA to become a teacher with a different purpose in mind. The teachers’ decision to enter the profession seemed to impact their commitment to teaching and professional growth as novices in the teaching community of practice, which in turn, indirectly impacted their teacher identity development in relation to ELLs.

Of the five participating teachers, three participants (Cheryl, Patrick, Davorka) expressed a desire to make a difference in the lives of students and therefore, they decided to join TFA to become teachers in under-resourced schools. In addition, consistent with the model of teachers’ identity development proposed by Olsen (2008), significant others who emerged during the three teachers’ life trajectories played a part in their decisions to enter the teaching profession. For example, Patrick mentioned that his experiences with his high school teacher influenced his decision to enter the teaching profession while Davorka reflected on her childhood experiences and indicated that being a child of immigrants and her parents contributed to her decision to pursue a career in teaching. Cheryl’s positive early experiences with her mother, who was a teacher at an under resourced, high minority school, played an influential role in her decision to become a teacher. These findings also point to Vygotsky’s notion of *perezhivanie*, which suggests that *perezhivanie* takes place when a lived experience is meaningful for an individual (Vygotsky, 1994). It appears that the participating teachers’ lived experiences with significant others were meaningful to them and evoked emotions in the three participants, which in turn, influenced their decisions to become teachers.
Three participants (Cheryl, Patrick, Davorka) also indicted that they viewed teaching as a lifelong career and entered it with the intention of staying in the profession beyond their two-year TFA commitment. Because they viewed teaching as their long-term career, it appears that they were invested in developing their pedagogical skills, deepening their content knowledge and establishing meaningful relationships with their colleagues in their school communities. For example, Patrick started a chess club and he also volunteered to teach additional mathematic courses after school to participate in his school community as a newcomer. Furthermore, in addition to the graduate courses he was required to take, he enrolled in additional online courses to improve his teaching skills. Both Cheryl and Davorka mentioned that they attended workshops, conferences and professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching skills as novice teachers. It also appears that they also made efforts to become a part of their school communities by socializing with their colleagues, such as going out to lunch with other teachers and/or meeting after school or on weekends.

In contrast, two participating teachers (Melissa, Sally) did not join TFA to ultimately become a part of the teaching community. Therefore, it appears that they might not have been willing to develop a sense of belonging to the profession. Additionally, both participating teachers’ motivation to enter the teaching profession seemed to impact their growth as teachers during their teaching career, which played a significant role in their teacher identity development overall and as teachers of ELLs. For example, Melissa’s main professional goal was to move to Washington DC and work in politics. She mentioned that although she had positive experiences in the graduate courses she was required to take as an alternatively certified teacher, she admitted that she did not feel motivated to translate new knowledge into her teaching practices because
her intention was to leave the teaching profession in two years. This finding also explains why Melissa was not willing to change her teaching practices for ELLs in her math classrooms.

On the other hand, Sally mentioned that she could not feel a member of her school community because, similar to Melissa, her goal was to leave her placement school after her two-year TFA commitment was over. As Schultz and Ravitch (2013) pointed out, novice teachers’ identities are constructed and shaped through participating in and interacting with other members of a teacher community (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). Yet, Sally recognized herself as an outsider and remained on the peripheral of the community of practice in her placement school (Wenger, 1998). She admitted that she intentionally distanced herself from her colleagues and did not make an effort to get involved in the school community. That is, Sally reflexively positioned herself as an outsider, and excluded herself from her school community. As Wenger (1998) suggested, identities are constructed through both participation and non-participation in communities of practice. It seems that as a newcomer, Sally chose non-participation in her school community, which led to limit her ability to negotiate her teacher identity (Wenger, 1998). Sally’s case also supports the claim that identities are not developed by the individual alone but (re)constructed and shaped through the engagement and interactions within the given community of practice. These findings also seem to suggest that individuals who enter the teaching profession without the intention to remain in the profession might be limited in their growth as teachers in comparison to those who view the teaching profession as a long-term career.

School Culture

The TFA organization’s teacher preparation model is based on learning in practice (Gabriel, 2011). Therefore, the participants’ experiences in their school contexts and perceptions
of the school culture played a significant role in their professional growth as novice members of
the teaching community. Findings revealed that the participating teachers who perceived their
school culture to be collaborative, supportive and encouraging developed a sense of belonging
and immersed into the school community successfully as newcomers. In contrast, it seems that
the participating teachers who perceived the school culture as dysfunctional or uncollaborative
did not develop a sense of belonging and membership to that community (Sfard, 1998; Wenger,
1998).

Three participants of this study (Cheryl, Patrick, Davorka) spoke positively of their
school contexts and credited the positive school culture and their success as novices in the
teaching profession to their colleagues and administrators. For instance, Cheryl mentioned that
the encouraging school culture provided her with a sense of belonging and enabled her to
participate successfully in the teaching community of the school as a new teacher. Davorka and
Patrick perceived that they became more motivated and confident in their teaching ability
because of the positive and collaborative school culture. On the other hand, two participants
(Melissa, Sally) experienced tensions and struggles in their school contexts, which in turn
seemed to hinder them in developing a sense of belonging to the school community and the
teaching profession. Specifically, due to the conflicts with their administrators, both participants
experienced feelings of frustration and isolation in their school contexts. This finding confirms
previous research (Flores & Day, 2006; Luehmann, 2007) that new teachers struggle or benefit in
school contexts, depending upon the school community.

Findings also revealed that the participating teachers (Cheryl, Patrick, Davorka) who
experienced a positive school culture demonstrated positive attitudes towards their school
contexts and the teaching profession. However, the participating teachers who perceived the
school culture to be problematic described their school contexts and the teaching profession negatively. For instance, Patrick viewed the teaching profession as rewarding; however, Sally and Melissa described their negative perceptions of the teaching profession. This finding is consistent with Vygotsky’s (1994) notion of perezhivanie. That is, Melissa and Sally’s lived emotional experiences with their administrators in their schools induced negative contexts that appeared to have had a significant impact on their perceptions of the teaching profession, hindering their professional development as novice teachers in the teaching community.

All participants perceived that their school cultures were welcoming and inclusive of ELLs. Nevertheless, they also mentioned that they did not have the opportunity to work collaboratively with the ELL teachers in their schools. Yet, given the fact that ELLs spend the majority of their school day in mainstream classrooms, findings of this study suggest that it is necessary for school administrators to provide opportunities or create professional learning communities for ESL and classroom teachers to engage in collaborative work. ELL teachers might play an important role in novice mainstream teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs as they could be role models and provide support regarding the implementation of desired teaching practices for ELLs.

**Level of Content Knowledge**

The teacher’s expertise in content knowledge is considered as an integral part of teacher identity (Mizza, 2013). In this study, the TFA teachers’ perceived level of content knowledge influenced their perceptions of their own identities as content-area teachers and played a critical role in either constraining or facilitating their teacher identity development.

As stated in Chapter 2, the TFA teachers are given the opportunity to indicate their preferences of subjects to teach prior to entering the teaching profession; however, in some
cases, they are chosen to teach in content areas that are different from their undergraduate degrees. Three participants (Cheryl, Patrick, Davorka) indicated that they entered the teaching profession with strong content knowledge in their content areas due to their educational backgrounds. As novices in the teaching community, despite having experienced some challenges with curriculum or lesson planning in their first year of teaching, they indicated that they had always felt confident in their teaching abilities in the classroom and reflexively positioned themselves as effective and successful teachers in their content areas. This finding supports previous research (Harlen & Holyrod, 1997; Kind, 2009; Mizza, 2013) concluding that teachers’ level of content knowledge is closely related to their confidence in teaching in the classroom.

On the other hand, two participants (Melissa, Sally) were unfamiliar with their assigned teaching content areas. As a psychology major, Sally indicated that she “had no idea about teaching Earth Science” (Interview 1). Similar to Sally, Melissa was assigned to teach mathematics which was outside of her content area as an international relations major. She further expressed that she was not passionate about teaching high school level mathematics. Due to their perceived lack of content knowledge, they did not feel as experts in their content areas and experienced confusion and frustration throughout their teaching careers. They reflexively positioned themselves as incompetent and unsuccessful teachers as content-area teachers in their new teaching contexts and their positional identities seemed to play a significant role in their professional growth not only as novice content-area teachers but also as teachers of ELLs. Additionally, despite all five participants experienced survival stage as novice teachers in the teaching profession, it seems that Melissa and Sally could not move beyond survival mode due to the lack of confidence and knowledge in their assigned content areas. These findings support
Johnson, Birkeland and Peske’s (2005) claim that alternatively certified teachers’ confidence as teachers and early sense of success in the profession facilitate their teacher identity development; however, the lack of confidence in teaching might hinder their emerging teacher identity development.

The participating teachers’ perceived level of content knowledge also played a part in their ability and willingness to employ instructional strategies for ELLs in their classrooms. The findings of this study revealed that the participants (Patrick, Cheryl, Davorka) who felt confident in their content knowledge focused on improving their knowledge and skills in ELL instruction. For instance, Cheryl consulted her mother to design ELL- friendly history lessons. Patrick, on the other hand, read articles online to improve his knowledge of instructional strategies for ELLs. However, both Melissa and Sally were more concerned about teaching the content than providing effective instruction for ELLs in their classrooms. Thus, they devoted their time and energy to improve their content knowledge instead of focusing on ELLs in their classrooms. This finding is significant as it suggests that lack of or inadequate content knowledge might hinder teachers of ELLs to develop teacher identities attentive to ELLs. Findings also confirm Walqui’s (2006) claim that teachers of ELLs must be well prepared in their content areas to effectively teach content to ELLs in their classrooms.

**Positionings in Relation to ELLs**

Varghese and colleagues (2005) suggested that the teacher is not “a neutral player in the classroom, but on the contrary, her positionality in relation to her students, and to the broader context in which the teacher was situated” is crucial (p. 22). In order to understand teacher identity of teachers of ELLs, it is necessary to understand their reflexive positionings as teachers of ELLs and how their positionings affect their identities in relation to ELLs. The findings of this
study indicated that the participating teachers’ reflexive positionings played a significant role in their understandings of themselves as teachers of ELLs, instructional decisions, practices and the development of teacher identities in relation to ELLs.

The findings revealed that all five participants reflexively positioned themselves as emphatic towards ELLs. Three participants (Patrick, Sally, Melissa) expressed that their empathy concerning that challenges of ELLs face in learning English stemmed from their previous foreign language learning experiences. This finding confirms previous studies’ (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011; Ellis, 2004) findings that teachers’ second and/or foreign language learning experiences may affect their attitudes and feelings of empathy toward their ELLs. For two participants (Davorka, Cheryl), their own language, ethnic and cultural backgrounds served as a way to relate to the challenges of ELLs. For example, Davorka’s schooling experiences as a former ELL appeared to contribute her teacher identity in relation to ELLs. She felt her schooling experiences in the U.S. enabled her to be more aware of what ELLs might feel in English-only mainstream classrooms. Additionally, Davorka’s experiences as an ELL positioned her as knowing rather than predicting what it feels like for ELLs in the mainstream classroom. As a teacher of ELLs, Cheryl defined her teacher role identity through the lens of her racial identity. She deployed her racial identity as a Black woman to relate to the challenges of ELLs and interpret her positioning. Cheryl positioned herself and ELLs as members of minority groups and felt that she could empathize with ELLs due to her racial identity. This finding is supported by Ajayi (2011) who found that African American teachers’ racial backgrounds and sociocultural identities served as a way to connect with the challenges and marginalized experiences of ELLs and mediated their teacher identities and perspectives about ELLs.
Despite the fact that all five participating teachers reflexively positioned themselves as emphatic teachers, only Cheryl assigned a powerful position to herself with respect to teaching ELLs in content-area classrooms. The other four participants (Patrick, Davorka, Sally, Melissa) reflexively positioned themselves as ineffective and incompetent teachers in relation to ELLs. Despite two participating teachers (Patrick, Davorka) having reported that they made some accommodations and employed some instructional strategies for their ELLs during instruction, they did not view themselves as successful teachers of ELLs. Both positioned themselves as linguistic outsiders, as non-Spanish speaking teachers, which affected their perceptions of their roles as teachers of ELLs. Such positioning is problematic as it suggests that both participants seemed to perceive that they did not have a strong responsibility to ELLs as content-area teachers. This finding also suggests that teachers’ deficit beliefs might influence their positional identities as teachers of ELLs and constrain the development of a strong sense of teacher identity in relation to ELLs.

Similar to the teacher, Mrs. Taylor, in Yoon’s (2008) study, Melissa viewed herself as a content area teacher and reflexively positioned herself as the teacher of majority students. She rejected taking on the identity of a language teacher and indicated her main responsibility was to teach mathematics in the classroom. Melissa’s reflexive positioning was consistent with her teaching practices. She reported that she did not accommodate her instruction for ELLs and did not focus on academic language development. Similar to Melissa, Sally also did not make any accommodations for ELLs in her science classrooms. She constantly questioned her commitment to the teaching profession during her teaching career and struggled to position herself as a member of the teaching community. As Lave and Wenger (1991) claimed identity development is a negotiated process and new teachers become experts through participation. Yet, Sally
explicitly indicated that her purpose was to fulfill her commitment to TFA and not to participate in the teaching community.

It appears that Cheryl was the only participant who negotiated her teacher identity as a history teacher and adopted a language teacher identity. She firmly believed that teaching ELLs was her responsibility as a content-area teacher and positioned herself as a teacher of all students, including ELLs. Her reflexive positioning appeared to affect her purpose and motivation to be an effective teacher for ELLs. That is, she indicated that she had felt ineffective as a teacher of ELLs in her first year of teaching; however, her TESL course experiences and interactions with her mother gave her the knowledge and confidence in teaching ELLs, which in turn, she believed, helped her “think like a language teacher” and adopt a language teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs (Interview 3). Adopting a language teacher identity, according to Cheryl, affected not only her thinking but also actions in her content-area classrooms. She indicated that she changed her pedagogical approaches and focused on academic language development in her history classrooms in order to correspond to her new identity position. The case of Cheryl supports the claim that identity not only changes across time but also according to the context and the purposes for which the individual engages in that context (Norton, 2006; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995).

Sources of Support

Consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Flores & Day, 2006; Izadinia, 2016; Madsen & Hancock, 2002) findings of this study revealed that support the participants received from school community members (e.g., their colleagues, administrators) and sources outside of their school communities of practice (e.g., TFA peers, MTLDs, family members) contributed to their professional identity development as novice content-area teachers. In
contrast, a lack of or inadequate support appeared to affect their perceptions of themselves as new teachers and hinder the growth of their teacher identity.

With respect to teaching ELLs, all five participating teachers reported that they did not receive any support or guidance from their managers of teacher leadership development (MTLDs), mentors from their university program, school administrators, TFA peers and other teachers in their school contexts. As stated in Chapter 2, TFA teachers are assigned an MTLD during their two-year teaching commitment to TFA. MTLDs are responsible for mentoring novice TFA teachers, observing their teaching and providing them support and feedback regarding their teaching throughout the two obligatory years. Although all five participating teachers were observed by their administrators and MTLDs regularly during the first two years of their teaching, they reported that they were not provided any guidance, suggestions and feedback regarding teaching ELLs. This finding is alarming as it might explain why the participating teachers positioned themselves ineffective or incompetent with respect to working with ELLs in their content-area classrooms. Furthermore, this lack of support and guidance regarding ELL instruction from experienced others might also explain why the four participating teachers struggled with translating the knowledge they gained from TESL coursework to their teaching practices as novices. If the teachers of ELLs are not provided adequate support regarding effective ELL-pedagogy by their administrators, MTLDs or mentors, it is likely that mainstream teachers of ELLs continue to assume that educating ELLs is the responsibility of ESL or bilingual teachers.

Of the five participants, Cheryl was the only participant who received ongoing support and guidance from an experienced other with respect to the education of ELLs throughout her teaching. She mentioned that she consulted her mother who was experienced in ELL instruction.
in order to learn how to adapt her history instruction specific to the needs of her ELLs in the classroom. Cheryl’s interactions with her mother, an experienced other, was conducive to her teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. Cheryl perceived that she became “more effective” teacher for her ELLs as a result of ongoing interactions and professional dialogs with her mother (Focus group). This is in line with Vygotsky’s (1986) sociocultural theory with regard to learning leading development that presupposes that learning occurs through interactions with experienced others. Cheryl’s case also supports Urzúa and Vásquez’s (2008) claim that teacher identities “emerge through interactions with others” (p. 1936).

Furthermore, consistent with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notions of community of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, it appears that Cheryl’s mother reflexively positioned herself as a mentor and functioned as an old timer. Her mentoring seemed to assist Cheryl as a newcomer to the teaching community to access legitimate peripheral participation as a novice teacher of ELLs. This finding suggests that collaborating and interacting with experienced ELL teachers aid novice teachers of ELLs to grow professionally and facilitate their teacher identities in relation to ELLs (Wenger, 1998).

Summary of the Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine in what ways the five TFA teachers developed their teacher identity in relation to ELLs in the context of a semester-long TESL course. It also aimed at exploring the primary considerations that came into play in the five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. A multiple case study design guided the data collection and analysis. Data collection took place approximately six months and included the following five methods: (1) semi-structured in-depth one-to-one interviews, (2)
focus group discussion, (3) artifacts, (4) field observations, and (5) researcher’s journal. Data were analyzed using the Lichtman’s (2012) three C’s of analysis.

The findings revealed that the TESL course provided “context for developing new understandings” (Wenger, 1998, p. 215) for the participating teachers of ELLs and contributed to their teacher identity through improving their knowledge of the education of ELLs, particularly important for this population owing to little training received through TFA. The course also led to some positive changes in the participating teachers’ beliefs about ELL instruction and the population of ELLs, especially regarding the native language use in class and characteristics of effective teachers of ELLs. In addition, data indicated that through their participation in the TESL course, the participating teachers developed new understandings about working with ELLs as content-area teachers if with a somewhat limited scope. Of the five participants, only Cheryl negotiated real changes in her teaching identity in relation to ELLs, particularly coming to realize that as a content area teacher, she was responsible for teaching ELLs and took on linguistically responsive teacher identity through her participation in the TESL course. The other four participating teachers could not reflexively position themselves as effective teachers of ELLs and charged bilingual or ESL teachers with the responsibility of educating ELLs.

Consistent with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) views of identity, the cases of five participating teachers of ELLs also indicated that teacher identity development is a complex and ongoing process. It is not context-free and relates to the contexts the teachers are situated in (Lave &Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Therefore, considering that identities are developed, (re)constructed and shaped by the engagement with multiple communities of practice, it would be too simplistic to assume that providing a semester long TESL course would be sufficient to develop a strong sense of teacher identity in relation to ELLs. The findings of this study revealed
that although the TESL course contributed to the participating teachers’ teacher identity development by improving their knowledge of ELL instruction, the participants’ experiences in different communities of practice seemed to play a more pervasive role in their growth as novice teachers of ELLs. To be more specific, multiple and overlapping influences such as the participants’ experiences as novice teachers, motivation for becoming teachers, reflexive positionings in relation to ELLs and the contexts in which they worked played a more significant role in the trajectory of their professional development as teachers of ELLs.

This study also explored what primary considerations came into play in the five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. The findings for the study indicated that five primary considerations facilitated or hindered the five participants’ teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. These five considerations were: (a) decision to become a teacher, (b) school culture, (c) level of content area knowledge, (d) positionings in relation to ELLs, and (e) sources of support.

The findings show that the participants’ reasons of entry into the teaching profession played a role in their intention and commitment to the teaching profession and professional growth as novice teachers in the teaching community. Findings indicated that those TFA teachers who entered the profession with the intention to remain in the profession beyond their two-year commitment to TFA invested more in their professional growth and development as teachers in order to become legitimate members of the teaching community, which in turn, played a role in their teacher identity development in relation to ELLs.

I also found that the participating teachers’ perceptions of school culture shaped their understandings of themselves as novice teachers in the profession. The professional identities of those participants (Davorka, Patrick, Cheryl) who perceived their school culture to be positive
followed a developmental path. In contrast, the negative perception of school culture led to feelings of frustration (Melissa) and disenchantment (Sally). With respect to ELLs, all five participating teachers perceived their school culture to be inclusive and welcoming for ELLs. However, they also reported that they did not have any opportunities to work collaboratively with ELL teachers in their school contexts. The findings suggest that the participants’ placement schools did not go beyond providing a welcoming school environment for ELLs.

As Beijaard and colleagues (2000) suggested teachers derive their teacher identity from how they view themselves as experts in their content areas. The participants’ perceived level of content knowledge also seemed to play a significant role in either hindering or facilitating their teacher identity development. Lack of knowledge in the content area seemed to inhibit the participants to reflexively position themselves as successful and effective teachers, which influenced their perceptions of their own identities as teachers. On the contrary, the participating teachers with strong content knowledge felt more confident in their teaching ability and reflexively positioned themselves as successful teachers in their content areas. The findings also show the participating teachers’ perceived level of content knowledge affected their willingness and motivation to utilize instructional strategies for ELLs in the content area classrooms.

Yoon (2008) argued that teachers’ reflexive positionings guide “the way in which they act and think about their roles, assignments, and duties” in their teaching contexts (p.499). My findings confirmed Yoon’s argument. The participating teachers’ reflexive positionings in relation to ELLs closely influenced their perceptions of their roles as teachers of ELLs, their actions in the content area classrooms and views of teaching ELLs. The findings also revealed that taking on a positional identity as an emphatic teacher towards ELLs did not contribute to adopting ESL-inclusive pedagogy in addressing the needs of ELLs in content area classrooms.
Findings also revealed support, or lack thereof, played a crucial role in shaping the participating teachers’ experiences and professional growth as novice teachers of ELLs. As discussed in the previous sections, of the five participants, Cheryl was the only teacher in the study who received ongoing support and guidance from an experienced other as a novice teacher of ELLs. The ongoing support Cheryl received from her mother seemed to facilitate her teacher identity development in relation to ELLs and helped her take on a linguistically responsive teacher perspective. Findings also revealed that Cheryl’s constant interactions with her mother were conducive to her teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. These findings support the claim that teacher identity is constructed and reshaped in interactions with experienced others within certain communities of practice (Danielewicz, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

**Limitations of This Study and Implications for Further Research**

This qualitative research study was conducted with five content-area TFA teachers of ELLs. Thus, the findings are not generalizable to larger populations. Further research studies could investigate or compare the teacher identity development of the following groups of teachers of ELLs: (a) teachers who entered the profession through traditional route and those coming from other alternative pathways, (b) those who work with elementary-aged ELL students and those who work with high school ELL students, (c) those who speak Spanish as their first language and those who are monolingual English-speaking.

Another possible limitation of this study could relate to the fact that this study relied on the participants’ self-reported teaching experiences and practices with ELLs in their content area classrooms. Further research studies could utilize classroom observations of TFA teachers of ELLs as a means of data collection in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of how
TFA teachers’ positional identities influence their ELL instructional strategies and teaching practices in their classroom contexts.

Another limitation of this study was the fact that it observed the five TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs only for six months. A longitudinal study tracking TFA teachers’ learning experiences and teacher identity development in relation to ELLs from the TFA’s five-week summer training program to the end of their two-year teaching commitment might provide much richer insights.

Finally, there is a general lack of scholarly investigation regarding the teacher identity development of mainstream teachers of ELLs in the teacher identity literature. This research contributes to understanding the development of teacher identities of TFA teachers of ELLs. Nevertheless, given the increase in the number of ELLs, more research studies are needed to understand how mainstream teachers of ELLs develop, construct and reconstruct their teacher identities as teachers of ELLs and how their teacher identities impact ELLs’ academic and language development in mainstream classrooms. Such line of research could be helpful for teacher education practice to promote a linguistically responsive teacher workforce.

**Implications for the Study**

There are a number of implications of the findings of this present study. First, given the fact that the TFA organization places new teachers in several regions across the country that have among the highest ELL populations after a five-week teacher summer training (Hopkins & Heineke, 2013), for the TFA organization, one of the implications of this study is that the summer training programs should include specific sessions focusing on the essential language-related understandings for educating ELLs and the implementation of effective instructional ELL strategies. The TFA teachers in this study participated in some sessions focusing on cultural
diversity and racism issues as part of their five-week TFA summer training. However, the diversity sessions did not equip them with the specific knowledge required to address the challenges of teaching academic content to ELLs in their classrooms. As Lucas (2011) pointed out, teachers need special expertise in order to teach ELLs effectively and this requires specific preparation. Therefore, sessions focusing on language instruction and linguistic diversity should be added to the TFA’s teacher training program to help novice TFA teachers develop the specialized knowledge, skills and teaching practices required to support ELLs’ learning.

Furthermore, all TFA teachers are assigned a TFA mentor, referred as an MTLD, that is responsible for supporting novice TFA teachers throughout the two-year commitment period by observing and providing feedback on all aspects of their teaching practices. Although the teachers in this study had ELLs in their classrooms, they did not receive any support, guidance or feedback regarding teaching ELLs during their two-year teaching commitment to TFA. That implies that the TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs was not encouraged or supported by their mentors. Given that the TFA’s teacher preparation model is based on “learning in practice” (Gabriel, 2011), TFA mentors play a crucial role in supporting fledgling teachers’ growth and teacher identity development as novice teachers of ELLs. Therefore, the TFA organization need to select TFA mentors carefully and make sure that mentors are knowledgeable about ELL education and effective practices for ELLs so that they can give effective feedback in teaching ELLs and promote novice TFA teachers’ teacher identity development in relation to ELLs.

Findings of this study suggest that novice teachers of ELLs should be provided opportunities to engage in interactions with experienced ELL teachers in the field. For instance, constant professional interactions with experienced content-area teachers who are effective
working with ELLs would help novice teachers understand how to integrate effective instructional strategies for ELLs within content area and support their development as teachers of ELLs. In this study, Cheryl’s case provides an example of how the ongoing support and professional interactions with an experienced other have a profound impact on the professional growth and identity development processes of novice teachers of ELLs. Creating opportunities to engage in professional interactions with experienced ELL teachers would afford novice TFA teachers of ELLs dialogic spaces wherein they can remold their beliefs and understandings regarding educating ELLs and facilitate their teacher identity development in relation to ELLs.

Findings of this study also indicated that the TFA teachers’ perceived level of content knowledge played a part in either hindering or facilitating their teacher identity development, which in turn, impacted their growth as teachers of ELLs. The TFA teachers who did not have sufficient specific content knowledge in their teaching reflexively positioned themselves as unsuccessful and ineffective teachers and invested their time and energy in improving their knowledge in their assigned content areas instead of learning effective instructional strategies for ELLs. Therefore, the TFA organization should consider novice TFA teachers’ educational backgrounds before placing them in their teaching positions as the findings of this study indicated that lack of or inadequate content knowledge might hinder TFA teachers of ELLs to develop teacher identities attentive to ELLs.

The findings of this study also have implications for teacher education courses related to teaching ELLs. All teachers in the study perceived that their knowledge with respect to the education of ELLs and the ELL population in general had improved after their participation in the TESL course. Furthermore, the TFA teachers seemed to develop an awareness of the central role of language in the educational success of ELLs as content area teachers as a result of
participating in the TESL course. These findings indicate that TESL courses are influential in improving content-area TFA teachers’ knowledge of ELL instruction and therefore, should be included in the teacher education curriculum to facilitate teacher identity development in relation to ELLs. Yet, the findings of this study also underscore the necessity and importance of going beyond informational learning to making teachers’ identity development as teachers of ELLs a conscious and intentional process throughout teacher education courses on teaching ELLs. That is, teacher educators should provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their incoming teacher identities as teachers and begin to identify as teachers of ELLs, instead of simply being teachers of content area. In teacher education courses, teacher educators could facilitate discussions in which teachers reflect on their teacher roles as mainstream teachers and discuss how their roles, positionings in relation to ELLs, might influence learning opportunities of ELLs in general education classrooms.

Furthermore, in this study, with the exception of Cheryl, the participant teachers could not position themselves as effective teachers of ELLs after taking the TESL course due to their beliefs and perceptions of their roles as teachers of ELLs. For instance, Patrick remained consistent in his belief that he would not become effective teachers of ELLs as a monolingual English-speaking teacher. His belief hindered him to develop confidence as a teacher of ELLs and take on ELL teacher perspective. Thus, teacher educators should encourage teachers of ELLs to consciously externalize and examine their beliefs about their positionings as teachers of ELLs. Furthermore, teacher educators should encourage teachers to focus on their strengths to improve their confidence and have them feel empowered as teachers of ELLs.
APPENDIX A

First one-to-one Individual Interview Questions

Personal History

a. Tell me about yourself.

b. What were your previous personal or educational experiences that made you join TFA?

c. Why did you decide to join TFA? Please tell me about what led you to become a teacher.

d. Have you studied any other foreign languages? How long did you study? How easy/difficult did you find language study?

e. What were your first experiences with linguistic diversity?

f. How do you feel about being a TFA teacher?

g. What do you believe you accomplished as a TFA corps member?

Teaching and Teaching ELLs

a. What do you find most challenging about your work?

b. What do you like most about being a teacher?

c. Tell me about your experiences working with ELLs. Tell me about the ELLs in your classroom.

d. How do you describe ‘being an effective teacher’ for ELLs?

e. Describe any challenges you have faced while teaching ELLs.

f. How confident are you as a teacher of ELLs?

g. What have found to be unexpected and/or surprising about teaching ELLs so far?
h. What kind of support or guidance have you received regarding teaching ELLs as a content area teacher?

i. Do you have use any specific strategies for teaching your ELL students? Why, why not?

j. How would you describe the characteristics of effective teachers of ELLs?

k. Do you think the TFA’s five-week summer training prepared you well with respect to teaching ELLs? Why, why not?

l. Would you teach in a classroom with high number of ELLs, if given the choice? Why or why not?

Course

a. What do you expect from this course?

b. What was your motivation for enrolling the TESL course? Are you interested in ELL education?

c. What would you like to learn about ELL education?

d. How would you rate yourself regarding your knowledge and teaching ability of ELL instruction? Why?

Identity

a. How do you think your identity affects your teaching in general?

b. How do you think your identity affects your teaching ELLs?

c. How would you evaluate your teaching ability (competencies and knowledge)?
APPENDIX B

Second one-to-one Individual Interview Questions

Teaching and Teaching ELLs

a. Tell me about the school environment you work.

b. Do you think you should use specific teaching strategies to teach ELLs? Why, why not? What strategies do you use to teach ELLs?

c. What strategies do you employ to meet the linguistic needs of ELLs in your classroom?

d. How do you create a classroom environment that supports ELLs?

e. How many times did you meet with your instructional coach (MTLD)/mentor? Have you received any suggestions/feedback about teaching ELLs?

Course

a. How would you describe your growth in teaching ELLs through your experiences in the course thus far? (ie. knowledge, dispositions, and skills)

b. What have you learned about teaching ELLs?

c. Has the course affected your teacher identity? Why, why not? How?

d. Are you making connections between the TESL course topics and your experiences as a content area teacher? How? Examples?

e. How would you describe your growth in teaching ELLs through your experiences in the course thus far? (knowledge, dispositions, and teaching skills)

Identity

a. How has the course influenced your teacher identity thus far?

b. What are some of the challenges of being a TFA teacher?
c. What are some of the advantages of being a TFA teacher?

d. How does being a TFA teacher affect your teacher identity?

e. Have you ever felt isolated or marginalized as a teacher of TFA? Why? How?

f. Can you describe a moment when you felt you were particularly successful as a teacher? How did you know you were successful? What do you think you understood about your students or about teaching that made you successful? How did you learn that?

g. Can you describe a moment when you felt you were particularly unsuccessful as a teacher? How did you know you were unsuccessful? What did you need to learn to be an effective teacher for ELLs?

h. How do you think your teacher identity inform your instructional practices in the classroom? What aspects of your identity/social position are most influential in your teaching (probe: race, class, gender)?

i. How do you think your teaching changed over time based on what you learned about your students?
APPENDIX C

Third one-to-one Individual Interview Questions

Teaching and Teaching ELLs

a. In what ways (if any) have your beliefs about ELLs, teaching ELLs changed this semester?
b. What extent you feel comfortable working with ELLs?
c. Did your opinion on being an effective teacher for ELLs change because of the course? Why? How?
d. How do you meet the academic needs of ELLs in your classroom?
e. What are some of the challenges you experience in teaching ELLs?
f. What are your expectations from the school you work to help you to become more effective teacher for ELLs?
g. Would you teach in a classroom with high number of ELLs, if given the choice? Why or why not?
h. Is there anything I have not covered that you’d like to discuss?

Course

a. What impact did your course experiences have on your understanding of teaching ELLs?
b. Has the course affected your teacher identity as a teacher of ELLs? Why, why not? How?
c. Do you think the course provided a sense of community to develop yourself as a teacher of ELLs? (such as group discussions, discussion boards, working together with other teachers...)

d. In what ways, did the course help your teaching career?

e. Did your opinion on being an effective teacher for ELLs change because of the course?

f. What course components influenced your perspectives regarding the education of ELLs?

g. Do you feel your teaching style has changed as a result of your experiences in the TESL course? How? Can you give me some examples?

Identity

a. How would you describe yourself as a teacher of ELL after the course?

b. Could you tell me about the emotional experiences you have had while teaching ELLs? the times when you got so happy, excited, surprised, angry, overwhelmed, upset, frustrated, sad etc.? Any specific moments or incidents you want to share?

c. How would you evaluate your teaching ability regarding teaching ELLs (competencies and knowledge)?

d. Do you think about teaching as a career? What do you see yourself doing in the next five years?

e. How would you describe the characteristics of effective teachers of ELLs?

f. Have you ever felt powerless in terms of providing effective instruction for ELLs as a content area teacher? Can you give me some examples?
APPENDIX D

Focus Group Questions

1. What are the characteristics of an effective ELL teacher in your conceptualization? How do you think you came up with this conceptualization? To what extent do you think you have these qualities as a content area teacher?

2. In what ways has your teaching practices changed as a result of participating in the TESL course?

3. What are your concerns about having ELLs in your classroom as a content area teacher? Would you like to work with ELLs in future? Why? Why not?

4. In what ways (if any) have your perspectives about ELLs, teaching ELLs changed during your teaching career?
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