

# Navigating Tensions: The Dynamic Growth of Preservice Teachers' Critical Translingual Stance in Partnership with Refugee Children

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## Abstract

This comparative case study explores how two preservice teachers (PTs), working with recently arrived Afghan refugee students in a reading methods course, navigated and enacted critical translingual stances, despite the course's absence of explicit translinguaging pedagogy. Framed by Critical Translingual Approach and Culturally Disruptive Pedagogy, this study analyzes the non-linear, situated development of two racially, ethnically, and linguistically different PTs' ideological stances and pedagogical choices. Findings illustrate the tensions PTs experienced as they sought to recognize and affirm their students' full linguistic and cultural repertoires while contending with normative language ideologies, conflicting expectations, and narrow views of literacy. The study highlights the importance of critical joy, relationship building, and oral storytelling as literacy practices, while also pointing to the need for deeper theoretical and experiential preparation in teacher education. We end with a call for teacher educators to embed justice-oriented approaches across the curriculum and to create and sustain ruptures that invite the confrontation of whiteness.

## Keywords:

Emergent Bilinguals, Literacy, English Language Learners, Teacher Education, Language, Reading Instruction, Refugees, Science Of Teaching Reading

## Introduction

### *Partnership with Refugee Children*

By the end of June 2024, 122.6 million people throughout the globe were forcibly displaced "as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order" (UNHCR, 2024). As the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide grows, an increasing number of migrant and refugee children enter U.S. schools. One-fifth of the world's international migrants have relocated to the United States, according to the Pew Research Center (Moslimani & Passel, 2024) and in 2024 alone, 100,034 refugees were admitted to the United States (Refugee Processing Center, 2024). Texas, the state in which this research takes place, is currently third among U.S. states for resettling refugees (Covington, 2023). Additionally, as migration has increased, so too has the overall linguistic



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diversity of schools. In 2021, over 10% of students in the U.S were considered English Learners (ELs) and in Texas, ELs comprised more than 20% of the student population with over 1.1 million students receiving language support services (NCES, 2022).

Many teacher education programs attempt to equip future teachers with the knowledge and resources to meet the needs and draw on the strengths of linguistically and culturally diverse students through multicultural education (Wiseman & Galegher, 2019). However, these efforts often fall short, as treating culturally and linguistically diverse students as a homogenous group fails to recognize the rich diversity in backgrounds and experiences (Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2023). This is especially true when considering refugee students who bring unique strengths such as resilience, multilingual repertoires, and deep cultural knowledge, as well as challenges that may include interrupted formal education, experiences of trauma, and systematic barriers in schools (Block et al., 2014; McBrien, 2005; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Limited research exists on how and if education regarding refugee children is incorporated into teacher education programs (Kovinthan Levi, 2019; Wiseman & Galegher, 2019), despite studies demonstrating that teachers are the primary supports for refugee children and that educators often feel underprepared for this task (e.g., Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2023; Kovinthan Levi, 2019).

This is particularly urgent in the region in which this study takes place. At least 17,000 Afghan refugees have resettled in Texas since 2020 (Covington, 2023). Recent funding issues have led to the closure of private organizations that provide refugee families with resettlement services such as Refugee Services of Texas which abruptly closed in 2023 due to a severe budget deficit (Moreno-Lozano, 2023). Families also face the impending end of federal funds for nonprofit organizations serving refugees, a consequence of Executive Order 14163, "Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program" (90 FR 8459), issued in January 2025 and suspending the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) until further guidance. At the same time, the Office of Management and Budget's Memo M-25-13 briefly paused disbursements across roughly 2,600 federal grant and loan programs (McAfee, 2025). Although the memo was rescinded within days after court challenges, the delay created chaos and disruption in nonprofit services, including those serving refugees. Nonprofits like Catholic Charities of Central Texas and the Global Impact Initiative dissolved their refugee resettlement programs as their budgets were slashed and the future of government funding was uncertain (McAfee, 2025). In addition, Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW), the state's lead refugee resettlement agency, sued the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on March 3, 2025, for unlawfully withholding more than \$36 million

in refugee resettlement grants, eventually prompting partial restoration of funds. The situation was further destabilized when CCFW announced plans to withdraw from its leadership role, jeopardizing \$200 million in funding through 2026, though that decision was later reversed following statewide provider outcry (McAfee, 2025; Remadna, 2025). At the same time, CCFW was targeted for a federal "program integrity review," a move widely viewed by state providers as politically motivated. While framed as oversight, the review added additional pressure and uncertainty for agencies already struggling to maintain essential services, underscoring how federal policy decisions can destabilize local infrastructures of refugee support (Fort Worth Report, 2025).

The federal funding freeze also directly disrupted school-based supports for refugee and multilingual students in Texas. In the focal school district, the freeze resulted in the suspension of federal grant funds for the district's International Welcome Center, which had served as a crucial liaison for newly arrived families (Remadna, 2025). The district also reported millions of dollars in federal grant losses tied to Title III and related programs, leading to staffing cuts affecting multilingual education, newcomer supports, and AVID college readiness initiatives (Bell, 2025). A subsequent hold on federal grants placed more than 100 district jobs at risk, jeopardizing positions in "deeply valued" programs that families and educators relied upon (Wiley, 2025). District administrators also warned the funding cuts were dismantling critical programs and services, particularly those supporting the district's more than 22,000 emergent bilingual students, including recently arrived refugee youth who depend on these resources to navigate schooling in a new language and context (Fogel, 2025). The ripple effects underscore how federal-level decisions reverberate in districts, shaping not only the resources available in schools but also the everyday educational experiences of newly arrived families.

With the elimination of these specialized supports that uniquely meet the needs of refugee children and their families, it is even more imperative that classroom teachers become equipped with the stances and pedagogy to respond equitably to their students. A small but growing area of research explores how integrating translanguaging theory and pedagogy across teacher education courses as a political stance (Flores, 2014) may create a more equitable and just education for language minoritized students (e.g., Herrera, 2022; Varghese et al., 2023). However, less is known regarding how preservice teachers (PTs) embody and continue to develop this stance in subsequent contexts such as field placements and other courses that implicitly or explicitly reinforce White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020) language norms through unquestioned practices U.S. schools (Zapata & Laman, 2023).

This study explores how two PTs working alongside two elementary refugee students negotiated their emerging critical translingual approaches within the context of a literacy methods course that did not explicitly engage translingual ways of thinking and being.

We seek to understand what occurred in the messy, nonlinear development of translingual dispositions (Ponzio, 2020) when constricted by real and perceived contextual barriers and expectations. In what follows, we provide a brief review of existing research that has investigated the development and enactment of PTs' translingual dispositions, as well as scholarship that explores growing teachers' capacity for teaching and learning with refugee students. Next we introduce Seltzer's (2017, 2022) Critical Translingual Approach and San Pedro's (2018) Culturally Disruptive Pedagogy as the theoretical frameworks for this study. Employing a comparative case study, we explore the narratives of two racially, ethnically, and linguistically different PTs as they navigated their emerging critical translingual stances to answer the following question: How did preservice teachers, if at all, draw on their emerging critical translingual approaches within their planning and implementation of reading-focused tutoring sessions for newcomer refugee students within a methods course that did not explicitly engage translanguaging theory and pedagogy? We analyze how their unique positionings shaped the divergent ways they (dis)engaged their critical translingual stances and conclude with implications for teacher education and research.

### *Translanguaging Stances in Teacher Education*

Over the past decade, teacher educators have employed a range of strategies to develop PTs' knowledge of translanguaging, including coursework infused with translanguaging theory, programmatic redesigns, and structured field experiences. These efforts often involve dual goals: building ideological clarity around language, power, and identity; and fostering pedagogical capacity to recognize and leverage students' full linguistic repertoires. Some programs have taken systemic approaches, weaving translanguaging, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and raciolinguistic ideologies throughout courses (e.g., Herrera, 2022; Varghese et al., 2023). Others have emphasized critical reflective practice, identity work, and direct fieldwork with linguistically diverse students to help PTs recognize and interrogate their existing language ideologies (España et al., 2019; Ponzio, 2020). Results show promise as PTs begin to shift from monolingual, deficit-oriented perspectives to more dynamic, asset-based views of languaging. However, this transformation is rarely linear. PTs' stances slowly evolve through ongoing reflection, developing pedagogical knowledge, and teaching experience

as they confront firmly cemented ideologies (Ponzio, 2020; Deroo & Ponzio, 2019).

In developing critical translingual approaches (Seltzer, 2017; 2022), teacher educators have more recently begun to emphasize that beliefs and practices not only engage students' dynamic linguistic repertoires but also critically interrogate systems of linguistic oppression. This includes engaging teachers in developing raciolinguistic literacies, deep listening to students' lived experiences, and using multimodal texts to spark inquiry into language, identity, and power (Seltzer, 2020; Zapata & Laman, 2023). For example, read-aloud protocols and multimodal composition tasks have been used to position students as meaning-makers while helping teachers confront deficit ideologies embedded in curricula (Stewart et al., 2024; Zapata et al., 2024). The developmental path toward a critical translingual stance, like translanguaging more broadly, is complex and emergent and requires sustained reflection and a commitment to justice.

### *Partnerships with Migrant and Refugee Children in Teacher Education*

Refugee students bring important cultural and linguistic resources to classrooms. Research highlights their resilience, adaptability, and strong educational aspirations, often grounded in family and community values (McBrien, 2005). They contribute multilingual repertoires, bicultural knowledge, and the ability to navigate across cultural and linguistic worlds, which can enrich learning environments for all students (Block et al., 2014; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Shapiro and MacDonald (2017) argue that curricula and pedagogy should create opportunities for refugee youth to mobilize their agency, resourcefulness, and resilience, assets they already possess but that schools often overlook. In this way, the responsibility lies with institutions to recognize and sustain these strengths while also addressing structural barriers and systemic inequities that shape refugee students' schooling experiences.

At the same time, refugee students may face challenges shaped by histories of forced displacement, trauma, interrupted or limited formal education, linguistic differences, and cultural dislocation (Kovinthan Levi, 2019; Naidoo, 2012; Miller et al., 2014). These challenges necessitate teachers go beyond simply teaching content, but also respond as trauma-sensitive and culturally responsive practitioners (Okilwa et al., 2025; Block et al., 2014). Despite limited training and support, teachers often act as emotional supports and advocates for refugee students, providing care and creating inclusive environments that foster safety and belonging (Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2023; Ficarra, 2017). While some educators rely on differentiated instruction, relationship-building, and language scaffolds, these efforts often fall short

when not grounded in sustained, justice-oriented pedagogical frameworks (Weisman & Galegher, 2007; Naidoo, 2012).

Existing scholarship demonstrates that many teachers, including PTs, report feeling underprepared to support refugee students in meaningful ways (Kovinthan Levi, 2019; Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2023). Teacher education programs often address cultural diversity through broad multicultural coursework but rarely engage with the specific historical and sociopolitical aspects of refugee experiences (Hanna, 2023; Ficarra, 2017). While PTs frequently enter classrooms with good intentions and a desire to learn, exposure to refugee students alone does not guarantee critical engagement without guided reflection and mentorship (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009; Theilheimer, 2001). Scholars advocate for deeper integration of trauma-informed practices, refugee-specific community partnerships, and sustained opportunities for preservice teachers to explore issues of identity, race, language, and power through experiential and critically reflective pedagogies (Okilwa et al., 2025; Kirisci-Sarikaya, 2024; Dogutas, 2023). Moving forward, teacher education must go beyond “tapping into backgrounds” for engagement and instead work toward cultivating critically conscious, relationally grounded approaches that affirm and empower refugee learners.

Yet, despite these important calls, significant gaps remain. Much of the existing research centers either on refugee students’ adaptation or on teachers’ general preparedness, with fewer studies examining the specific tensions PTs navigate in their pedagogical development when working in refugee-serving contexts (Damaschke-Deitrick et al., 2023; Kirisci-Sarikaya, 2024; Dogutas, 2023). Comparative case study research with in-service teachers has demonstrated the value of analyzing both shared patterns and context-specific enactments in translanguaging pedagogy (Hamman-Ortiz & Romero, 2025; Sah & Uysal, 2022; Seltzer & de los Ríos, 2018), but no such work has been conducted with PTs in refugee-serving settings. This study addresses these gaps by examining PTs’ stance development across two distinct tutoring contexts, illuminating the tensions that arise in practice. In doing so, it contributes theoretically, by applying a critical translanguaging stance and culturally disruptive pedagogy to refugee education research, and methodologically, by extending comparative case study approaches into preservice teacher education.

### ***Critical Translingual Approach to Literacy and Language***

A critical translanguaging approach, as conceptualized by Seltzer (2017, 2020, 2022), serves as a foundational theoretical framework for this study. Rooted in critical

literacy and the multilingual turn (May, 2013), this approach views language through interconnected lenses: as ideological, invented and heteroglossic, socially and ideologically constructed, and as a social and local literacy practice (Seltzer, 2017). Drawing from theories of translanguaging, raciolinguistics, and critical language awareness, Seltzer (2017) builds upon García, Johnson, and Seltzer’s (2017) conceptualization of a translanguaging stance to address all language-minoritized students, both multilingual learners and those marginalized for their language varieties, such as African American students (Seltzer & de los Ríos, 2018). In doing so, Seltzer extends García’s (2015) theory of critical multilingual language awareness by moving beyond cultivating awareness of the sociopolitical dimensions of multilingualism to emphasize how teachers adopt agentic stances that disrupt raciolinguistic hierarchies in practice. This framing not only highlights language as socially constructed and ideologically maintained but also positions teachers as active participants in transforming those conditions. This approach emphasizes close listening to students’ perspectives and recognizing their linguistic expertise, while challenging monoglossic ideologies in favor of heteroglossic understandings through “poststructural linguistic thinking” (Seltzer, 2019, p. 991). It also encourages researchers and educators to develop a critical awareness of how languages are socially constructed and maintained through ideological practices, prompting them to question why certain language practices are deemed appropriate while others are stigmatized (Seltzer, 2017, 2020).

Within educational settings, a critical translanguaging approach has been employed to examine how educators navigate raciolinguistics and translanguaging with linguistically minoritized students, engaging in reflective practices alongside peers and students (de los Ríos & Seltzer, 2017; Seltzer, 2019). This approach challenges educators to transform pedagogy by integrating multilingual, multidialectal, and multimodal texts, validating students’ linguistic practices while critiquing exclusionary systems like standardized testing (Seltzer, 2019). “A critical translanguaging lens... welcomes students as their full selves with their full cultural and linguistic repertoires” (Zapata & Laman, 2023, p. 247) allowing their unique ways of knowing and being to be recognized as brilliance within school spaces. In teacher preparation, Seltzer (2022) emphasizes engaging preservice teachers (PTs) with theory, critical literacies, and multimodal texts, encouraging them to reflect on their own positionalities and ideological stances. This process helps PTs recognize the sociopolitical dimensions of language education, enabling them to unpack deficit ideologies and appreciate students’ diverse language practices. In this study, a critical translanguaging approach will be used to analyze how PTs develop and maintain their beliefs about language and power across contexts, considering

how these ideologies influence their pedagogical practices.

### *Culturally Disruptive Pedagogy*

Additionally, we draw on San Pedro's (2018) concept of Culturally Disruptive Pedagogy (CDP) to understand how, if, and when the PTs respond to conflicting ideologies and practices within the methods course, particularly those that serve to maintain White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020) and English hegemony. CDP as conceptualized by San Pedro (2018), builds upon culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies (McCarty & Lee, 2014). While these frameworks emphasize the importance of sustaining and revitalizing the cultural and linguistic practices of historically marginalized groups, CDP takes this further by actively disrupting dominant cultural norms that render whiteness invisible and unquestioned. San Pedro (2018) argues that educational spaces often reproduce whiteness through curricula, language norms, and pedagogical practices, making it essential to expose and disrupt these hegemonic structures. This includes challenging the construction of White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020) as the normative linguistic standard and recognizing how language has historically functioned as a system of control and containment (García, 2007). CDP promotes critical interrogation of what is considered "normal" in schools and encourages both educators and students to recognize how their own identities have been shaped by racialized and colonial histories.

San Pedro (2018) originally conceptualized CDP through the experience of a white student in a Native American ethnic studies course, illustrating the need to disrupt hegemonic ideologies that position whiteness as normative and privileged. However, CDP applies to all individuals socialized through schooling, as educational structures play a crucial role in reproducing whiteness through Eurocentric curricula and pedagogies (San Pedro, 2018). CDP fosters "sacred truth spaces" (San Pedro, 2017), where individuals engage in dialogue, embrace tensions, and wrestle with their evolving understandings of identity and power. Within this study, CDP will guide an examination of how pre-service teachers (PTs) encounter and respond to these moments of rupture, as they navigate interactions with instructors, mentors, peers, and students. This framework calls for resistance to tidy conclusions and instead embracing the iterative, sometimes uncomfortable, work of transformation.

### **Methods**

We employ a comparative case study design to investigate two preservice teachers' journeys in

negotiating their critical translingual stances within a course that did not explicitly address translanguaging theory and pedagogy within its curricular design. A comparative approach to case study moves beyond the description of individual cases to explore the differences between the cases and the environments and cultures that shape these differences (Thomas, 2021). This design reenvision case study by centering "culture, context, comparison, and a critical understanding of power" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 8) and integrates horizontal, vertical, and temporal comparisons to provide a richer, more dynamic understanding of social phenomena across contexts. We consider how the PTs engaged in similar social activities and interactions within the coursework and integrated field component to explore how their stances, identities and prior experiences led to divergent shifts and responses to ruptures.

Our focus on two preservice teachers with distinct racial, cultural, and linguistic identities affords an opportunity to explore how these identities and experiences shape their engagement with and embodiment of a critical translingual approach. Comparing their journeys allows us to consider how PTs negotiated their stance development in a space where translanguaging theory and pedagogy were not explicitly addressed and critical self-reflection was not integrated. Thus, we trace the nonlinear, situated, and often messy process of stance development within an ideologically complex educational landscape.

### *Context and Participants*

This study took place within a teacher preparation program at a large research university in the Southwest U.S. The focal course, focused on elementary reading methods, was part of a professional development sequence that spanned the final three semesters of the PTs' undergraduate experience. This course focused on reading theory, assessment, methods and instruction with the goal of preparing the PTs to meet the instructional needs of all future students. The course curriculum was recently revamped to prepare PTs for a new Science of Teaching Reading (STR) Certification Exam required of all new teachers in the state, in addition to the existing English Language Arts and Reading Certification Exam. This exam addresses STR educator standards related to the five pillars of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) such as how to provide explicit, systematic instruction and how to assess reading progress. The course was field-based, located on a local elementary school campus allowing for an integrated practicum in which the PTs planned and implemented eight weeks of 30 minute reading tutoring lessons in one-on-one settings with second grade students. The PTs planned using a lesson plan template that included opening engagement,

word work focused on skill building, shared reading focused on comprehension and decoding, and a PT-selected activity tailored to the student.

The focal PTs were members of an undergraduate cohort of 15 students pursuing their Early Childhood - 6th ESL Generalist certification, preparing them for English-medium mainstream classrooms in the state. Prior to this reading methods course, the PTs had taken courses that centered language acquisition and critical approaches to language with topics including language policy, family and community language practices, and an anti-racist approach to writer's workshop as well as course readings that included *Rooted in Strength* (Espinosa & Ascenzi-Moreno, 2021) and *The Translanguaging Classroom* (García et al., 2017). The PTs also engaged in fieldwork within local elementary classrooms in which at least 20% of the students were identified as Emergent Bilinguals and tutored children in a bilingual classroom during a writing methods course with a specific focus on translanguaging practices. It was during this semester that Katie and Kelsie met Olivia and Diya as field supervisors for their practicum experiences. While Katie was the field supervisor for both focal PTs, Kelsie also supervised within the same elementary schools and came to know the PTs through cohort-wide professional development. Katie continued working with the cohort as a teaching assistant during the focal course, a course that Kelsie had previously taught. As an instructor of record, Kelsie had revised the course to include literature circles around children's books about language and identity (Lee & Corriston, 2024).

We selected Diya and Olivia as focal cases because they were the only two preservice teachers in the course who tutored recently arrived refugee students, making them information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) for exploring our research questions. In addition, their distinct racial, linguistic, and cultural identities, along with their disparate prior schooling experiences, offered a productive basis for comparison within a comparative case study design. To situate these cases, it is important to note how the tutoring partnerships were formed. Classroom teachers first identified students from their 2nd grade ESL classes who could benefit from additional support but were not receiving supplemental instruction (such as reading intervention, SPED, etc). Within this list of students, two were identified as beginning emergent bilingual students and newcomers from Afghanistan. Based on her knowledge of the PTs as a previous instructor and field supervisor, Author 1 recommended Olivia and Diya to work with these two children because of Olivia's emerging advocacy and openness to centering the linguistic and cultural resources of Pashto-speaking students in her previous field placement and Diya's emerging stance, creative lesson planning within her field placement, and openness to drawing on

possible shared identities. Unintentionally, Diya and Olivia's side-by-side tutoring experiences provide us with a compelling case study through which we may compare their experiences in the course and tutoring alongside their differing identities.

### *Positionalities*

In the writing that follows, we share the positionalities of Diya, Olivia and the researchers as related to language identity.

*Diya's Stance.* Having immigrated as a child from India, Diya considered herself bilingual in Hindi and English and a practicing Muslim, all identities that remain underrepresented among teacher candidates in U.S. teacher preparation programs. Having grown up in predominantly white schools where she often felt invisible, Diya carried with her a deep commitment to creating a classroom culture that would feel different for her future students. She reflected, "When I was in school the curriculum was not molded for people like me." Diya repeatedly emphasized her desire to cultivate a space where students could express their cultures, languages, values, and community lives. She posited, "People are made of other people and it's very important that we see who has shaped our students." Her first field placement, a Spanish-English dual language classroom with a Cuban American teacher, showed her what it meant to teach toward the translanguaging corriente, the fluid and authentic language practices of students flowing across languages and modalities (García et al., 2017). She embraced this approach through efforts to invite students' whole selves into the classroom, linguistically, culturally, and socioemotionally. For example, in her field placement she embraced the corriente of the classroom by teaching students words in Hindi in reciprocity for their teaching her words in Spanish, while also encouraging students to translate with one another across Spanish dialects to capture shared meaning. She created lessons that highlighted celebrations from her Indian culture and invited students to share their own, positioning cultural knowledge as a shared resource. Even in smaller moments, such as when teaching earth's rotations, she connected the concept to her family's location and current time in India and encouraged students to think about their own families across time zones, often moving fluidly across languages to make sense together. These practices reflected her emerging stance as a teacher who sought to center students' full repertoires and identities. In this way, she demonstrated an emerging stance rooted in humanizing pedagogy and a desire to dismantle the invisibility she had once experienced herself.

*Olivia's Stance.* As a white woman raised in an upper middle class, English-speaking household, Olivia shared identities with the majority of teachers and preservice

teachers in the U.S. She also identified as Jewish and had knowledge of the Hebrew language. Through high school and college, Olivia learned Spanish, which motivated her to pursue her teaching certification in bilingual education; however, she did not meet the language proficiency standards for the program. As a white woman, the courses and field experiences often served to mediate her ongoing journey to become aware of and negotiate her own linguistic and cultural identities, identities often rendered invisible through hegemonic normalization (Marx, 2006). During her first semester in the program, Olivia was placed in a 3rd grade ESL classroom with students whose linguistic repertoires included Arabic, English, Farsi, Haitian Creole, Pashto, and Spanish. There, Olivia wrestled with pedagogical choices related to language policing, behavior management, and centering of English that she viewed as dehumanizing and unjust, especially toward students of color. For instance, she sought to counter deficit narratives of refugee youth and the centering of English by selecting read-aloud texts that portrayed Afghani children as strong protagonists and inviting students to compose translingual writing. At the same time, Olivia's view of identity and language was sometimes framed through instructional utility, drawing on language to "tap into" engagement or comprehension, rather than as a right or as a wholly valid way of knowing and being. Through layered reflection and practice, Olivia began to enact a critical translingual stance that both disrupted English hegemony and positioned students as knowledge-holders.

*The Researchers' Stance.* We identify as white, upper middle-class women schooled in predominantly white, suburban communities. Like Olivia, many of our identities reflect those of the majority of teachers; through this work, we seek to learn alongside these PTs to continue in our own growth. Our evolving critical translingual approaches grew as teachers in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms within the United States. Author 1 taught for 8 years in California, South Dakota, New Mexico and Texas. She identifies as an English-dominant speaker and emergent Spanish bilingual through teaching and learning alongside immigrant and migrant communities. Author 2 taught third grade for 6 years in Los Angeles. She identifies as an English-dominant speaker. Translanguaging theory has helped her claim a linguistic repertoire that includes formal schooling in French and Italian along with lived knowledge of Spanish. As current doctoral candidates, we strive to center and hold ourselves accountable to the children our PTs teach. That includes engaging critical literacies to read how power operates in schools (Janks, 2010). We recognize that our positionalities can constrain our capacity to critically examine raciolinguistic and hegemonic language ideologies; we work to confront our own limitations through collaborative critical reflection and

praxis. Additionally, we also recognize the ways our positionalities carried both influence and constraint. On one hand, our training and commitments to critical and justice-oriented pedagogies shaped the stances we brought into this work; on the other hand, we held limited authority within the contexts of state and district mandates. In Texas, for example, the legislated Science of Teaching Reading (STR) exam and corresponding coursework have institutionalized narrow, skills-based orientations to literacy (Mosley Wetzel et al., 2020), shaping the policies and instructional messages circulating in schools. We acknowledge these tensions as part of the research ecology in which this study unfolded.

### *Data Collection*

This study draws on data from a larger ethnographic research project that followed the undergraduate cohort across the final three semesters (eighteen months) of their teacher preparation program. The focus of this paper is on two PTs, Diya and Olivia, during the second semester of that project, situated within a reading methods course that included a field-based tutoring practicum. Data from the first semester are also integrated to offer contextual grounding and trace early shifts in their pedagogical stance development.

Multiple forms of qualitative data were collected to construct each case, with an emphasis on triangulation, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing to enhance trustworthiness. Collected data included course artifacts such as written responses (e.g., reading responses, scenario-based questions, self-portraits), tutoring lesson plans and reflections, case reports of tutored students, and reflections on critical literature circles using *When Stars Are Scattered* (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020) and *Front Desk* (Yang, 2018). Instructor feedback on weekly lesson plans – written comments that PTs were expected to read and respond to before teaching – were also included as a data source, providing a window into how the PTs engaged with guidance and revision during their instruction design process. Additional data sources included field notes from classroom observations, informal conversations before and after class, and each PT's final oral examination. These interactions provided insight into moments of ideological questioning, rupture, and maintenance that were not always visible in written work.

Our data analysis emerged from shared questions stemming from our own experiences in teacher education programs and classrooms, as well as our desire to better understand how preservice teachers develop critical stances, particularly around language and literacy. Author 1 captured reflective memos with emergent analysis concurrently with the coursework, documenting insights as preservice

teachers engaged in tutoring and course activities. More focused collaborative analysis began after the conclusion of the authors' work alongside the PTs.

We began our analysis by approaching each PT as an individual data set. Drawing on our theoretical frameworks, we engaged in iterative reading and initial/open coding of the artifacts (Saldaña, 2021). Instructor feedback on weekly lesson plans was coded alongside lesson plans, reflections, and anecdotal notes to examine how preservice teachers engaged with guidance and revision in their instructional design process. During our initial coding, we documented not only examples of critical translanguaging pedagogies and stances but also instances of tension, rupture, and normative reproduction. We paid particular attention to the discourses PTs took up, the ways they positioned their students and themselves, and

how they responded to ideological and instructional expectations within the reading methods course.

As we moved from open to axial coding (Saldaña, 2021), we collapsed codes into broader thematic categories and reread the data to refine our analytic claims (for an excerpt of our coding scheme, see Table 2). We also positioned tutoring plans, PTs' anecdotal notes, and reflections side by side, aligning their shared work to examine how they reflected similarly and differently on parallel teaching and learning moments and to look for similarities and differences in how each PT (dis)engaged with potential ruptures (San Pedro, 2018) in the dominant language ideologies they encountered. This allowed us to identify both patterns and discrepancies across cases, highlighting points of convergence as well as divergences in stance development.

**Table 1**  
*Data Collection Count*

Written Responses	5
Lesson Plans (inclusive of reflections, anecdotal notes, and instructor comments)	16
Case Reports	2
Literature Circle Reflections	10
Field Notes and Reflective Memoing	13

Data Analysis

**Table 2**  
*Excerpt of Coding for Data Analysis*

Theme	Sample Codes	Representative Examples from Data	
		Diya	Olivia
Leveraging multimodalities	Oral language use	They both had a lot of fun. They were speaking about the story in Pashto and Zikriya was able to tell me what they were talking about. They were making predictions, recognizing characters and setting, and creating dialogue. They also connected it to their own world by talking about getting ingredients from Walmart and saying how they like eating bananas for breakfast (Lesson Plan).	I really liked that he was able to tell me a sentence and I could write down his thinking so that he could have ownership of his ideas and see them on paper. I think that the two really like to work together and I enjoy watching them interact with one another and talk in their native language (Lesson Plan).
	Tools/ manipulatives	[Tools used for] Emergent reader assessments: white boards, magnetic letters, word tiles (Lesson Plan).	I began with using Elkonin boxes with chips and three-syllable words so we were only focusing on sounds. He did well with separating the sounds with the chips and also could use his arm to kinesthetically segment and then blend words (Case Report).
Literacy as expanding fluid linguistic repertoires	Shared repertoire	I learned he is from Afghanistan, he speaks Pashto and Hindi (I translated everything I said to him in Hindi after I said it in English to promote understanding (Lesson Plan).	As we went through the story I used this information to ask him questions and used his language to say 'who is that?' or 'what is the brother doing now?' (Lesson Plan).
	Student's words as text	This lesson included a lot of agency for my student and for Olivia's student. We recognized how they found immense joy in the lessons because they were able to collaborate to come up with the story from the picture book (Lesson Plan).	I loved how both of them pointed to the pictures and engaged in creating a story from pictures. They really seemed to be talking and working together well in this portion. When they encountered a word they didn't know in English they would ask us which was helpful to connect vocabulary to pictures (Lesson Plan).
Literacy as the acquisition of bounded language systems	Language difference as barrier	I believe this was because he was not able to connect his prior language knowledge to the books since they were in English (Case Report).	Due to our language barriers, Diya and I decided to work together for half of the sessions to encourage our students to speak and bridge learning in their home language (Case Report).
	Centering English	[We will read] Pancakes for Breakfast – this book has no words, only pictures. ... We chose to do this because both of our readers struggle with English and also aren't ready for read alouds since they are not understanding and comprehending (Lesson Plan).	An overarching goal I had for all of our sessions together was to increase his English vocabulary which I did in a variety of ways. As our sessions went on, I learned the strategies that worked and the ones that didn't to inform the instruction I planned each week (Case Report).

## Findings

Our findings section is organized as short narratives of Diya and Olivia's emergent stances toward translingual teaching as evidenced within the reading methods course. Each narrative is structured to zoom in on a particular moment of rupture – moments that open possibilities for unsettling or countering whiteness (San Pedro, 2018). San Pedro conceptualizes such disruption through the metaphor of muscle growth: "In order for muscles to grow stronger, they must undergo small ruptures and tears in the fibers in order for new tissue to form as it heals" (San Pedro, 2018, p. 1221). We draw on this metaphor to recognize the tiny tears that manifested within the teaching and learning and to examine how and if the PTs responded. While these tears provided the potential for growth and disruption, the PTs did not always recognize and respond to them, leading to nonlinear development of critical translingual stances.

### Diya

Diya entered the reading methods course with a clear commitment to centering her students' identities, cultures, and lived experiences in her teaching. Shaped by her own schooling experiences in predominantly white educational spaces where she often felt invisible, Diya articulated early on that she did not want her future classroom to replicate the oppression she had experienced. She reflected, "Growing up... in a very white space, I didn't have other people of color around me and when society tells you who you are is wrong, that's what continues as you grow up." These values of affirmation and belonging were embedded in her coursework and vision for her future classroom, where she hoped students would feel empowered to draw from and share their existing cultural and linguistic resources. In envisioning her future classroom, she wrote,

*I want them to learn how to access their strengths. I want them to see themselves and others as learners that all contribute to one community. I want them to be able to appreciate the values that other people live by and start forming their own values and identities... My hope for the community is that we are able to hold space for each other and respect our individualities.*

Diya's observations of her mentor teacher in a Spanish-English dual-language placement classroom reinforced and concretized these commitments. She noted how the classroom was structured around collaboration and student voice: "Students partner up or do group work so that they could bounce their ideas off of each other... [The teacher] gives an assignment for students to tap into their personal lives and their own experiences." Diya saw her mentor's use of language partners, circle activities, and student-centered writing as examples of how

pedagogy could affirm identity while cultivating critical thinking and connection as well as expanding students' communicative repertoires through creating zones of contact within the classroom. In her own literature unit assignment for the course, she planned around the theme of exploring personal and cultural values, integrating drawing, oral storytelling, sharing family stories and traditions, and scaffolded language partner work to support students in recognizing the values they hold as well as learning about and showing respect for the values of others.

Diya's participation in class and her coursework often shifted back and forth between identity and culture appreciation and more critical stances. However her participation in the literature circle centered on the graphic novel *When Stars Are Scattered* (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020), which follows the life of a boy growing up in a refugee camp, surfaced her emerging criticality. Drawing from her own experiences and struggles as an immigrant, Diya complicated and nuanced group conversations through her layered multimodal texts including YouTube videos, humanitarian websites, and news sources that expanded the group's understanding of the book's context and revealed the systemic issues facing refugee communities. She connected scenes from the book to experiences, including the dehumanizing and biased processes involved in immigration and asylum systems, drawing on her own family's encounters with these structures. She noted how the UNICEF interviews in the book reminded her of how seemingly neutral bureaucratic processes often carry subjective and racialized assumptions. When the group completed assignments focused on using the novel to teach reading strategies aligned with the five pillars of literacy instruction, Diya extended the discussion to include cultural and religious knowledge not explicitly included in the text such as Eid and Ramadan, highlighting how teachers can use the novel to teach into learning and sharing about cultures and identities. Her reflections and participation within the literature circle became one of the few spaces in this course where the PTs openly considered how systemic oppression functions in education and society, and how texts and pedagogy might either reify or challenge those forces.

*The Potential Ruptures.* This centering of students' experiences laid the groundwork for Diya's tutoring work with a newcomer student, Ikram. While the tutoring lesson plan template was organized around the five pillars of reading instruction, including discrete skills like phonics and comprehension, Diya began to bend these expectations in response to what she noticed about her student. In her very first session, Diya planned a structured icebreaker game but quickly pivoted as she realized Ikram would rather organically talk about himself and his love of cricket, as well as

learn about their shared cultural experiences such as foods they both enjoy at home. Despite being from different countries, through their shared cultural and linguistic repertoires, her student seemed to feel that this was a safe space to make his identities visible and excitedly did so. Creating space for these conversations within the limited 30-minute window of tutoring meant that other teaching objectives were pushed aside or constricted, but Diya notes that hearing about him helped her create more responsive instruction.

She continued to work agentially within the constraints of the lesson template's skills-based expectations, by layering in storytelling, identity, and joy. She selected *Bilal Cooks Daal* (Saeed, 2019) as her next read aloud text, explaining, "I chose this book because it reflects Ikram's own culture and identity. Daal is a cultural food that he would be able to relate to and it would connect his personal life to his school life." Here Diya seeks to bridge the often-bifurcated lives of the student, perceiving a line between his school life and home life that echoes her feelings of her identities being silenced growing up. When her student lights up and excitedly responds to her saying, "Yes, I eat daal at home! The ones with the channa (chickpeas)," her use of the book is validated and it demonstrates that he is feeling seen in the curriculum.

The following week, Diya and Olivia decided to partner for their tutoring sessions to provide their students with a language partner for meaning making. In this shift, they move away from texts that serve as mirrors like *Bilal Cooks Daal* to wordless books, hoping to elevate students' voices as the text itself and to decenter English print. Diya reflected,

*"This lesson included a lot of agency for my student and Olivia's student. We recognized how they found immense joy in the lessons because they were able to collaborate...They were speaking about the story in Pashto and Ikram was able to tell me what they were talking about. They were making predictions, recognizing characters and setting, and creating dialogue. They also connected it to their own world by talking about getting ingredients from Walmart and saying how they like eating bananas for breakfast."*

Here we see Diya separating comprehension abilities from named languages, resisting the conflation of reading abilities with reading abilities in English. Recognizing that while he is continuing to grow in his abilities to comprehend texts in English only, he possesses the ability to comprehend texts through other resources in his communicative repertoire. The wordless books also opened up a space for collaborative meaning-making rooted in students' linguistic knowledge, further affirming Diya's growing stance toward a literacy practice that valued oral storytelling and translanguing communication.

Each of these instances demonstrates where Diya found glimpses of her student through a holistic lens, instead of a lens that privileged English meaning-making and discrete reading skills in English. When the student's authentic literacy and languaging practices were invited through oral storytelling, language partners, and connections with identities, Diya noticed the creativity and abilities that already existed. Each of these noticings acted as tiny "tears" (San Pedro, 2018) working to grow her stance, leading Diya to shift her design and in-the-moment implementation to respond to him as a learner and person. While she continued to retain a portion of their time for work on short vowel sound-letter correspondence, she reimagined the prescribed read-aloud time to respond to her student and elicit his joy and comprehension skills. As she listened to his engagement with the texts and activities in more expansive ways rather than limiting her noticings to English skills based abilities, her view of literacy was complicated.

Response to the Potential Ruptures. The tableau lesson marked a pivotal moment in Diya's pedagogical trajectory. The PTs selected a tableau picture for the students to decipher, discuss related vocabulary, and create a related story. Tableaus, still life images, were an idea they borrowed from a prior course and can be used to explore body language, emotion, relationships between people. While the image they selected depicted five white children in rain jackets holding umbrellas and jumping in the rain, the boys' responses demonstrated that the depicted children's identities did not hinder Ikram and Sifat from connecting with the depicted experience. As they introduced the picture and asked the boys what they noticed, Diya spoke in Hindi inviting the students to share about the picture with each other in the languaging of their choosing. The boys leaned their heads together and began pointing, laughing, and talking excitedly in Pashto together. Olivia and Diya sat back, observing their conversation and their boy's language, creating space for the boys to make sense of the picture together without interruption or the need to translate into English. As their conversation slowed, Olivia and Diya added sticky notes with English labels for actions and objects in the picture, first saying the word aloud and then inviting the boys to repeat the words. With each addition, they also asked the boys what the words were in Pashto and then recorded the transliterated word on the corresponding sticky note. For example, where they labeled "sky", the PTs added the word "aasman," using English script to write a Pashto and Hindi word (while written differently, the word for "sky" in Hindi (आसमान) and Pashto (نښه) is pronounced similarly). As they labeled, Diya noted, "Ikram started getting really animated and telling us stories about what he used to do when it rained in Afghanistan and how he liked playing in the rain with his friends." Building on his oral storytelling, Diya

shifted her original plan of creating a picture of a prediction to inviting him to illustrate and caption the experiences he was remembering. She then worked with him to transliterate Pashto using English script and write sentences in English. Although English remained dominant in the final product, this moment marked a turning point as Diya made space for her student's oral language to take up visible space on the page, not as a bridge to English but as meaning in itself.

In her reflective memoing, Diya recounted a moment during this lesson that she labeled as *"TEACHING MOMENT!"* As they were drawing their pictures, Diya's student paused and asked her if she was Muslim. When she replied that she was, the students were surprised and followed up questioning why she didn't wear a hijab. Diya explained that they were Sunni Muslims and she was Shia, and "we practiced our faith in different ways, but we all say the same Dua and practice the Quran." In this spontaneous exchange we see Diya highlighting their shared cultural repertoires as well as expanding the students' cultural understandings, surfacing the kind of shared, nuanced understanding she hoped to cultivate in her classroom, where identity and inquiry were welcomed rather than silenced.

These shifts were not without regression however. During the prescribed "word work" sections of her lessons, Diya returned to English phonics instruction, working on CVC words and short vowel sounds, despite knowing her student did not know how to spell his name in English script and was working on letter-sound correspondence. Diya seemed to view the teaching of this phonics component in White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020) as non-negotiable. In this space, we did not witness her letting go of strict English outcomes, which may reflect the perceived expectations of the tutoring and the ways that "English" and "phonics" are often fused within Science of Teaching Reading focused teacher education courses, making it difficult for PTs to imagine alternatives. Yet in other parts of her teaching she began to let go of strict English outcomes. In later lessons, she allowed transliterated Pashto to stand alone on the page, without English translation, elevating her student's oral language as valid text.

In her final reflections, Diya wrote, "Teaching most likely will not adhere to the lesson plans. In fact, it is a good thing to let the lesson flow, because that will provide more insight on how your student prefers to learn". Here we see her recognizing the need to tap into what García et al. (2017) call the *corriente* of the students' dynamic languaging practices, a flow of languaging unrestricted by perceived home and school barriers that "generates the creative energy and produces the speakers way of interacting with others and other texts" (p. 23). For Diya, this *corriente* is reflective of her and Ikram's identities and cultures;

by surfacing it, she invites authentic meaning making to become visible in the classroom that can then be utilized to inform her design and shifts within instruction. She recognized that joy, storytelling, and multimodality were not tangents from instruction but critical forms of meaning-making. She began to listen not for what could be heard as Ikram's lack in English abilities and skills, but for the complexity of his comprehension across languages, images, and experiences.

Diya's State of Fluid Ideologies in Relation to Language and Identity. Across her tutoring and coursework, Diya demonstrated a developing critical translingual approach that was both ideologically grounded and pedagogically emergent. Her teaching revealed movement toward a stance that valued the full linguistic and cultural repertoires of her students, even as her implementation remained constrained by institutional structures and perceived expectations of what reading instruction should look like.

One key marker of this developing stance was Diya's effort to build on shared cultural and linguistic repertoires with Ikram, using her own identity as an entry point to affirm his. This was evident in both her literature circle discussions, where she connected refugee experiences in the text to her own family's experiences with immigration systems, and in her tutoring, where she intentionally designed for joy, storytelling, and affirmation. Her commitment to "critical joy," which Muhammad (2023) describes as not merely as an engagement tool but as a form of fulfillment, resistance, and connection, surfaced early in her sessions and became a guiding force in her instructional choices. She listened differently (Seltzer, 2020) to Ikram's stories not for correctness or as evidence of decontextualized skills but instead to learn about him and the ways he drew on his unitary communicative repertoire to make meaning with others. Through this, Diya began to decenter herself as the expert and shifted the literacy space toward collaborative learning.

Diya resisted mainstream perspectives that position language minoritized students as lacking; instead, she viewed her student's multilingual practices as assets, though this resistance was more often enacted than explicitly named. In her planning and instruction, she consistently documented what he could do across and beyond bounded language systems, yet her reflections rarely made visible the ideological commitments behind these moves. This was especially apparent in the tableau lesson, when she described the tableau activity as inviting students to "decipher" the image. Her word choice subtly but meaningfully reframed comprehension as a culturally and experientially grounded act, something to be interpreted through lived experience

rather than assessed against a singular, normative answer. In doing so, Diya constructed a literacy event that validated multiple ways of knowing, resisting the narrow definitions of comprehension that often dominate early reading instruction within the U.S.

Throughout her tutoring, Diya gradually shifted the linguistic and modal landscape (Zapata, 2020), planning lessons that incorporated multimodality, oral storytelling, transliteration, and collaborative meaning-making. She began to invite transliterated Pashto words and sentences to stand alone, without English translation, affirming that meaning-making did not need to be validated through English to be valid. These shifts aligned with what García et al. (2017) describe as the translanguaging corriente. And yet, Diya did not always document these practices in her formal lesson plans or reflections. Her use of transliteration during the tableau lesson, for example, was only captured through [Author 1]'s observational field notes. This omission raises important questions: Did she view these moves as unremarkable or less legitimate within the expectations of the course? Was she hesitant to foreground non-English literacies in a space structured around English reading development?

Diya's approach reveals both the promise and tensions of enacting critical translanguaging pedagogy within contexts that include real and perceived constraints. While she retained structured English phonics work in her "word work" blocks, perhaps out of a sense that this was less flexible and attached to her grade in the course, she reimagined shared reading and engagement time to be more student-driven and culturally sustaining. She followed her student's linguistic and narrative leads, used transliteration to give visibility to oral language, and cultivated space for joy and identity expression. Her pedagogy was not one of complete rupture, but of small, persistent shifts – glimpses of resistance that invited her student's full identity to surface. Importantly, Diya's developing critical translanguaging stance was not characterized by a full critique of English hegemony or explicit naming of racialized language ideologies. She did not outwardly interrogate how her student's Pashto was heard and valued in school spaces, nor did she take up issues of power, race, and language explicitly in her reflections. However, within just seven tutoring sessions, Diya's work signaled ideological growth and pedagogical responsiveness. She did not remain within the scaffolds of translanguaging as a tool to reach English goals, but began to position her student's language and experiences as central to the literacy curriculum itself. While her shifts were not always documented or named, they mattered. They expanded what literacy could look and sound like and offered a vision of what is possible when teachers listen differently and teach toward joy.

### Olivia

Olivia began the reading methods course committed to centering joyful teaching so children might "want to engage in a literate life." She envisioned using "[a]ctivities like shared readings, individual reading time, guest readers, book studies, and more" within a text-rich environment to highlight "diverse perspectives and characters" in "books that students really want to read." Instructionally, Olivia envisioned challenging students while also supporting them "to have confidence in themselves as learners and readers." She believed in "encouraging reading and writing no matter the level of your students."

Still, language linked to ability and intervention permeated Olivia's work. She described wanting to "base my instruction on what my students need to work on" and "pull those students who are struggling so that grouping is beneficial to them, and once they have a good grasp on the topic they can move on to work on another skill." This approach to teaching skills "based on reading level/ability" was a practice she had experienced as a student and a teacher "for as long as [she could] remember." Encouraged by her work with language minoritized students, however, she began to consider alternatives. Reflected Olivia,

*I like the idea of having students of different levels in groups so students can learn from each other. I think this would have been particularly beneficial in my placement last year where many of our students were at many different levels and were English Learners. I think my students could have benefitted from having a mix because they all had different linguistic abilities, so the ability to translate and work with one another could have helped them a ton.*

Similar experiences with language minoritized students surfaced occasionally in her coursework. These connections were largely practical—for example, reading a specific book that her students "who also were ELLs and spoke Pashto loved" to her tutoring student, Sifat.

Moments of critique emerged in her coursework. Leveraging her knowledge of Hebrew, Olivia challenged English-centric definitions of reading in a class discussion, highlighting that directionality and decoding vary across language systems. In a later activity, Olivia critiqued Instagram posts that positioned readers as being "behind." Remarkably, Olivia, "This is the same mentality as many of the teachers in our placements, but I don't agree. It's overwhelming [to teach in this context] but we can incorporate what the research says plus what you know about your kids and bringing their identities together." In literature circles, she connected these critiques to structural racism, linking Front Desk narrator Mia's experience of being racially profiled as a Chinese immigrant to the Model Minority Myth, and later designed a unit

featuring diverse texts and cooperative language-based grouping.

Olivia consistently envisioned teaching in responsive, translingual ways while simultaneously positioning language differences as barriers. Such positioning recentered whiteness (San Pedro, 2018). For example, Olivia described striving to “bridge the language gap” between herself and her mentoring student by “allow[ing] him to use as much of his home language as he wants.” When tensions between that effort and course concepts about reading ability emerged, however, she seemed to integrate rather than interrogate them. While Olivia does not explicitly name this tension, her tutoring lesson plans indicate a substantial push-and-pull. In the writing that follows, we highlight small ruptures that emerged.

**The Potential Ruptures.** Given her experience supporting refugee and migrant students in placement and voiced interest in a pedagogy of translanguaging, Olivia was invited to tutor Sifat, an 8-year-old refugee student from Afghanistan. After meeting Sifat and conducting some introductory assessments (for alphabetic knowledge, letter/sound knowledge, and word recognition in English), she collected observations of her new mentee, adopting an appreciative stance to name several of Sifat’s assets include a linguistic repertoire of Pashto and English, camaraderie with friends, interests in Math and Reading, and knowledge of the Latin Alphabet (which he sings aloud to identify letters). Simultaneously, however, she makes a claim about his reading ability—namely, that he “cannot execute on” reading.

This is a strong statement, one perpetuated by ideologies that position reading as decoding print in English and language as a bounded system (García & Wei, 2014). Indeed, similar languaging surfaces throughout Olivia’s first lesson, evidenced by observations that tug between appreciating Sifat’s dexterous literacy repertoire and positioning linguistic differences as a knowledge “gap”. To prepare for their first lesson, Olivia curated a collection of picture books from which her student might select a read-aloud. Sifat “used a thumbs up and a thumbs down to indicate interest in books” and “whether he liked a picture or particular page.” Olivia both named the strength of Sifat’s reading strategy, noting, “he understood concepts of print” and positioned his repertoire as disadvantageous, commenting, “Unfortunately because of our language barrier, I wasn’t able to really get a lot of information on his interests because he couldn’t articulate why he said no to certain books.”

After teaching, Olivia considered how to use what she learned to design a lesson for the next week. She reflected that her teaching “went okay” but was “a bit too much above his level.” She described, too, a pivot she made using a translation app:

*I tried to use an English to Pashto translation but he was unable to read Pashto even though it is the language he speaks at home and with his friends. I think moving forward I will need to focus on letter-sound correspondence and foundational elements of literacy.*

Again, we see Olivia step towards leveraging translanguaging (using tools to invite Sifat’s home language into the tutoring space) before stepping back to make claims about his reading ability. Pashto is an alphabetic language, denoted by symbols or letters connected to individual sounds or phonemes, just like English; the alphabets, however, differ. English relies on the Latin alphabet, while Pashto includes Arabic/Persian letters as well as some all its own. In the U.S., Internet searches or apps often translate languages like Pashto into the Latin alphabet. We do not know what Olivia generated nor the nuances of Sifat’s response. We do see, however, a rather quick shift from her effort to explore Sifat’s linguistic repertoire back to monolingual, word-knowledge-focused instruction. As Olivia’s plans for the next week show, “foundational elements of literacy” refers to literacy learning in English.

This might have been an opportunity to use her knowledge of literacy learning to design activities to better understand Sifat’s existing literacy repertoire, connecting his knowledge in both languages. Indeed, Olivia’s instructors responded to this reflection, digitally commenting support (“Do you need access to more bilingual resources?”) and questions (“Do you have any thoughts on his reading abilities in his home language?”) to encourage Olivia to dig into more fluid possibilities. Based on the expectations for the reading methods course and a report from Sifat’s teacher that he “need[ed] support with letter recognition and basic English phrases,” she turned to teaching letter-sound correspondence in English instead.

Still, Olivia consistently wrestled with ways to infuse joy into her teaching. Using her knowledge of name studies (McNair, 2007; Nash et al., 2018) from a prior writing methods course that centered culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies, she decided to deliver explicit instruction about the letters in his name during her second lesson, as “these are letters that have a personal connection to him.” As Olivia read aloud to Sifat, she noted his strengths in ways she had not the prior lesson. Observed Olivia,

*He really engaged in this book which made me really happy. He pointed to images on the page and said the parts of repetition with me. About halfway through the book he was making predictions of what it was going to say since the words repeat every time, and although they weren’t exactly right they were really close. He got a lot of joy from seeing the images and words that went along with them. He was really excited to see the dog and identified the characters as dad, mom, sister, and brother. As we went through the story I used this information to ask him questions and used his language [Pashto] to say ‘Who is that?’ or ‘What is the brother doing now?’”*

Here, Olivia noticed how shifting from print-centered learning to oral language use opened up the experience for both of them to engage the text. In decentering print, she shifted to using a translation tool to ask Sifat questions—and translate his responses. Despite her earlier assessments telling her that Sifat could not read in Pashto or English, in this lesson space was created for him to demonstrate his abilities to make predictions, share connections, and answer comprehension questions.

Olivia then pivoted to using a worksheet to teach the letter S. Drawing on her early assessments and the course instruction, she decided to “focus on individual common letters,” such as those in his name as written in the Latin alphabet. Thus, her lessons become two-fold: first, a read aloud where translanguaging practices, multimodal meaning-making, and oral language use were encouraged; then a lesson on a singular letter. By the end of her third lesson, she decided she needed to make a change. “Overall I think the direct teaching of letter sounds is a bit too challenging for him,” observed Olivia. While Sifat “went through the [letter recognition] activities” she had planned and “did pretty well...it took a lot of repetition.” Most importantly, his enjoyment seemed to have waned. But there was another reason to shift strategies, too, one tied to cultural knowledge. While Olivia had selected T from Sifat’s name for letter study, Sifat had voiced discontent. Noted Olivia, “He was telling me that [T] is not the last sound in his name because of the way that he pronounces it.”

Each of these instances shows how Olivia’s teaching lived between a desire to privilege her refugee students’ full linguistic repertoire and the expectation that she assess his capabilities through tools that position reading as the sequential acquisition of particular decoding skills. When Olivia opened up her teaching to a more translanguaging approach to literacy, she noted the joy and accomplishment that came from inviting oral, home language use into their shared reading; before shifting to the decontextualized, monolingual, print-based letter-sound practice that her assessments told her Sifat needed. Thus, the tiny tears (San Pedro, 2018) in Olivia’s stance were accompanied by repair toward the literacy learning she believed was expected of the course.

The Response to Ruptures. Between Lessons 4 and 5, Olivia’s teaching shifted. When she and Diya began to collaborate on lessons, Olivia noticed the refugee children’s learning burst open with possibilities. She described the joy of Sifat, Ikram, Diya, and herself translating between three languages to practice “really advanced [comprehension] skills” with wordless picture books. By the end of their time “deriving meaning from images, predicting, drawing conclusions, and telling a story,” the group “only had a few minutes” left for word study, so Olivia scrapped

her planned Elkonin box activity and to practice “blending and segmenting” by “mov[ing] around and kinesthetically show[ing] the sounds on their arm.” Suddenly, her student who did not “know letters in isolation” was identifying full words. “Engaged, happy, and learning together,” the children opened up Olivia’s teaching plans to more fluid, cooperative learning.

This learning included an increase in oral, translanguaging, and kinesthetic activities. In lieu of isolating letters on a worksheet, she leveraged letter tiles and chips for Sifat to move as he segmented words. Olivia translanguaged and transliterated within the language within the tutoring group, inviting the children to read wordless picture books and tell stories which she and Diya scribed. Her reflections focused less on ability or intervention, and more on supporting Sifat to “have ownership of his ideas” by “interact[ing] with” his language partners to “connect words to images.” Reflected Olivia, “Sifat and Ikram gained a sense of pride in telling us stories and grew in their abilities to interpret meaning from images as well as comprehend a story.” These reflections show Olivia embracing a more dynamic view of languaging—and seeing a Sifat soar.

Still, some ruptures remained unexplored.

As she planned for increasingly multimodal activities, Olivia noticed differences in Sifat’s work within their tutoring group and other learning tasks. Reflected Olivia after a co-taught lesson using the wordless picture book *Good Dog, Carl* (Day, 1997),

*It was really interesting to see how well he was able to segment words but the second I put the book in front of him and asked him to read the word dog (a work we segmented minutes before) he was completely unable to read the word or identify the sounds.*

In the next breath, Olivia returned to reflecting on their shared read-aloud: “There was a lot of joy in this lesson, they were laughing at the images in the book and having so much fun together.” Later, she struggled to reconcile Sifat’s skillful reading by blending of words using alphabet tiles with her perception of inability “to pick out the letter S from a group of letters that [she] gave him.” Thus, while Olivia responded to some ruptures by reflecting and shifting her teaching, others remained unnoticed.

In her final lesson plan reflection, Olivia praised Sifat’s growth across the tutoring practicum. She wrote,

*I loved how he identified words we have worked on before in the book and participated on every page. I feel like he was able to answer the questions that I asked really well and pointed to things and used Pashto when he wasn’t sure how to express himself in English. I asked more questions like “Why do you think that?” and he pointed to the images in the book which told me a lot about how he was understanding the images deeply and able to explain his reasoning.*

Here, Olivia applied asset-based wording to appreciate the fluidity of Sifat's interaction with a text. She noted, too, his acquisition of "a lot more conversational vocabulary" and how he "asked to keep the stories and sentences that we wrote together." Throughout the practicum, she tried on instructional strategies, gauging their effectiveness by Sifat's response. She followed his joy, and let that be her guiding light.

Olivia's State of Fluid Ideologies in Relation to Language and Identity. Across her tutoring and coursework, Olivia's teaching both stepped toward and away from a critical translingual stance. While work in prior semesters spotlighted her commitment to justice and her capacity to engage critical reflection on race and language, the expectations of this practicum shifted her to more technical musings. Olivia did not explicitly name the tension between her desire to embrace her students' linguistic strengths and the reading instruction this particular course prepared her to teach; still, her reflections show she felt it, deeply enough to observe inconsistencies between Sifat's work in the tutoring group and more de-contextualized word study. Her ideological commitment to joy guided her to embrace Sifat's perspective and linguistic expertise (Seltzer, 2019), moving toward translingual praxis. As Sifat disrupted stances that reading development is sequential and fixed (for example, by blending sounds or reading words while struggling to identify letters), Olivia wondered how this could be. Her reflections did not yet reach for why—why did she at first feel that she needed to teach in a decontextualized way, why did Sifat show decoding capabilities that transcended her original assessment, why did she have to use monolingual inventories or worksheets, why couldn't she design her own just as the tutoring group composed their own texts?

The answers are less about Olivia and more about the language ideologies she had been immersed in, ones she critiqued in other spaces when invited to do so. Olivia believed in the value of diversity, of embracing a reader's full linguistic and cultural repertoire, of strengthening literacies by teaching into who children are. During tutoring, she reflected that she wanted "to keep bringing in books for us to read together so he can see his culture represented in literature." Her shift to using wordless picture-books that were culturally familiar to her instead represented both an opening of the tutoring up to translingual oral storytelling and a small tear she ultimately did not engage.

We position these subtle inconsistencies in Olivia's praxis as generative spaces for rupture. Collectively, her instructors and peers might have engaged them with her, identifying and confronting firm ideologies (Ponzio, 2020; Deroo & Ponzio, 2019) connected to white-centered teaching practices in the United States. While Olivia did not appear to contend with

ruptures through a culturally disruptive political stance (San Pedro, 2018), she did disrupt the norms of the practicum space to make reading more enjoyable, multimodal, and translingual.

During her final reflections, Olivia described how she would build on future language minoritized students' existing literacy practices by "connecting to their home language." She noted, too, the deeper listening (Seltzer, 2020) to Sifat that occurred within their last session, when the lesson became less about targeted intervention and more about celebration: "he told me more about the food he likes to eat and how he likes to play with his brother which is something we didn't get the opportunity to really do before." Her noticing suggests a tension between building space to bond with her student and the tutoring tasks she was expected to complete.

This tension surfaced again at the end of the course. Olivia's case report of Sifat was a largely technical commentary on decoding instruction. She summarized his strengths as "Blending, Segmenting, Deriving meaning from images, Recognizing vocabulary, and Cultural wealth and joy for learning." His needs were "Letter recognition and Letter sound correspondence." Issues of justice, linguistic racism, and children's rights did not surface. Her final exam response, however, indicated the emergency of a politicalized translanguaging stance: "the worst thing to do" would be to "shut down" a child's "language experiences" or your "own," Olivia argued. It "can be scary to open that up, but it's so valuable."

## Discussion

Diya and Olivia's narratives highlight the possibilities and tensions in growing translanguaging stances, particularly when languages and literacies are engaged as separate. Both PTs stepped toward critical translanguaging stances prior to tutoring; each engaged and struggled differently to enact those stances in partnership with refugee children. We follow the PTs' journeys not to critique them as individual teachers, but to explore the nuances of untidy transformation.

Diya and Olivia represent compelling examples of what can happen in these spaces for refugee students and their teachers. Each brought her own stance into tutoring children who in turn carried their own perspectives, too. Sometimes, PTs' stances contested finite views of language and literacy; other times, PTs grew their fluid stances alongside those more fixed approaches. We wonder if PTs were creating little pockets of critical translanguaging within a white-normed space, and whether those pockets might eventually stretch to be transformative. We remind ourselves that translanguaging corriente is winding, and that the flow across languages and modalities

that the linguistically diverse tutoring group fostered disrupted the normative silencing within English-dominant spaces (García et al, 2017).

The PTs' narratives show the importance of attending to the inherent politics of translanguaging. As Zapata and Laman (2023) have argued, translanguaging spaces that do not interrogate deficit ideologies fall short; "just cultivating spaces for students' fluid language use is insufficient as it fails to acknowledge the institutional bias that limits linguistically minoritized speakers and learners" (p. 251). Having grown up interrogating racial ideologies due to her own positionality, Diya was aware of the impact systemic and social beliefs had on her family and community. Having grown up being schooled through lenses that matched her own, Olivia seemingly did not question how aspects of her instruction might reinscribe whiteness; nor did she explore tensions as they emerged. Both PTs seemed to engage translanguaging and monomodal, English-centric teaching as separate halves of their lessons, the first as joyful and the second as necessary. We wonder what might have surfaced had the PTs been better positioned to interrogate the ideologies underlying their instructional decisions, from read-aloud text selections to opportunities for translanguaging word study.

Although both PTs engaged in moments of rupture that opened possibilities for more expansive views of literacy, their trajectories diverged in ways that were closely connected to their identities, prior experiences, and the students they were tutoring. Diya, as a multilingual immigrant and practicing Muslim, drew on her own experiences of invisibility in predominantly white schools to design lessons that foregrounded affirmation, storytelling, and shared cultural knowledge. These commitments resonated with her newcomer student, who eagerly shared stories in Pashto and connected school texts to his home and faith practices. Olivia, in contrast, as a white, English-dominant speaker who was still grappling with her own linguistic and cultural positionality, often oscillated between moments of translanguaging openness and returns to skill-based reading instruction. Her work with Sifat, a child navigating early literacy in a new alphabetic system, pushed her to wrestle with competing ideologies: the technical expectations of the reading methods course and her desire to create joyful, student-centered experiences. These differences underscore how comparative case study illuminates the ways PTs' emerging stances are shaped not only by programmatic and course structures but also by the interplay of their own identities and histories with the linguistic repertoires and lived experiences of the children they teach.

Reading Diya and Olivia's narratives, it's clear that they approached joy as a pursuit that would

inform the instructional design of their lessons. We trace this to their work in a prior literacy class with Muhammad's (2023) framework for culturally and historically responsive education (CHRE). Critiquing the focus on discrete skill acquisition in American schools, Muhammad argues for explicitly centering joy in learning as "the practice of loving self and humanity; caring for and helping humanity and earth; recognizing truth, beauty, aesthetics, art, and wonder; and working to solve social problems of the world" (p. 77). Diya and Olivia's emphasis on joy, which guided them away from narrow views of literacy toward translanguaging teaching, surfaced as tapping into everyday shared experiences, such as splashing in the rain. Their unconscious hesitancy to extend into learning more about their refugee students' unique experiences suggests space for them to be better supported in contextualizing the children's learning through deeper understandings of and care for forced displacement, children's home countries, and the specifics of each child's story. We wonder about continuing to explore notions of joy alongside care for trauma within both translanguaging and refugee work, while recognizing that a first step is for PTs to layer their tutoring with understandings of power.

Finally, PTs narratives raise questions about practicum experiences, about who tutoring serves and how. Our data did not create space for Ikram and Sifat to speak back to the experience; while we endeavored to understand the PTs stance growth, we found ourselves reaching for the children's voices. Through Diya and Olivia's recollections, we do see the refugee children claiming a space to use their language freely. We wonder how the sharp shift between the translanguaging welcomed in the comprehension lessons and more discrete skill-focused activities felt for the Ikram and Sifat, and how better understandings of the literacies they already carried might have extended their learning. We wonder, too, about the literacy learning they experienced within their classrooms, which neither we nor the PTs observed. We critique many of the assumptions that the tutors made—that a Pashto-speaking child's name spelled and pronounced using the Latin alphabet be personally relevant, that learning about American culture through stories would be of interest, and that assumptions could be made about their literacy capacities based on brief monolingual and -modal assessments.

In reflecting on how PTs drew on their critical translanguaging approaches (fostered and sustained in other spaces) to respond to the students in the field, we conclude that stances are dynamically evolving in community with others (Canagarajah, 2013) and must continuously be re-explored through politicized lenses to center the broader fight for linguistic self-determination (Flores, 2014). A critical translanguaging

approach to teaching and learning is not something a teacher acquires, but a way of being that we must all continuously grow and critically reflect upon.

### Implications

Our findings suggest several implications for teacher education programs, teacher educators, and researchers who aim to more effectively prepare educators to support refugee students and cultivate critical translingual stances. The tensions and discontinuities evident in Olivia and Diya's experience of their methods course point to the necessity of aligned, integrated programs that support critical dialogue around language, race, and power across time and context. Drawing on Seltzer's (2022) framework, teacher education programs must embed translanguaging theory, raciolinguistic ideologies, and multimodal, multilingual practices not as isolated content but as foundational, political commitments. Embedding this work across coursework and field experiences allows preservice teachers to sit with moments of rupture, moments that don't offer clear answers but open possibilities for transformation. This complexity cannot be compartmentalized or addressed through surface-level engagements. Instead, teacher education must engage PTs in sustained, scaffolded exploration of language and identity, cultivating the kind of ideological clarity that can withstand high-stakes, skills-focused policy mandates.

Teacher educators play a crucial role in this process. They must be willing to interrogate their own positionalities and ideologies, doing the work of disrupting hegemonic norms and deficit-based assumptions alongside their students. As San Pedro (2018) calls for, educators must create sacred truth spaces where PTs can engage with contradictions, name institutional biases, and imagine more expansive literacies. The tutoring context, while rich in one-on-one interaction, can unintentionally narrow focus to individual learning and can ignore or silence individual's membership in a greater social fabric. This contributes to teaching becoming apolitical or decontextualized, coming to know children as separate from the groups and histories to which they belong. This separation may explain the disconnect we observed between literature circle engagement and tutoring praxis, particularly when reading and literacy are framed narrowly. Educators must help preservice teachers consider how literacy skills can be contextualized across languages, how assessments might be designed to capture what students know beyond English, and how critical joy can be cultivated.

These implications also point to key directions for future research. There is a critical need for studies that explore how preservice teachers are prepared to work with refugee students, particularly through longitudinal

designs that trace ideological development across varied settings. Research must also center the perspectives of refugee students themselves, offering insight into how they experience these tutoring partnerships and classroom interactions. This study highlights the use of comparative case study design as a compelling methodology for this work. By exploring within and across two PTs' journeys in negotiating their critical translingual stances within a reading methods course, we illuminate how the PTs' disparate linguistic, racial, and cultural identities and lived experiences shaped the ways they engaged with refugee students and their nonlinear approaches to enacting their emergent translingual stances. As Flores et al. (2019) argue, teacher education has the potential to either reinforce dominant structures or contribute to transformative, justice-oriented instruction. We believe this transformative work is often quiet and cumulative, unfolding through moments of disruption, reflection, and joy. These are the spaces where change begins.

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