Professional identity development by language background in a multi-lingual/cultural co-teaching TESOL practicum

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Despite research and advocacy, discrimination based on a teacher's L1 continues; thus, L1 background remains a negative factor in the development of language teachers' professional identities. This study asked how language teacher identities develop in a multilingual, multicultural, team-based co-teaching approach to the TESOL practicum, contrasting 15 MESTs (multilingual/multicultural English-speaking teachers) with 16 NESTs (native English-speaking teachers). Qualitative data collected through pre- and post-practicum surveys, in-practicum reflective journals, and alumni interviews suggest that early inclusive and collaborative assignments in language teacher preparation programs may positively impact the development of language teacher identities, both MESTs and NESTs.

Introduction

Despite the multilingual turn in theory and to some extent practice, monolingual approaches to language education, which advocate exclusive use of the target language and revere native speakerism, still dominate (e.g., Burton & Ranjendram, 2019; Calafato, 2019; Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Debreli, 2016; Ellis & Shintani, 2014; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). As a result, discrimination based on language teachers' native languages (L1) continues, particularly in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (e.g., Anderson, 2016; Brady & Gulikers, 2004; Braine, 2004; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Selvi, 2014; Zhang & Zhang, 2015). Indeed, Calafato (2019) argues that "the native speaker ideal can be said to disadvantage one group of teachers more than any other: non-native speaker teachers" (p. 2). In an era of internationalization of higher education (Llurda, 2005), professional inequities among second language (L2) practitioners who do not (and indeed can never) claim *native speaker* identities can emerge early, for example in teacher preparation programs, where L1-based barriers to participation have been observed (e.g., Brown & Ruiz, 2019; Anderson, 2016; Brady & Gulikers, 2004; Mahboob, 2003; Reid, 1997). Such early marginalization may have a profoundly negative impact on the emergence of teacher identity (Braine, 2010), specifically "persona, self-esteem, and in-class performance" (Selvi, 2014, p. 579), and has been noted as a critical area of inquiry (e.g., Cheung, 2015; Rudolph, Selvi, & Yazan, 2020; Varghese et al., 2005).

This study asked how language teacher identities develop before, during, and after the implementation of a multilingual, multicultural, team-based co-teaching approach to the TESOL practicum, contrasting 15 MESTs (multilingual / multicultural English-speaking teachers) with 16 NESTs (native English-speaking teachers). Data gathered from pre-service teachers through pre-/ post-practicum surveys and in-practicum reflective narrative journals and from program alumni through interviews support the capacity for this type of practicum to positively impact the development of all language teacher identities by (1) actualizing the multilingual turn in teacher education through multilingual awareness, with the potential to promote approaches such as translanguaging, (2) facilitating multidirectional participant validation and individual professional growth, (3) disassembling L1-based negative stereotypes, and (4) fostering supportive, nonpartisan, and multicompetent communities of practice.

Background

In the field of TESOL, NNESTs (non-native English-speaking teachers) outnumber NESTs (native English-speaking teachers - Braine, 2010; Canagarajah, 2005), and much academic and professional work has addressed what many consider to be a biased and inequitable distinction (see e.g. Selvi, 2014, for an overview). Despite research and advocacy, discrimination based on an English language teacher's L1 continues in professional practice (e.g. Anderson, 2016; Brady & Gulikers, 2004; Braine, 2004; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Selvi, 2014; Zhang & Zhang, 2015). As a result, the L1-based distinction remains a critical and often negative factor relating to the development and maintenance of teachers' professional identities (Calafato, 2019; Swearingen, 2019).

Reves and Medgyes (1994) initially drew attention to negative self-perceptions by NNESTs, particularly surrounding their target language use and the relationship between initial poor self-image and later poor performance in the classroom. Zhang and Zhang (2015) later noted,

> NNESTs … have to face more challenges than their native-speaker counterparts. This is because identity comprises composite factors such as the speakers' accent, physical features, skin color, cultural patterns of behavior, English proficiency, lived experiences… More significantly, a TESOL professional's identity is closely related to his/her social and academic/professional life on a daily basis, particularly concerning how native speaker peers and students regard his or her competence and performance vis-a-vis the legitimacy of his/her professional practice when "standards of English for English language education" (Holiday, 2008: 119) are defined in favor of native English speakers. (p. 116)

In their ethnographic, longitudinal study of two NNESTs in Singapore, Zhang and Zhang found that NNESTs' multilingual skills were not appreciated and that they were subjected to persistent implicit and explicit *othering* by native speakers of the local variety of English, as reflected in common conversations about their country of origin as well as accents in and lexical knowledge of English. This led to NNEST attempts to use the local variety, Singaporean English, and to "prove their worth" professionally, a process which contributed to a deconstruction and reconstruction of their professional identities over time.

The seeds of professional teacher identity are sown during training (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Unfortunately, research has documented inequities based on teacher language background in teacher preparation programs, where NNESTs may be prohibited from participating fully or at all, and their professional development needs may not be met (e.g., Anderson, 2016; Brady & Gulikers, 2004; Brown & Ruiz, 2017; Mahboob, 2003; Reid, 1997), a situation that can negatively impact professional identity development (see review in Swearingen, 2019; see also Banegas et al. 2021). Some work has described attempts to redress the negative self-image that NNESTs may develop during training as a result of inequities. Park (2012), for example, found that after working with an NNEST mentor during a teacher preparation program, a pre-service NNEST was able to view her nonnative English-speaking status more positively. Furthermore, Pavlenko (2003) examined how academic study expanded the categories of professional membership for language teachers beyond the traditional NEST/NNEST dichotomy to include "multicompetent, bilingual, and multilingual speakers," and that a large number of student-teachers repositioned themselves to align with the latter, resulting in feelings of empowerment and agency and a positive self-image. Moreover, many of those teachers expressed a desire to communicate their positioning to their language learners in order to encourage learners to similarly reconstruct their own identities. They thus engaged "in active attempts to reshape the surrounding contexts" (p. 266, see also Banegas et al. 2021; Ilieva, 2010; Kim, 2011; Wolff & De Costa, 2017, for further studies of the potential for positive impact on NNEST identity development in teacher education programs).

The current study continues this line of research, asking how English language teacher identities develop by teacher language background in a teacher education program without L1-based barriers to participation, considering specifically the impact of a collaborative, multi-lingual-cultural team-based approach to the TESOL practicum. Drawing from Pavlenko (2003) and with data from pre- and post-practicum surveys, reflective journals, and alumni interviews, the study contrasted MESTs (multilingual/multicultural English-speaking teachers - Brady, 2009), for whom English was not the L1 and who were "proficient multilinguals by default" (Calafato, 2019, p. 4) with NESTs, for whom English was the L1 and who had varying levels of second language knowledge.

Method

Participants and context

A group of 27 pre-service and four in-service teachers participated in this study. Pre-service participants were all graduate students in a US university working towards a non-licensure MA degree and were taking an advanced teaching methods course, which included completion of a 6-

week practicum teaching English. They comprised 12 MESTs, whose L1s were Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, or Turkish, and 15 NESTs, whose native language was English and who had varying levels of competence in a second language. In order to develop and encourage application of 'multilingual awareness' (García, 2008), pre-service teachers were initially surveyed on L1/L2 background and teaching experience and subsequently grouped within multilingual, multicultural, co-teaching teams of between three and five members that leveraged diverse and complementary backgrounds in language and learning. They collaboratively planned and subsequently co-taught ESOL classes in a local community-based adult ESL program, partnering with an experienced classroom teacher. In-service alumni comprised three MESTs, whose native languages were Chinese, French, or Japanese, and one NEST. The MESTs were working in international or domestic (US) contexts and the NEST was working in the US at the time of interview, having graduated between one and two years prior to the interview.

Data and analysis

Qualitative data were gathered before, during, and after the practicum and are described in Table 1. Importantly, as the data collection instruments for pre-service teachers were course assignments and not designed for the purpose of research, none asked participants explicitly to comment on their self-image, particularly as it related to issues of personal linguistic profiles; therefore, all commentary relating to identity and L1 background was considered salient enough to mention by the individuals themselves. Further, responses from pre-service teacher elicitation tools were not evaluated separately, but instead folded into a global evaluation of each student-teacher's practicum performance, which comprised 50% of the overall course grade. In-service alumni were interviewed for approximately 30 minutes each using the prompts identified below. These interviews had no evaluative goal, were intended for research purposes, and thus specifically asked about teacher L1 background.

A thematic analysis was conducted on all data following procedures laid out in Nowell et al. (2017). Given the relatively open nature of the data, inductive, data-driven coding was applied in an iterative fashion (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), noting major themes particularly relating to the development of professional identities (Johnson, 2003; Norton, 2000). These themes are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Data types, timings, prompts, participants, and emergent themes

Elicitation type	Timing	Prompts	Participants	Themes emerging from analysis
Written survey	Pre-practicum	What is/are your native language/s? Where are you from? How would you describe your metalinguistic knowledge of English versus other languages? What are your concerns about the upcoming practicum?	27 pre-service teachers	MEST: Primary concern about NNEST status MEST: Knowledge of target language NEST: Concern about target language knowledge NEST: Concern about teamwork
Written narrative reflection	In-practicum	Reflecting on the lesson(s) you just taught, please comment on the following: your own performance. the performance of your team members. the performance of the students.	27 pre-service teachers	MEST: Experience of linguistic challenges MEST: Concern about learners' attitudes MEST: Observation of NEST linguistic / other challenges MEST: Awareness of professional 'community' MEST: Attenuation of concern about NNEST status NEST: Experience of linguistic / other challenges NEST: Observation of MEST linguistic / other challenges NEST: Observation of MEST-learner empathy NEST: Awareness of professional 'community'
Written survey	Post-practicum	Reflecting on your recently completed practicum experience, please comment on the following: your own performance. the performance of your team members. the performance of the students. our practicum hosts.	27 pre-service teachers	MEST: Focus on intercultural communication MEST: Recognition of individual professional skills MEST: Reflection on professional development MEST: Reconsideration of learner attitudes NEST: Recognition of individual professional skills NEST: Reflection on professional development
Oral semi-structured interview	Post-graduation and entry to workforce	What is your current teaching situation? What have your experiences been thus far as a NEST/MEST? Have you experienced or witnessed any discrimination in the workplace based on teacher L1 background?	4 in-service teachers	MEST: Observation / experience of L1-based discrimination MEST: Confidence / sense of agency from training / experience MEST: Attempts at advocacy NEST: Little observation of L1-based discrimination NEST: Desire for MEST collaborator NEST: Attempts at advocacy

Findings

Analyses revealed similarities and differences in the characteristics of MEST and NEST identities that evolved during the practicum, with declining importance ascribed to L1 status, an increasing sense of agency particularly among MESTs, and a growing sense of professional community. Major themes derived from analyses of MEST versus NEST data at different stages of the practicum with illustrative examples are outlined below.

Pre-practicum

MESTs

Analyses of pre-practicum surveys revealed the following insights:

Primary concern about NNEST status – Responses revealed that L1 background was a considerable source of anxiety for MESTs. One said, "I have no confidence to teach a language that is not my native language." Negative views were based at least in part on prior learning experiences:

> I had English teacher who was Chinese when I was in high school. It was helpful when I knew nothing about English. My teacher explained in my own language and made me understand the grammar clearly. But when I was in a higher level, I preferred not to have a non-native teacher. I was not denying non-native English teachers can help us be familiar with different accents which were really needed in the real situation. From personal opinion, I didn't like non-native teacher.

Such views were striking given that the literature on the NEST/NNEST distinction had been discussed as part of the prior academic content, for example, perceptions of each by teachers and learners, and self-ascriptions of identity (Davies, 2003). One participant revealed, "Although we have talked about the advantages and strength of non-native English teacher, I would not take a class taught by non-native teacher if I were a student."

Knowledge of target language – Related to the above, MEST participants negatively positioned themselves apart from other professionals on the basis of their knowledge of English as a target language:

> Taking my English ability into consideration, I should use visual aids and body language more than a regular English teacher. When I get nervous, my pronunciation gets unclear and I make so many grammatical mistakes. Thus, I would like to practice speaking … before class.

Overall, despite considerable academic study, MESTs appeared not to view themselves as professionals, particularly in comparison to their NEST counterparts, before the practicum. Their identities were overwhelmingly and negatively defined by L1 background and knowledge of the target language.

NESTs

Similarities and differences existed between NESTs and MESTs in issues expressed before the practicum:

- Concern about target language knowledge – Like, MESTs, NESTs also expressed concern about their knowledge of the target language. One revealed, "My main concern … my weak metalinguistic knowledge of English. I worry about getting... tough questions." This comment also implied anxiety about potentially difficult interactions with learners on issues of language, which would likely reflect on self and other's perceptions of professionalism.
- Concern about teamwork – co-teaching was a source of apprehension for several NESTs. As one related, "I've had negative experiences in the past at language camp with team teaching. Sometimes there is an unequal distribution of work, planning, or teaching, etc... and sometimes you just really cannot work well with certain people."

In-practicum

MESTs

Extensive reflective journals completed after each practicum session displayed a number of common themes among pre-service MESTs relating to a developing sense of professional self. These themes evolved over time and are presented below in broadly chronological fashion.

Experience of linguistic challenges – Particularly in the early stages of the practicum, MESTs recounted difficulties with and in the target language. One recounted, "I made a spelling mistake", while another said, "I have difficulty understanding the students' accent." These issues seemed to trigger anxiety and self-doubt, as shown below.

Concern about learners' attitudes – While teaching, MESTs worried about their learners' perceptions of them, particularly in light of the linguistic challenges described above. One said,

> "I told students that I was not good at spelling. My voice was not loud and I did not know whether students caught that or not. If they did, could they treat it as a joke or take it seriously? If they took it seriously, they might not trust me anymore."

MESTs also continued to distinguish themselves from NESTs in this area:

> "I feel like native English speakers would understand them better than I do, because whenever students say anything in a wrong grammar or pronounce words with thick accent, I need to ask them to repeat and I feel that I hurt them by asking, especially when I ask for more than one repetition or ask for repetition in public."

- *Observation of NEST linguistic/other challenges* – It was not long into the practicum before MESTs witnessed varied challenges experienced by NESTs. One noted, "I was so glad since the students could see even a teacher making a mistake. It seemed to me that the native speaker's mistake became a release of tension in class." In this instance, the general sense of relief in the classroom may have been genuine; however, the MEST may also have been projecting her own sense of relief, realizing, conceivably for the first time, that NESTs were not perfect and perhaps even that professionalism does not imply or entail perfection.
- *Awareness of professional 'community'* – Almost without exception, MESTs acknowledged the support they had received from their colleagues. One description reflected many, "If one of us forgot something, the others would give supplement, correction and help immediately and naturally." Importantly, such comments reflected a movement away from the initial 'othering', specifically away from a binary MEST/NEST distinction, and towards a sense of collective collegiality, with teams reflecting communities of practice, regardless of individual L1 backgrounds. The shift towards an awareness of co-teaching teams as communities of practice was further evident in the emergence of strategic division of labor, implemented at some point by all teams. Workload distribution appeared to result from group consensus, with participants describing how "we each did separate parts during the class teaching." Importantly, the division of labor was based on individual competencies. As one participant noted, "we did different work according to everyone's strengths and weaknesses." The leveraging of complementary strengths within teams reflected two important processes in the development of the professional identity of MESTs. First, they became conscious of their value and the recognition of that value by others, including NESTs. Second, they became aware of weaknesses among NEST peers. These evolving realizations led to the final theme expressed by MESTs in their reflective journals during the practicum.
- *Attenuation of concern about NNEST status* – Over time, MESTs became much less self-critical in the face of target language difficulties: "I had problems reading it [class materials] for the first time because there were some words that prevented me from reading it fluently. I could read it better for the next time. … I think it worked well." They even began to balance acceptance of their language profiles with an acknowledgment of their own strengths. One said, "although [Teacher A] and I were not native speakers … I thought that our enthusiasm made students feel good." Moreover, in a striking reversal of the initial and possibly imposed identity as a NNEST with its associated negative self-perceptions, some began to argue for the benefits of their L1 backgrounds and consequent multicompetence and proactively claimed (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2014) their identities as MESTs. One commented,

> "I felt they [learners] were comfortable having a Spanish native speaker as instructor, because they felt more secure when talking (when they did not know a word, they could say it in Spanish) … knowing the fact that I was also learning new vocabulary with them, with

> words like “junk food”, made them feel less intimidated.”

In a particularly impassioned journal entry, a MEST cast away her prior attempts at identity construction, which she revealed were based on deception, in favor of a sense of self that was genuine and valuable, proclaiming, “instead of pretending a knowledgeable perfect English teacher, I would like to be honest to my students ... show a model who likes to learn a new thing ... not afraid of making mistakes and revealing an imperfect English ability.*”*

Overall, MESTs underwent a transformation during the practicum, moving from a profoundly negative and potentially destructive sense of professional identify, based on a negative L1-based conceptualization and perception of learner attitudes and compounded by harsh and unrealistic benchmarking against their NEST counterparts, to a more positive self-view, that was more balanced with a favorable conceptualization of their multicompetence.

NESTs

Issues NESTs initially described before the practicum evolved and others emerged during the practicum.

- *Experience of linguistic/other challenges* – At first, NESTs were concerned about possible linguistic dominance over MESTs in the classroom. One said, “I felt a little insecure as if maybe I was talking too much and not giving [Teacher A – MEST] a chance to add.” Over time, NESTs experienced their own challenges relating to language knowledge while they were teaching, which were often described in rather profound terms,

> “I was already in front of the class, … practice for the did/didn't questions, .. I realized that in my pre-analysis of grammar structures, I had myself not comprehended one aspect of grammar. … There I was in front of the class, having this epiphany.”

One explicitly reflected on some disadvantages of being a NEST, the danger of taking L1 knowledge for granted, and the need for professional preparation:

> “As a native speaker, sometimes things sound right to me that don’t actually follow the rules. For example, the students were asked for a two-syllable adjective and they said ‘happy’. So when they used ‘more happy’, I said ‘good’. But then, [Teacher A – MEST] had to say that it was actually an exception that could add –er by switching the ‘y’ to an ‘i’ and forming ‘happier.’ Although I know this rule, my native speaker judgments led me astray. I think it’s important for me to review the grammar more before trying to explain.”

Other similar views were expressed, with one NEST lamenting, “I am so concerned with monitoring my language that I become too serious.” In some cases, the initial experience of teaching a native language was not a positive one, with feelings of insecurity and incompetence: “I feel really uncomfortable teaching this class. It’s really difficult for me to slow down my speech, and to use the correct target language,” and “It’s really strange for me to teach English. …. I feel clueless in some areas.”

- *Observation of MEST linguistic/other challenges* – While documenting their own difficulties, NESTs also observed difficulties their MEST counterparts experienced. In one instance, an instructor noted, “in the explanation of the requests that should have followed the complaints, I felt that [Teacher A - MEST] lost confidence and wasn’t able to fully explain what they [learners] were expected to do.” Interestingly, NESTs often treated such issues with delicacy, refraining from revealing individual names and speaking in general terms, “there were a few slips in [teacher] pronunciation mainly of ache, pronounced ‘eck’ and coughing, pronounced ‘couching’” (though by process of elimination, it was clear that a MEST was the object of description in this case). The same instructor also continued with a description of a resolution in this case: “’coughing’ was corrected right away.”
- *Observation of MEST-learner empathy* – In contrast to themselves, many NESTs reflected on how comfortable MEST teammates appeared to be in the classroom. One said, “[Teacher A – MEST]’s face was aglow as she welcomed the students. I remember feeling nervous, ..panic .. got in the way of my extending a warm welcome.” Another said,

> "I often shy away from making jokes to the students because I am afraid that they will be too idiomatic or too specific to American culture. [Teacher A – MEST] and [Teacher B – MEST] do not seem to have any such reservations. This week in fact, we had just finished reviewing symptoms and were moving on to the medical history form when [Teacher A – MEST] pointed to it and said "Now this is a headache". The students understood and appreciated the humor, plus it was a great way to tie together the two parts of the lesson."

One NEST reflected on an experience of learning and teaching her own L2 in comparison with the ongoing experience of teaching her L1:

> "15 years of my formal language classes have been in people teaching me Spanish, so I am comfortable with teaching those classes. I have something to model my behavior over, and I can remember struggling with the same issues when I was learning my L2. However, with English, I feel clueless."

Another feature of NEST reflection on MEST-learner empathy was in the domain of cross-cultural comparisons. NESTs noticed and appreciated that MESTs overtly identified cultural practices that were American. One said,

> "although the idea of a food pyramid may seem foreign to most of the students [Teacher A – MEST] made it seem relaxing and natural. I was also glad she mentioned it was American … Also it was great that [Teacher A – MEST] mentioned that the examples given were American customs for new parents. This allowed us to elicit more language from the more advanced students … we asked them to think of their own sentences to describe what happened in their countries in regards to preparing for babies."

- *Awareness of professional 'community'* – Like MESTs, NESTs quickly realized the value of teamwork and witnessed the development of a supportive professional community of practice. They often recounted their "mistakes" in the classroom, and instances where they had been rescued by team members. For example,

> "While I was giving the instructions for the activity "two truths and a lie" I initially forgot to model a response as we had planned, but [Teacher A – MEST] reminded me. We also skipped the activity about cultural differences of greetings at the start of the lesson but [Teacher B – MEST] remembered and worked it in later."

Professional support was also seen in the area of language. One NEST described receiving language help from a MEST colleague:

> "We had a little trouble explaining 'different from' and 'different than' and one student asked me to write examples on the board. After I wrote them, I asked if the students understood, but I mixed up 'different from' and 'different than' and [Teacher A – MEST] corrected me."

Another specifically commented on the tactful way her MEST colleague corrected her, "I mistakenly modeled 'take out the trash' instead of 'take out the garbage', which [Teacher A – MEST] noticed and was very gracious in the manner in which she interjected to correct the error." This was also salient since it indicated considerable control of language by a MEST in the challenging area of pragmatics. As with MESTs, NESTs described an emerging division of labor based on individual strengths. One said,

> "During this activity, [Teacher A – MEST] led. This worked out well because she is very good at encouraging and animating the students. She gets so excited in activities like this and her excitement spreads to the students and they respond very well to her."

Interestingly, unlike in MEST journals, which included numerous self-descriptions, NEST journals typically commented on the contributions of others, notably MESTs, for example,

> "I am really enjoying the method that we decided upon to allow [Teacher A – MEST] to give the directions for the activities and for me to just add to the activity. It gives [Teacher A – MEST] the chance to speak up and give input and me the chance to learn from her. I like the way that she introduces the activities."
>
> Another said,
>
> "[Teacher A – MEST] and I also figured out how to share the responsibilities of teaching. We had an idea of our strengths and really worked them to their full potential. [Teacher A – MEST] is great at thinking on her feet, so she wrote the sentences on the board. I am good at working off of [Teacher A – MEST] by expanding upon her ideas."

Overall, like MESTs, NESTs expressed some serious initial doubts regarding their own professional competence, particularly regarding metalinguistic knowledge of English, and witnessed similar difficulties among MESTs in this domain. In addition, after initially expressing concern about the efficiency and efficacy of teams, they subsequently observed and benefited from the emergence of diverse repertoires of skills, which were deployed in a collective community of practice.

Post-practicum

MESTs

Several dominant themes were displayed in MEST responses to a survey evaluating learners, peers, and themselves, completed after the practicum.

- *Focus on intercultural communication* – In place of the prior categorical distinctions based on L1 and unidirectional view of communication during the English language teaching practicum, MESTs contemplated the multidirectional nature of intercultural communication upon completion of the practicum. As one participant noted, "The three people in our group were all from different countries and had different cultural backgrounds. There were so many disagreements when we prepared our syllabus and lesson plans." Such comments reflected a recognition of cultural parity. MESTs could have elected to position themselves along with diverse MEST peers on one side in contrast to NESTs on the other side, but instead cultural backgrounds were viewed independently and equally. Although outcomes were not described in this particular instance, we can infer that all participants, MEST and NEST, felt sufficient professional confidence to at least advocate for their positions overtly.
- *Recognition of individual professional skills* – Again, MESTs commented on the use of complementary strengths in the teaching team, including their own.

> "As the only native speaker, [Teacher A] did very well. She proofread our lesson plans, corrected [Teacher B's] and my pronunciation, searched materials, and gave brilliant ideas. [Teacher B] was full of enthusiasm. I could tell she really loved teaching. She was good at making the classroom environment. … I tried to make our study more effective and efficient. Being a non-native speaker gave me advantages to know about students' needs in their daily life. I paid great attention to this when we prepared our lesson plans."

Here, while the instructor attributed superior linguistic knowledge to her NEST colleague, she described a characteristic of herself commonly attributed to MESTs – that of empathy (e.g., Ling & Braine, 2007).

- *Reflection on professional development* – MESTs ended the practicum with a balanced assessment of themselves as a result of the team-based environment. One commented, "We all worked as a group. It helped me a lot to become aware of different perspectives. It both helped me develop myself… see what are my weaknesses are …. also, it showed me the benefits of working together."
- *Reconsideration of learner attitudes* – Finally, the attitudes of learners towards MESTs, once predicted as negative and viewed as an area of great concern by MESTs, became an area of reassurance. The evaluation given by one instructor reflected the views of many, "The students were so friendly to even English non-native teachers, so their supportive and non-discriminatory attitude helped me a lot."

NESTs

In post-practicum survey evaluations of learners, peers, and themselves, NESTs noted the following themes.

- Recognition of individual professional skills – Like MESTs, NESTs spent much time recognizing the strengths of their professional peers and the advantages of working within a team. One said that the "benefits of teaching with .. other people is that if one encounters a problem, the others can assist." Another observed the smooth way in which this process emerged, "During the teaching of our lessons the group could not have been better. We worked and helped each other having almost seamless transitions." And others focused on the emotional value of the close community of practice, "I am very happy with the way my group worked together. I thought we all shared the activities and the planning as necessary, and provided each other with a lot of support," and the opportunities for self-reflection afforded by the process, "Having to jump right in and start teaching wasn't as daunting with an entire group of teachers, and I became more conscious of my own strengths and weaknesses in the process."

- Reflection on professional development – Relatedly, NESTs clearly recognized their development in a team-based environment. One said, "I learned a lot from working with my team, gaining ideas from my peers for classroom activities and strategies," while another emphasized that diversity leads to development, "We also learned a lot from one another because we were all such different teachers and people. I …. really value my experience working with my group members." In closing, one NEST explicitly addressed the MEST/NEST collaboration, "we were … able to learn so much from each other in terms of intuition of linguistic forms and metalinguistic knowledge of English. It was great fun, and such a valuable learning experience!"

Post-graduation in-service alumni

MESTs

In separate interviews, three MEST professionals, all alumni of the multilingual and multicultural, team-based practicum, provided lengthy descriptions of their professional experiences after entry into the field, two in international contexts and one in a domestic US context. They noted the following:

- L1-based discrimination – One MEST contrasted her practicum and professional experiences and described a fairly clear-cut case of professional discrimination in an international context:

> "I didn't feel discrimination in the practicum. I didn't feel that students liked or trusted the native speakers teacher more than me. … Working at this company, I had to face a lot of discrimination. I have my MA degree but my salary is the same as teachers who have no experience or training. Foreign teachers get paid more just because they are foreign. And the cost of the lessons are different. Students pay more if they want to take native English speaker lessons than mine. I hate that. The schools are more protective of the native English speakers because they are the moneymakers. There are no trainings for native speakers because they can speak English. Non-native speakers have to take [a standardized test] every year. Native speaker teachers don't have to learn anything, but we have to keep studying. They have cockiness, 'we are the money makers, we are the face of the school.' And other head teachers treat them that way. They [NESTs] don't like to teach low level lessons because they are too important, so they [head teachers] don't make them."

- Confidence/sense of agency from training/experience – Despite institutional discrimination, MESTs drew confidence from their training and experiences, "[my] knowledge is coming from my own language learning experiences but also from my courses." As one noted about her professional colleagues, "There are some native speakers with experience, but I feel more comfortable than them because I have knowledge and experience because of my MA." Crucially, their professional competence was recognized in the workplace,

> "My trainees have a lot of respect for me. They think I am a very strong leader and teacher and they send their students to me with questions about grammar and word differences and knowledge about tests that native speakers have never taken. Native speaker teachers can't identify the difficulties of sentences, e.g. complex sentences."

It is important to note that the native speakers to whom this particular MEST was comparing herself were those without advanced degrees, and that she was the only teacher with an MA in her professional setting.

- Attempts at advocacy – Finally, MESTs described attempts at advocacy in the profession, small and large scale. In the international context outlined above, NESTs were often exempted from teaching lower levels; however, a MEST in a mid-level managerial position did not follow the pervasive corporate culture in this area, explaining how, "I make my trainees teach from the lowest to the top because they need to see the whole process." Furthermore, a MEST recounted how a mentor, also a MEST, consistently praised other NESTs, but criticized her and prevented her from accessing opportunities for professional development, until she "stood up and said this is discrimination." Given the existing corporate structure that overtly and publicly privileged NESTs, this was a bold, high-stakes move that could have cost the practicum alumna a job. Instead, she was provided with additional institutional support and opportunities for professional development, which served as an important message to all stakeholders.

NEST

An interview with a NEST alumna of the practicum two years after graduation and working in the field documented the following insights.

Little observation of L1-based discrimination – Unlike the MESTs working in international contexts, the NEST alumna working in a domestic (US) setting had not really experienced or witnessed professional discrimination on the basis of teacher L1. She had coincidentally held several positions teaching her own L2 (Spanish), and described experiences akin to those of the MESTs above in which colleagues and learners had treated her as a source of knowledge and inspiration. She reported that one learner of Spanish had written in a course evaluation that "she [the instructor] said that she was not a native speaker, so if she can do it, I can do it too." For ESOL, the alumna had worked domestically with several MESTs. In one case, she noted that a MEST "seemed very comfortable and never mentioned native / non-native issues…. and was respected by at least one of the supervisors." However, she did note some mixed reactions from his learners. On the one hand, learners appeared to question portions of his instruction, particularly in pronunciation, "In his pronunciation, there were things that the students noticed and a couple of them came to me." Yet on the other hand, other learners and the institution benefited greatly from his multilingual capabilities: "Then there were times that it was useful when we had very beginner Arabic speakers, and he would speak to them in their L1." In that specific context, there appeared to be no inequities in salary on the basis of L1 background, as she reported, "The differences in salaries were differences in education. So there was nothing in there dependent on being a native or non-native speaker. He … was getting paid more than me." In another professional setting, where the NEST alumna was professionally and personally close to a MEST, she noted that the MEST was

> "awesome. I can go on and on about the cool stuff she does in class. She knows her stuff. Occasionally she'll ask me about the right use of a word. One thing I noticed about her is that she's very in tune with pop culture and that's how Americans communicate with each other. She has a really good grasp of informal language, and I'm impressed because it's not always something that non-native speakers have. She will manipulate the language to create something new. She was doing this for comic purposes. I don't know about other colleagues' views of her. I know that some of her students have written it [being a MEST] on an evaluation. She deals with it well. She tells them that she has an accent and tells students that when people tell them they have an accent they should say thank you because they were brave enough to come to a new country. I'm not sure if at the top she is 100% accepted."

- *Desire for MEST collaborator* – In reflecting on her prior practicum experiences, the alumna revealed that,

> "I felt for the first time that being a native speaker doesn't help you all that much. I realized during planning that I didn't know how to explain something. It made me aware that native speakers must know the rules and the content - that you aren't born with it. I realized that during the practicum."

She also recalled her own and others' statuses as MESTs,

> "The practicum reaffirmed my idea that non-native speaker teachers have a certain set of strengths that native speakers don't have. I saw that in the Spanish program on the other side myself, so the [TESOL] practicum was reaffirming from the opposite side. As long as the non-native speaker has the proficiency level appropriate for the level they are teaching, they are capable and bring their own strengths."

As a result of these professional experiences and views, she concluded that "the best scenario for teaching would be native / non-native speaker. That would be the best teaching situation - to fill in each other's gaps."

- Attempts at advocacy – Finally, the alumna expressed some attempts at advocacy, albeit on a relatively small, low-stakes scale. Of her prior MEST colleague, she reported that, "I would never say anything to them [learners] about his pronunciation. I would just answer their initial question as "I say it like this." About her current MEST colleague, she shared,

> "I'm rooting for her because she brings up really good ideas and gets good things going. She brought an idea up in the last meeting and people were really excited and talking about it. I hope everyone values her the same way they value everyone else."

Discussion and conclusion

This study examined the development of professional identities by teacher language background prior to, during, and after a team-based TESOL practicum. Multilingual English-speaking teachers (MESTS), with diverse L1s, were grouped with native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to constitute multilingual and multicultural co-teaching teams. For both MESTs and NESTs, the findings described above document the evolution of a sense of professional self in formative teacher training, and underscore the non-static nature of teacher identity (Banegas et al. 2021; Varghese et al, 2005). Furthermore, the survey and reflective journal data demonstrate the influence of internal but also external factors (Banegas et al. 2021; Cheung, 2015), where practitioner perceptions of the views of teammates and learners were described at length and reflect the crucial role played by others in identity construction.

In the initial stages of constructing their identities as English language teachers, both MESTs and NESTs questioned their professional competence in the context of the target language. In line with much research reviewed in Swearingen (2019), for MESTs, this was a source of great anxiety, including both metalinguistic knowledge but also language use, and led to related concerns about the perceptions of others regarding their NNEST status, despite academic coverage in this case (cf. Pavlenko, 2003). However, NESTs also questioned their own metalinguistic knowledge of the target language, though did not express explicit concern about language use. Unlike MESTs, they added trepidation about co-teaching and about how this would affect their own professional practice.

In later stages of the practicum, identity construction between MEST and NEST appeared to align in some areas. Both groups experienced and witnessed pedagogical challenges in target language knowledge/use and classroom management. However, they observed and participated in the development of a supportive multicompetent community of practice with a diverse repertoire of linguistic and cultural strengths and skills. Yet differences existed between the two groups. MESTs appeared to transition away from an 'assigned' towards a 'claimed' identity (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2014). They began with a view of themselves that was based entirely on their L1 background, which, with its associated nomenclature of 'non-native English speaker', was largely negative despite having completed academic readings critically countering such discourse. As Varghese and colleagues (2005) state, MESTs in teacher training programs are "in the process of establishing a self-identification as *ESL teacher,* [and] must reconcile the tension of their concurrent membership in the social group of *nonnative English speaking teacher,* a tension exacerbated by the profession's continued adherence to NES dominance" (p. 25). In line with other studies (see Swearingen, 2019), over time and with evidence of their contributions to a team and the associated recognition from administrators and learners and crucially also peers, many of the MESTs in this study appeared to reach such a reconciliation during the practicum. They actively embraced their MEST status, identifying the many benefits such a status conferred and moving from a 'language-as-problem' to a 'language-as-resource' perspective (Ruiz, 1984), which ultimately yielded a positive self-image. For most NESTs, initial concerns about target language knowledge appeared to moderate over the course of the practicum. In contrast to their initial concerns about co-teaching, they reflected on the effectiveness of their co-teaching teams, and focused particularly on the professional successes of their peers, many of whom were MESTs. Finally, MEST and NEST in-service alumni described experiences of L1-based prejudice/discrimination, but successful job searches and attempts at small and large-scale advocacy to redress MEST/NEST inequities.

These findings can be interpreted hierarchically in the context of Gee's (2001) identity framework, where teacher language background constituted an initial "nature-based" source of identity, the views of community-based learners and co-teachers constituted later "institutional" and "discourse" sources of identity, and the construct of the novice practicum co-teaching team constituted an "affinity" source of identity (see also Higgins & Ponte, 2017, for affinity building particularly among novice teachers). This study speaks to Beauchamp and Thomas' (2009) claim that "gaining a more complete understanding of identity in general and teacher identity in particular could enhance the ways in which teacher education programs are conceived" (p. 176). In light of the data and in the context of continuing professional inequities based on L1 background but also the 'multilingual turn' in research and practice, this study supports a multilingual and multicultural, team-based practicum model in language teacher education that can facilitate individual professional growth as well as foster a sense of multidirectional participant validation, disassembling negative stereotypes based on L1 background and constructing nonpartisan multicompetent communities of practice.

Outstanding questions from this study include the impact of different levels of non-target second language knowledge among NESTs (see Otwinowska, 2017) and the extent to which they can or do position themselves as MESTs, especially given reported associations between language background and multilingual pedagogical practices (Burton & Rajendram, 2019) but also the predominance of monolingualism among English language teachers (Blair, Haneda, & Bose, 2018). Further research should address the impact of practicum context since it is not clear to what extent the diverse community-based language program utilized here positively affected identity development, especially given the language learners' role in constructing "institutional" and "discourse" sources of teacher identity (Gee, 2001). Further research should also address the impact of including explicit reflections on identity construction among student-teachers in practicum assignments since such work has the potential to impact identity development positively (Banegas et al. 2021). Relatedly, we should acknowledge that a professional identity among NESTs and MESTs "is not a separate set of identity that they develop once they are teachers" (Hsieh et al. 2021, p. 2), that even professional identity is developed from all past experiences and evolves over time (Banegas et al. 2021). In addition, as noted by Calafato (2019), abundant research has focused on English language teaching and learning, and more research on languages other than English is now needed. Finally, a clear limitation of the current research is that although co-teaching teams were explicitly constructed on the basis of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and there was evidence of the existence and use of 'multilingual awareness' in practicum teaching, the community-based language program and thus the pre-service teachers did not systematically employ a multilingual pedagogy, e.g. translanguaging, in their English language instruction. Calafato (2019), in a review of the field, argues there is a need for more investigation of the inter-relationships between the development of a MEST teacher identity and the implementation of multilingual language pedagogies (see e.g. Otwinowska, 2017)

In conclusion, this study at least in part answers Calafato's (2019) call "to reconfigure training programs and encourage teachers to develop a multilingual identity" (p. 1) in order to engage with multilingual learners, and adopts the recommendation from Swearingen (2019) that narrative enquiry be employed in teacher education to facilitate this process. I argue that a multilingual, multicultural, co-teaching practicum with narrative reflection may positively impact the construction of professional identities among all language teachers, but in particular vulnerable MESTs, in the formative short-term. Moreover, early inclusive, collaborative and reflective assignments in teacher preparation programs may also have longer-term implications whereby in-service language teachers may advocate for themselves as well as MEST and NEST colleagues. Finally, although not examined in the current study, the development of multilingual identities among language teachers may engender multilingual identities among language learners (see Haukås, 2016). All such outcomes may help to combat bias and inequities in the profession and beyond.

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