Confronting Deficit Narratives: Supporting Pre-Service Teachers in Understanding the Racialization of English Learners

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This descriptive qualitative study investigates the concerns that pre-service teachers at a small liberal arts college expressed about the racialization of English learners (ELs) and documents their increasing awareness of and preparedness to address these concerns during and after their student-teaching experience. The study included informal meetings and discussions with seven pre-service teachers at various coffee shops in the midwestern United States. Data consisted of transcripts of focus-group interviews, drawings by the participants, discussion posts, reflective essays, and field notes from one author's observations of their interactions and reactions during the meetings. The study draws on a raciolinguistic perspective to examine the participants' expressed opinions and experiences. Findings document the participants' concerns regarding misconceptions about racialized students and their learning in connection with language and race. These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in guiding pre-service teachers to embrace an antiracist education. The results align with the imperative of challenging deficit narratives and preparing socially conscious content-area teachers who advocate for equal educational opportunities for ELs. The paper concludes with implications for critical teacher preparation for school districts with racially and linguistically diverse students and promotes a broader perspective that goes beyond instructional practices and considers the socio-political aspects of schooling for ELs.

Cette étude qualitative descriptive examine les préoccupations exprimées par les futurs enseignants dans un petit collège d'arts libéraux au sujet de la racialisation des apprenants de l'anglais et documente leur prise de conscience croissante et leur préparation pour répondre à ces préoccupations pendant et après leur stage en enseignement. L'étude comportait des réunions et des discussions informelles avec sept futurs enseignants dans différents cafés du Midwest des États-Unis. Les données étaient composées de transcriptions d'entretiens de groupes, de dessins réalisés par les participants, de messages de discussion, d'essais réflexifs et de notes prises par l'un des auteurs sur le terrain lors des observations de leurs interactions et leurs réactions pendant les réunions. L'étude s'appuie sur une perspective raciolinguistique pour examiner les opinions et les expériences relatées par les participants. Les résultats révèlent les préoccupations des participants concernant les idées fausses sur les élèves racialisés et leur apprentissage en relation avec la langue et la race. Ces résultats permettent de comprendre de manière globale les défis et les opportunités liés à l'adoption d'une éducation antiraciste par les enseignants en formation. Les résultats

soutiennent l'impératif de remettre en question les discours déficitaires et de préparer des enseignants de matières disciplinaires socialement conscients qui défendent l'égalité des chances pour les apprenants de l'anglais en matière d'éducation. L'article conclut avec les implications d'une préparation critique des enseignants destinés aux districts scolaires accueillant des élèves issus de la diversité raciale et linguistique, et promeut une vision plus large qui va au-delà des pratiques pédagogiques pour prendre en compte les aspects sociopolitiques de l'enseignement des apprenants de l'anglais.

Keywords: antiracist pedagogy, English learners, language ideology, linguistic discrimination, raciolinguistics

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This study emerged from a small grant project focusing on cultivating socially conscious teachers within the context of content-area education. The study took place in an area in the midwestern United States with a high percentage of Congolese immigrants. The participants—a cohort of seven White, Black, Latino, and mixed-race pre-service teachers majoring in science, social science, and music education at a small liberal arts college —were student-teaching at rural schools with Congolese English learners (ELs)[1] who are Black immigrants. The school district is quite diverse, with EL-classified students comprising approximately 8% of the student population. Data for this article come from the participants' dynamic learning during 11 meetings they held with Uysal, the first author, at various coffee shops in three different towns near their university campus. At the heart of these meetings was the goal of facilitating critical conversations about traditional educational paradigms among the participants and fostering critical awareness of linguistic diversity, cultural competence, and antiracist pedagogy. The study also incorporated two focus-group interviews that Uysal held with the participants to follow up on recurring themes that arose from the preliminary analysis of the collected data.

The study draws on the proposals by Alim et al. (2016) and Rosa and Flores (2017) for bringing a raciolinguistic ideologies perspective to the study of educational inequities in US schools. Their raciolinguistic perspective focuses on how schools, through their curriculum and policies, and teachers and administrators act as White listening and seeing subjects who perceive racialized individuals' linguistic practices as always "deficient," based on their racial positioning (Rosa & Flores, 2017). As a perspective that examines the co-construction of ideas about language and ideas about race, raciolinguistic ideologies became a useful theoretical lens for us, given the high percentage of Congolese students in the classrooms where participants were student-teaching. In addition to that, a perspective centering experiences of racialization is key because in the context of the United States, "we are constantly orienting to race while at the same time denying the overwhelming evidence that shows the myriad ways that American society is fundamentally structured by it" (Alim et al., 2016, p. 3). This raciolinguistic perspective enabled us to examine how participants enacted and/or resisted what Rosa and Flores (2017) call racialized modes of perception, overcoming views of language barriers and fostering cultural competence.

We draw on studies documenting the need to help pre-service teachers reflect upon raciolinguistic ideologies as they become able to serve students of color effectively (e.g., Briceño et al., 2018; Daniels & Varghese, 2020; Fallas-Escobar et al., 2022; Lindahl et al., 2021) and answer the following questions: (1)

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[1] Throughout this article, we use the term *English learner* or *EL* ethnographically, since it is the term used in US schools and education policies to refer to students of color. Otherwise, as researchers and teacher educators, we prefer García's (2009) term *emergent bilingual*, because it recognizes the linguistic resources and dexterity of students who are often racialized by the school system.

What concerns do pre-service teachers express about the racialized experiences of ELs in US schools through a series of reflection-oriented activities and field trips? (2) To what extent do pre-service teachers demonstrate preparedness to address these concerns during a series of reflection-oriented activities and field trips?

Theoretical Framework

This study draws from the theoretical construct of language ideologies, which we define as ideas or beliefs about language structure, language use, and language users that often uphold the economic and political interests of those in power (Kroskrity, 2004). In the United States, critical scholars have thoroughly explored various language ideologies that keep non-Whites at the margins of social and institutional life. For example, they have documented the deleterious effects of ideologies that otherize "non-native" speakers of English (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1989) and position English as the superior institutional language (Auer, 2005). They have also examined ideologies that disparage the "non-standardized" home language varieties that immigrant children bring to school (Lippi-Green, 2012), as well as those that establish English monolingualism as the default for human communication and as the norm within the United States (May, 2014). Similarly, scholars have also analyzed language ideologies that disparage the hybrid and fluid linguistic varieties (e.g., Spanglish) spoken within minoritized communities (Cummins, 2007; García, 2009). These ideologies coalesce to uphold Whiteness across social and institutional spaces.

Furthermore, we also acknowledge that language ideologies are not just ideas, nor are they just about language (Gal & Irvine, 2019; Kroskrity, 2004). That is, we recognize that language ideologies connect forms of talk to groups or kinds of people in ways that rationalize sociolinguistic complexity and construe (mis)representations of linguistic and nonlinguistic differences (Irvine & Gal, 2000). For example, in the United States, language ideologies may lead people to associate Spanish and/or Spanglish speakers with illegal immigration and low levels of literacy (Zentella, 2014). Likewise, ideologies can construe Latino Spanish speakers as a problematic community in the country (Santa Ana, 2002) and frame Latino/a children's Spanish as the culprit for their academic "underperformance" (Sayer, 2013). Likewise, language ideologies may also result in teachers and administrators in US schools labelling Latino/a children as needing pedagogical interventions for being bilingual speakers of English and Spanish or simply for coming from a Latino household (Allard et al., 2014).

More specifically, we are interested in language ideologies that reproduce difference, along the lines of language and race. Therefore, we draw on the raciolinguistic perspective proposed by Flores and Rosa (2015) and Rosa and Flores (2017). From this perspective, raciolinguistic ideologies are defined as ideas that conflate racialized bodies with alleged linguistic "deficiency," regardless of observable communicative dexterity and literacy skills (Flores & Rosa, 2015). As they explain, raciolinguistic ideologies are rooted in racialized modes of perception that interpret the linguistic practices of racialized individuals as always lacking (Rosa & Flores, 2017). They construe racialized bodies as in need of remediation for enacting language practices otherwise praised when produced by White individuals (Rosa & Flores, 2017; Rosa, 2019). For instance, while Latinos/as are often viewed as semilingual for speaking both English and Spanish, White individuals are celebrated for using Spanish at any given level of proficiency (Rosa, 2016, 2019).

Raciolinguistic ideologies justify and perpetuate the marginalization of minoritized groups across the United States. However, a critical space for the reproduction of these ideologies is US schools, where students and teachers develop perceptions that conflate race with alleged "deficiencies" (Flores & Rosa, 2015). For instance, the school-based label of English learner (EL) often signals for teachers a perceived linguistic "deficiency" of racialized students coming from bi-/multilingual homes (Flores et al., 2020). In like manner, mainstream students in US classrooms often interpret the label as suggesting that multilingual

learners are less likely to be good learners or succeed in science (Braden, 2019; Dexter, 2020). Specifically, Sung (2018) examined how students perceived the shifting tracking structures of their urban middle school as a response to the inherent deficits of the African American and Latino student body. Raciolinguistic ideologies are so entrenched in US schools that even teachers who received training on racism and linguicism maintain colorblind stances to the teaching of "the language of the school" to students of color (Daniels, 2018; Love-Nichols, 2018).

Review of the Literature on Raciolinguistic Ideologies in US Schools

White, middle-class, English-monolingual women comprise most of the teacher workforce in the United States (Daniels, 2018; Garza, 2018; Villegas et al., 2012). As a result, racialized students of color who enter US schools frequently find themselves in classrooms where their teachers lack the preparation and critical consciousness to provide them with culturally and linguistically responsive education. Beyond the cultural and linguistic mismatch between teachers and the increasingly racially diverse student body, researchers have also documented that racialized youths encounter language policies (Hamm-Rodriguez & Sambolín Morales, 2021) and assessment practices in schools that frame their linguistic and literacy practices and those of their communities as inherently "deficient" (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021; Flores, 2020). Even schools aiming to redress the experiences of youths of color (e.g., through dual-language programs) confront barriers upheld by histories of poverty and segregation (Flores & McAuliffe, 2022) and face the institutionalized practice of catering schooling to the needs of White elites (Delavan et al., 2020).

Further complicating their educational experiences, US schools frequently assign institutional labels (e.g., *English learner* or *EL*) to these racialized students. These labels not only curtail the quality of education they receive but also serve as tools for further marginalization (Flores et al., 2020; Hernandez, 2017). Recent research indicates that negative racialized perceptions associated with students of color within bilingual education programs enable White mainstream students to assert themselves as more legitimate language knowers than their multilingual peers, despite the latter's diverse linguistic repertoires (Chaparro, 2019; García-Mateus, 2020; Ricklefs, 2021). In STEM classrooms, scholars have found that White mainstream students construed non-White multilingual students as unlikely to engage in science or become scientists (Braden, 2019; Dexter, 2020; Harper & Kayumova, 2023). Most of the existing literature taking on a raciolinguistic perspective has addressed the experiences of the Latino/a diaspora. Significantly less research has been conducted on the experiences of African Americans (e.g., Harper & Kayumova, 2023; Sung, 2018), and even less attention has been paid to Black immigrant youths (e.g., Smith, 2020).

Amidst the pervasive structures of oppression and exclusion faced by non-White students within US schools, Daniels and Varghese (2020) recently called for teacher education programs to center race. Their call highlighted the need to have pre-service teachers examine their own "raciolinguicized" subjectivities and how these interact with those of the students in their classroom. In response, some scholars have examined how raciolinguistic ideologies shape Latino/a pre-service teachers' perceptions of their Spanish (Briceño et al., 2018; Collins et al., 2019), bilingual proficiency (Fallas-Escobar, 2023; Fallas-Escobar et al., 2022; Fallas-Escobar & Treviño, 2021), overall language experiences (Ek et al., 2013), and the factors influencing their choice of ESL over bilingual certification endorsements (Briceño et al., 2018).

Scholars have also examined how teacher-learning tasks (e.g., language portraits) can enhance pre-service teachers' critical consciousness about raciolinguistic ideologies (Lindahl et al., 2021). Some studies explored how role models can help pre-service teachers transcend raciolinguistic ideologies and forge alternative understandings of language and linguistic identity (Vega & Fallas-Escobar, 2024). Bilingual teacher education scholars have been swift to respond to Daniels and Varghese's (2020) call. However, there is still a need for research that examines the shifts or challenges experienced by content-area pre-service teachers as they prepare to serve culturally and linguistically diverse/multilingual learners.

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Methodology

Context

Greenbig,[2] nestled in the American Midwest, provides a unique setting to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of ELs with diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. Historically a railroad hub with the current population being approximately 30,000, Greenbig now has a diversified economy, with revenues now stemming from manufacturing, education, health care, and retail. The town's demographic makeup mirrors rural America's trends, with a blend of Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and immigrant communities. There is notably a growing Congolese population who have migrated to the area from central Africa, drawn by manufacturing jobs. As more Latinos and Africans move to Greenbig, the demographics of schools have changed. In fact, according to their report card, the percentage of ELs in the Greenbig School District has rapidly increased from 5.1 in 2018 to 6.8 in 2023. Similarly, the percentage of Black-identifying students rose from 14.1 in 2018 to 17.3 in 2023.

The study context is a small-sized, private, residential liberal arts college in Greenbig: Brooks College. This college enrolls approximately 1,100 students and has a predominantly White student body, with the following demographics for students of color: 16% Hispanic, 7% African American, 7% mixed race, and 5% Asian American. The college emphasizes holistic education and community engagement and offers only undergraduate degree programs. The teacher education department at this institution prepares educators committed to social justice and equity, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experiences. With roots tracing back to the college's founding, the department adapts to meet evolving educational needs, offering majors in elementary, secondary, and special education. The department offers courses that are cross-listed in other departments, and its mission statement—as stated on their official page—clearly focuses on the well-rounded orientation of liberal arts education:

> We aren't a college of education. And we think that's a good thing. We study the world through a liberal arts framework, focusing on all parts of the world around us in intense, worthwhile ways—from science to languages, history to the arts. We prepare students to see all sides of the equation, to ask questions, and to communicate clearly.

Additionally, the department describes its pre-service teachers as "change agents [who] aren't satisfied with the status quo but are empowered to … make a difference in the community." The departmental context has apparently evolved from the abolitionist mission of the institution and embraces change as an orientation. However, the department's mission and goals visibly do not mention a word about preparing teachers with linguistic responsiveness or criticality in approaching racial equity. Similarly, the department does not offer any ESL or bilingual education endorsements. Instead, pre-service teachers collect credits by taking courses on the foundations of ESL and bilingual education and assessment practices in bilingual classrooms. Pre-service teachers interested in obtaining any of these endorsements can transfer these credits to a program at a crediting institution when they start to teach at a school district. Some school districts cover new teachers' tuition for the endorsement as part of their professional development initiatives. This is a pipeline that students choose to follow given their knowledge that the schools where they are likely to teach will require ESL or bilingual endorsements.

Greenbig's proximity to the Aroma Cities, which are urban centers along the Mississippi River, enriches the possibilities for the community service in which the pre-service teachers enrolled in the

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[2] All institution, place, and participant names have been anonymized. We have used fictitious names for institutions and locations, and participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities.

department. The department works in collaboration with multiple non-governmental organizations in the Aroma Cities, which offer support services for immigrants, providing valuable insights into challenges faced by immigrant communities. Greenbig's sociocultural context, coupled with the department's educational framework and collaborations with the community-based organizations, offers a rich backdrop for examining pre-service teachers' perceptions of ELs with a diverse range of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Participants

Participants were recruited through flyers sent via email to junior and senior pre-service teachers (all working on their practicum and student-teaching) from the entire teacher education department. The flyer included a QR code that guided them to a survey about their motivation to take part in this project as well as their long-term plan to work with linguistically diverse students. Eleven pre-service teachers completed the survey, out of which Uysal selected seven based on their interest in learning about the intersection of race and language and using these perspectives in their student-teaching. The pre-service teachers selected were majoring in social science, elementary, and English/language arts education, and they were student-teaching at schools in and around Greenbig. All had completed their PK–12 education in the United States. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographics.

Table 1

Description of the Participants

Participant	Field of Study	Race/ethnicity	Language(s)	Sex
Athena	elementary education	Mixed (Latina-White)	English	woman
Joy	social science education	Latina	English, Spanish	woman
Katherine	English/language arts education	Latina	English, Spanish	woman
Melinda	elementary education	Latina	English, Spanish	woman
Willow	elementary education	Black	English	woman
Vaclovas	social science education	White	English	man
Fender	elementary education	White	English	man

All participants were raised in the United States and have attended U.S. PK-12 schools. Four participants self-identified as people of color (Black or Latina), two as White, and one as mixed. Reflecting the trend in education departments across the United States, all but two self-identified as female. All are at

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the culmination of intensive field experiences and practice-oriented coursework. For their student-teaching requirements, they are placed in public schools in Greenbig. These schools have self-contained ESL classrooms with EL-classified Black students from the Republic of the Congo.

Data Collection and Analysis

We approach our inquiry as a descriptive qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) that draws from ethnographic research methods to capture the participants' perceptions and lived experiences. Three main data-collection methods were used for this study: conversations, drawing, essay writing and participant observation during coffee-shop meetings, focus-group interviews, and discussion posts.

Uysal organized 11 meetings, each taking about two hours, with the participants at various coffee shops in four neighboring towns close to Greenbig, from mid-January through late May 2024. Meeting at coffee shops, where Uysal acted as a facilitator, allowed us to build rapport with the pre-service teachers, facilitate candid and critical conversations in a relaxed and open environment, and take field notes during participant observations (Spradley, 1980) about their collegial interactions as future teachers and EL advocates. Leaving the traditional classroom setting and being in a new and vibrant space that was not their campus created a more relaxed atmosphere where they could speak about their lived experiences. In addition, creating a sense of community in a new and safe space encouraged them to use their lived experiences to discuss the systemic inequities and the racialization of ELs in US schools.

These meetings were structured to foster a critical awareness of linguistic diversity, with a particular focus on translanguaging, cultural competence, and antiracist pedagogy, and led to critical conversations about traditional educational paradigms such as the perpetuation of inequities for ELs. The activities during these meetings were intentionally designed by Uysal to remind participants of their pre-service teacher identities and to engage them in discussion-based and collaborative work. This design was achieved by encouraging participants to reflect on their practicum experiences and envision themselves as future teachers with an antiracist orientation. Each meeting started with a warm-up conversation, which organically developed with each participant sharing their realizations as pre-service teachers (e.g., how difficult it is to manage their schedules as students and pre-service teachers). These warm-up conversations were followed by small-group activities, including drawing or writing tasks and discussion on assigned readings related to the racialization of ELs. As a whole group, they wrapped up the meetings by sharing the learning points and the possible actions to take as teachers.

To ensure data quality and address potential limitations of holding meetings in public spaces, we reserved tables in secluded areas of the coffee shops to minimize interactions or overhearing by other customers. Moreover, participants were informed during recruitment about the settings, and they expressed a preference for vibrant environments, indicating that they were not distracted by the presence of others. The study also implied asking participants, during the meetings, to write two reflective essays about their perceptions of and experiences with students who identify as people of color. These writing tasks asked them to make connections to the particular incidents and conversations during their practicum, coursework at Brooks College, and participation in the coffee-shop meetings, and to respond to questions such as "Reflecting on your personal growth throughout this study, how do you envision incorporating principles of antiracist pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching into your future teaching practice?" Additionally, they were asked to draw figures that show the systemic injustices that disadvantage EL-identified students or racial microaggressions against these students (see Appendix). Before the meetings, participants were assigned book chapters and journal articles (e.g., Sue et al., 2007) and podcast episodes, which focused mainly on the racialized experiences of multilinguals and EL-identified students in the United States, and were asked to take notes about the similar experiences or observations that they had.

Additionally, in February and May 2024, Uysal carried out two focus-group interviews (Morgan, 1998) in a reserved classroom at Brooks College to follow up on recurring themes that emerged from preliminary analysis of field notes and essays. The focus groups were designed to elicit participants' insights on these emerging themes, which ranged from antiracist pedagogy to linguistic responsiveness in teaching. Following Haukås and Tishakov's (2024) suggestion, Uysal pre-disclosed the interview protocol with the participants to elicit in-depth responses. The protocol was structured to begin with discussions on their practicum experiences in rural schools with emerging linguistic diversity and gradually move toward ideal teaching strategies and advocacy practices for ELs and multilingualism at schools, inspired by their coursework and participation in critical conversations on campus. While conducting the focus-group interviews, Uysal was careful not to over-monitor the conversation and encouraged interaction among the participants.

We used Temi (2024) to transcribe the focus-group data, and we manually revised the transcription. Using the qualitative data from focus groups, field notes, discussion posts, and reflection essays, we conducted inductive coding in three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). We held 16 weekly online meetings to discuss both the organization of the themes and our narrative. First, we color-coded the emerging themes on a Microsoft Word document by focusing on issues related to awareness about race and language. Second, we created 76 open codes (e.g., White English as an indicator of academic readiness), and collapsed them into 13 axial codes (e.g., realization about the role of the teacher in ELs' educational trajectories). Then we discussed and collectively wrote a coherent narrative that the axial codes tell us, with a particular focus on racialization of EL-identified students through misconceptions about their communities and language learning, as well as systemic barriers at their schools and in the PK–12 system. Lastly, once our narrative was complete, Uysal carried out member reflections (Smith & McGannon, 2018) verbally with each participant through phone calls.

Researcher Positionalities and Trustworthiness

Uysal invited Fallas-Escobar to join this study. We came together as scholars and teachers who are often racialized and invested in raising awareness about and promoting action against structures of inequity in education. We met weekly for five months in a row. During our virtual meetings, we talked about our positionalities and subjectivities reflectively in relation to the major themes that emerged from our data.

Uysal brings a rich background shaped by his upbringing in a Turkish-speaking monolingual community in Turkey and a deep-seated passion for learning (about) languages. His academic journey culminated in a PhD from the University of Florida, where he not only expanded his knowledge but also actively engaged in designing and co-teaching courses for both pre-service and in-service teachers. With a career spanning over a decade in higher education, his scholarly pursuits have consistently gravitated toward the social dimensions of language education.

During the data-collection phase of this study, Uysal held a visiting assistant professorship at Brooks College. This position not only facilitated his collaboration with content-area pre-service teachers but also provided him with the opportunity to predominantly teach courses with a focus on ESL and bilingual education. Despite the smaller size of his department, Uysal established a strong rapport with the participants of our study. Many of these individuals had taken at least two courses under his guidance and had known him for close to two years by the start of data collection.

Throughout the funded project, Uysal maintained a sustained and immersive engagement with the participants, characterized by open dialogues and candid exchanges. These interactions, held at coffee shops and during joint visits to public schools, served not only to foster a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences but also to cultivate a sense of trust and mutual respect between Uysal and the participants. He gained credibility through his prolonged engagement (Lundy, 2008) with the

participants and positioned himself as a "participant as an observer" rather than "a complete observer" (Gold, 1958).

Fallas-Escobar identifies as a Latino, trilingual (Spanish-English-Portuguese), and critical applied linguist. The symbolic violence embedded in his training as an English teacher and applied linguist gradually led him to explore the intersections of language and race. Part of this exploration included completing a doctorate in culture, literature, and language at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). At UTSA, he gained experience working with/for Latina/o and non-Latina/o pre-service teachers seeking ESL and/or bilingual education endorsements.

Our growing understanding of processes of racialization in US schools shaped the framing of our research questions and led us to choose to answer them via the raciolinguistic ideologies perspective. This understanding also guided data collection and interpretation. Specifically, our understanding of the discomfort experienced in the United States around open discussions of race led us to decide to collect data outside of an institutional setting (i.e., various coffee shops), which provided a more casual atmosphere and to combine oral and written media for the collection of data. Finally, our experiences as non-White transnational scholars who have been racialized enabled us to be sensitive to the personal experiences that participants shared.

Results and Discussion

Pre-Service Teachers' Encounters with Misconceptions about Racialized Communities

The first research question we posed was *What concerns do pre-service teachers express about the racialized experiences of ELs in US schools through a series of reflection-oriented activities and field trips?* The participants expressed concern regarding misconceptions about students and their families and about learning in connection to language and race. They reported encountering these misconceptions during their school visits and student-teaching, and even as part of their lived experiences as racialized individuals themselves.

Misconceptions about Racialized Students and Their Families

Participants expressed having come face to face with assumptions about racialized students in US schools, a trend that has been documented in the literature (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021; Flores, 2020). For instance, Joy—a former EL—stated that she has heard that bearing the EL label brings negative perceptions of students' academic capacities: "I've definitely heard that English language learners are below your average student because they get pulled out. But, I mean, sometimes they're excelling way more than you think." In her comment, Joy acknowledged that, on the contrary, students labeled as ELs may in fact excel at schools in ways that the label excludes. Joy's concern for the negative impact of the EL label coincides with studies demonstrating how this label serves to hide the linguistic and literacy skills of racialized youths (Chaparro, 2019; García-Mateus, 2020; Ricklefs, 2021).

In fact, as participants recounted, the EL label reveals more about the racist system in place at US schools than about students' capacities. As has been previously shown, these labels negatively affect the quality of education provided for students of color (Flores et al., 2020; Hernandez, 2017). For example, Vaclovas, a White-identifying pre-service teacher, recounted a story where a Polish student fell off the radar as an EL because he resembled the White mainstream students:

> I think perception plays a huge role in it. In high school, I had an EL who was from Poland. The
> first day they were like, "We have an EL student in the class." And they looked around to the
> Spanish kids and then he was over here. You would never have thought he was the EL. And he

kind of just tried to blend in and a lot of people didn't assume that. So maybe he didn't get the help that he needed because he kind of just fit the mold of a normal student.

On the one hand, Vaclovas shared his concern that the EL label is automatically assigned to non-White students who look like "typical ELs": "the Spanish kids." On the other hand, he also confessed that such practice may lead teachers to assign the label to racialized students who are actually linguistically proficient while misidentifying students who in fact need language and academic support.

Katherine, a Latina pre-service teacher, also commented on the racial nature of the EL label. She shared her own experience with having a friend, who was fluent in both English and Spanish, pulled out of the class for ESL support. Katherine expressed that despite her fourth-grade Latina friend's linguistic dexterity, "she still got pulled out every other day because she had an accent. And so they were like teaching her English, but it was actually like trying to get rid of her accent that she had." In the same comment, she surmises that the practice of pulling racialized students out for ESL service is rooted in a stereotype that may affect the entire Latino community:

> I feel that the stereotype there is that if you don't have an accent then you're probably going to sound more qualified or proficient. But if you do have the accent, people might take you a little bit less seriously or like you don't know what you're talking about.

During one of the sessions with the participants, they were asked to visually represent challenges faced by ELs in public US schools. Katherine and Fender used this assignment as an opportunity to depict how accentism works in US schools and beyond. In their drawing (see Figure 1), students labelled as ELs constantly receive comments on perceived linguistic "deficiencies": "Use proper English," "I don't think they'll understand if you present," "Do you know how to write?"

Figure 1

Fender and Katherine's Depiction of Accentism in US Schools
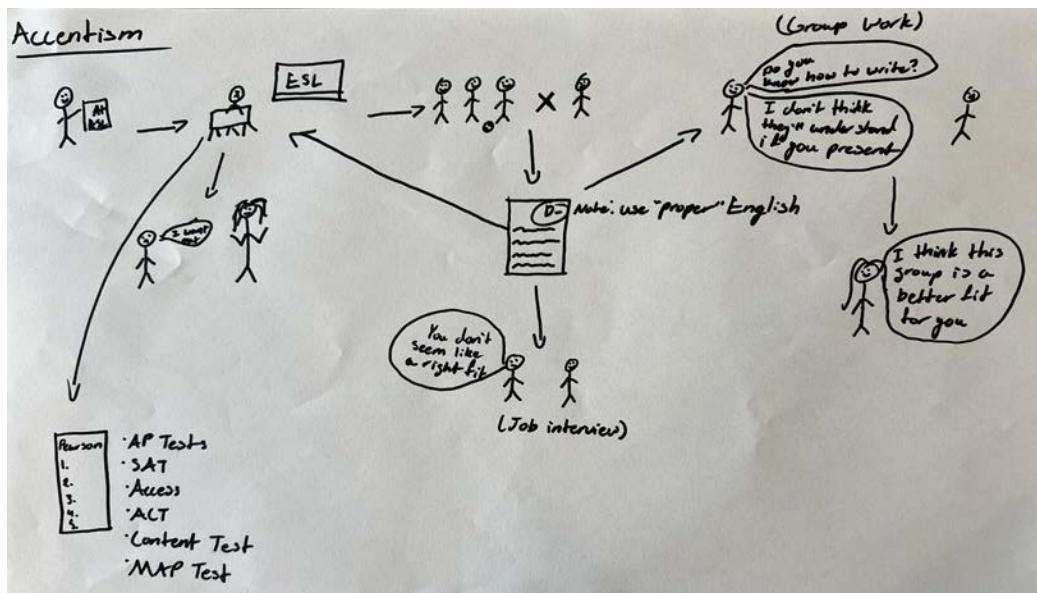
In fact, participants stated their concern about the role that the practice of accentism plays in shaping the demographics of advanced placement (AP) classes in US schools. For example, Athena often mentioned

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how in her high school in California, White students were overrepresented in AP tracks. Going back to Figure 1, in these pre-service teachers' perspective, accentism is a practice that continues to happen in settings outside of school such as job interviews: "You don't seem like a right fit." Subtirelu (2017) found that while Spanish/English bilingualism is in demand in the US labor market, it was most frequently cited as required or preferred in advertisements of jobs that require lower levels of education and experiences, as well as lower wages. This is an area that continues to be under-researched to this day.

Finally, participants also expressed that misconceptions extend beyond the individual racialized students, to include their families, as has been documented by critical scholars (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021; Flores, 2020). Melinda, a Latina-identifying pre-service teacher, recounted that she has "heard people assume that they [ELs] don't receive enough help at home because maybe they're struggling to understand something." In the same comment, she explained that what teachers interpret as "a struggling student" may be a student who takes longer to grasp concepts and may in fact be "trying their best."

Misconceptions about Learning in Connection to Language and Race

Participants shared their concerns that learning was often seen in connection to language and race. They recounted encountering misconceptions that always construed racialized students as needing fixing (Rosa & Flores, 2017). For instance, Athena—a self-identifying mixed-race (White and Latina) pre-service teacher—referenced the misconception that concepts can be learned only through English:

> [one misconception is] that they [ELs] came into the classroom without certain types of intelligence before they learned English…. "Oh, if you don't know English, you won't be able to understand this concept that hasn't been taught to you in English." But … they may have had other languages before, even other education. That's a misconception.

Athena is concerned that this misconception neglects the fact that many racialized students identified as ELs come into US schools with literacy skills that they acquired in their home language (Rosa, 2019).

Similarly, other participants added that there is a predominant mentality of language as a barrier within US schools. Melinda herself confessed that during her teaching practicum, she had a French-speaking Congolese student whom she thought was going to face difficulties building connections with her classmates. Yet, much to her surprise, the opposite was the case:

> During my practicum, I got to interact with a French-speaking student who came out of the United States. I also came in with the assumption that she would be a quiet student, but she was actually not. She was really outgoing, and she had a lot of friends. I had that assumption [that] she was going to be a quiet student and she was going to struggle in making friends because there's that language barrier. But she was not. She was really out there. And that really opened my eyes.

Melinda explained how debunking this misconception "really opened my eyes." Melinda could see how her racially hegemonic perception of the student shaped expectations of her (Daniels & Varghese, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017). There is research examining how teacher-learning tasks and role models can increase pre-service teachers' critical consciousness (Lindahl et al., 2021). Yet studies are needed to examine how they develop this skill during their clinical teaching.

A related misconception participants narrated encountering was that EL students' quietness (their limited oral participation) means a lack of understanding, yet another iteration of the practice of conflating racialized bodies with "deficiency" (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Melinda referred to this misconception in the following manner:

When some ELs are very quiet students … sometimes [teachers] think, "Oh, maybe they don't understand what the class is about or what's going on." But in reality, they might know what's going on. They just don't know how to explain it in their own words, which is why they just stay behind and prefer to listen instead of talking about it. I feel like it's a struggle that kids who have English as a second language struggle with, but it takes time for them to push themselves out of their comfort zone. And finally, it will be a struggle too, talking another language, but eventually it will just progress in time.

Melinda also explained that quiet students may understand the subject being taught but find it difficult to express themselves in a language that they are still acquiring. Melinda further clarified that it takes time for EL students to come out of their "comfort zone," but they do eventually get there.

Yet another misconception participants recounted was that learning to sound White is a natural and normal part of the process of schooling. To illustrate this point, Katherine shared her own experience receiving ESL support:

Last time we met, we were talking about how the Whiter you sound or the Whiter you look, the least weird looks you're going to get. When I was learning English, they tried to beat my accent out of me as much as possible. Now when I am in academic settings, I watch myself and I'm like "I can't have an accent. I need to sound White. I need to sound correct and proper." But it still comes out sometimes. But it is just an unfortunate thing where sometimes kids are put through such rigorous EL courses that they start losing their dominance on their home language.

In her reflection, Katherine equated her own ESL experience with learning to sound White, which she described as "beat[ing] my accent out of me." Katherine reveals that her ESL experience has led her to perceive sounding White as sounding "correct and proper," a tacit expectation that haunts her to this day. She concludes by stating that it is "unfortunate" that the "rigorous EL courses" result in racialized students' loss of proficiency in their home language.

Pre-Service Teachers' Awareness about the Racialization of ELs

The second research question we asked was *To what extent do pre-service teachers demonstrate preparedness to address these concerns during a series of reflection-oriented activities and field trips?* Our analysis revealed that pre-service teachers demonstrated awareness about the complexities and unique challenges faced by racialized students on the individual, school and society levels.

Racialization in Individual Student Experiences

One of the central themes that surfaced during our meetings was the recognition that ELs are not a homogeneous group. Acknowledging the varying experiences of ELs based on their linguistic backgrounds, particularly emphasizing the additional challenges faced by speakers of underrepresented languages, Athena noted, "I would assume the experience for French-speaking and Spanish-speaking students would be a bit, I don't want to say easier, but compared to the Native American student, it probably would be ... because they're the only one that doesn't have that common knowledge of those languages." Also, drawing from her conversation about an EL speaking "an ancient Aztec language" with a superintendent she met at a conference, she expressed that these students might often "be feeling isolated" and "tend to be singled out." Athena's statements underscore a critical awareness that mainstream languages like Spanish and French benefit from greater institutional resources and familiarity

among educators, whereas languages spoken by Native American students and other minority groups are often overlooked, leading to further marginalization.

Fender expanded on this by discussing how existing teaching strategies might fail students who speak minority languages. He reflected on the limitations of teaching strategies that rely on connections to students' home languages, which may not be feasible for speakers of less common languages. Fender illustrated this point by explaining, "Math class context ... the addition, subtraction, all those math symbols ... could cause more confusion in Native American languages that might use ... those symbols for other purposes." This recognition highlights the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies that can adapt to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of ELs.

The pre-service teachers also became more attuned to the cultural dissonance that ELs might experience in the classroom. Willow's insights into cultural differences in practices such as eye contact emphasize the potential for misunderstanding and tension. She stated, "Your teacher wants you to look them in the eye when they're talking to you.... But in some cultures ... if you look them in the eye ... it's a sign of disrespect." This awareness is crucial for developing classroom environments that respect and accommodate cultural differences, thereby fostering a more inclusive atmosphere for all students.

Latina participants, in particular, highlighted the importance of having racial and linguistic representation among teachers. Katherine's reflection on her motivations for becoming a teacher for communities that have high numbers of students of color illustrated this point: "I didn't have teachers that looked like me and understood what I was going through as an EL." Reflecting on her student-teaching experience, she further emphasized the challenges faced by ELs in schools with a lack of bilingual teachers, noting, "Both [of the ESL teachers] don't know a second language.... It's hard for them to communicate with the students sometimes. I can easily see that." Katherine's perspective, rooted in her lived experience as a former EL, underscores the critical need for bilingual teachers who can effectively communicate with and support ELs by making them more comfortable in speaking. Her observations highlight the broader issue of underrepresentation of teachers who share the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students, which can significantly impact students' comfort and receptivity to learning.

Systemic Racialization within Educational Structures

The pre-service teachers in this study demonstrated a growing awareness of the ways in which schools and teachers play a role in the racialization of ELs. Through their reflections, they identified critical areas where schools fall short in supporting ELs, particularly in engaging with immigrant families and leveraging students' cultural and linguistic resources.

One prominent theme was the lack of communication and support systems for immigrant families within the school system. Athena highlighted this issue, noting, "I feel like sometimes kids coming from immigrant families, if they're first-generation students, their parents probably know no English, and there's a lack of communication or an effort to reach out to parents and have a support system for them to learn English." This sentiment underscores the systemic barriers that prevent meaningful engagement between schools and immigrant families, often leading to the erroneous assumption that "these parents don't value education."

Melinda echoed Athena's concerns, emphasizing the need for teachers to establish strong communication channels with parents. She noted, "If the teacher provides those resources and lets them know what's going on in the classroom, it will help parents know what they can do at home whenever they have time with their kid." This proactive approach by teachers is crucial in bridging the gap between home and school environments, ensuring that parents are informed and involved in their children's education.

The pre-service teachers also recognized that how ELs are taught in mainstream US classrooms excludes them from learning and engaging in meaningful interactions with peers. For example, Willow

pointed out the detrimental effects of isolating EL students through passive teaching methods in mainstream classrooms or through specialized language services like pull-out ESL programs. She noted, "Just giving the EL students worksheets or putting them in the back of the class ... it's not helpful for their experience and just moves them backwards because they're not really engaging or connecting with anything." Willow highlights the need for interactive and inclusive teaching strategies that actively involve ELs in the learning process.

In fact, the participants recognized the importance of using visual aids and creating a sense of community in the classroom to support ELs attending US schools. Athena shared her observation of a French-speaking teacher who benefitted from the use of pictures and images for communication. She explained, "Pictures were this EL's way of communicating and finding a way to understand what was happening ... a picture really is a commonality that most people can hopefully resort to." Visual aids serve as universal tools that can enable EL students to participate in learning activities.

Katherine highlighted the significance of fostering a community within the classroom, where students feel comfortable and supported. She described an ESL classroom where the teacher used daily warm-up activities to encourage interaction and friendship among students:

> There was a specific classroom that I got to observe. That was just for ESL kids. What really struck me about that is the sense of community that she tried to bring into the classroom. Because when I was in ESL, you're at your desk and you're doing your own work and the teacher's going to come and help you. But it was very individual and you're really only talking to the teacher. But in her classroom, it was really small and so every day she would have these little cards and there would be random questions like, What's your favorite cereal? They had to read the question out loud so they're practicing their reading and they're speaking and then answering it. So, it was a good warm-up for them. Then all the kids got to learn a lot about each other, and you could tell that they were all friends even though they all spoke different languages. I thought that was nice because learning a new language is really difficult. If you get embarrassed easily, you don't always want to speak in front of your peers. But if there's a sense of community and you're like, "Oh, we're all here learning and nobody here is going to judge me," it makes it a lot easier for students to want to speak up and be comfortable with reading out loud and practice those skills that they need to do in order to be proficient in English.

This heightened sense of community aids not only with language acquisition but also with building a supportive network among students. Joy supported this by sharing her experience: "I feel like bringing up the point Katherine made that community is a really big thing, making them feel at home. I had my own classroom ... so I took a couple of the ELLs and then a couple of my regular students ... they were all bonding over soccer." This sense of community fosters connections and understanding among students, which is crucial for their emotional well-being and academic success.

The pre-service teachers also became aware of the systemic racism within school structures that were practiced through standardized tests. These realizations were particularly evident in their reflections on how students are categorized and assessed based on their racial and linguistic identities. Katherine's experience with ESL testing illustrated the pressure and anxiety faced by ELs. She shared, "Testing during my ESL days always made me nervous ... there was always this fear that if I was not able to showcase that I was learning enough, they would push me back within my ESL class." This narrative underscores the high stakes and stress associated with ESL assessments, which often do not account for the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. Katherine was apparently aware of the systemic discrimination that EL students are exposed to on a daily basis through the inherently monolingual-oriented ESL programs. The tracking system used accent as a marker of academic readiness or linguistic proficiency. As previously

explained, Katherine described this discriminatory goal of the state-mandated tests as "to beat [the students'] accent out of [them] as much as possible" up until there is no or minimal sign of home language.

The pre-service teachers also critiqued the use of standardized language assessments as culturally biased mechanisms that favour White students (see Figure 2). Vaclovas, for instance, noted, "Standards-based language assessments do not always show proficiency; someone might be well-versed in conversation but do poorly on the test." Also, Fender expressed his concern about "the monopoly of language assessment," underlining the benefits of the big stakeholders like Pearson Education, and discussed why these companies need more ELs to remain in the specialized services. Likewise, Athena argued that these tests "set up prejudices for students of color to appear lesser than or not as knowledgeable" and negatively impact these students' self-confidence and self-value. Melinda and Katherine both observed that this pressure from tests to conform to White linguistic norms and the stigma that comes with the EL status might negatively impact the self-esteem and confidence of EL students. For example, as Melinda reflected, "If they're separated from someone else, they start questioning like, Oh! Is there something wrong with me?" These criticisms highlight the limitations of standardized testing in accurately reflecting the language skills of minority students and supporting their language development. Additionally, labelling students as ELs through test scores not only isolates them but also reinforces feelings of inadequacy and marginalization.

Figure 2

Melinda, Vaclovas and Willow's Illustration of the Differing Pathways at US Schools Based on Race and Skin Color
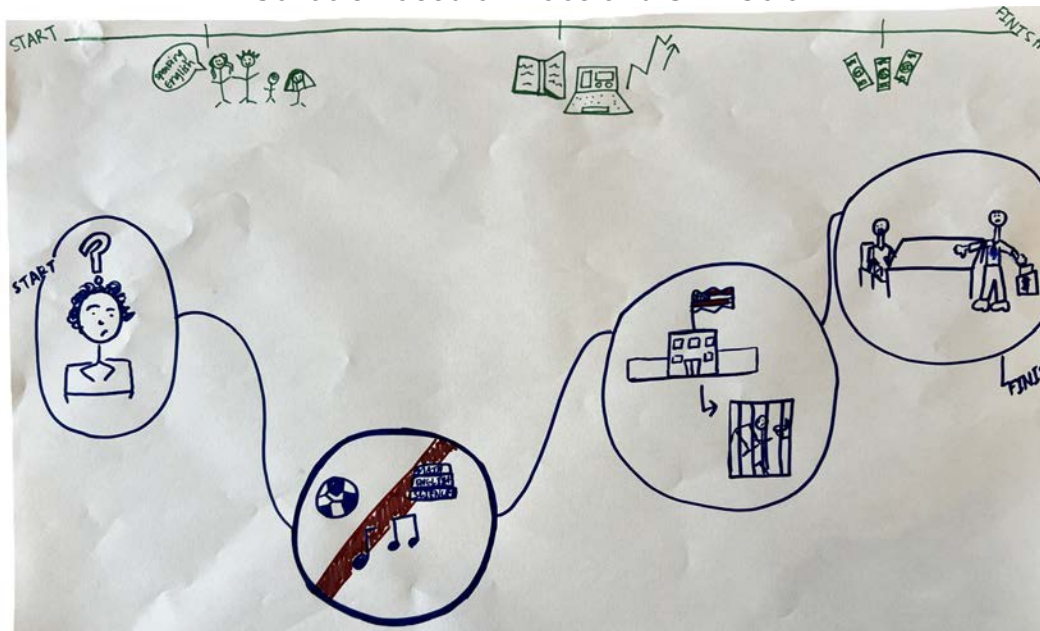
Moreover, the participants discussed the role of academic English as a tool for exclusion and assimilation. Willow shared her struggle with navigating her Black American identity while adhering to the expectations of speaking "standard English" in school settings. She shared during a coffee-shop meeting that she felt that I [Uysal] had to stick to the standard English—which she later referred to as White English—to sound "teacherly." But she was aware that she would easily be positioned as "the Black lady with a big vocabulary and an educated tone" if she ordered her beverage in standard English. Her positionality helped her understand ELs who had to navigate the White spaces at schools and still remain

connected to their communities. This experience resonated with Katherine, Joy, and Athena, who noted that ELs often had to speak like White students to fit in and make friends in mainstream classrooms.

Through these reflections, the pre-service teachers demonstrated a heightened awareness of the racialized structures and practices within schools that disadvantage EL students. These insights underscore the need for more equitable and inclusive educational practices that recognize and value the linguistic and cultural diversity of all students.

Conclusion and Implications

As this study has documented, participants stated their concerns about the misconceptions regarding racialized students. They discussed the EL label and what it hides about the racist structures in place and about racialized students' skills. They also shared their concern about accentism and the racist attitudes toward racialized youths within and beyond the school. They also showed concern regarding misconceptions about racialized students' families' alleged lack of support for their children. Furthermore, participants also expressed preoccupation regarding misconceptions about learning in connection to language and race. They stated that teachers often hold assumptions that do a disservice to racialized students: that learning happens only via English, that racialized students face a language barrier, and that their quietness means a lack of understanding of the subject. Finally, and maybe the most alarming misconception participants discussed, was that learning to "sound White" is a natural and inherent part of the schooling experience for racialized youths in the United States. These are misconceptions that participants confronted in their school visits and clinical teaching experiences, that they lived as racialized individuals themselves attending US schools, or that they witnessed as White individuals.

Fortunately, participants also demonstrated an emerging critical consciousness about the systems-level issues that directly impact ELs' access to educational opportunities and perpetuate the injustices that they encounter on a daily basis. Standardized testing emerged as the major actor or mechanism that was used to justify the tracking system and ability-grouping and still to deny them access to mainstream classrooms by determining their educational trajectory. A common practice that they collectively observed as exemplary during their student-teaching was the community-building efforts that their collaborating teachers implemented.

The informal meetings at coffee shops enabled participants to question the racialization of ELs in US schools and to consider ways to mitigate ELs' marginalization. However, enabling them to translate these discussions into actionable plans requires further institutional support. Preparation of teachers at institutions of higher education should prioritize integrating racial and linguistic justice into their curricula. We recognize the extensive coursework required for pre-service teachers and the challenge of embedding these critical issues across various disciplines. Riley (2009) argues that social consciousness and social justice should be infused into curriculum rather than added as separate courses, thus avoiding overburdening pre-service teachers. Our findings highlight the pervasive influence of raciolinguistic ideologies, necessitating examination by pre-service teachers in all disciplines, given the high likelihood of working with ELs. We recommend the following practical implications for teacher preparation. Teacher education programs should:

(1) Integrate raciolinguistic ideologies modules into core education courses to raise awareness of how language and race intersect in educational settings.

(2) Embed discussions of linguistic justice into foreign language courses, which are often part of the required curriculum, to broaden pre-service teachers' understanding of linguistic diversity and its implications.

(3) Ensure that teacher educators, regardless of their specialization, engage with scholarship on race and language. This can be achieved through a series of workshops, seminars, and professional development sessions aimed at fostering intellectual conversations about linguistic injustices.

(4) Promote inquiry-based learning approaches that encourage pre-service teachers to adopt a social-justice stance. Such an orientation prepares them to recognize and challenge the power dynamics in educational processes.

By implementing these strategies, teacher preparation programs can cultivate educators who are critically aware of raciolinguistic ideologies and equipped to advocate for equitable educational practices. Equipping them with skills and awareness about language ideologies in play will prepare them to be advocates of ELs at US public schools, where they are likely to work with teachers with ideological and political clarity in supporting home language use or multilingualism more broadly (Sah & Uysal, 2022). By preparing pre-service teachers with a raciolinguistic lens, we can empower them to act as agents of change in their local contexts and be ready to combat injustices and advocate for the linguistic and cultural rights of all students.

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Group 1: Accentism

Goal: to visually represent the various challenges faced by PK–12 students in public schools in the US due to accentism and linguistic discrimination.

Preparation: The drawing will consist of multiple components or sections, each representing a different aspect of the challenges faced by students. These components can include employability challenges, maintaining cultural and linguistic identity, and systems-level issues such as teacher expectations. Brainstorm ideas for each component based on your own knowledge and experiences. Additionally, you can conduct research to find real-life examples and statistics to support your ideas.

Mini-Scenarios and Drawing: Develop mini-scenarios or brief descriptions for each component. These scenarios should illustrate specific instances or examples of the challenges faced by students. For example, a scenario could involve a student being discouraged from taking advanced courses due to their accent. Feel free to choose the format of your drawing, whether it is a map, flowchart, or another type of visual representation. You can be creative and think about how you can effectively convey information through your design. Include both visuals and text in your drawing. Visual elements such as images, icons, and symbols can help enhance understanding, while text should provide clear explanations and descriptions.

Presentation: Discuss your ideas, provide feedback to each other, and make revisions as needed. I will be listening and minimally participating as I will be taking notes. Present your drawings to the group. During the presentation, you should explain each component of your drawing and discuss the significance of the challenges highlighted.

Group 2: Racial Microaggression

Goal: to visually represent the various challenges faced by PK-12 students in public schools in the US due to ethnicity, race, and skin color.

Preparation: The drawing will consist of multiple components or sections, each representing a different aspect of the challenges faced by students. These components can include employability challenges, maintaining racial and ethnic identity, student-student interactions, police brutality, and systems-level issues such as teacher expectations. Brainstorm ideas for each component based on your

own knowledge and experiences. Additionally, you can conduct research to find real-life examples and statistics to support your ideas.

Mini-Scenarios and Drawing: Develop mini-scenarios or brief descriptions for each component. These scenarios should illustrate specific instances or examples of the challenges faced by students. For example, a scenario could involve a student being discouraged from taking advanced courses due to their race and its association with the English Learner or immigrant status. Feel free to choose the format of your drawing, whether it is a map, flowchart, or another type of visual representation. You can be creative and think about how you can effectively convey information through your design. Include both visuals and text in your drawing. Visual elements such as images, icons, and symbols can help enhance understanding, while text should provide clear explanations and descriptions.

Presentation: Discuss your ideas, provide feedback to each other, and make revisions as needed. I will be listening and minimally participating as I will be taking notes. Present your drawings to the group. During the presentation, you should explain each component of your drawing and discuss the significance of the challenges highlighted.