

TREE OF LIFE: GROWING TEACHER AGENCY IN WORKING WITH MULTILINGUAL
LEARNERS THROUGH NON-TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By

Ivanna Mann Thrower Anderson

May, 2026

Dissertation Director: Travis Lewis, EdD

Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations

ABSTRACT

This Dissertation in Practice examined the impact of a non-traditional, narrative-based professional learning (PL) model on teacher agency in working with multilingual learners (MLs). As the ML population continues to grow across the United States, many educators report feeling underprepared to meet students' linguistic and academic needs. Traditional skills-based PL often emphasizes instructional strategies but overlooks teachers' beliefs, identities, and sense of professional agency. This inquiry addressed that gap by adapting the Tree of Life (ToL), a narrative approach rooted in strength-based reflection, into a PL framework for elementary dual language/immersion teachers. Grounded in improvement science and guided by Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) cycles, this convergent mixed-methods study engaged two third-grade teachers in four ToL PL sessions. Data sources included initial- and final-questionnaires, session transcripts, reflective journals, and participant-generated graphical ToL. Quantitative analysis examined shifts in self-perceived agency, while qualitative narrative analysis identified themes related to identity, beliefs, and instructional decision-making. Findings indicate that participation in the

ToL PL increased teachers' awareness of their strengths, contextual influences, and capacity to advocate for MLs. Participants reported shifts from deficit-oriented thinking toward asset-based perspectives and demonstrated greater confidence in supporting MLs academically and socio-emotionally. The narrative structure fostered reflection on personal and professional identities, strengthening teachers' sense of agency. This study contributes to the field by integrating narrative inquiry with professional learning design, offering a replicable model for fostering educator agency and advancing equity for multilingual learners.

TREE OF LIFE: GROWING TEACHER AGENCY IN WORKING WITH MULTILINGUAL
LEARNERS THROUGH NON-TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By
Ivanna Mann Thrower Anderson
May, 2026

Director of Dissertation: Travis Lewis, EdD
Dissertation Committee Members:
J. Scott Glass, PhD
Joel Gomez, EdD
Margo Gottlieb, PhD
Marjorie Campo Ringler, EdD

©Copyright 2026
Ivanna Mann Thrower Anderson

DEDICATION

Tree of Life

I dedicate this work to the
multilingual learners and their educators
in North Carolina and across the country who face
multiple challenges as they address content and language
embedded within various personal and educational contexts.

May you grow deep roots which support your trunk
of many strengths. May you

branch out with

dreams

and goals

supported

by the rain,

sunshine,

and fertilizer which nourishes your ground.

May your leaves of support and encouragement be many. May your flowers
bloom year-round. May the bugs and storms teach you valuable lessons which increase your
resilience as an individual and as part of the forest. May your sense of
agency flourish as you come to know yourself more fully.

With love and light,

Dr. Ivanna Mann Thrower Anderson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My tree of life has been greatly enhanced by so many through this dissertation process. I love collaboration and giving shout outs to those who have helped me along the journey. This is going to be a bit long, yet I still fear I will leave someone out. I beg forgiveness in advance!

I MUST start with **Dr. Ye “Jane” He**, UNCG. Jane mentored me for years as we worked together on National Professional Development Grants she had secured. When I received my first grant in 2022, I immediately asked Jane to be part of the work. She then told me to “get the title to go with the work.” I can never thank her enough for that push and the endless support throughout the process!

Dear **David B. Anderson**, you endured much as I sat in my office hour after hour researching and writing. You chuckled when I got excited about the research (Wow! Wow! OH WOW!) or frustrated with technology (&%#@). You knocked timidly to bring me snacks and always gave me something to look forward to when I finally emerged! You are a brave, patient, and loving man! You are truly my GFG!!

Jodi Gee, through thick and thin you were there to help me clear my head, take notes, edit, fix technical difficulties, and listen to me whine. Words are not enough!

To the **NCDPI and CAL M2-Si Grant Team and Grant Participants**, I say THANK YOU for your motivation and support through the initial stages of the process. You taught me so much about teacher agency and impacting MLs through our collaboration. I am disappointed we did not get to work together more fully on this research.

To my external committee members, **Dr. Margo Gottlieb and Dr. Joel Gomez**, what an honor to have such amazing educators agree to be a part of the team. You have been mentors and friends over the years, sharing professional wisdom and personal commitment to the education of

MLs. You have transformed the field of ML education and been an inspiration for my work!

Muchas gracias por todo!

To all my **ECU professors** including former chair, **Dr. Marjorie Ringler**, and current chair, **Dr. Travis Lewis**: You work miracles every day turning full-time educators into scholarly practitioners! Going through a program focused on our sphere of influence through Improvement Science was invaluable and truly made a difference in my ability to impact education and educators! Keep up the GREAT work! To our **cohort** and my accountability partner, **Dr. Emily McCanney**: WE DID IT!

To my **Cheering Squad** around the country via NAELPA, CCSSO, La Cosecha, NABE, CarABE, Carolina TESOL, WIDA, etc. your encouragement kept me going when I wanted to scream, quit, run away, stay in bed in a fetal position, add your own (circle all that apply)!

Finally, to the most important people in this work, the **participants! Pilot Participants**, you were key to germinating the seed of my idea and growing it into a strong sapling. Your expert skill set as educators, material developers, professional learning facilitators, educational leaders, researchers, and trusted friends allowed me to put you in dual roles as participants and editors. What a gift you gave me by volunteering your time for this work.

Inquiry Participants B and C, you are the heart of this work. When our lives intersected, we could not have imagined it would lead to such impactful growth in self-realization and agency as educators, individuals, and collectively as a forest. Your commitment and vulnerability built deep roots which allowed the research to go much wider and deeper than I imagined possible in such a short time. I learned so much from you as you shared your different perspectives and approaches to constructing your trees. The power of your insights and revelations are not adequately addressed within the pages of this document, giving us cause for

more collaboration! Thank you for helping me grow as a scholarly practitioner, PL developer/facilitator, and human being! Short of finishing the dissertation, co-presenting with the two of you at La Cosecha and seeing your continued passion for the ToL PL experience was the highlight of the EdD process. Hearing that you have made the ToL a permanent part of your professional and personal lives through ongoing reflective practices encourages me to share it with the world!

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	i
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	1
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	2
Background of the Focus of Practice.....	3
Context of the Inquiry.....	5
Statement of the Focus of Practice.....	6
Focus of Practice Inquiry Questions.....	7
Overview of the Inquiry.....	8
Collaborative Inquiry Partners.....	13
Conceptual Framework.....	14
Definition of Key Terms.....	14
Assumptions.....	15
Scope and Delimitations.....	16
Limitations.....	17
Significance of Inquiry.....	18
Advancing Equity and Social Justice.....	18
Advances in Practice.....	21
Summary.....	21
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	23
Conceptual Framework.....	23
Professional Learning.....	24
Teacher Agency.....	29
Tree of Life Narrative Approach.....	33
Multilingual Learner Legislation and Policy.....	37
Impact of Policy on Practice.....	40
Preparing Educators to Work with Multilingual Learners.....	41
Requirements for Working with Multilingual Learners.....	41
Pre-Service Teacher Preparation for Working with MLs.....	42

In-Service Teacher Support for Working with MLs	43
Additional Supports for MLs	44
Teacher Agency	45
Teacher Agency and Bias	46
Agency and Professional Learning	47
Summary	50
CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY	52
Inquiry Questions	52
Inquiry Design and Rationale	54
The Tree of Life Approach	55
Context of the Inquiry	58
Inquiry Participants	59
Collaborative Inquiry Partners	60
Ethical Considerations	61
Inquiry Procedures	62
Phase I	62
Phase II	76
Phase III	87
Inquiry Design Rigor	90
Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions	92
Delimitations	92
Limitations	92
Assumptions	93
Role of the Scholarly Practitioner	94
Summary	95
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	96
Pilot Study	97
Demographics	97
Intervention and Implementation	99
Data Collection	102
Inquiry Question 1	102
Inquiry Question 2	104
Data Analysis	104

Inquiry Question 1	104
Inquiry Question 2	105
Use of AI.....	105
Results.....	106
Inquiry Question 1	106
Narrative Analysis	124
Addressing Researcher Bias and Ensuring Validity	147
Member Checking and Sustained Impact	147
Reflection.....	147
Summary.....	149
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS	152
Overview of the Inquiry.....	152
Summary of the Findings.....	153
Interpretation of Findings	155
Limitations	160
Implications for Practice	160
Implications for Equity and Social Justice.....	162
Implications for Policy.....	163
Recommendations for Future Study	164
Conclusions.....	166
REFERENCES	167
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	183
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM	184
APPENDIX C: TREE OF LIFE PL OUTLINE.....	187
APPENDIX D: TREE OF LIFE JOURNAL TEMPLATE	203
APPENDIX E: TREE OF LIFE RESEARCHER JOURNAL TEMPLATE.....	208
APPENDIX F: RESEARCHER TREE OF LIFE	214
APPENDIX G: RESEARCH CRYSTALIZATION.....	215
APPENDIX H: INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE	216
APPENDIX I: FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE	221
APPENDIX J: AI USE ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	227
APPENDIX K: CODE BOOK.....	228

LIST OF TABLES

1. Federal Legislation Impacting the Education of Multilingual Learners.....	37
2. Tree of Life Adaptations.....	64
3. Questionnaire Groupings and Purpose	69
4. Participant Demographics.....	99
5. Research Concerns with Change in Participants	100
6. Pre-Post Shifts in Perceived Agency Across Ten Dimensions.....	106
7. Magnitude of Agency Shifts by Dimension	108
8. Pre-Post Shifts in Perceived Influence Over ML-Related Outcomes.....	109
9. Pre-Post Beliefs About ML Student Capabilities	110
10. ToL Component Impact: Participant Selection and Explanation	112
11. Overall Impact Rating and Self-Assessment	113
12. Self-Reported Impact Mechanisms.....	114
13. Evidence of Agency Development: Data Triangulated with Action	116
14. Inquiry Question 1: Evidence Summary.....	117
15. Code Frequency Comparative Analysis by Participant	118
16. Theme 1: Resilience within Contextual Constraints - Codes to Themes	120
17. Theme 2: Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience- Codes to Themes.....	121
18. Thematic Presence Across Data Sources.....	122
19. Implications and Actions	157

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Participants' attribution of agency over the course of the dialogic inquiry	9
2. Intersectionality of teacher agency, professional learning, and the Tree of Life narrative approach.....	24
3. The roadmap for professional learning.....	26
4. Building teacher professional agency through transformative professional learning.....	27
5. Definition of professional agency within a subject-centered socio-cultural framework	29
6. Standards for professional learning (SPL).....	30
7. How standards lead to improvement for all learners	31
8. Five awarenesses of the teaching framework	33
9. Narrative therapy: Growing agency through stories.....	34
10. Collective Tree of Life.....	48
11. Multiple PDSA cycles across phases for continuous improvement	55
12. Phase I improvement-based inquiry timeline	63
13. Phase II improvement-based inquiry timeline	76
14. Crystallization for a deeper understanding of teacher identity and agency	84
15. Phase III improvement-based inquiry timeline.....	87

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, demographics in U.S. K–12 classrooms have shifted significantly, with more than five million multilingual learners (MLs) enrolled nationwide (Flores Peña et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2023). MLs represent a heterogeneous group, bringing diverse linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds as well as varying levels of English proficiency (Gunderson, 2020; Kibler et al., 2018; Martinez, 2018; Umansky et al., 2022). Despite this diversity, pre-service coursework and in-service professional learning (PL) often vary widely in their approach to ML education (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). As a result, many teachers report feeling underprepared, which can foster deficit-oriented perspectives, lowered expectations (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017), and frustration when attempting to meet rigorous state and federal instructional mandates (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Civil Rights Act, 1964; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; Molla & Nolan, 2020; NCP Test-011, 2022; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

Traditional ML-focused PL often emphasizes language-specific strategies and instructional methods, while overlooking the personal and professional beliefs teachers bring to their practice (Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Teacher self-awareness and perceptions of agency are rarely considered essential components of classroom practice (Biesta et al., 2015; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Palmer & Martínez, 2013). However, research demonstrates that teacher agency can be strengthened through dialogical and narrative approaches, which foster self-awareness and promote equity in the classroom (Imperiale et al., 2021; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Of particular interest is the Tree of Life (ToL), a narrative approach that has been adapted for educational contexts and shows promise in supporting teachers of MLs (Denborough, 2014; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006; Rice, 2015).

Personal and professional beliefs teachers bring to their practice (Wallen & Tormey, 2019), such as a feeling of unpreparedness for working with MLs, deficit-oriented perspectives, and lowered expectations (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017), may be offset by the ToL narrative approach (Denborough, 2014; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006; Rice, 2015). Self-reflection through a non-traditional approach to PL can foster self-awareness, grow a sense of teacher agency in working with MLs, and promote equity in the classroom (Imperiale et al., 2021; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Wallen & Tormey, 2019).

Given this backdrop, the remainder of this chapter introduces and elaborates on growing teacher agency through non-traditional PL. It includes a background on the Focus of Practice, Context of the Inquiry, Statement of Focus of Practice, Practice Inquiry Questions, Overview of Inquiry, Inquiry Partners, Conceptual Framework, Definition of Key Terms, Assumptions, Scope and Delimitations, Limitations, Significance of Inquiry, Advancing Equity and Social Justice, Advances in Practice, and Summary.

Background of the Focus of Practice

Students identified as “English learners” (ELs) under federal definitions are frequently viewed through a deficit lens, as the term emphasizes what students have not yet mastered, English (Arias, 2022; Byfield, 2019; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) defines ELs by age, school enrollment, birthplace or language background, and level of English proficiency. In recent years, many states and organizations have adopted the term “multilingual learners” (MLs) to highlight students’ linguistic and cultural assets rather than their perceived deficits. WIDA (2019) clarifies that MLs encompass not only federally identified ELs but also students in dual language immersion programs, heritage language classes, and speakers of Indigenous or non-standard English varieties. As a WIDA consortium member,

NCDPI adopted the term MLs in March 2022 (Hemphill-Josephs, 2022). In this dissertation, I use MLs to refer to students federally identified as ELs, except when citing published titles or quotations.

Despite steady growth in the ML population nationwide (Flores Peña et al., 2023; NCDPI, 2021; Thompson et al., 2023), challenges persist in providing equitable education. Federal legislation guarantees access to content through non-discriminatory practices (Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981; Civil Rights Act, 1964; Lau v. Nichols, 1974; Plyler v. Doe, 1982). Access, however, does not equal opportunity, nor is it equated with achievement, as the achievement gaps reveal. For example, the 2016–2018 Biennial Report to Congress documents that MLs scored lower, on average, than their peers in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science (USED, 2021).

Meeting legal requirements for MLs is complicated by the wide variation in student needs (Gunderson, 2020; Kibler et al., 2018; Martinez, 2018; Umansky et al., 2022) and teacher preparation. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) differ substantially in their training for pre-service teachers and support for in-service educators, often failing to adequately prepare them to serve MLs (López & Santibañez, 2018; Rafa et al., 2020; Wessels et al., 2017). Most ML students are immersed in English-only classrooms for the majority of the school day and are often subject to an ineffective “one size fits all” approach to classroom instruction and services (Byfield, 2019; Umansky et al., 2022). Given the continued growth of the ML population, it is increasingly likely that all teachers will encounter MLs in their classrooms (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018).

Research points to the prospect of traditional, skills-based PL increasing teacher effectiveness with MLs, yet teachers may still lack the specific skills and understanding needed

to meet the academic and linguistic needs of MLs in their classrooms (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Echevarria et al., 2023; Gándara et al., 2005). Even when teachers receive skills-based PL, many continue to view MLs through a deficit lens, focusing on what students cannot yet do rather than their potential (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017). This mindset is often reinforced by feelings of unpreparedness and lack of agency (Byfield, 2019; Gunderson, 2020; Martinez, 2018). Strengthening teachers' belief in their own capacity has been shown to influence both professional identity and student outcomes positively (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Molla & Nolan, 2020). Teacher agency encompasses understanding MLs' linguistic, cultural, and socio-emotional needs, confidence in addressing those needs, and the ability to advocate for effective instructional practices.

This inquiry employed a narrative inquiry design to examine teachers' sense of agency through self-reflection on their instructional environments and practices with multilingual learners (MLs). Using the metaphor of a tree and a narrative approach to professional learning (PL), the Tree of Life (ToL) framework guided participants through structured reflection, personal discovery, and re-storying (Denborough, 2014; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006). Participants engaged in initial and final questionnaires, developed graphic ToL representations, and participated in discussions and journaling to articulate their perceptions of agency and its impact on their personal and professional lives. In parallel, I engaged in ToL development and journaling to reflect on the inquiry's influence on scholarly practice.

Context of the Inquiry

In 2023, this dissertation inquiry was initially designed to combine the traditional PL offered during a grant workshop with the ToL PL to gauge the perceived growth in teacher agency in working with MLs, helping them better understand themselves, their context, and the

students through a narrative reflection process. The shift in the political climate regarding ML education in early 2025, state-mandated LETRS training (NCDPI, 2023a), along with personal and professional changes among educators, led to the unavailability of most of the twelve targeted grant teacher-researchers.

Although only one of the twelve invited grant teacher-researchers participated, this provided an opportunity to broaden the inquiry's scope and strengthen its focus. The recruitment criteria were expanded to include a non-grant teacher, and the project was reconceptualized as a narrative inquiry centered on international teachers teaching in third-grade dual language/immersion (DL/I) classrooms in a southeastern state. This shift enriched the inquiry by engaging participants with substantial experience as MLs and in supporting MLs in their classrooms. Working closely with two participants enabled deeper exploration of each topic, producing richer, more nuanced descriptions of the ToL PL experience. The smaller participant group also fostered stronger relationships and allowed more time for meaningful, synchronous reflection.

Statement of the Focus of Practice

This inquiry focused on the impact of professional learning (PL) designed to foster teacher agency and examined how enhanced agency influences equitable education for MLs. Given persistent concerns about teachers' limited preparation and confidence in serving MLs (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Imperiale et al., 2021; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018; Wallen & Tormey, 2019), I explored teachers' sense of agency through an adapted ToL approach turned into non-traditional PL.

Focus of Practice Inquiry Questions

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore self-reflection as a tool to enhance teacher agency in working with MLs via a non-traditional narrative-based approach to PL. Participating in the ToL PL, teachers reflected on their challenges and successes in providing equitable education for MLs in third-grade DL/I classes.

Improvement science provides an ideal foundation for this education-based inquiry, given its rapid and iterative approach to change and focus on continuous improvement. Educators are often exposed to change with little to no systematic approach for determining its impact (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). I incorporated the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle of improvement to provide a process for conducting and refining the inquiry, thereby facilitating professional growth opportunities for teachers of MLs (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020). Within improvement science, multiple PDSA cycles allow for continuous improvement across and within phases and answer the three essential questions: (1) What are we trying to accomplish?; (2) how will we know that change is an improvement?; and (3) what change can we make that will result in an improvement? (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 152). Addressing these questions serves to drive the improvement process and, for the purpose of this inquiry, helps operationalize agency growth.

The following questions and sub-questions guided this improvement science-based inquiry:

1. What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life (ToL) Professional Learning (PL) on teacher agency?
 - a. How do teachers perceive changes in their sense of agency after participating in the ToL PL?

- b. What elements of the ToL PL do teachers perceive as contributing to these changes?
- 2. How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?
 - a. As a scholarly practitioner?
 - b. As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?

These questions guided the inquiry into the focus of my practice. The inquiry considered each teacher as an individual and then collaboratively, utilizing the ToL narrative approach to PL as its intervention and data collection tool. This inquiry considered the impact of a narrative approach to PL as an addition to traditional skill or methods-based PL, which often focuses on the needs of the learners without considering teachers' skills and context (Biesta et al., 2015; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Wallen & Tormey, 2019).

Exploring the impact of the inquiry on myself as a scholarly practitioner and developer/facilitator of PL served to inform the work in an ongoing and cumulative way. Reflecting upon my perceptions and actions throughout the process, as my knowledge and experience grew with the ToL PL, I gained insights into both professional and personal growth opportunities.

Overview of the Inquiry

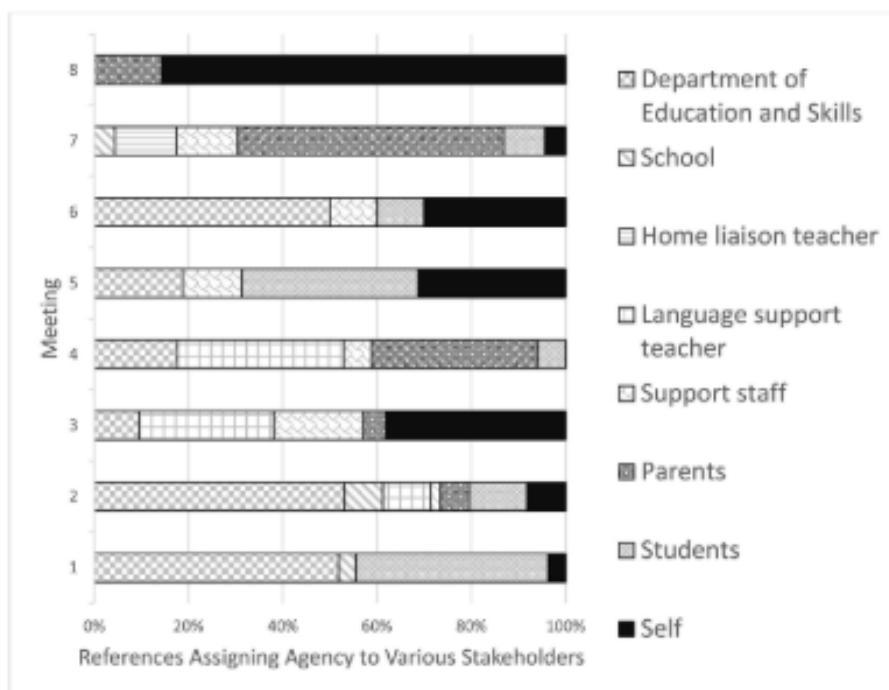
The literature review highlighted two studies that employed self-reflection as a central component of teacher professional learning (PL), rather than focusing solely on strategies and methodologies. Wallen and Tormey (2019) adopted a dialogic approach that encouraged teachers to integrate their personal experiences and professional judgment with formally taught skill sets. This narrative-based approach contrasts with traditional PL models and has been shown to strengthen teacher agency, thereby enhancing the application of instructional strategies (Biesta et

al., 2015; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). This research, conducted in Ireland, highlights a unique approach to utilizing what teachers bring to the classroom and how it can be shaped through guided self-exploration. As shown in Figure 1, the dark bar shows how participants' attribution of agency shifted considerably throughout the inquiry, culminating in a greater realization of the control they possessed (Wallen & Tormey, 2019).

Similarly, Imperiale et al. (2021) employed an adapted Tree of Life (ToL) process, initially developed for trauma therapy, to investigate teacher agency among English as a foreign language teachers across five countries. This narrative-based PL framework invited participants to reflect on their past (roots), strengths and capabilities (trunk), and aspirations (branches and leaves). Although the approach did not emphasize teaching skills, it nonetheless fostered increased teacher agency within classrooms and communities, as evidenced by participant reflections and interviews. Imperiale et al. (2021) identified four themes emerging from participants' reflections:

1. Education as a tool for transformation and social change;
2. Engagement both within and beyond the education system to enact change;
3. The importance of sustaining teacher motivation, particularly in challenging contexts, through collaboration; and
4. Identity as a relational, dynamic process of change (p. 18).

For this inquiry, I expanded the framework to include components from Ncube's (2006) original design, such as the ground, bugs, and storms, and adjusted its length to accommodate the participants' needs. I also added a journaling component to document reflections, aligning with narrative-based PL practices. This adaptation emphasized teacher self-discovery, a deeper understanding of working with MLs, and the cultivation of agency.



Note. (Wallen & Tormey, 2019)

Figure 1. Participants' attribution of agency over the course of the dialogic inquiry.

By examining teachers' awareness of biases, dominant self-stories, and the linguistic and cultural diversity of students, the modified ToL PL aimed to deepen understanding of agency and promote equity in ML education (Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006; Palmer & Martínez, 2013). This process had immediate implications for third-grade dual language immersion teachers in North Carolina and holds potential for broader application among educators of MLs. To address the guiding questions, I employed a convergent mixed-methods design with a purposive sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Mertler, 2022). Both participants completed quantitative and qualitative components. Collaborative inquiry partners contributed to the development of questionnaires and ToL adaptations for the PL. I chose to structure the inquiry around the improvement science Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) model (Perry et al., 2020), implemented in three phases.

Phase I included collaboration with CIPs to adapt and design questions for the initial and final questionnaires, as well as to refine the ToL PL framework to serve as the change model. Recruitment for a pilot study occurred in April and May 2024 to test materials prior to finalizing the inquiry design. The pilot consisted of five sessions held between May 14 and May 30, 2024. Participants served as CIPs, offering feedback on questionnaire design, materials development, and PL facilitation. In June 2024, I reviewed pilot materials and data, analyzing individual stories and themes. Based on CIP feedback, materials were revised. In July, I reconvened with pilot CIPs to review and finalize questionnaires, ToL PL, journals, and recruitment materials prior to defending my proposal.

Phase II began with the defense of my inquiry proposal in September 2024, followed by the preparation of the IRB application. Working with my committee chair and professor, I drafted and edited the application, which was submitted on December 16, 2024. The IRB was

approved without revisions on January 5, 2025. Recruitment of grant teacher-researchers began with the distribution of official invitation emails on January 5, 2025. The interest sessions were held on January 8 and January 23. By January 26, two teacher-researchers had signed consent forms, though one later withdrew. On February 1, participation requirements were adjusted to remove the grant affiliation requirement, and a non-grant educator was recruited.

The initial questionnaire was administered before the first session, establishing baseline data and informing guiding questions for PL sessions. Four ToL PL sessions were held between February 12 and March 26, 2025. In parallel, I created a researcher ToL and completed a researcher journal between sessions. Data from ToL session transcripts and journals were analyzed using narrative analysis (Goodson, 2013; Nasheeda et al., 2019) and coded for themes (Saldaña, 2013). Given the richness of the data, a focus group was deemed unnecessary. A joint presentation proposal was submitted to the *La Cosecha Dual Language/Immersion Conference* in Albuquerque, NM. The presentation was accepted and presented in November 2025.

Phase III included further data analysis of the two questionnaires, journals, and PL sessions. Quantitative analysis examined Likert-scale item shifts between initial and final questionnaires, including magnitude coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Goodson, 2013; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2013). Open-ended responses underwent qualitative analysis focusing on evidence of growth and change in perceptions of ML student capabilities and self-reported agency. Concepts were triangulated within the questionnaire and across the questionnaire, transcripts, and journals. I collaborated with CIPs to identify additional dissemination opportunities and continued editing chapters in preparation for defense and graduation.

Collaborative Inquiry Partners

This dissertation inquiry was initially connected to a grant. However, shifts in the political climate surrounding ML education, state-mandated LETRS training (NCDPI, 2023a), changes in participant availability, and my retirement from a southeastern State Education Agency (SEA) resulted in limited involvement of most grant team members beyond the early phases of the work. The following section outlines the contributions of each collaborator during the dissertation process.

The grant team participated in regular grant meetings and advised on ways the dissertation inquiry could align with and extend the grant's goals, thereby enhancing understanding of the impact on teacher-researchers. Two members of the grant's Technical Working Group also served as collaborative inquiry partners (CIPs). One grant CIP continued as an informal advisor, while two joined my dissertation committee as external members.

In addition to grant partners, pilot participants served as CIPs. Current and volunteered as pilot participants and material editors. Each brought prior experience with MLs, lesson planning, professional development facilitation, and reflective practice, as well as personal connections with me. I systematically documented engagement with CIPs through meeting agendas and minutes, email correspondence, collaborative edits and comments in shared documents, and recorded meetings when applicable.

Dr. Imperiale, author of an adapted ToL process (Imperiale et al., 2021), and I met to discuss the origins of her work, methodological adaptations, coding strategies, and the implications for this inquiry. These discussions also informed adaptations to the ToL approach to PL used in this inquiry, including the addition of a journaling component.

Conceptual Framework

Literature across professional learning (PL), educator agency, and the Tree of Life (ToL) narrative approach suggests that when educators have the freedom to guide their own learning through context and self-reflection, agency growth occurs (Denborough, 2014; Learning Forward, 2022; Imperiale et al., 2021; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rice, 2015). Identifying agency as a common theme across these complementary fields prompted the question of whether combining these theories and approaches could yield stronger outcomes, particularly in examining the impact of PL on teachers of MLs and their agency in directing and applying their learning.

The conceptual framework for this inquiry integrates three domains: (a) professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rodman, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020), (b) teacher agency and professional practice (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imperiale et al., 2021; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018; Molla & Nolan, 2020), and (c) narrative therapy (Denborough, 2014; Rice, 2015), specifically the ToL approach (Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006). This framework and the intersection of these concepts are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Definition of Key Terms

Several key terms are used throughout the inquiry and are defined as follows:

Agency (Teacher) - Defined by Imants and Van der Wal (2020) as a model built on five characteristics: (1) teachers as actors, (2) dynamic relationships, (3) contextualized PL and reform, (4) variable content, and (5) cyclical outcomes. For this inquiry, I adapted agency to mean teachers' perceptions of:

- their understanding of MLs' linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, and academic needs;

- their confidence in addressing those needs; and
- their ability to communicate effective methods of supporting MLs to others

Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) - Programs delivering content in two languages. Two-way programs include both native speakers of English and the partner language, while one-way programs primarily serve MLs (Collier & Thomas, 2017; NCDPI, n.d.-a,b).

English Language Development - Instruction designed to develop English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills for multilingual learners (WIDA, 2020).

Multilingual Learners - Students who use languages in addition to English, including newcomers, students with interrupted formal schooling (SIFE), long-term English learners (L-TEs), English learners with disabilities, gifted MLs, and students with English as an additional language (Hemphill-Josephs, 2022; WIDA, 2020).

Tree of Life approach - A strength-based narrative tool originally used in therapy, later adapted for research and PL contexts (Ncube, 2006; Imperiale et al., 2021).

WIDA - An organization of 42 states, territories, and agencies advancing academic language development and achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse students through standards, assessments, research, and professional learning (WIDA, 2020).

Assumptions

Roberts (2019) emphasizes that assumptions are inherent to an inquiry and should be explicitly addressed. Four assumptions guided this inquiry:

1. Teachers would participate fully in the inquiry through consistent attendance, in-depth self-reflection, and application of new insights.
2. Teachers would respond openly and honestly, supported by relationships established through prior grant work (NCDPI, n.d.-c) or initial inquiry activities.

3. The ToL PL would serve as an effective tool, enhancing the application of existing skills through narrative-based reflection (Biesta et al., 2015; Wallen & Tormey, 2019).
4. Dialogical and narrative approaches to PL, which have been shown to increase teacher agency in similar contexts (Imperiale et al., 2021; Wallen & Tormey, 2019), would likely yield comparable results in this inquiry.

Scope and Delimitations

My background in psychology, coaching, and management informed the inquiry's emphasis on self-reflection and agency. Prior studies demonstrate that dialogical and narrative approaches to PL foster educator self-discovery and positively impact work with MLs (Imperiale et al., 2021; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). This inquiry provided an opportunity to adapt the ToL approach (Imperiale et al., 2021; Lock, 2016; Mrema, 2023; Ncube, 2006; Wallen & Tormey, 2019), apply principles of improvement science (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Lewis, 2015), connect the work to the grant (NCDPI, n.d.-c), and develop an approach which aligns with my life philosophy and my Luminary Insights Life Coaching. Bringing these aspects of my work together more effectively to meet the needs of MLs and their educators was the culmination of years of experience and the beginning of a new phase in my role as an educator and coach.

To delimit the scope of this inquiry, the following boundaries were established:

- The inquiry took place during the spring 2024 - 2025 semester.
- Participation included two third-grade teachers, one who worked in Study 2 of the grant and one who did not.
- Participants could work in a Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) or non-DL/I program.

- The inquiry had no delimitations regarding participants' gender, length of teaching experience or amount of experience working with MLs.

Although these boundaries limited the participant pool, the inquiry did not undermine the analytic integrity of the inquiry. The two educators represented diverse experiences with skills-based PL, grant and non-grant training, and varying numbers of MLs in their classrooms. These attributes reflected the broader teaching environment in the southeastern state at the time. Baseline data, intervention analysis, and post-intervention responses allowed examination of change regardless of participants' starting points.

Limitations

Twelve teacher-researchers involved in the grant were invited to participate in this inquiry. Participation was voluntary, and ultimately, only one grant educator elected to join. To broaden the sample, an additional educator outside the grant work was included. The teachers were self-selected from a limited pool of candidates. Sessions were conducted virtually to accommodate participants' geographic distribution.

Another limitation was the restricted timeframe. The inquiry consisted of four two-hour sessions conducted over one semester, supplemented by initial and final questionnaires and the option of a follow-up focus group. The demands on elementary teachers in the state included shifts in the political climate surrounding ML education, and state-mandated training further constrained participant availability. All elementary teachers were required to complete over 40 hours of Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training (NCDPI, 2023a). Neither of these limitations was under my control.

Imperiale et al. (2021) emphasized that adapted ToL inquiries are most effective when designed as long-term engagements to foster trust and relationships. Although this inquiry was limited in duration, the relationships established during the grant and reinforced in the initial ToL PL session mitigated the time constraints.

Significance of Inquiry

Grounded in improvement science, this inquiry offers meaningful implications for preparing educators of MLs through narrative-based PL approaches that center on teacher knowledge and context. By fostering teacher agency, the approach aimed to influence educators' perceptions of themselves and their capacity to support MLs (Imperiale et al., 2021; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). The potential impact extends beyond teachers to ML students, families, and communities (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018).

Cultivating teacher agency is essential. Agency enables teachers to scaffold learning effectively and provide rigorous academic instruction (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Short, 2017; Wessels et al., 2017). Equal access to curriculum, as mandated by ESSA (2015), requires both confidence and skill in working with MLs. Although the state offers over 200 DL/I programs, most MLs spend the majority of the school day in English-only classrooms. Strengthening teacher agency across contexts, DL/I and non-DL/I, promotes equity in ML education (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). Equipping teachers to pursue equity and social justice for MLs is expected to positively influence student achievement (Arias, 2022; Warikoo et al., 2016).

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

Access, equity, and inclusion were central to this inquiry's examination of teacher agency in ML education. The grant principle of Access, Equity, and Inclusion affirms respect for

participants' backgrounds, identities, and expertise, and seeks to create inclusive environments that value diversity and promote equity in science education (NCDPI, n.d.-c). Although the grant work was not included in the inquiry as originally expected, these principles were integrated into the ToL PL design.

Persistent achievement gaps between MLs and their English-speaking peers (OELA, 2018) underscore the need to prepare teachers to address MLs' academic needs equitably (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Palmer & Martínez, 2013). Preparation must extend beyond skills and methodologies to include teachers' perceptions of themselves, their students, and their contexts. Deficit mindsets can lower expectations and restrict access to rigorous instruction (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017; WIDA, 2023). Conversely, asset-based perspectives that recognize student strengths and funds of knowledge foster equitable learning opportunities (González, et al., 2007; Arias, 2022).

The WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework, adopted in the state as the ELD Standard Course of Study (SCOS), embeds a social justice orientation by centering the needs of historically underserved ML populations (WIDA, 2020; WIDA, 2023). Designed for use by all teachers of MLs alongside content standards, the framework supports linguistic development while promoting equity. WIDA emphasizes its commitment to challenging linguistic discrimination, cultural bias, and racism in education, stating:

We are at a transformative time in education, and WIDA will continue to take an active role in challenging linguistic discrimination, cultural biases, and racism in education, by serving as a foundation for a community that uplifts and includes the voices of educators of multilingual learners (WIDA, 2023, p. 1).

As a WIDA state, the state in this inquiry adopted this philosophy, promoting social

justice and equitable education for MLs through intentional support for educators statewide. Through “ML Identification, Data Collection, and Reporting,” the state agency upholds the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Equal Rights Act (1974), which require public schools to provide equitable access to educational programs. Identification of ML students, classroom supports, and annual English language proficiency testing serve as mechanisms to ensure ongoing compliance and promote social justice (ESSA, 2015; NCP Test-011, 2022). These supports are designed to build educator skills through evidence-based approaches shared across the state.

While essential, skills alone are insufficient to shift deficit mindsets toward asset-based perspectives (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). This improvement science-based inquiry extended beyond skills, fostering teacher agency through self-reflection on teacher background, students, and context, with the expectation that raised self-awareness would increase agency and promote equitable approaches to ML education (Palmer & Martínez, 2013).

Studies examining teacher agency, such as those by Wallen & Tormey (2019), have found that dialogue and collaborative knowledge creation lead to growth in awareness of aspects of assumptions, instruction, and context that teachers can control. Palmer & Martinez indicated that helping teachers become aware of “interactional dynamics” could lead to better opportunities for increased equity in the classroom (2013, p 269). The results of these two studies, along with the work of Ncube (2006) and Imperiale et al. (2021) on the ToL approach, led to my inquiry design utilizing collective narrative as a form of PL to lead teachers through a discovery process exploring their practices and sense of agency.

Lock describes the ToL approach as “a psychosocial support tool underpinned by narrative therapy” (2016, p. 2). First implemented in Africa and later across the globe, the ToL

approach has been used to work with children and adults who have experienced trauma. The ToL approach has been adapted for use in other fields, including education, to address issues of social justice and equity (Imperiale et al, 2021; Lock, 2016; Ncube, 2006). The ToL approach, adapted into non-traditional PL, helps teachers become experts on themselves, discover or rediscover their existing strengths and skills, and develop new ones to make a difference in their understanding of their level of agency and act upon it (Denborough, 2014; Mrema, 2023).

Advances in Practice

Teachers often report that they lack sufficient preparation to meet the academic needs of their students (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018). Deficit mindsets (Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017) and diminished teacher agency (Molla & Nolan, 2020) further restrict MLs' access to rigorous instruction, even in DL/I settings. The ToL PL guided teachers in examining their beliefs and biases, uncovering strengths in themselves and their students (Imperiale et al., 2021; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Progression through the ToL PL raised awareness, strengthened agency, and fostered social justice-oriented approaches to student support (Mrema, 2023).

Integrating narrative-based self-discovery with traditional skills-focused PL has shifted teacher perspectives from deficit to asset-based orientations (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). This inquiry was an in-depth narrative approach focused on two third-grade DL/I teachers in a southeastern state. In the future, expanding the approach across grade levels and content areas may further advance equity in ML education and strengthen educators' social justice commitments.

Summary

Chapter 1 outlined the background and rationale for examining the impact of PL on teacher agency in ML education as a critical focus of practice. It introduced the inquiry's

context, collaborative partners, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, key definitions, and the narrative ToL approach (Lock, 2016; Mrema, 2023; Ncube, 2006). Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature, highlighting key research and identifies areas where knowledge gaps exist. Chapter 3 details the convergent mixed-methods design and tools employed in this inquiry. Chapter 4 presents data collection and analysis, while Chapter 5 discusses findings and offers recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore self-reflection as a tool to enhance teacher agency in working with MLs via a non-traditional narrative-based approach to PL. Participating in the ToL PL, teachers reflected on their challenges and successes in providing equitable education opportunities for MLs in third-grade Dual Language/ Immersion (DL/I) classes. The inquiry explored how participation in the ToL PL influenced teachers' perceptions of agency in supporting MLs.

This chapter offers an overview of the theoretical framework, followed by a review of landmark ML-related court cases and their impact on the field of education. Federal and state legislation ensuring MLs' access to education is then discussed. The chapter also examines teacher preparation, teacher agency in ML contexts, and the use of narrative therapy to support agency, concluding with exemplary practices and programs.

To adopt an assets-based perspective, this review uses the term multilingual learners (MLs) to refer to students federally identified as English learners (ELs), except in published titles or quotations (ESEA, 2015). While "EL" emphasizes what students have not yet mastered, English, "ML" highlights linguistic and cultural assets. WIDA (2019) defines MLs broadly to include ELs, students in DL/I and heritage programs, speakers of Indigenous languages, and users of English varieties. In March 2022, the state formally adopted the term MLs to replace ELs (Hemphill-Josephs, 2022). This dissertation follows the state definition.

Conceptual Framework

Literature across professional learning, educator agency, and the ToL narrative approach suggests that when educators are free to guide their own learning through context and self-reflection, growth in agency occurs (Denborough, 2014; Learning Forward, 2022; Imperiale et al., 2021; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rice, 2015). Identifying agency as a common theme across

these complementary fields prompted the question of whether combining these approaches could yield stronger outcomes in supporting teachers of MLs.

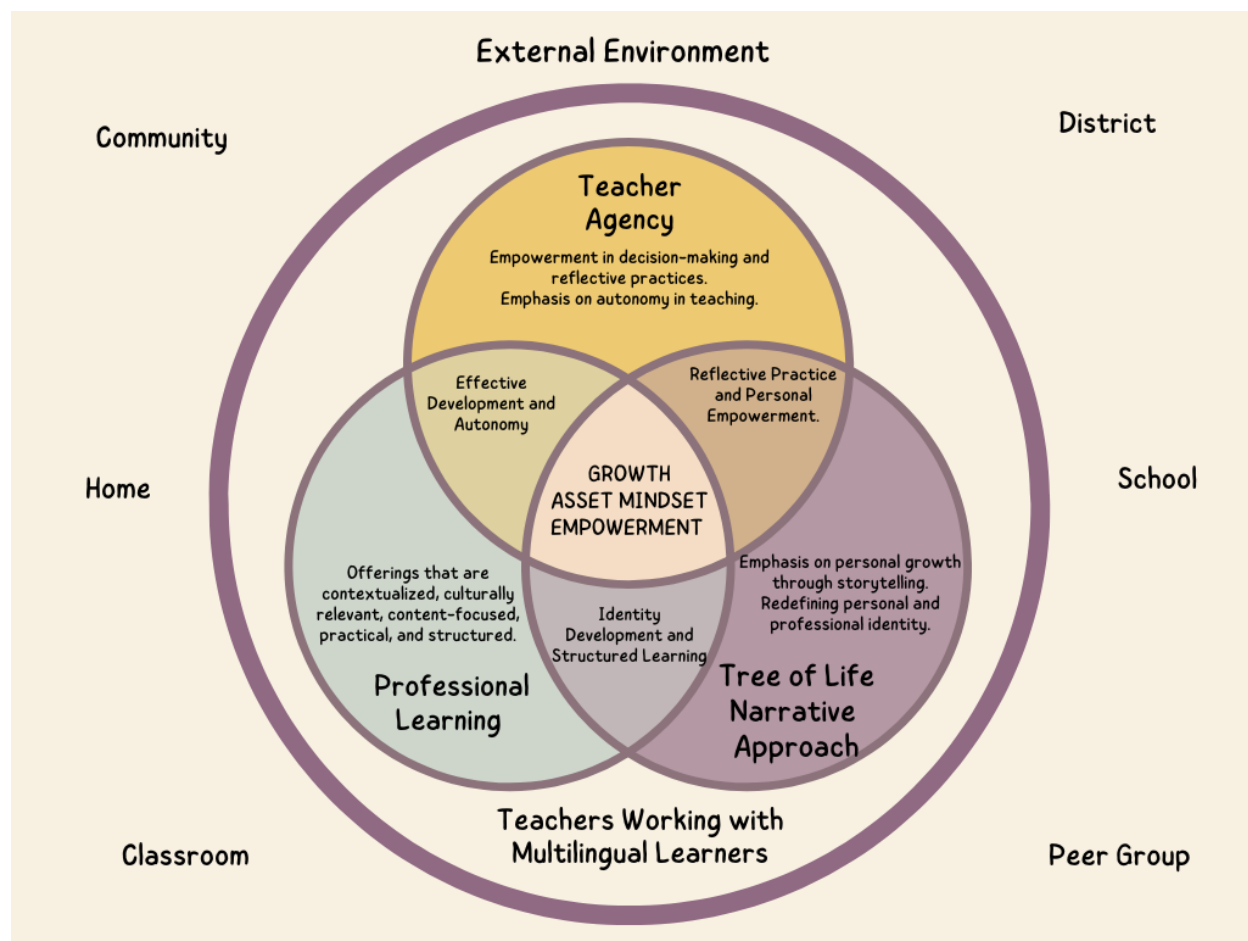
The conceptual framework for this inquiry (see Figure 2) integrates three domains: (a) professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rodman, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020), (b) teacher agency and professional practice (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imperiale et al., 2021; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018; Molla & Nolan, 2020), and (c) narrative therapy (Denborough, 2014; Rice, 2015), specifically the ToL approach (Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006).

The outer field of the framework represents the educator's external environment, including community, home, district, school, classroom, and peer group, all of which influence work with MLs. At the center of the framework is the educator's interaction with MLs. Three primary factors, PL, teacher agency, and the ToL approach, individually and collectively have the potential to foster teacher growth and empowerment.

Professional Learning

For teachers of multilingual learners (MLs), change is often introduced through professional learning (PL) designed to equip educators to meet the diverse needs of their students (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Leider et al., 2021; Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017). PL for ML education frequently draws on sociocultural strategies such as schematic building, scaffolding, cooperative learning, instructional conversations, identifying learners' zones of proximal development, leveraging students' funds of knowledge, multicultural education, and authentic assessment (Gottlieb, 2024; Lavadenz, 2011), alongside content-specific approaches.

While combinations of these strategies may be effective in some classrooms, their impact



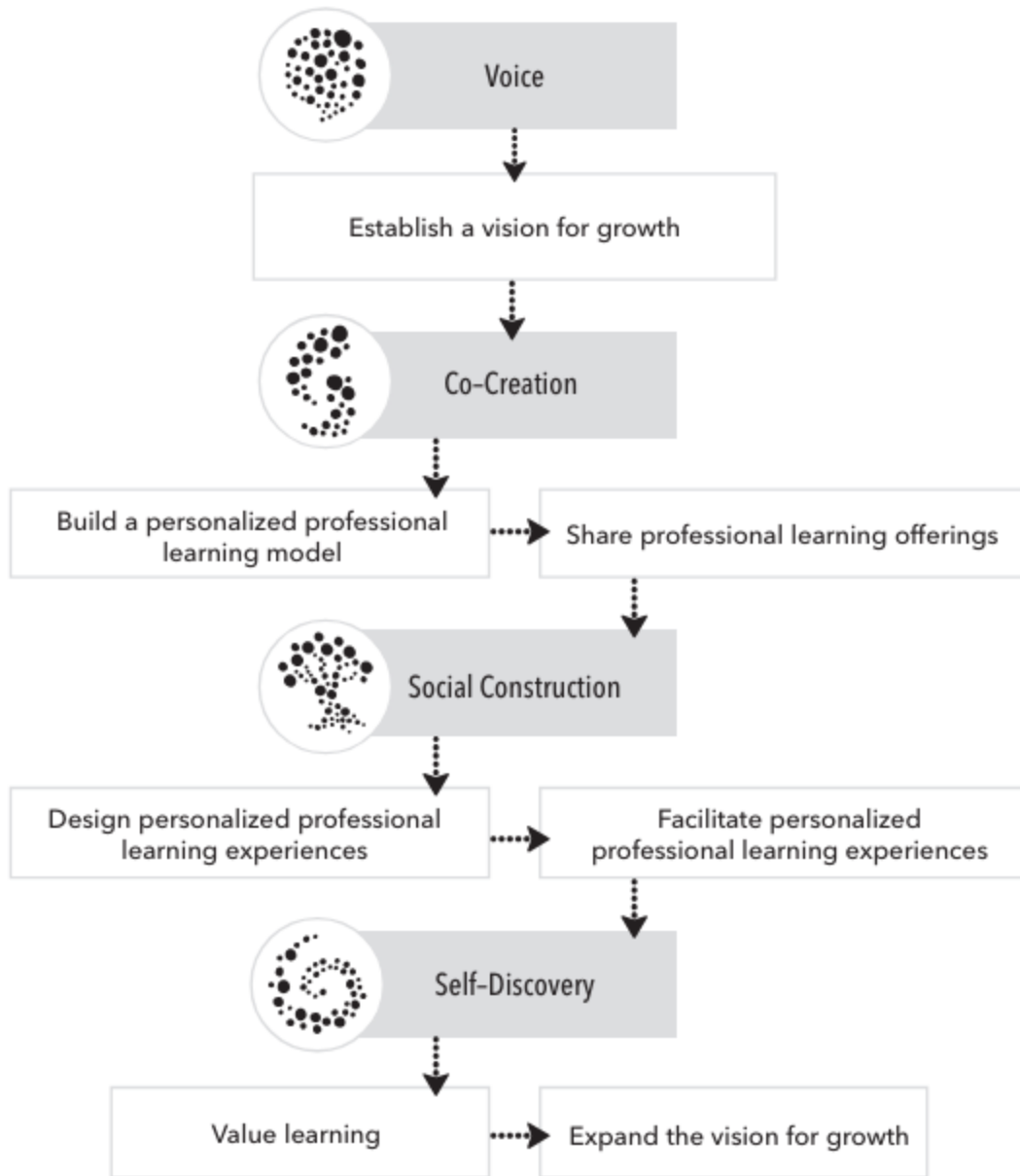
Note. (Denborough, 2014; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imperiale et al., 2021; Learning Forward, 2022; López & Santibañez, 2018; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rice, 2015; Rodman, 2019; Rodríguez et al., 2020).

Figure 2. Intersectionality of teacher agency, professional learning, and the Tree of Life Narrative approach.

varies depending on contextual factors such as student diversity, teacher background, and available instructional materials. This variability complicates the selection of PL that meets the needs of all educators (Guskey, 2024). Educators may also fixate on specific methods without considering contextual differences (Wong et al., 2024). The 2022 Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (SPL) emphasize the importance of contextualized learning goals alongside evidence-based approaches (Garrett et al., 2021; Learning Forward, 2022). Incorporating teacher voice in PL selection, an expression of agency, may address gaps identified in Garrett et al.'s (2021) meta-analysis, which highlighted the need for greater understanding of PL contexts.

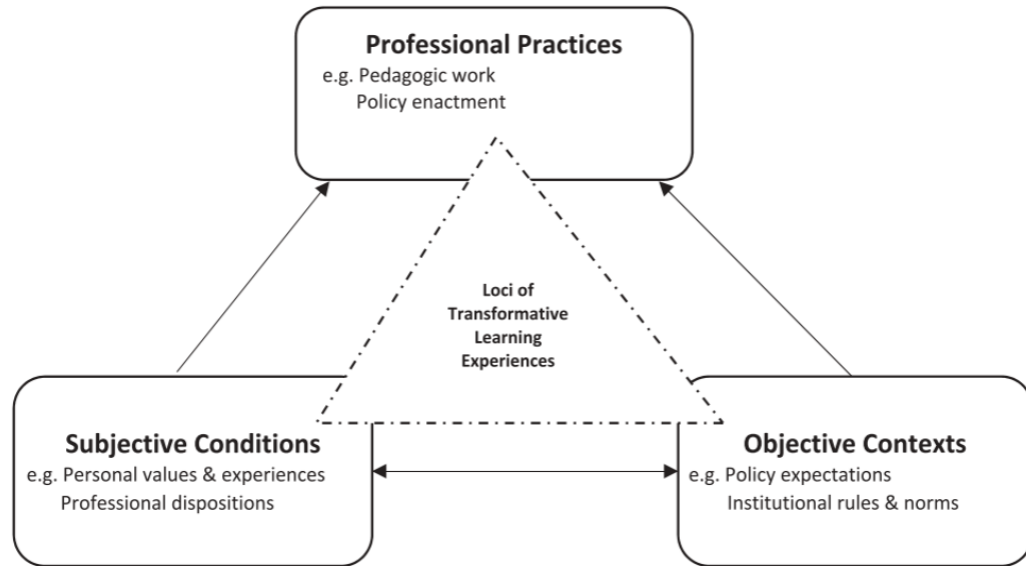
Several PL approaches and theories provide insights into processes that foster teacher agency (Learning Forward, 2022; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rodman, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020). Rodman's (2019) Roadmap for Personalized Professional Learning (RPPL) emphasizes teacher voice as the first step in the PL process. The model advances collaboration through co-creation and evaluation, incorporates social constructivist principles in PL delivery and support, and promotes self-discovery as a pathway to continued growth. Centering teacher voice in the co-creation of learning and embedding PL in context are essential for effective self-reflection (see Figure 3).

Molla and Nolan (2020) conceptualize teacher agency as transformative learning, represented within a pyramid of Subject Conditions, Object Contexts, and Professional Practices. They argue that PL must be embedded not only in context but also in teachers' lived experiences, knowledge, and identities. This perspective aligns with Biesta et al.'s (2015) view of the complex interactions among these factors and their relationship to agency (see Figure 4). Similarly, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) frame agency as an intersection of context and identity,



Note. (Rodman, 2019).

Figure 3. The roadmap for professional learning



Note. (Molla & Nolan, 2020).

Figure 4. Building teacher professional agency through transformative professional learning.

drawing on Biesta (2015) to emphasize reflection and self-direction in determining which aspects of PL to prioritize and apply (see Figure 5).

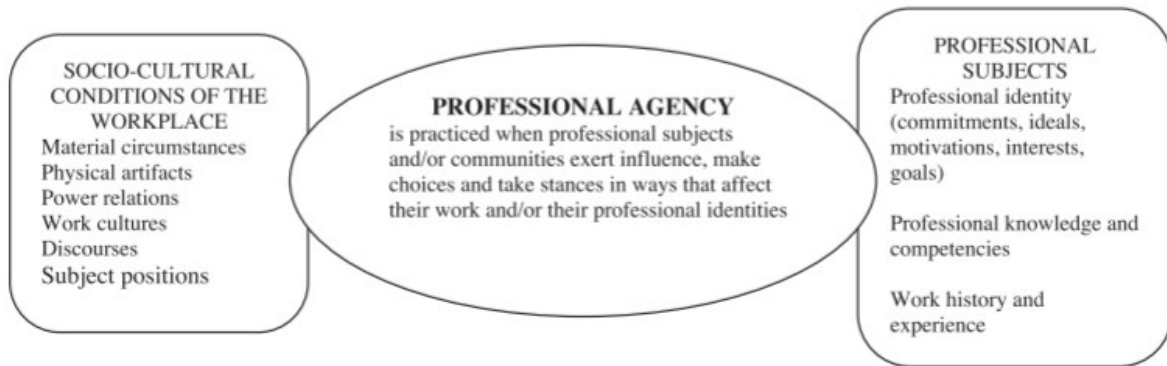
Professional learning for ML education often relies on sociocultural strategies such as scaffolding, cooperative learning, instructional conversations, and authentic assessment (Gottlieb & Honigsfeld, 2025; Guskey, 2024; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Lavadenz, 2011). While these strategies can be impactful, teachers are frequently excluded from decision-making regarding the PL they receive, limiting their agency in shaping professional growth (Molla & Nolan, 2020).

The Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards (2022) provide a tiered framework for building teacher agency through PL. The standards are organized into three categories: Rigorous Content for Each Learner, Conditions for Success, and Transformational Processes, each with subcategories (see Figure 6). Figure 7 illustrates the progression from standards to PL, leading to growth in educator knowledge, skills, and beliefs, the central focus of this inquiry.

Teacher Agency

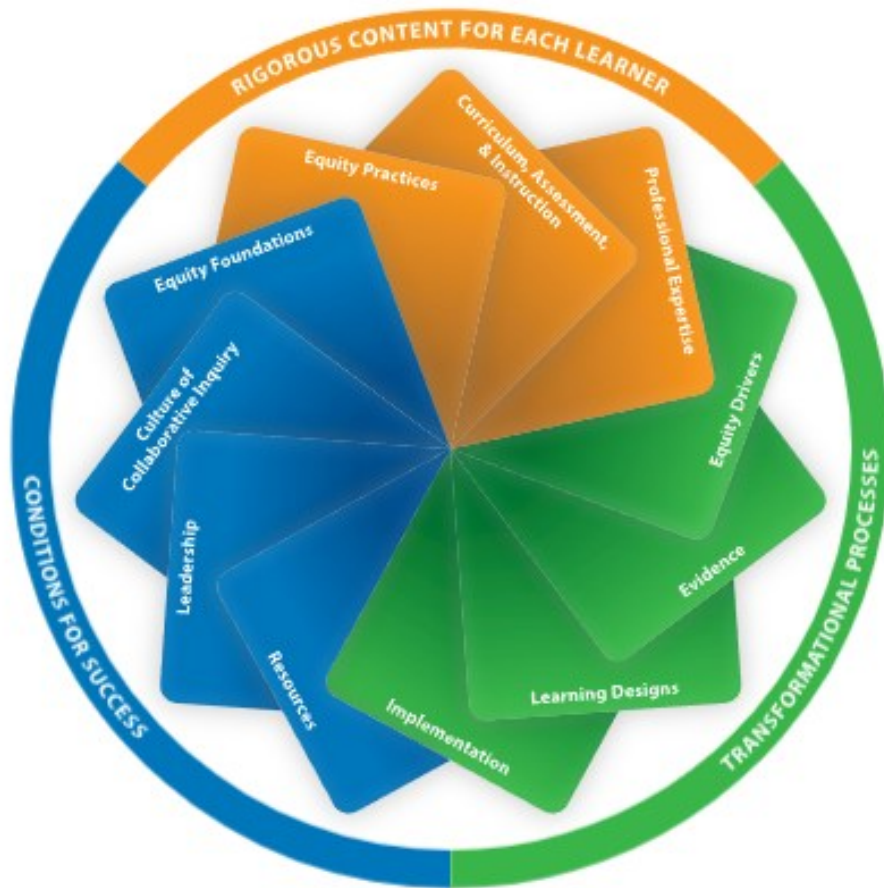
Molla and Nolan (2020) assert that “At the core of teacher professionalism is agency” (p. 68). They further explain that a freedom-based assessment of agency shifts the focus of professional learning (PL) from knowledge acquisition to voice and engagement, as expressed through teachers’ ability to articulate their preferences, advance their interests, and exert influence. Despite this, teachers are often denied agency in the form of choice or input regarding the PL they receive.

Rodriguez et al. (2020) highlight a lack of understanding of how teachers develop through PL, which hinders agency in meeting student needs. Their study, informed by Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), connects agency to multiple dimensions of teacher development. As



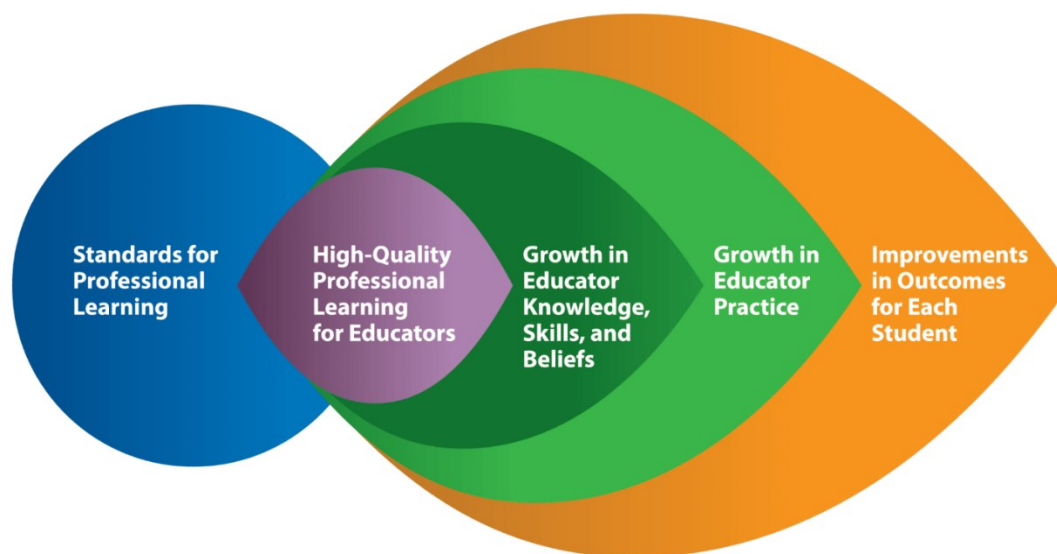
Note. (Eteläpelto et al., 2013)

Figure 5. Definition of professional agency within a subject-centered socio-cultural framework.



Note. (Learning Forward, 2022).

Figure 6. Standards for professional learning (SPL).



Note. (Learning Forward, 2022)

Figure 7. How standards lead to improvement for all learners.

illustrated in Figure 8, contextual factors form the foundation of the educational environment, with teacher competence and well-being at the center. Enhancing teacher agency, as depicted in the model, is critical to improving student outcomes.

For the purpose of this inquiry, agency is defined as teachers' perceptions of:

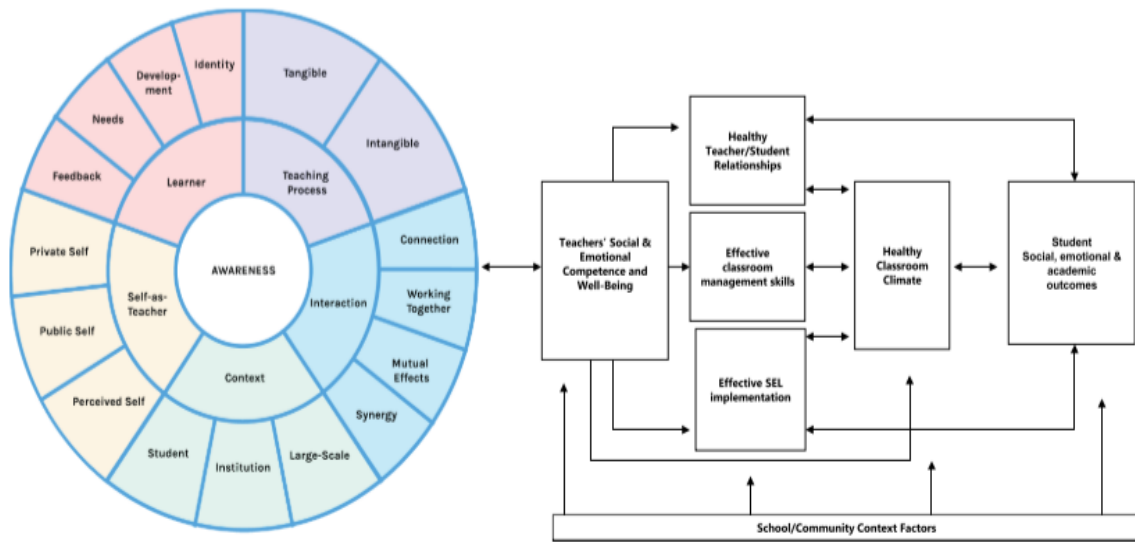
- their understanding of MLs' linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and related needs;
- their confidence in addressing those needs; and
- their ability to communicate effective methods of supporting MLs to others.

Tree of Life Narrative Approach

Human beings construct meaning through the narratives they tell about themselves. Dominant stories often emphasize problems and fail to capture the full complexity of one's identity. Narrative approaches aim to separate the person from the problem through *externalization* and to identify alternative stories that challenge or expand the dominant narrative (Denborough, 2018; Freedman & Combs, 2013; Rice, 2015). This process enables the recognition of multiple stories and possibilities, thereby strengthening agency (see Figure 9).

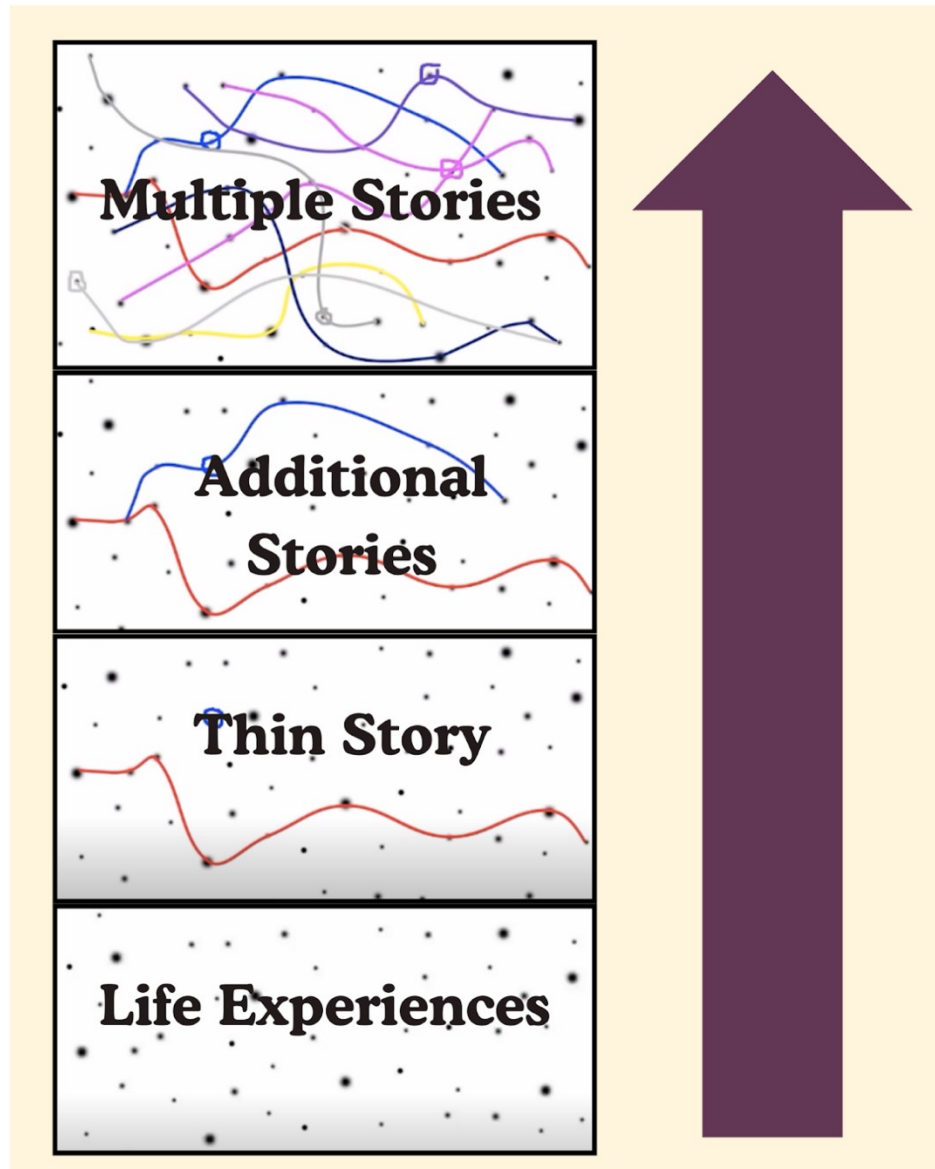
Narrative approaches are grounded in the idea that meaning is attributed to experiences through the stories individuals construct. These stories shape identity and influence how people perceive themselves and others (Lock, 2016). Approaches such as the Tree of Life (ToL) demonstrate that re-telling one's story allows individuals to "re-author" their lives, creating a "second story" that reflects chosen identities and aspirations (Lock, 2016; Ncube, 2006).

Applying self-reflection through the metaphorical components of a tree has been shown to foster growth in teacher agency when working with MLs (Imperiale et al., 2021). Imperiale's COVID-19 project, commissioned by the British Council, engaged ten early-career English



Note. (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Figure 8. Five awarenesses of the teaching framework.



Note. (Freedman & Combs, 2013).

Figure 9. Narrative therapy: Growing agency through stories.

teachers from Armenia, Brazil, Morocco, Nigeria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in three workshops using an adapted ToL framework. Each workshop focused on a different part of the tree: roots (past experiences), trunk (strengths and capabilities), and leaves/blossoms (dreams and aspirations).

Findings revealed that participants gained insights into their perceptions of agency as they progressed through the ToL framework. Four themes emerged:

1. education as a tool for transformation and social change;
2. engagement both within and beyond the education system to enact change;
3. sustaining teacher motivation, particularly in challenging contexts, through collaboration; and
4. identity as a relational, dynamic process of change (Imperiale et al., 2021, p. 18).

In follow-up interviews, participants emphasized the uniqueness of the project, noting that it focused on PL while simultaneously “recognizing and acknowledging their agency” (Imperiale et al., 2021, p. 19). Teachers reported feeling heard and valued both as individuals and as members of a community. Recommendations from the study emphasized the importance of establishing relationships, incorporating participants’ professional and personal contexts, and fostering a sense of community among participants. More details about the foundations of the ToL approach are included in Chapter 3.

Integrating the centrality of agency growth through PL and narrative therapy forms the foundation of this inquiry. Figure 2, the conceptual framework, illustrates the intersection of three bodies of research: teacher agency, PL, and the ToL narrative approach. Teacher agency encompasses empowerment in decision-making, reflective practice, and autonomy in the teaching process. PL involves contextualized, culturally relevant, content-focused, and structured

offerings. The ToL narrative approach emphasizes personal growth through storytelling, enabling the redefinition of personal and professional identity. At their intersection, empowerment and growth, conceptualized here as agency, emerge as the expected outcome (Denborough, 2014; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imperiale et al., 2021; Learning Forward, 2022; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rice, 2015; Rodman, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020).

An adapted version of the ToL was employed in this inquiry (see Appendix C). The PL Outline is designed to guide participants through self-reflection, encouraging awareness beyond “thin stories” and recognition of multiple narratives that shape identity.

Multilingual Learner Legislation and Policy

An overview of legislation and policy related to ML education provides essential context for understanding the need for teacher agency in serving this population. Presented chronologically, the following review highlights the persistent struggle to achieve equitable education despite decades of legislation intended to secure such outcomes (see Table 1).

Beginning in 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, and other factors (Civil Rights Act, 1964). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted in 1965, further advanced equality and access to education for all students (ESEA, 1965). Despite these progressive measures, inequities in access to curriculum, particularly for MLs, persist nearly sixty years later (Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981; Lau v. Nichols, 1974; Plyler v. Doe, 1982).

In 1982, a Texas statute denied state funding to students who were not in the country legally. The Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) overturned this statute, affirming that all children, regardless of immigration status, have the right to free public education. This ruling

Table 1

Federal Legislation Impacting the Education of Multilingual Learners

Year	Legislation/Case /Policy	Key Provisions	Implications for ML Education
1964	Title VII, Civil Rights Act	Prohibited discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, and other factors.	Established legal protections against discrimination but did not address how MLs would access curriculum or instruction equitably.
1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)	Expanded federal funding to promote equal access to education, particularly for students affected by poverty.	Increased access to schooling but did not resolve inequities in curriculum access or instructional quality for MLs.
1974	Lau v. Nichols	Ruled that equal treatment does not ensure equal educational opportunity; schools must address language barriers.	Affirmed the need for bilingual or language-supportive instruction but did not mandate specific programs, leaving implementation uneven.
1981	Castañeda v. Pickard	Established a three-prong test: programs for MLs must be based on sound theory, properly implemented, and evaluated.	Required program quality and accountability but allowed broad interpretation, increasing reliance on local leadership and teacher initiative.
1982	Plyler v. Doe	Guaranteed free public education to all children regardless of immigration status.	Ensured access to schooling for immigrant MLs but did not guarantee equitable access to content, instruction, or bilingual education.
2002	No Child Left Behind (NCLB)	Required MLs (then ELLs) to participate in state assessments and meet AMAOs and AYP.	Elevated attention to ML outcomes but imposed rigid accountability without sufficient research-based professional learning or evaluation strategies.
2015	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)	Maintained high expectations while granting states greater flexibility in assessment timing and growth targets for MLs.	Allowed states to adapt accountability systems to local contexts, supporting more responsive approaches to ML instruction.
2025	Federal Policy Shifts Affecting Title III	Delayed and uncertain funding for Title III; proposed restructuring or defunding of ML-focused programs.	Created instability in ML program administration, staffing, and oversight, increasing the need for teacher agency to sustain services.

was particularly significant for immigrant populations, including those from Mexico. However, the guarantee of free education did not ensure equitable access to content, effective instructional approaches, or bilingual education (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

A pivotal case, *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), determined that equal access to education does not equate to equitable accessibility. The Court emphasized the need for bilingual education as a means of accessing content. Similarly, *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) required that educational programs for MLs be based on sound theory, adequately implemented, and properly evaluated. Neither case mandated specific approaches or curricular materials, leaving implementation open to interpretation. Without teacher agency and initiative, MLs' needs often went unmet, resulting in inequitable services and additional litigation.

President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty expanded funding for school improvement through the ESEA of 1965. Subsequent reauthorizations sought to strengthen equitable education for MLs. The 2002 reauthorization, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), brought MLs, then referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs), into state-mandated assessments. MLs were required to meet Annual Measurable Objectives (AMAOs) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) alongside their English-proficient peers (NCLB, 2002). While this attention highlighted the need for equitable access, it also raised concerns about unrealistic expectations given the lack of research-based PL and evaluation strategies (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017).

Although NCLB elevated MLs as a subgroup requiring focused attention, its rigid accountability measures limited State Education Agencies' (SEAs) autonomy to adapt requirements to local contexts (NCLB, 2002). The subsequent reauthorization, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015), maintained high expectations for ML achievement but offered

greater flexibility. ESSA allowed states to delay testing for MLs to permit language acquisition and to set growth targets based on state-specific data.

Beginning in 2025, changes in national leadership initiated efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education and defund programs such as Title III, which specifically serve ML populations. Title III funding scheduled for release in July 2025 was delayed, resulting in the loss of ML-designated positions at the federal, state, and local levels. Although funding was eventually released one month later, no assurances exist for future allocations. Ongoing efforts to shift oversight of ML programs to other agencies have created instability in program administration and oversight.

Impact of Policy on Practice

The Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) Biennial Reports to Congress review state progress in ML language proficiency and content achievement. The 2016–2018 report indicated that MLs scored lower, on average, than all students in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science (USED, 2021). The 2018–2020 report, which was limited to 2018–2019 data due to COVID-19 waivers, showed similar results, with only one in five MLs proficient in science, compared to one in two students overall (USED, 2023).

Despite the availability of content, ELP, and classroom assessment data, mandates outlined in legislation and policy are not fully met (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Civil Rights Act of 1964; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). In 2017, a complaint was filed with the Department of Justice against a North Carolina school district, alleging noncompliance with Section 1703(f) of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. The district settled in 2020, agreeing to increase language instruction, provide additional PL for content teachers, and expand translation and interpretation services for families over three years (OCR, 2021a,b).

These examples demonstrate that legislation alone does not guarantee environments conducive to ML academic and linguistic success (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Short, 2017; Wessels et al., 2017). Continued efforts are needed to equip teachers with the skills, confidence, and agency to provide MLs with equitable access to the curriculum, scaffold learning, and support their success on assessments and beyond (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Lazarin & Flores Peña, 2021; López & Santibañez, 2018).

Preparing Educators to Work with Multilingual Learners

Teachers frequently report feeling unprepared to meet the needs of MLs in their classrooms (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Short, 2017; Wessels et al., 2017). Many approach students whose first language is not English with a deficit mindset, focusing on what students cannot do and doubting their ability to succeed academically (Sugimoto et al., 2017). Such mindsets diminish educators' sense of agency. With MLs numbering more than five million nationwide (Flores Peña et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2023) and over 146,000 in the state (NCDPI, 2021), most K–12 teachers will encounter MLs in their classrooms (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Lazarin & Flores Peña, 2021; Mellom et al., 2018; Wessels et al., 2017). Deficit perspectives, therefore, pose significant risks to the success of MLs. This review examines efforts to prepare both pre-service and in-service teachers to work effectively with MLs.

Requirements for Working with Multilingual Learners

Federal legislation establishes criteria to ensure MLs have equitable access to public education and that educators are trained to meet their academic needs (Civil Rights Act, 1964; ESSA, 2015). However, fewer than half of U.S. teachers have received formal training to work with MLs (Lazarin & Flores Peña, 2021). Section 3111(b)(2)(B) of ESSA (2015) specifies that Title III funds must support activities such as:

- Effective teacher and principal preparation;
- Professional development activities related to ML education;
- Assistance for educators in meeting certification/licensing requirements for teaching MLs; and
- Improving teaching skills to meet diverse ML needs, including the implementation of effective programs and curricula.

For State Education Agencies (SEAs) to comply with federal guidance and provide equitable services (Byfield, 2019; Lazarin & Flores Peña, 2021), attention must be given to both pre-service teacher preparation and in-service PL.

Pre-Service Teacher Preparation for Working with MLs

Teacher preparation programs and accreditation processes across the United States vary widely in coursework and support for preparing teachers to work with MLs (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Goodson et al., 2019; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). Literature highlights the need for ML-focused coursework in second language acquisition, research-based instructional practices, and cultural responsiveness (Wessels et al., 2017). Clinical experiences, in addition to coursework, are consistently emphasized as critical for building teachers' understanding of MLs and confidence in serving diverse student populations (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Leider et al., 2021; Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017). Teacher perceptions of preparedness directly influence confidence and instructional effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018).

State and federal funding are needed to support recruitment, training, and ongoing development of teacher candidates (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Lazarin & Flores Peña, 2021; López & Santibañez, 2018). Few universities currently offer sufficient coursework to prepare

teachers for the diverse ML population (Rafa et al., 2020; Wessels et al., 2017). Federal incentives such as the National Professional Development (NPD) grants provide critical support, assisting both pre-service and in-service teachers in improving ML instruction through PL (NPD Program, 2018).

Additional efforts include the ML IHE Committee, hosted by the state, which brings together 15 IHEs and two professional organizations (NCDPI, 2023b). Reflecting national inconsistencies in teacher preparation (Goodson et al., 2019; Wessels et al., 2017), the committee identified three objectives:

1. Expand support for educators of ELs through DL/I programs.
2. Develop pathways for teachers to obtain credentials aligned with CAEP-endorsed National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards.
3. Document innovative Educator Preparation Program (EPP) designs and evaluate their effectiveness.

The Phase 1 report concluded that ongoing collaboration among IHEs is essential to address ML education needs at the pre-service level and to initiate research on EPP design and impact (NCDPI, 2023b).

In-Service Teacher Support for Working with MLs

ML achievement improves when teachers are required to demonstrate knowledge of and implement effective instructional strategies, particularly when supported by coursework or specialized certification (Leider et al., 2021; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). All states offer an ML credential (Goodson et al., 2019), and at least 39 provide ML-related professional learning focused on developing proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Rafa et al., 2020). However, requirements and supports vary widely across states, contributing to teacher

uncertainty (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018) and inconsistent services for MLs nationwide (Goodson et al., 2019). Variations include coursework in English language acquisition, standards-based instruction, assessment, cultural awareness, and ML teaching endorsements (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Goodson et al., 2019; Rafa et al., 2020). Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that certified teachers reported feeling more prepared than their non-certified peers in nearly all areas, except for technology (p. 288).

In addition to National Professional Development (NPD) grant funds used in pre- and in-service partnerships, other federal grants support ML-focused professional learning. These include Title I (Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged), Title II (Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders), and Title III (Language Instruction for English Learner and Immigrant Students) (ESSA, 2015).

Leider et al. (2021) emphasize that State Education Agencies (SEAs) are responsible for preparing and supporting teachers of MLs. Some SEA activities have a national scope, while others are state-specific. At the national level, the National Association of English Learner Program Administrators (NAELPA) convenes SEA ML directors and Local Education Agency (LEA) leaders, providing professional learning through webinars, member discussions, and an annual conference (NAELPA, n.d.).

Additional Supports for MLs

Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) programs provide MLs with opportunities to close achievement gaps by offering instruction in both English and the students' native language (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Gándara & Escamilla, 2017). Despite their prevalence nationwide, only 24 SEAs offer credentialing for DL/I educators. North Carolina supports more than 260

DL/I programs, yet pre-service coursework and credentialing beyond state licensure requirements remain limited. Progress has been made in administrator training. East Carolina University (ECU) offers a Dual Language Immersion Administration Certificate Program to prepare administrators to initiate, support, and sustain DL/I programs (ECU, n.d.). NCDPI has sponsored administrators with Title III funds to participate in this program, reflecting the SEA's role in supporting educators through professional learning (Leider et al., 2021).

The responsibility for equipping teachers to meet MLs' needs is vast and multifaceted (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Goodson et al., 2019; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018), yet essential for compliance with federal law (ESSA, 2015). From Department of Justice cases requiring professional learning as part of compliance (DOJ, 2022) to training offered by schools, districts, and states, PL remains central to creating positive outcomes for MLs (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Gándara & Escamilla, 2017).

Teacher Agency

Teachers require specialized skills to effectively meet the academic and linguistic needs of MLs (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Echevarria et al., 2023; Gándara et al., 2005). Training in second language acquisition and scaffolding strategies, when adequately supported, has been shown to result in significant student gains (Calderón & Slakk, 2016; Collier & Thomas, 2017; López & Santibañez, 2018). Although more than half of U.S. states offer professional learning, endorsements, or legislated requirements for ML-specific training (Rafa et al., 2020), preparation and support remain inconsistent (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Goodson et al., 2019). Inconsistent preparation undermines teachers' ability to develop as leaders, succeed in classrooms, and establish agency (Ado, 2016).

Definitions of agency vary across the literature. Imants and Van der Wal (2020) describe

agency as occurring when individuals, alone or in groups, “make decisions, take initiatives, act proactively rather than reactively, and deliberately strive and function to reach a certain end” (p. 2). Agency is therefore linked to autonomy and self-fulfillment, serving as a force for change that influences both professional practice and identity (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Molla & Nolan, 2020). Agency is shaped by multiple factors, including identification and reduction of bias in classrooms (Okonofua et al., 2016; Warikoo et al., 2016), education policy (Warikoo et al., 2016), and professional learning (Ado, 2016; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006; Nolan & Molla, 2019; Smith, 2023; Tanguay et al., 2018). Bandura’s (2006) definition of agency as a sense of control or ability to achieve within a given context provided the foundation for the adaptation used in this dissertation inquiry.

Teacher Agency and Bias

Bias in education contributes to inequitable outcomes, including high suspension rates, underrepresentation in gifted programs, and overrepresentation in special education for minoritized students (Okonofua et al., 2016; Warikoo et al., 2016). Such disparities often stem from explicit biases (conscious preferences or prejudices) and implicit biases (subconscious or automatic associations) (Greenwald et al., 1998; Mahzarin et al., 2015; Schimmack, 2021; Warikoo et al., 2016). Implicit bias is closely tied to deficit mindsets and can reduce MLs’ access to rigorous instruction, thereby limiting achievement (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017).

Research on both pre- and in-service teachers suggests that deficit mindsets and bias can be reduced through targeted interventions (Warikoo et al., 2016; Wessels et al., 2017; WIDA, 2019). Combining insights from social psychology and education has proven effective in decreasing deficit perspectives and increasing empathy (Devine et al., 2012; Warikoo et al.,

2016). For example, empathy training has been shown to reduce suspension rates (Okonofua et al., 2016), while trauma-informed approaches, such as the Tree of Life framework, have helped educators reflect on the impact of past experiences on their present practice (Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006). Such training may be among the most effective strategies for addressing bias and fostering teacher agency (Ado, 2016; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Imperiale et al., 2021; Nolan & Molla, 2019; Smith, 2023; Tanguay et al., 2018).

Agency and Professional Learning

Targeted professional learning (PL) designed to uncover preconceived ideas, foster empathy and understanding, and build skill sets that strengthen teacher agency is widely recommended in the literature (Ado, 2016; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006; Nolan & Molla, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Smith, 2023; Tanguay et al., 2018). Molla and Nolan (2020) explored opportunities for professional growth and agency in professional contexts through semi-structured interviews with ten teachers. Thematic coding revealed aspects of agency and professional practice, emphasizing “transformative professional learning” (p. 78). This model integrates professional practices, objective contexts, and subjective conditions, leading to critical reflection and actions that support agency. Rodriguez et al. (2020) examined teacher learning and development as a pathway to educational improvement. Their framework highlights five areas of awareness: (a) self as teacher, (b) teaching process, (c) learner, (d) interaction, and (e) context. This model assumes that teachers are active learners who can develop agency as they expand awareness (p. 942). Figure 8, previously mentioned, illustrates the dynamic interplay among these five areas.

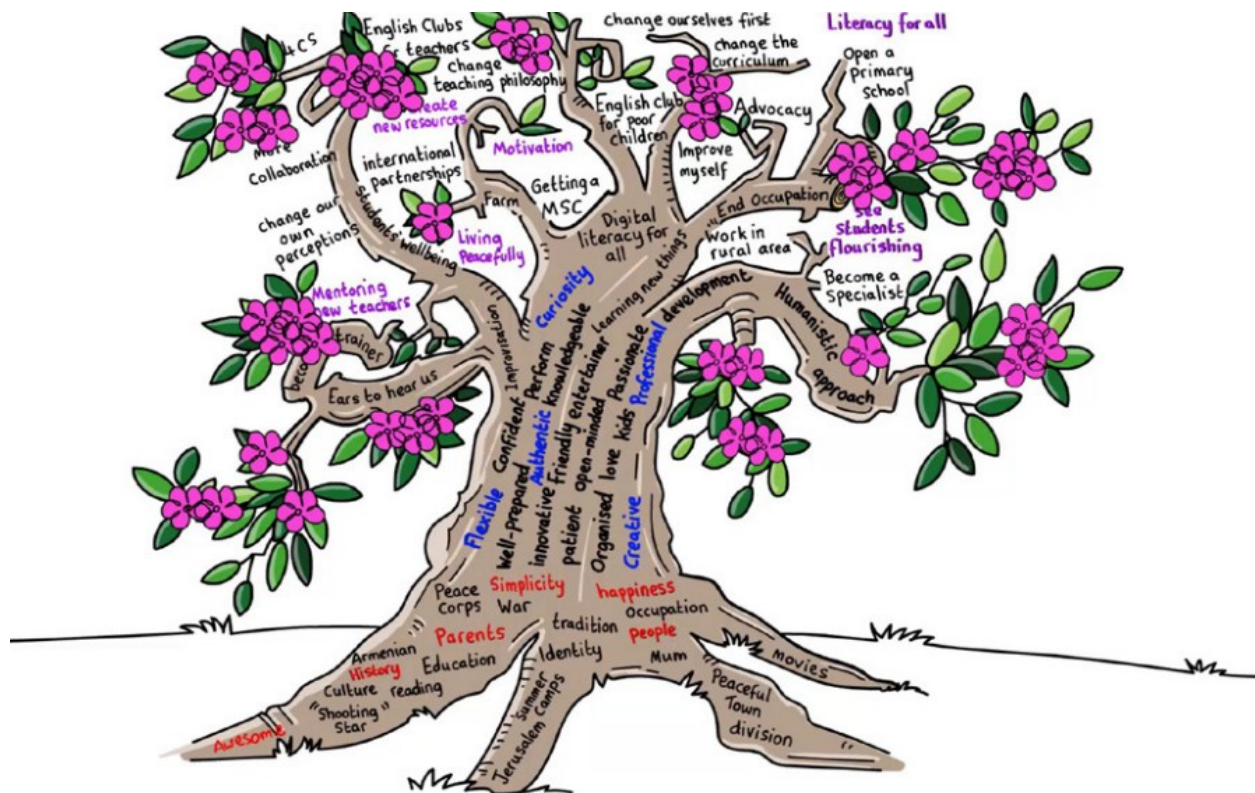
Another perspective situates agency in action; what individuals or collectives do to influence their work and professional identity. Eteläpelto et al. (2013) define professional agency

as occurring when teachers and/or school communities “influence, make choices and take stances in ways that affect their work and their professional identity” (p. 61). Their subject-centered approach emphasizes that educators bring personal knowledge, history, and identity into their work. Agency thus emerges from the interaction of socio-cultural conditions with individual experience, shaping decisions to support or resist change.

In 2003, Ncazelo Ncube introduced the Tree of Life (ToL) activity to help vulnerable children in South Africa process trauma related to HIV/AIDS. The activity included four parts: (1) Tree of Life, (2) Forest of Life, (3) When the Storms Came, and (4) Certificate and Song. Ncube was drawn to the ToL because it engaged children in reflection, relied on storytelling rather than spoken word, encouraged creativity, and provided a safe space to explore difficulties. In 2005, the Dulwich Centre introduced the narrative concept of creating a “second story,” which deepens the exploration of difficulties while maintaining a safe foundation. A celebratory component, including certificates and a song, was also incorporated.

Imperiale et al. (2021) adapted the ToL approach to support international English teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the goals of strengthening teacher development through community, understanding early-career teachers’ perspectives on identity and agency, and informing new approaches at the British Council. Sessions were spread across three days and included fewer ToL components than Ncube’s original model.

Through workshops, educators reflected on their backgrounds (roots), strengths (trunk), and hopes (leaves), analyzing how these perceptions influenced their work. Findings revealed that teachers viewed themselves as change agents, responsible for helping students become global citizens (Imperiale et al., 2021). Figure 10 depicts a collective ToL created by participants



Note. (Imperiale et al., 2021).

Figure 10. Collective Tree of Life.

in the Imperiale study: roots representing education, family, and life experiences; trunks highlighting strengths such as confidence, flexibility, and passion; and branches, leaves, and flowers symbolizing dreams, hopes, and influential relationships. For these teachers of English as a foreign language, the collective tree fostered a sense of community and growth in agency, even though this was not the project's initial goal. Applying reflective narrative practices, such as those outlined in ToL, to educators working with MLs can help shift deficit-focused mindsets toward asset-based perspectives. Reducing bias and adopting asset-based approaches are crucial for teacher and student well-being (CASEL, 2020; Wessels et al., 2017; WIDA, 2019).

The ToL PL provides teachers with a safe space for self-reflection, enabling them to find their voice within their context and connect to existing skills (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006; Nolan & Molla, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020). The aim is to foster teachers' perception of agency, as demonstrated in Imperiale et al. (2021), leading to an assets-based mindset and greater confidence in working with MLs. Recognizing the importance of teacher agency underscores the need to provide teachers with the skills and training required to meet MLs' academic and linguistic needs (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Echevarria et al., 2023; Gándara et al., 2005; Imperiale et al., 2021; Nolan & Molla, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Summary

This inquiry draws from the literature on professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rodman, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020), teacher agency and professional practice (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imperiale et al., 2021; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018; Molla & Nolan, 2020), and narrative therapy (Denborough, 2014; Rice, 2015), specifically the ToL approach (Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006). The inquiry examines the impact of the ToL PL on the development of agency for third grade DL/I teachers working with MLs. Creative

approaches, such as those employed in the ToL PL, are needed to support educators in working with this diverse student population. Chapter 3 discusses the methods used to analyze the non-traditional ToL PL approach and the growth of participants' agency in working with MLs.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

This inquiry addressed the need for a deeper exploration of teacher preparation and support to cultivate teacher agency in providing equitable education for multilingual learners (MLs). Classroom teachers are often unprepared to scaffold learning with appropriate linguistic support or to provide rigorous academic instruction for MLs (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al., 2018; Short, 2017; Wessels et al., 2017). Despite the growth in the ML population and legislation mandating equal opportunity, professional learning (PL) has not sufficiently adapted to equip educators with the skills needed to meet MLs' linguistic and academic needs (ESSA, 2015). This gap in preparation limits teachers' ability to employ evidence-based strategies and undermines their confidence in working with MLs (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018).

This inquiry focused on non-traditional, self-reflective PL using an adapted Tree of Life (ToL) approach to enhance teacher agency in working with MLs. The purpose was to explore self-reflection as a dialogical tool for strengthening teacher agency, enabling educators to analyze their mindsets, recognize assets, and build confidence in serving MLs. Two third-grade DL/I teachers in North Carolina participated in the ToL PL and reflected on their challenges and successes in providing equitable education for MLs. In parallel, I conducted a self-study to address inquiry question two and examine how the process impacted my development as a scholarly practitioner, PL designer, and facilitator.

Inquiry Questions

The following questions guided this problem-focused, user-centered inquiry:

1. What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life (ToL) Professional Learning (PL) on teacher agency?

- a. How do teachers perceive changes in their sense of agency after participating in the ToL PL?
 - b. What elements of the ToL PL do teachers perceive as contributing to these changes?
- 2. How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?
 - a. As a scholarly practitioner?
 - b. As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?

These questions guided the inquiry into my focus of practice and were examined over time through multiple data sources. Baseline data were collected via an initial questionnaire, followed by implementation of the ToL PL (Denborough, 2018; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006). Perceived changes in agency were assessed through analysis of PL discussions, participant journals, and responses to a final questionnaire. This inquiry considered the impact of a narrative approach to PL on perceptions of agency, contrasting with traditional PL models that often emphasize learner needs without accounting for teachers' skills and context (Biesta et al., 2015; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Narrative approaches recognize that individuals make meaning through the stories they tell about themselves, often dominated by a single "problem story" (Freedman & Combs, 2013; Ngozi, 2009). The ToL PL enables identification of alternative stories—those that do not fit the dominant narrative—revealing multiple perspectives and possibilities that strengthen agency (Denborough, 2018; Freedman & Combs, 2013; Rice, 2015). Through this process, multiple stories and endless possibilities may be identified, strengthening a person's sense of agency (See Figure 9).

An important component of the narrative approach is the use of therapeutic documents,

such as *Documents of Knowledge* and *Documents of Authority*. Participant journal entries (see Appendix D) and my researcher journal (see Appendix E) served both functions, helping teachers retain preferred identities and recall knowledge and skills during times of stress (Fox, 2003). Creating such support documents can be a powerful tool for educators, enabling them to document expertise and authority that daily challenges may otherwise overshadow. This process is central to growing agency in working with diverse student populations.

Inquiry question two, “How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?”, guided my exploration of the inquiry’s impact on myself as both a scholarly practitioner (2a) and a PL developer/facilitator (2b). This exploration was conducted through journaling and analysis using crystallization and thematic coding. Reflection during and after each ToL session informed the work in an ongoing and cumulative manner. Journaling provided a linear mode of thought, while crystallization enabled abstract synthesis through artistic representation (Richardson, 2000). After each session, I documented my thoughts about the materials, participant responses, and my reflections on the process. I constructed my own ToL from the perspective of a researcher and PL facilitator (see Appendix F) and extended the tree metaphor to crystallize my growth throughout the inquiry (see Appendix G). Reflecting on my perceptions and actions throughout the process revealed insights into both professional and personal needs. These reflections informed adjustments to the ToL PL materials and my facilitation approach, contributing to the iterative refinement of the inquiry.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

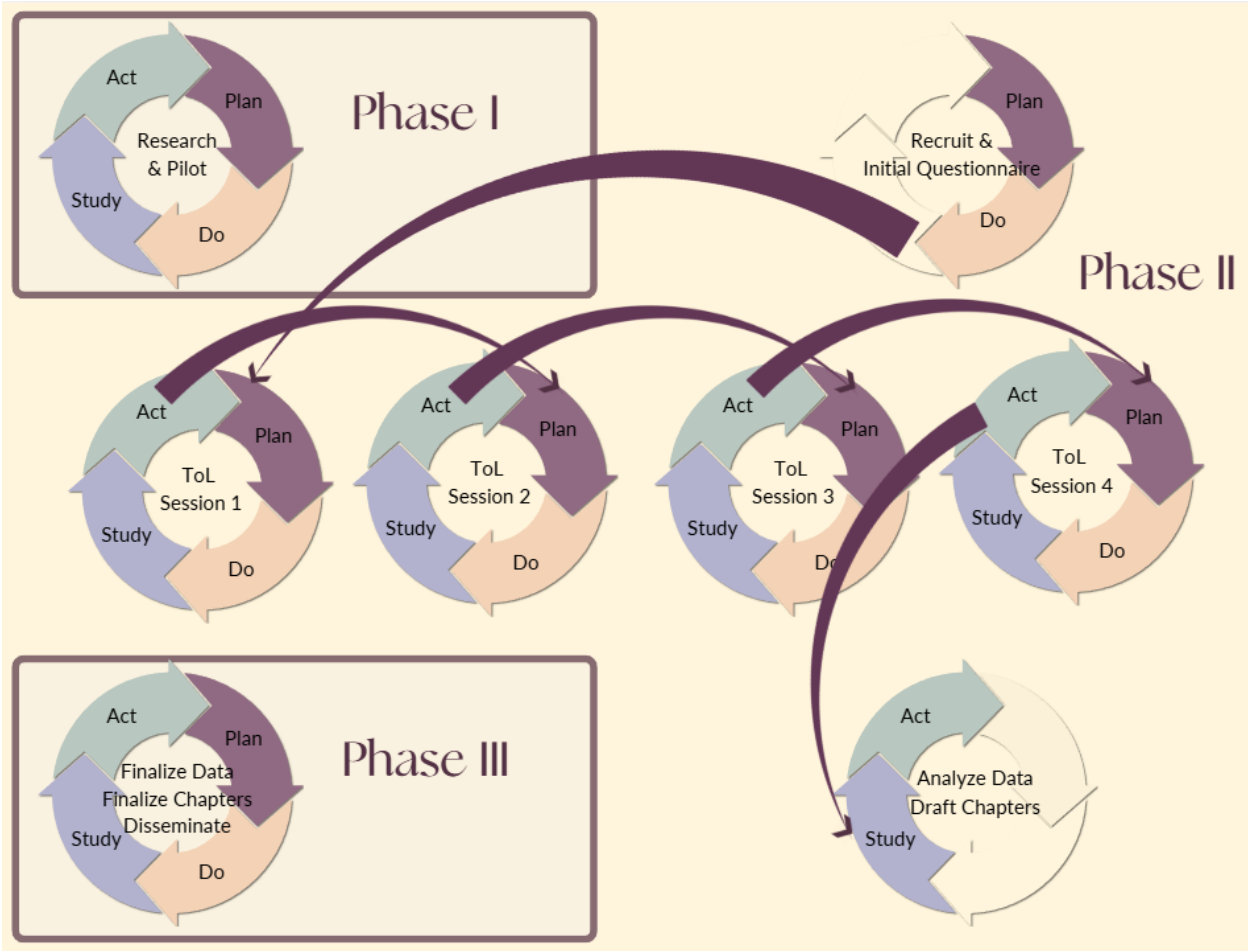
To answer the questions guiding this inquiry, I applied Improvement Science (Crow et al., 2019; Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020) and its Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) process to exemplify the cumulative power of a cyclical approach to real-time educational

research. Central to this inquiry was the inclusion of educators in a collaborative approach to change. This inquiry investigated teacher agency in working with and teaching third-grade MLs in DL/I classrooms. Agency, defined as the sense of being in control or able to achieve within a given context (Bandura, 2006), was operationalized in this inquiry as: the perception of understanding the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and related needs of MLs; confidence in addressing those needs; and the ability to convey methods of supporting MLs to others.

Improvement Science provided the methodological foundation, with the PDSA cycle serving as the process for conducting and refining the inquiry to facilitate professional growth opportunities for teachers (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020). Multiple PDSA cycles allowed for continuous improvement across phases. Phases I and III functioned as self-contained cycles, while Phase II incorporated four embedded mini-cycles within the “Do” component. This iterative design refined the inquiry, expanded its scope, and reflected real-world approaches to problem-solving (see Figure 11).

The Tree of Life Approach

Situated within the PDSA cycle of Improvement Science (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020), the adapted Tree of Life (ToL) PL functioned as a tool for integrating traditional PL with narrative practices. To accomplish this integration, I drew upon a review of research, twenty hours of narrative training, and the development of a network of CIPs. Seeking practitioners engaged with the ToL approach, I connected with Dr. Grazia Imperiale, lecturer in adult education at the School of Education, University of Glasgow. Dr. Imperiale co-authored *Early Career English Teacher Identity Project Report: Exploring Teacher Identity and Agency through the Tree of Life Approach* (Imperiale et al., 2021). This inquiry informed my adaptation of ToL



Note. (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020)

Figure 11. Multiple PDSA cycles across phases for continuous improvement.

PL. Our discussions sparked my interest in further adapting Ncube's (2006) original work to strengthen teacher agency for ML educators. Dr. Imperiale reviewed my adaptations and agreed to serve as a critical inquiry partner (CIP) in an advisory role during later stages of the work.

Imperiale et al.'s (2021) research, commissioned by the British Council during COVID-19, aimed to strengthen teacher development, explore perspectives on identity and agency, and identify new approaches for supporting international English teachers. Ten early-career teachers from Armenia, Brazil, Morocco, Nigeria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories participated in three workshops using a ToL framework adapted from Ncube (2006). Each workshop focused on a different part of the tree:

- Roots (past): Participants reflected on their backgrounds and co-constructed knowledge through dialogue.
- Trunk (strengths): Scenarios based on identified challenges guided discussions of capabilities and resilience.
- Leaves and blossoms (aspirations): Participants explored dreams, hopes, and future goals.

Findings revealed that participants gained insights into their perceptions of agency as they engaged with the tree metaphor. Four themes emerged:

- a) Education is interpreted as a tool for transformation and social change.
- b) Teachers work both within and beyond the education system to enact change.
- c) Retaining teacher motivation is essential, particularly in challenging contexts, and collaboration strengthens this motivation.
- d) Identity is perceived as relational and dynamic, shaped by processes of change (Imperiale et al., 2021, p. 18).

One participant noted that the project was unique in focusing on PL while “looking at teachers as human beings, recognizing and acknowledging their agency” (Imperiale et al., 2021, p. 19). Teachers reported feeling heard and valued both individually and collectively. Recommendations emphasized the importance of establishing relationships with participants, incorporating professional and personal contexts, and fostering community.

The success of this project prompted me to consider whether a narrative approach could be applied with U.S. teachers to build agency in working with MLs. Further research revealed that Imperiale et al.’s adaptation originated in narrative therapy for trauma. While the ToL approach has been successfully adapted for education, I am not licensed in narrative therapy and did not use the approach for therapeutic purposes. Instead, I recognized that components of the approach could support agency development through mindset shifts.

I adapted elements of Ncube’s (2006) and Imperiale et al.’s (2021) approaches to guide teachers of MLs through self-exploration using the TOL PL. Adaptations included reordering the tree’s components and focusing explicitly on teacher identity in relation to MLs. I offered guiding prompts through the introduction to the part of the tree. First, I described the meaning of the ToL part, then offered ways they might interpret this as they built their tree. The same prompts were offered for the asynchronous journal. Consistent with narrative practice, the teacher-focused prompts served only as guidance, allowing participants to direct ToL development and discussion toward their own needs (Denborough, 2014; Rice, 2015).

Context of the Inquiry

This dissertation inquiry began in 2023, during my tenure as an ML Consultant with a southeastern State Education Agency (SEA) and as principal investigator (PI) of a state grant. Since its inception, the inquiry has evolved in response to significant changes, including the

January 2025 shift in the political climate within the U.S. Department of Education and ML education, and my unexpected early retirement from the SEA. These changes required the inquiry to adapt and align with new contexts.

As an SEA ML/Title III Consultant from January 2009 to August 2025, I supported educator preparation and policy implementation. As PI of the \$2.9 million grant, I addressed the needs of ML educators and students through innovative approaches. As a doctoral candidate, I braided traditional PL with grant activities to design an intervention that enhanced teachers' understanding of MLs not only through skill development but also by fostering confidence and agency (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). This inquiry provided an opportunity to explore how teacher agency can be cultivated to meet the needs of MLs better.

Inquiry Participants

Twelve educators from a southeastern state who participated in Phase II of a grant were invited to participate in this dissertation inquiry.

Initially, in 2023, this dissertation inquiry was designed to combine traditional PL offered during the grant workshops with the ToL PL, examining perceived growth in teacher agency through narrative reflection. Invitations to participate in an interest session on the ToL research were sent to all 12 grant teacher-researchers via email on January 5, 2025. To align with the inquiry's focus on teacher agency, a Doodle Poll link was included to allow prospective participants to select convenient times. Based on survey responses, an interest session was held via TEAMS on January 8, 2025, from 6:15 to 7:15 p.m. Reminders were sent on January 7 and January 8. Two participants attended, and the session was recorded for those unable to join. To accommodate additional respondents, a second opportunity was offered on January 14, with

sessions from 5:00–6:00 p.m. and 6:00–7:00 p.m. Only one teacher-researcher attended.

Reminders regarding the availability of the recorded session and the January 17 response deadline were sent to all twelve potential participants. Ultimately, five teachers responded, expressing interest but citing personal and professional circumstances that limited participation. Only one grant teacher-researcher was able to participate.

As a result, two participants were included in this inquiry, including one grant participant and another bilingual international teacher working in a DL/I program. Both educators were Spanish-English bilingual who served as third-grade DL/I instructors in elementary schools. While both educators worked to support science instruction in their classrooms, science education was not the focus of this inquiry.

Collaborative Inquiry Partners

This dissertation inquiry was initially intertwined with the grant. Shifts in the political climate surrounding ML education, state-mandated LETRS training (NCDPI, 2023a), changes in participant availability, and my unexpected retirement from the SEA resulted in most team members participating only in the early phases of the work. The contributions of each collaborator during their involvement in the dissertation journey are described as follows.

The grant team met regularly to advance the grant and advised on ways the dissertation inquiry could supplement grant goals while remaining logically tied to the work. Three members of the grant's Technical Working Group also served as Collaborative Inquiry Partners (CIPs). They advised on concept and content review, data analysis, connections to the grant, teaching beliefs, teacher development, and ESL PL.

Most grant members did not participate in the research or analysis. Phase One continued as an informal advisor, while two later joined my dissertation committee as external members. In

addition to grant partners, pilot participants also served as CIPs. Current and former educators volunteered as pilot participants and material editors. Each had a personal relationship with me and brought experience with MLs, lesson planning, PL facilitation, self-reflection, and attention to detail.

Dr. Grazia Imperiale, author of an adapted ToL process (Imperiale et al., 2021), upon which my ToL PL was built, met with me to discuss her work. We explored the inspiration for her adaptations, coding processes, and the impact of her work on my inquiry. We also discussed the adaptations I planned to implement, including adding journaling.

Ethical Considerations

As part of this inquiry, I fulfilled East Carolina University's requirements for the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules. In 2023, I completed the CITI training as part of the grant work. Because CITI certification is valid for five years, renewal was not required for this inquiry, and no additional modules were mandated under ECU specifications. No further research requirement documents were necessary beyond CITI certification and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, as participation occurred outside of school hours and premises (see Appendix A).

Prospective participants were invited to join the inquiry through verbal and email requests. Those who agreed to participate received and signed an informed consent letter, making them aware of the benefits and possible risks of participation (see Appendix B). Permission was obtained from the IRB of East Carolina University and Medical Center, as well as from school districts when required, before administering questionnaires or collecting and analyzing data.

The consent form for research involving no more than minimal risk included a clause

ensuring that all questionnaire responses would remain confidential and securely stored for documentation purposes. Data were saved in a password-protected document on a secure network and backed up on a private external hard drive. Both qualitative and quantitative data obtained in this inquiry will be retained for three years, after which all collected data will be deleted, except for information explicitly covered under additional permissions for distribution.

From an ethical perspective, my position as an SEA employee specializing in MLs during part of this inquiry had minimal to no influence on participants. I was not employed within their schools or districts, nor did I hold any supervisory authority over them. This separation minimized potential conflicts of interest and ensured that participation was voluntary and free from coercion.

My participation as an embedded facilitator offered advantages for relationship building and depth of reflection. It also increased the possibility of researcher bias, which could prejudice the findings. Including robust member checking as part of the inquiry was essential to mitigating this possible ethical concern.

Inquiry Procedures

This Improvement Science-based inquiry consisted of three phases conducted between August 2023 and May 2026.

Phase I

Plan (Phase I)

In Phase I, I collaborated with CIPs to establish the foundation for the inquiry. Weekly meetings were held with grant CIPs to explore connections between the research and the work of teacher-researchers involved in the grant. In August 2023, an extensive review of literature was conducted related to professional learning (PL), teacher agency, and the Tree of Life (ToL)

approach, followed by refining my research questions, determining methodological approaches, drafting the initial and final questionnaires, adapting the ToL PL, and preparing for the pilot. (see Figure 12).

Questions from the *National Center for Education Statistics 2020–21 Teacher and Principal Survey* and the *In-Service Teacher EL Preparation Survey* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020, n.d.) were adapted to reflect the context and experiences of teachers participating in the grant and the adapted ToL PL. The initial questionnaire (Appendix H) and final questionnaire (Appendix I) included sections on participant demographics, student demographics, teacher agency, and professional learning. Using and modifying existing survey questions (NCES, 2020, n.d.) enhanced reliability and increased the likelihood of generating expected responses. Demographic questions were reduced, and answer choices were limited to those relevant to inquiry participants (e.g., degree options restricted to Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral, since individuals with only a high school diploma would not hold teaching positions. Similar questions across the two instruments were combined to reduce redundancy, and section headers were edited to emphasize consideration of each item in relation to MLs specifically.

The ToL process, originally developed by Ncube (2006) for trauma therapy and later adapted by Imperiale et al. (2021) for international English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, was further modified to strengthen teacher agency through narrative-based PL and guided self-reflection. Dr. Imperiale and I reviewed the proposed adaptations, comparing them to the original research and desired outcomes. Adjustments included reordering the parts of the ToL and revising PL guiding questions to focus specifically on teachers of MLs. Table 2 outlines the adaptations made to the ToL PL compared to Ncube's original model and Imperiale et al.'s adaptation.



Figure 12. Phase I improvement-based inquiry timeline.

Table 2

Tree of Life Adaptations

<i>Section</i>	<i>Ncube 2006</i>	<i>Imperiale et al. (2021)</i>	<i>Anderson (2024)</i>
Context	Children in South Africa impacted by HIV/AIDS	Ten early career English teachers from, and based in, one of the following ODA contexts: Armenia, Brazil, Morocco, Nigeria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.	Educators working with multilingual learners (MLs)
Goal	Create a place that allows children to experience a preferred identity in order to change their relationship with the problems and challenges that they are facing in their lives.	Slightly adapted and instead of growing a ‘forest’, we opted for integrating all participants’ stories into one ‘collective tree’, in line with our aims of strengthening community and shared identity.	The purpose of this research was to explore teacher agency in working with MLs. Agency means, “The sense of being in control, or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006).”
Sessions	One day, three parts	Interest session Three ToL sessions (length unknown) Time between sessions unknown Individual Interviews	Interest session Initial and final questionnaire Four two-hour ToL PL sessions Journal Focus Group (optional)
Roots	1 Children were invited to think about and write on their Tree of Life significant figures from their ancestry, origins and family history.	1 In the first workshop, participants were invited to discuss their ‘roots’. We asked them to add words that related to their past and roots, without giving further explanations. We then invited them to explain their choices.	1 Your roots represent where you come from. This can include locations, people, experiences, or anything else that has helped shape you into who you are today as a teacher of MLs, including your work with the grant.
Ground	2 The ground represents where the child lives at present; and some of the activities that the child is engaged in during their regular daily life.	Not Included	6 The ground represents the environment you are planted in. It can be the immediate surroundings or things that have impacted you over time. What would you include in your ground?

Table 2 (continued)

Tree of Life Adaptations

<i>Section</i>	<i>Ncube 2006</i>	<i>Imperiale et al. (2021)</i>	<i>Anderson (2024)</i>
Trunk	3 The trunk of the tree was a prompt for children to draw representations of significant events that had shaped their lives: these were either positive events or events that could be regarded as difficult or that evoked a painful memory.	2 Based on these challenges, during the second workshop we presented a series of hypothetical scenarios to participants, and they were asked to discuss how they would act in these situations.	2 The trunk represents your strengths as a teacher of MLs. As always, all aspects of your life can be included.
Branches	4 The branches of the tree were a prompt to elicit the child's thoughts, ideas and wishes about the direction which he/she would like to go in life.	Not Included	3 The branches are your hopes, dreams, and aspirations as a teacher of MLs. What has sprouted from your strengths? Grown from your roots or trunk?
Leaves	5 The leaves of the tree represented important people or significant relationships in an individual's life. At Masiye Camp we introduced the metaphor of fallen leaves to represent important people that had been lost to the child (e.g. parents who had died).	3 Combined with Blossoms In the final workshop, we focused on participants' dreams, hopes and aspirations. The prompt for discussion was again left deliberately open to avoid unintentional leading and extraction.	4 Leaves represent people or entities who have impacted your life as a teacher of MLs. They can be living or deceased. People you do or do not personally know. Think about the branches where these people have or could make an impact.
Fruits	6 The fruits stood for the achievements that the child had accomplished in his or her life; the things that he/she was proud of.	Not included	Not Included

Table 2 (continued)

Tree of Life Adaptations

<i>Section Ncube 2006</i>		<i>Imperiale et al. (2021)</i>	<i>Anderson (2024)</i>
Blossoms / Flowers	Not included	3 Combined with Leaves In the final workshop, we focused on participants' dreams, hopes and aspirations. The prompt for discussion was again left deliberately open to avoid unintentional leading and extraction.	5 Flowers represent things you have accomplished, are working on accomplishing, gifts received, or things you are proud of as a teacher of MLs. You might want to trace from the roots up the trunk through the branches and leaves to get to the flowers to see how they are all connected
Bugs	Mentioned in overview - not sure where used. The bugs of the tree, which would sometimes eat parts of the fruit and destroy the leaves, were designed to represent the problems and challenges that children were facing in their day-to-day lives.	Not Included	7 Much of what we have added to our trees has been positive, but we all know that negative or seemingly negative events and people can impact our personal and professional lives in various ways. Bugs can be things that attack specific aspects of the tree, like a relationship (leaf) or a project (flower).
Forest	Part 2 Reflect on this forest of beautiful trees of all shapes and sizes. Re-telling to draw attention to the strong and firm roots that we all seemed to have. I also mentioned the dreams and hopes that we had for our lives. I spoke of the people we are connected to who have taught us a lot of things in our lives.	Not Included	9 As individual trees we each have strengths. When we come together as a forest our strength is multiplied. Watch the first 46 seconds of this video . Think about how tree roots interlock and how they communicate and support each other through storms. How can we help each other as we work to meet the needs of MLs? Think of some examples from the grant work or from the earlier sessions we have shared.

Table 2 (continued)

Tree of Life Adaptations

<i>Section Ncube 2006</i>		<i>Imperiale et al. (2021)</i>	<i>Anderson (2024)</i>
Storms	Part 3 Draw the children's attention to the hazards that trees and forests sometimes face, as well as to talk about the effects of these hazards on trees and forests. This conversation on the hazards faced by trees allowed a safe entry point into a discussion about children and the dangers and problems that they face in life. Focus on what can be done to face the storms.	Not Included	8 Another possible negative or seemingly negative event is storms. Storms have a larger impact like the possibility of knocking the tree over, such as with a major health issue.

CIPs reviewed the questionnaire questions and the phases of the ToL PL for relevance to the first inquiry question. All six participants who agreed to participate in the pilot were asked to complete the questionnaire before participating in the pilot PL sessions. Questionnaire items were refined to ensure that only data directly relevant to the inquiry questions were collected (see Table 3). The original inquiry question (IQ), which focused on the grant, was removed. It read:

1. What is the perceived influence of ML science professional learning from the grant on teacher agency?
 - a. How do teachers perceive the impact of ML science PL on their confidence in teaching MLs?
 - b. Which components of the ML science PL do teachers perceive as the most effective in enhancing their agency?

The original question IQ2, then became IQ1 used in the inquiry.

In addition to working with CIPs, I discussed overarching aspects of Improvement Science with Dr. Brandi Hinnant Crawford at the 2024 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference. Her insights on the PDSA cycle gave me a better understanding of the iterative nature and importance of repeating the PDSA cycle to answer the three essential questions (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 152):

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How will we know that change is an improvement?
3. What change can we make that will result in an improvement?

At the same conference, I also attended a four-hour course on conceptual frameworks led by Dr. Johnny Saldaña. This course provided a step-by-step process for developing frameworks applicable to our own research. We were asked to identify the theoretical, methodological, and

Table 3

Questionnaire Groupings and Purpose

Questions	Purpose
Educator Demographics Init: Q1-Q9 Final: Only in PS if changes	Collected for possible patterns indicating that participant gender, grade level, etc. may impact agency
Student Demographics Inti: Q11-12 Final: Only in PS if changes	Collected for possible patterns indicating that student English proficiency level, language, etc. may impact teacher perception of agency
Perception of Students Init: Q13-15 Final: Q13-15	Collected to set a baseline and compare to measure the impact of ToL PL on the perceived sense of student abilities
Perception and Agency Inti: Q16 - Q25 Final: Q16 - 24	Collected to set a baseline and compare for perceived agency on multiple aspects of teaching and the impact of ToL PL
Professional Learning Init: Q26 - 28 Final: Q25 - 29	Collected to establish previous PL experience and determine the impact of aspects of ToL PL
Additional Comment Init: Q29 Final: Q30	Collected for additional insights that the questionnaire may not have asked for

epistemological premises of our work (Saldaña, 2024):

- Theoretical Premises - the main ideas that serve as foundations for an inquiry; the literature review as primary source for finding the major schools of thought about a topic.
- Methodological Premises - a rationale; why and how you're going to investigate your topic in a particular way
- Epistemological Premises - how the researcher perceives and experiences the social world and how you construct personal knowledge about it; your lenses, filters, and angles that inform the reader of your personality or standpoint.

This course enabled me to synthesize ideas from multiple researchers and integrate them with my conceptual understanding of the intersectionality of teacher agency, PL, and narrative therapy. The hands-on application of the framework-building process strengthened my confidence and validated my unique approach to using the ToL as a non-traditional form of PL. This process ultimately led to the development of the conceptual framework depicted previously in Figure 2.

Recruitment for a pilot study occurred in April and May 2024 to test materials before finalizing the inquiry design. Pilot participants were selected from outside the grant and had experience working with MLs greater than the expected inquiry participants. Three participants were members of a cadre of educators under my supervision who provided PL and coaching across the state. All six participants contributed teaching experience, lesson preparation, and editing expertise, which I believed would strengthen the alignment of the materials to the inquiry questions.

Do (Phase I)

The pilot sample size of five was smaller than anticipated for the full inquiry. This decision was strategic, reflecting the shortened pilot timeline and the need to estimate PL session timing for participant self-reflection and group debriefing.

The pilot included an interest session, administration of the initial questionnaire, five one-hour ToL PL sessions, asynchronous journal entries, and a one-hour focus group debrief. This format paralleled the expected inquiry design but was condensed into a four-week timeline. The full inquiry was initially planned as one two-hour session per month over five months but ultimately occurred every other week over two months.

The initial questionnaire was administered before the five-session pilot began on May 14, 2024. Pilot participants served dual roles: as inquiry participants and as CIPs focused on materials design. As participants, they completed questionnaires and journal assignments, engaged in ToL PL sessions, and participated in the culminating focus group. As CIPs, they provided constructive feedback on the length and content of the instruments, enabling real-time and ongoing adjustments. I participated as both facilitator and participant, creating my own ToL. I did not complete a journal as my focus was on revising the materials.

The purpose of the pilot was to test the initial and final questionnaires for reliability, evaluate the effectiveness of the adapted ToL PL prompts and journal guidance, and estimate the overall time frame for the inquiry. The pilot also provided an opportunity to become more familiar with the materials and refine them based on participant feedback.

Feedback from pilot participants indicated that questionnaire items needed to be revised to elicit ML-specific responses and ensure alignment with the inquiry questions. The pilot provided a realistic context for familiarization with the instrument and for gathering participant

feedback. Participants noted that the questionnaire was lengthy and recommended removing redundant items. While edits were made based on these recommendations, further revisions were required to sharpen the focus and reduce the overall length of the instrument. The pilot also provided insights into the effectiveness of the ToL PL adaptations, including the number and length of sessions and the alignment of PL guiding questions and reflective journals with the inquiry questions. Edits were made to ensure responses remained focused on participants' roles as educators of MLs, while allowing flexibility for participants to address broader contexts they deemed relevant. Ultimately, the pilot questionnaire and ToL data offered early proof of concept that informed the design and implementation of the full inquiry.

Study (Phase I)

In June 2024, I reviewed pilot materials and data, analyzing individual stories and themes. Based on CIP feedback, materials were revised. The ToL initial and final questionnaires were designed to collect quantitative data, with the expectation that analysis in the full inquiry would measure percent change and potentially identify statistically significant increases. Qualitative data were collected through transcription and note-taking during ToL PL sessions and the focus group. Analysis combined inductive and deductive coding, including descriptive, values-based, and narrative approaches (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2013). Additional data were gathered through ongoing feedback and session debriefs.

Preliminary analysis indicated that the ToL PL reflected findings from prior research and that journaling contributed to a greater sense of agency (Imperiale et al., 2021). One participant reflected after the first PL session (roots and trunk) on perceived growth in agency:

My experiences have been sort of soul-sucking and really discouraging. Not a great experience with teaching so far... We enter the field because we care and

want to make the world a better place. What this helps me do is reflect on my “whys”...It encourages you to revisit those roots and access it in a new way. It encourages me because I have a good reason to be a teacher, and I have things to contribute to the classroom that others may not have.

The same participant noted in their journal that exploring the roots of the tree increased confidence:

I still have so much to learn that it can be overwhelming. I get discouraged often and think I can't do this anymore because the challenges are so great, and the expectations are too heavy to carry. Looking at these roots has given me more confidence and assurance. It's been a very good reminder of who I am, and where I am going.

Another participant described the impact on both student work and personal insights:

My Tree of Life has been strengthened by creating a positive network of connections at the personal and professional levels. I am thankful for this ToL opportunity that has definitely helped me dig and look at the hidden and the bottom level of my true self. Not only has this experience given me the opportunity to pause, reflect, and perform a self-analysis of myself as an individual and as a professional, but has also opened my eyes to the importance of giving our students the opportunity to embark on such an experience so that they get to honor who they are, and we get to connect with who they are.

The pilot inquiry revealed the need to refine questionnaire items, ToL PL guiding questions, and journal prompts to more directly address the inquiry questions. It also highlighted the social-emotional dimensions of perceived growth in agency.

Act (Phase I)

A weakness of the pilot was that IQ1 could not be addressed, as it was tied to the grant. Only teacher-researchers from the grant would have sufficient knowledge of the grant PL. This limitation foreshadowed the eventual shift in participants from grant teacher-researchers to two DL/I teachers, leading to IQ1 being removed. This moved IQ2 to IQ1, and the original researcher-related IQ3 became IQ2.

Questionnaire analysis and participant feedback revealed that the pilot's condensed timeline and lack of classroom interaction between sessions limited opportunities for reflection on growth in several areas of the questionnaire. Feedback also indicated that the questionnaire was longer than expected and that some items were not sufficiently specific to MLs or agency to elicit meaningful responses. CIPs also recommended reducing the number of demographic questions to streamline the instrument.

The ToL PL sessions were interactive and well-received by participants. Substantial data were generated through the development of individual trees, reflective discussions, and journal entries, though not all information was directly pertinent to the inquiry questions. PL guiding questions and journal prompts require further refinement to focus on participants' roles as teachers of MLs and their agency growth. Participants recommended incorporating a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) component, which was supported by analysis. Reducing the number of tree components was discouraged as a strategy for limiting data; instead, an alternate approach was suggested—analyzing the impact of individual tree components to make the data more manageable. Additionally, interviews were recommended as a replacement for the final focus group. Materials that paralleled the tree development and journaling for participants were developed to address IQ 2.

Summary of Phase I

Phase I began with a review of relevant research, followed by refinement of the inquiry questions, determination of methodological approaches, drafting of the initial and final questionnaires, and adaptation of the ToL PL. The pilot was run to provide an opportunity to test the instruments with a small inquiry group, gather feedback, analyze preliminary data, and make necessary revisions before scaling up to the full inquiry. This phase concluded with adjustments to the instruments based on data collection and analysis from the pilot inquiry. Adjustments to the instruments were made based on pilot results, reviewed by CIPs and dissertation committee members, and further refined for use in the full inquiry. Inquiry questions were updated to remove the original question one, which focused on the grant. Materials were finalized for proposal defense.

Phase II

In Phase II, I defended my proposal, received IRB approval, conducted the ToL PL, analyzed data, drafted dissertation chapters, and shared initial research findings. The Do section was broken into four individual PDSA cycles embedded within the full Phase II PDSA, as overviewed in Figure 11 and broken down into more detail in Figure 13.

Plan (Phase II)

Following the proposal defense in October 2024, I worked with my committee chair and professor to draft, edit, and finalize the IRB application. The application was submitted on December 16, 2024, and approved without revisions on January 5, 2025. Upon IRB approval, recruitment of grant teacher-researchers began.

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

Initial recruitment targeted third- through fifth-grade science teacher-researchers

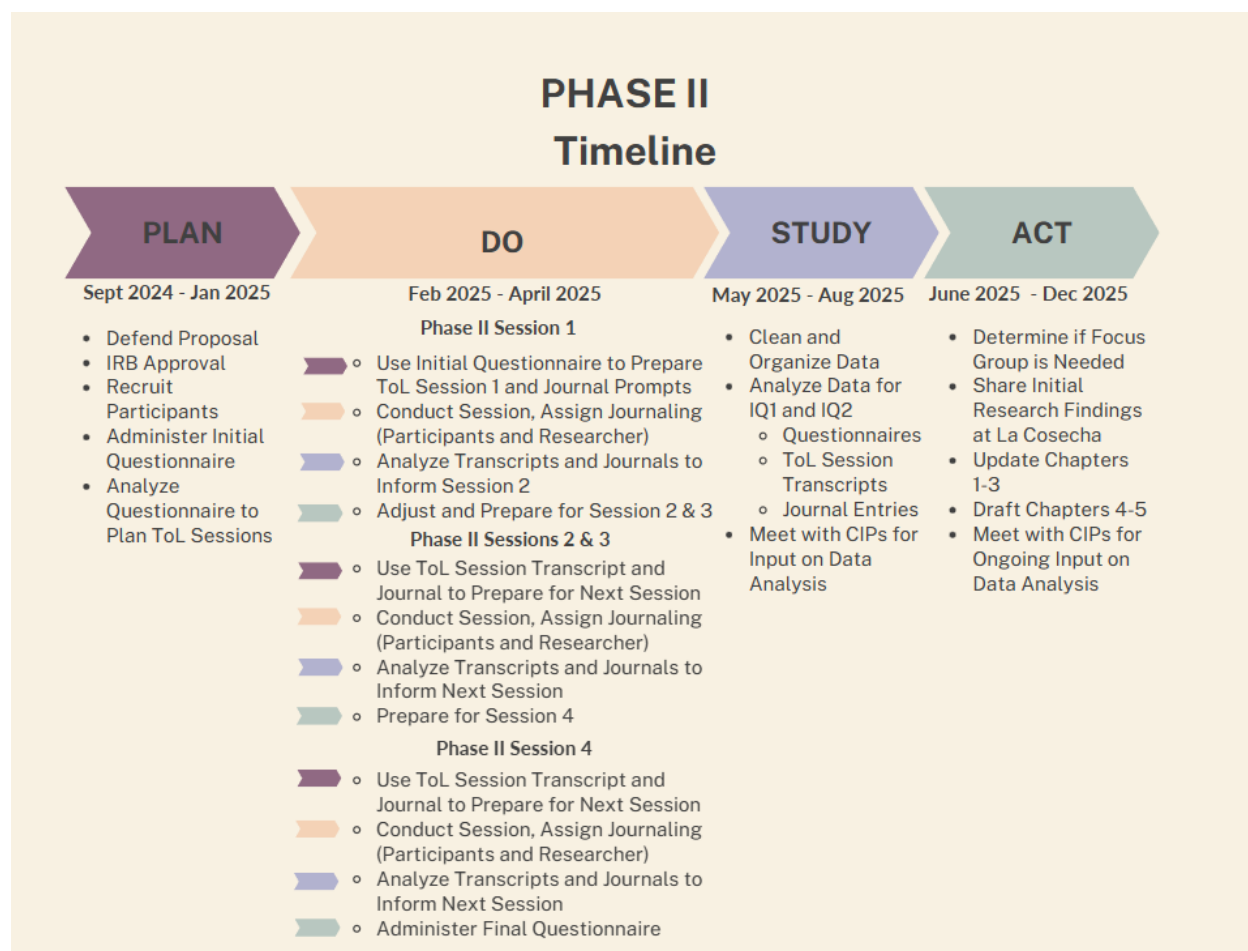


Figure 13. Phase II improvement-based inquiry timeline.

participating in the grant. These educators possessed characteristics ideal for the inquiry: demonstrated experience teaching MLs in science contexts, documented participation in ML-related professional learning and formative assessment development, established classroom observation records, active engagement in reflective practice regarding ML instruction, and existing professional relationships with me as a researcher. These attributes aligned with narrative inquiry prerequisites, particularly the relational trust necessary for deep biographical reflection (Imperiale et al., 2021).

Official invitation emails were distributed on January 5, 2025. All twelve potential participants had previously granted permission to be contacted. A Doodle Poll was included to determine optimal times for interest meetings. In January 2025, grant teacher-researchers received email invitations detailing the inquiry's purpose, time commitment, goals, expectations, and online format. Interested educators were invited to attend an informational session. Despite initial indications that all twelve were interested, only four attended the sessions, which were offered at multiple times to accommodate schedules. Participants cited concerns, including hostile political climates surrounding ML education, state-mandated LETRS training (NCDPI, 2023a), teaching load changes, and personal health issues.

The first interest meeting was held on January 8, with three expected participants; two attended and consented to recording the session for those unable to join. Due to low response, two additional sessions were offered on January 23, but only one teacher attended. The one-hour informational sessions included reintroductions, inquiry overview, selection criteria explanation, informed consent review, time commitment details, scheduling coordination via Doodle poll, initial questionnaire explanation, and opportunity for questions. Following the sessions, participants were asked to confirm their decision within one week.

By January 26, two teacher-researchers had signed consent forms, though one later withdrew. Despite follow-up emails and phone calls, only one grant teacher-researcher was secured. To maintain inquiry integrity while meeting IRB-approved selection criteria, participation requirements were adjusted to remove the grant affiliation on February 1. I recruited one non-grant participant, leading to both participants being third-grade dual language immersion teachers who are bilingual in English and Spanish. Following an individual interest session on February 6, 2025, this additional educator signed the consent form and was added to the inquiry.

The attrition from 12 potential grant participants to one, supplemented by one non-grant educator, rendered the original IQ1 untenable. That question had focused specifically on grant professional learning impacts:

1. What is the perceived influence of ML science professional learning from the grant on teacher agency?
 - a. How do teachers perceive the impact of ML science PL on their confidence in teaching MLs?
 - b. Which components of the ML science PL do teachers perceive as the most effective in enhancing their agency?

Consequently, research questions were reordered to center the ToL PL intervention as the primary focus. The original Question 2 became IQ1:

1. What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life (ToL) Professional Learning (PL) on teacher agency?
 - a. How do teachers perceive changes in their sense of agency after participating in the ToL PL?

- b. What elements of the ToL PL do teachers perceive as contributing to these changes?
- 2. The original Question 3, addressing my reflexive development, became IQ2:
- 3. How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?
 - a. As a scholarly practitioner?
 - b. As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?

This reframing preserved the inquiry's integrity while acknowledging the constraints imposed by recruitment realities, transforming what initially appeared as a methodological crisis into an opportunity for deeper exploration of narrative professional learning processes.

After participants completed consent forms in February 2024, the initial questionnaire was administered to establish baseline data. Questionnaire analysis informed guiding questions for the first ToL PL session held on February 12, 2025.

Do (Phase II)

The Do phase of Phase II was implemented through four smaller PDSA cycles (see Figure 13) designed to address Q1, 1a, and 1b. The ToL PL consisted of four two-hour sessions conducted from February through March 2025, during which participants employed self-reflection, visual representation, narrative, and dialogical approaches to explore their sense of agency in working with MLs. Participants completed journal entries between each of the four sessions. The intervention concluded with the administration of the final questionnaire. Concurrently, I engaged in a parallel process, constructing my own researcher-focused ToL during the concurrent sessions and completing reflexive journal entries asynchronously to address IQ2, 2a, and 2b.

Inquiry Approach/Intervention

To address IQ1, 1a, and 1b, the ToL PL was conducted online via Microsoft Teams from February through March 2025. Sessions were audio- and video-recorded, with AI-generated transcripts produced for data analysis (see Appendix J). I facilitated each session by introducing a tree component, posing reflective prompts, and allocating time for individual contemplation and visual representation. Participants then engaged in group sharing, with discussions incorporating follow-up questions and clarifications. Between sessions, participants completed asynchronous journal entries extending their reflections.

All session prompts and discussions focused on three components through the lens of participants' roles as ML educators:

- Session 1, held on February 12, 2025, from 6:00–8:00 p.m., introduced the inquiry, explored roots (biographical origins as educators) and trunk (core strengths as ML teachers), and assigned corresponding journal reflections.
- Session 2, held February 26, 2025, from 6:00–8:00 p.m., recapped Session 1 and journaling experiences, then explored branches (hopes, dreams, and aspirations as educators) and leaves (people or entities who have supported professional development), concluding with journal assignments.
- Session 3, held March 12, 2025, from 6:00–8:00 p.m., recapped Session 2, explored flowers (professional accomplishments) and ground (contextual environments shaping practice), and assigned related journal reflections.
- Session 4, held March 26, 2025, from 6:00–8:00 p.m., recapped Session 3, explored bugs and storms (challenges and obstacles impacting educators) and forest (collective strength through collaboration), and concluded with final journal assignments.

IQ2 was addressed through my parallel engagement: constructing a researcher-focused ToL during synchronous sessions, completing reflexive journals between sessions, and developing a summative visual representation of my growth trajectory.

Data Collection and Analysis

I employed multiple analytical approaches aligned with data sources and inquiry aims. I analyzed data in the following ways. Questionnaire responses were collected via Qualtrics at the beginning and end of Phase II. The initial questionnaire gathered demographic data and baseline perceptions, serving as comparison points for final questionnaire responses. Multiple-choice and Likert-scale items were analyzed quantitatively through descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode) and pre-post comparison to identify shifts in perceived agency. Open-ended responses underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns in teachers' self-reported agency development. Initial questionnaire responses informed follow-up probing questions during ToL PL sessions, creating iterative inquiry cycles.

Each ToL PL session was recorded via Microsoft Teams, generating audio, video, and AI-produced transcripts. Visual tree artifacts were collected photographically, and participant journal entries were submitted, reviewed, and responded to between sessions. Data were analyzed iteratively: preliminary coding and theme identification occurred between sessions, informing subsequent facilitation while maintaining fidelity to pre-established session protocols. This cyclical process enabled exploration of IQ1, 1a and 1b.

Coding employed both deductive frameworks derived from Imperiale et al. (2021) and inductive approaches, allowing emergent themes. NVivo software facilitated systematic analysis, with codes consolidated into categories and subsequently synthesized into overarching themes. Narrative analysis complemented structural coding, constructing participant stories documenting

re-authoring processes.

IQ2, 2a, and 2b, were addressed through parallel processes. During each ToL PL session, I constructed a researcher-focused Tree of Life centered on my development as a scholarly practitioner and PL developer/facilitator (see Appendix F). Between sessions, I completed reflexive journals adapted from participant templates and expanded to address facilitation processes, material effectiveness, and personal growth (see Appendix E). These artifacts underwent the same analytical processes as participant data—coding, thematic analysis, and narrative construction—enabling systematic examination of my professional development trajectory.

Upon completion of all sessions, participants completed the final questionnaire, which mirrored the initial instrument with additional items assessing ToL-specific impacts (see Appendix I). Final data corpus included: initial/final questionnaires, four session transcripts, visual tree artifacts, participant journals, researcher ToL artifacts, and researcher reflexive journals. Triangulation across these sources strengthened thematic interpretation. Member checking occurred through follow-up conversations with participants, confirming interpretive accuracy and surfacing sustained impacts beyond the formal inquiry period. A focus group protocol was prepared as a contingency but deemed unnecessary given rich data saturation and ongoing member-checking dialogue.

Data collected through my ToL artifacts, transcripts, and reflexive journals were analyzed using traditional coding methods, including narrative analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Goodson, 2013; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2013). To illuminate my development across both scholarly practitioner and facilitation dimensions, upon completion of all sessions, I used

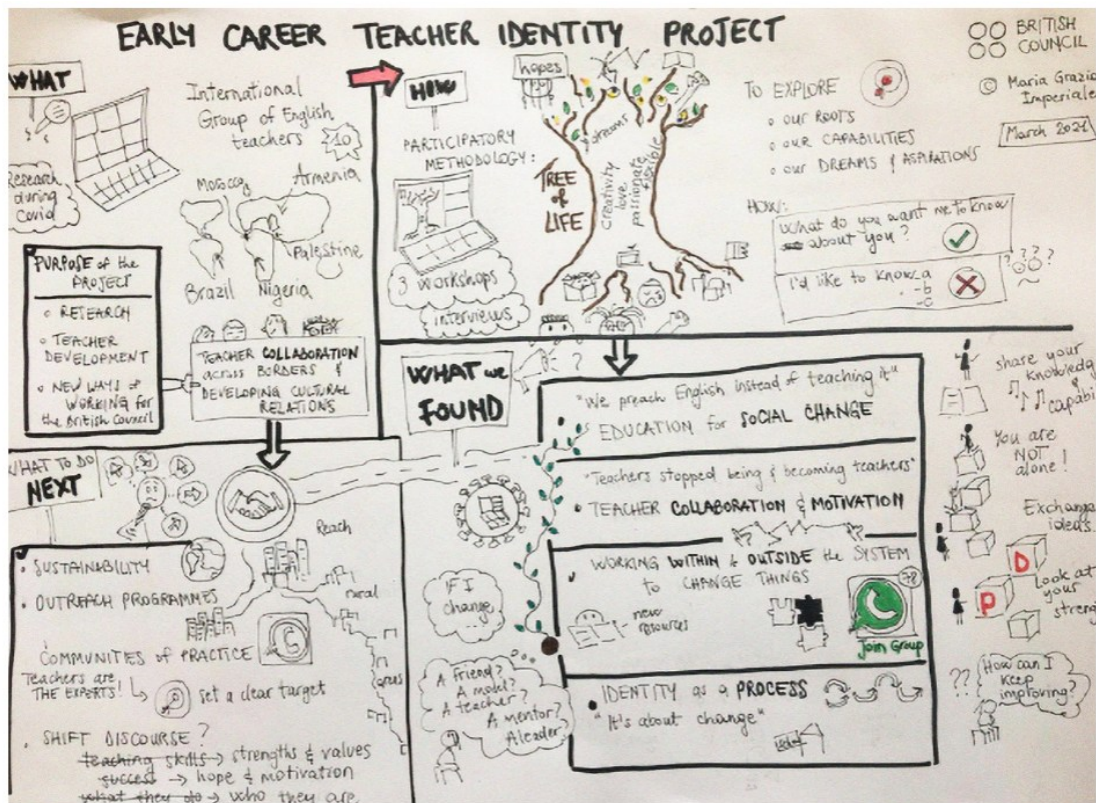
the analysis to create a summative ToL artifact representing my overall growth through the inquiry process as a form of crystallization.

Crystallization is a qualitative methodology that "provides another way of achieving depth, through the compilation not only of many details but also of different forms of representing, organizing, and analyzing those details" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 4). Imperiale et al. (2021) employed crystallization in their ToL narrative work with English as a foreign language educators (see Figure 14), modeling an approach fitting for identity-centered inquiry. Ellingson's framework, which formalizes crystallization for qualitative analysis, "offers a framework for blending grounded theory and other social scientific analyses with creative representations of data using narrative descriptions of rich, life experiences" (Cugno & Thomas, 2009, p. 113).

Study (Phase II)

Raw data was cleaned to remove identifying information. AI-generated transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and clarity. Video recordings of the sessions were reviewed as necessary to edit transcripts and ensure accuracy. Analysis of transcripts and journal entries was completed using NVivo. Coding included a combination of inductive and deductive coding. Deductive codes such as "agency, challenge, collaboration," and "identity" (operationalized as "Whole Person") were employed from the work of Imperiale et al. (2021). Inductive codes such as "culture, linguistic, politics," and "SEL (teacher/student)" grew out of the interactions.

Codes were subsequently consolidated into two overarching categories: Teacher SEL and International Teachers, yielding two central themes: Resilience within Contextual Constraints and Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience (see Appendix K). Triangulation was performed across all sources of data. Narrative analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Goodson,



Note. (Imperiale et al., 2021).

Figure 14. Crystallization for a deeper understanding of teacher identity and agency.

2013; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2013) was used to tell the participant stories, gathering information from recordings, graphic representations, and notes taken during the ToL PL. Both IQ1 and IQ2 were addressed in the analysis for individuals and for the participants and researcher combined. I worked with CIPs and committee members at different intersections of the data analysis and continued to polish the analysis in Phase III.

Act (Phase II)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the inclusion of an optional focus group as a contingency measure to facilitate additional debriefing or data collection should the ToL PL transcripts and participant journals fail to produce sufficiently rich descriptions or discernible themes for triangulation. However, following preliminary data analysis and consultation with CIPs, it was determined that the incorporation of a focus group was not necessary to achieve thematic immersion or ensure data triangulation. Consequently, Phase III of the inquiry was refined to concentrate on deepened data analysis and the dissemination of findings.

The first dissemination of preliminary findings was conducted in November of 2025 at the La Cosecha Dual Language Conference in New Mexico. A presentation featuring initial findings from the ToL PL intervention entitled *Tree of Life: Growing Teacher Agency through Non-Traditional Professional Learning* was shared. Both participants contributed to the proposal and planned to co-present. On November 14, 2025, over twenty participants attended the session. I presented the inquiry procedures and initial findings, followed by participants sharing their experiences. The presentation concluded with attendees engaging in a brief ToL PL. This experience was highly informative, guiding revisions to Chapters 1–3 and the drafting of Chapters 4–5.

I worked with committee members on specific aspects of updating Chapters 1-3 to adjust for the change in participants, reducing the references to the grant, and reducing testing-related materials in the literature review. I worked with Dr. Ye “Jane” He on additional data analysis and representation for chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Summary of Phase II

During Phase II, participants completed an initial questionnaire, participated in four narrative-based ToL PL sessions, submitted four reflective journals, and completed a final questionnaire. The guiding questions for each of the ToL PL were informed by the initial questionnaire to allow for the comparison of participants’ perceptions over time in order to capture any change in their sense of agency as teachers of MLs. Throughout the engagement process, qualitative data were explored to identify themes and narrative stories to address IQ1. In a parallel fashion, I also participated in the ToL PL sessions, documented my reflective journals, and completed my tree of life. The qualitative data focusing on my own reflective process was explored to address IQ2. CIPs, including committee members, were involved in data clean-up and initial analysis, as well as revisions and drafting of dissertation chapters. Initial findings were shared at a Dual Language Conference.

Phase III

Phase III lasted much longer than I had originally planned due to my struggle with Long Covid and forced early retirement. From May of 2025 through defense just before graduation in May of 2026, I focused on finalizing data analysis, writing chapters, and determining next steps for dissemination. Although many hours were spent recuperating, CIP input was crucial to the successful completion of this phase and the dissertation (see Figure 15).

Plan (Phase III)



Figure 15. Phase III improvement-based inquiry timeline.

From May to June 2025, I reviewed narrative analysis procedures, as outlined by Nasheeda et al. (2019), to guide decisions regarding the construction of thicker descriptions in the stories told by the transcripts and journals. Nasheeda emphasizes that narrative analysis varies according to research goals, with no single “best” approach. For this inquiry, the analytical goal was to capture the essence of participants’ perceptions of their agency growth in working with MLs. Accordingly, I went back through data, coding, thematic interpretation, and synthesis to further develop individual and collective narratives. CIPs reviewed the additions and gave suggestions for edits.

Collaborating with CIPs and my dissertation committee, I began to identify pathways to share findings and gather practitioner feedback. Since the conceptual framework for this inquiry integrates Professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rodman, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2020), Teacher agency and professional practice (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Imperiale et al., 2021; Lopez & Santibañez, 2018; Molla & Nolan, 2020), and Narrative therapy, specifically the Tree of Life (ToL) approach (Denborough, 2014; Rice, 2015; Imperiale et al., 2021; Ncube, 2006), and focused on DL/I teachers there are numerous venues for presentations and publications. Due to my health, we decided to focus on the writing rather than the dissemination at this time, especially since I had already shared at La Cosecha.

A plan was established, including setting up electronic alerts on Google Scholar for new research related to my topic, to familiarize myself with additional and updated research relevant to my inquiry.

Do (Phase III)

From June 2025 to February 2026, I focused on finalizing all materials with CIP and committee input. Progress was slower than expected due to Covid brain fog and fatigue. Writing

was done in spurts and came together slower than expected. My passion for the work, the impact it had on participants and in the presentation, along with the amazing support of my committee and CIPs made it doable. I cannot thank them enough.

Study (Phase III)

Preparation for defense included formatting the entire dissertation. A task made greater by working in Google initially and then converting to WORD. The defense presentation grew easily from the La Cosecha presentation.

Act (Phase III)

Following the successful defense presentation, the dissertation will be published through the university. Additional publications from aspects of the dissertation, as well as presentations and additional opportunities to share the ToL PL with educators to grow agency, will be explored.

Summary of Phase III

Data collected during Phases I and II were analyzed in Phase III to address both inquiry questions and determine whether growth in teacher agency when working with multilingual learners (MLs) was evident. Findings from this analysis also guided dissemination strategies.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Establishing rigor was a central priority of this inquiry. Key aspects of credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were addressed through methodological strategies including thick description, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Transferability is often questioned when working with such a small number of participants and is not addressed in this inquiry.

Thick description was employed to convey the depth and complexity of the ToL PL interactions, documenting contextual details, participant perspectives, and interpretive insights. Themes and narratives were examined both within each participant's individual ToL experience and across participants to identify patterns and points of divergence.

Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources, including session transcripts, journal entries, questionnaires, visual tree artifacts, and researcher reflections, allowing cross-validation of findings and enhanced interpretive credibility.

Peer debriefing occurred throughout the process, allowing collaborative reflection with participants on their emotional and cognitive responses to the PL experience and its effect on their agency. Member checking was conducted after each ToL component was analyzed and again at the conclusion of the inquiry. Participants reviewed relevant portions of the written report to confirm that their experiences and voices were represented accurately (Mertler, 2022).

To support instrument validity and reliability, questionnaire items were adapted from established educator surveys developed and validated by the National Center for Education Statistics and the Institute of Education Sciences (NCES, 2020, n.d.). This ensured alignment with widely used measures of teacher agency and instructional practice. Original questions were developed in collaboration with CIPs and piloted to assess content validity. Revisions were made when items did not elicit expected information or failed to align with inquiry goals. Together, these design decisions and verification strategies ensured that the inquiry met accepted qualitative research standards while maintaining authenticity, reflectiveness, and methodological transparency.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Delimitations

To clearly define the scope of this inquiry, the following boundaries were established:

- The inquiry was conducted during the spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year.
- Participation was limited to two third-grade teachers—one who participated in Study 2 of the grant and one who did not.
- Participants could teach in either dual language/immersion (DL/I) or non DL/I program settings.
- The inquiry placed no boundaries on participants' gender, length of teaching experience, or extent of experience working with MLs.

While these delimitations restricted the potential participant pool, they did not unduly affect the scope or validity of the inquiry. Both participants were content area educators who had engaged in various types of PL and taught differing numbers of multilingual learners in their classrooms. These characteristics were representative of educators across North Carolina at the time of the inquiry. The use of baseline data collection, implementation analysis, and post-intervention surveys allowed for measurement of perceptual and professional growth regardless of participants' starting points.

Limitations

All 12 educators participating in the grant as teacher-researchers were invited to participate, but participation was self-selection. Only one grant educator chose to participate, and another educator outside the grant work was added based on chair recommendations. The

teachers were self-selected from a limited pool of candidates. Sessions were conducted virtually to accommodate the geographic regions in which participants worked.

Another limitation was the amount of time allotted to the inquiry. This inquiry was confined to a series of four two-hour sessions over one semester, in addition to the administration of initial and final questionnaires and the possibility of a follow-up focus group. The demands on elementary teachers in NC, including the change in political climate related to MLs and state-mandated LETRS training (NCDPI, 2023a), limited the availability of the participants.

Imperiale et al. (2021) conducted a similar adapted ToL approach project and stressed that to build relationships and trust; it is best to design these types of inquiries as long-term approaches. Despite the limited amount of time for the inquiry, the belief was that relationships built during the grant work and during the first ToL PL session would offset the time restraints in the inquiry.

Assumptions

As Roberts (2019) notes, assumptions are beliefs implicit to an inquiry that must be examined transparently. Four assumptions guided this inquiry. The first assumption is that participants are committed. I assumed that teachers would engage fully in the ToL PL process, attend all sessions, and participate in authentic, sustained self-reflection. The second assumption addresses relational trust. Based on existing professional relationships established through grant collaboration (NCDPI, n.d.-c) and early inquiry activities designed to build psychological safety, I presumed participants would respond openly and honestly in reflection.

Regarding the effectiveness of the ToL Approach, I assumed that the ToL PL would enhance participants' ability to apply previously acquired technical skills in working with MLs (Biesta et al., 2015; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Finally, I assumed outcomes similar to prior

research showing that dialogical and narrative PL enhances teacher agency (Imperiale et al., 2021; Wallen & Tormey, 2019) would emerge in this context.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

From January 2009 to August 2025, I served as a Multilingual Learner (ML)/Title III Consultant in a southeastern SEA. In this role, I collaborated with K–12 public schools statewide to support ML program quality, Title III compliance, Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) initiatives, and grant-related research. My responsibilities included classroom observations, instructional coaching, technical assistance, and professional learning (PL) facilitation. Although I worked closely with educators, I held no supervisory authority over them, including those participating in this inquiry.

This focus of practice emerged from years of delivering PL, observing classrooms, and coaching teachers. Despite consistent exposure to research-based strategies for effectively supporting MLs, only a subset of educators implemented these practices with fidelity. When asked about barriers, teachers cited discomfort with language differences, doubts about MLs' ability to succeed, and constraints on time for differentiation. Such deficit-oriented perspectives prompted my interest in approaches that help teachers examine their identities, beliefs, and assumptions about working with MLs.

Narrative-based PL, particularly the Tree of Life (ToL) approach, offered a promising avenue for inquiry. The ToL has been shown to guide educators through reflective examination of their experiences and contexts, enabling them to recognize both bias and capability (Imperiale et al., 2021; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). I was especially interested in working with educators who had received prior, skills-based science PL through the grant to explore how combining methodological and narrative approaches might influence their sense of agency.

I also recognized the potential for bias at various stages—data collection, analysis, interpretation, and publication—given my professional investment in demonstrating growth in teacher agency. To mitigate this, I engaged the Community of Improvement Practices (CIPs) and my dissertation committee throughout all phases of the inquiry. Their participation in observation, data coding, and interpretation strengthened reflexivity and minimized subjective influence. Interrater reliability measures (Mertler, 2022) further enhanced credibility and confirmability.

Throughout the ToL PL implementation and my own reflective journaling, I developed both written and visual responses to IQ2:

2. How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?
 - a. As a scholarly practitioner?
 - b. As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?

This reflexive process allowed me to critically examine my evolving role as an educator, researcher, and professional learning facilitator, deepening my understanding of how narrative-based PL can cultivate teacher agency, empathy, and equitable practice in support of multilingual learners.

Summary

Chapter three presented the methods of inquiry, including the inquiry questions, design, and rationale. The context, CIPs, ethical considerations, and the three phases of inquiry were described. My role, as well as rigor, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions, were addressed in the context of the inquiry. Chapter four will review the results related to the impact of the ToL PL on teacher agency.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore self-reflection as a tool to enhance teacher agency in working with MLs via a non-traditional narrative-based approach to PL. Participating in the ToL PL, teachers reflected on their challenges and successes in providing an equitable education for MLs in third-grade DL/I classes. The inquiry investigated whether the self-reflective process of constructing a professionally oriented ToL influenced participants' cognition and practice. Given the complex interplay of social and professional factors shaping teacher decision-making, evaluating the ToL implementation required a systematic analysis of multiple data sources: initial and final questionnaires, reflective tree artifacts, synchronous discussions, and asynchronous journal entries. Throughout the PL delivery, I engaged in concurrent reflexive practice to examine my own development as both researcher and PL facilitator.

The following questions guided the inquiry:

1. What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life (ToL) Professional Learning (PL) on teacher agency?
 - a. How do teachers perceive changes in their sense of agency after participating in the ToL PL?
 - b. What elements of the ToL PL do teachers perceive as contributing to these changes?
2. How has the Tree of Life (ToL) Professional Learning (PL) impacted my professional growth?
 - a. As a scholarly practitioner?
 - b. As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with six educators with varying levels of experience with ML instruction and who had established rapport with the researcher, a prerequisite for successful reflective narrative work (Imperiale et al., 2021). The pilot mirrored the proposed inquiry design but employed a condensed timeline and reduced participant pool. While participant feedback informed refinements to questionnaires, lesson plans, and journal prompts, the pilot data provided preliminary evidence supporting the inquiry's theoretical foundation. One participant's post-session reflection suggested emergent agency development:

My experiences have been sort of soul-sucking and really discouraging. Not a great experience with teaching so far... We enter the field because we care and want to make the world a better place. What this helps me do is reflect on my “whys”... It encourages you to revisit those roots and access them in a new way. It encourages me because I have a good reason to be a teacher, and I have things to contribute to the classroom that others may not have.

Preliminary analysis indicated alignment between ToL PL outcomes and existing literature documenting the approach's capacity to enhance teacher agency (Imperiale et al., 2021).

Demographics

Participant recruitment initially targeted a cohort of 12 third- through fifth-grade public school teachers in a southeastern state who taught both science and MLs as part of grant research. The collaborative work of establishing lesson-planning protocols and conducting classroom observations had cultivated the requisite trust for reflective narrative inquiry. However, teacher attrition, shifting political discourse surrounding ML education, and individual circumstances resulted in only one targeted educator committing to participation. To facilitate

interaction during PL sessions, an additional participant from outside the grant was recruited. This modification necessitated both a methodological shift to narrative design and a demographic reorientation from predominantly English-speaking, U.S.-born educators to bilingual, internationally trained teachers working in DL/I programs. This allowed not only for a deeper exploration of narrative professional learning processes but also for insight into the impact of the ToL PL on participants who possessed a deep knowledge of the ML experience from both a personal and an educator lens.

Participant C, is a female, Spanish-English bilingual international teacher from Colombia with over 20 years of experience teaching third-grade DL/I. She participated in the grant work as a teacher-researcher. The grant worked reshaped her classroom practices to integrate science, inquiry, and language meaningfully. Having experienced exclusion and emotional injury in her past increased her resolve to make her classroom both a sanctuary and a platform for equity. She is an author and a former university professor deeply rooted in mathematics and linguistics. As an immigrant teacher she is rebuilding her professional identity in the United States. C desires to contribute to educational equity and professional dignity, particularly for Latin American teachers. She also dreams of completing her Ph.D., finalizing a personal pedagogical theory (“the vital cycle of a class”), authoring additional books, and creating a legacy of educational leadership that uplifts multilingual educators.

Participant B is a female, Spanish-English bilingual international teacher from Chile, with over 20 years of experience who teaches third-grade in a DL/I program. She did not participate as a grant teacher-researcher. Having lived in 27 different homes across numerous countries due to her father’s and husband’s military service, she described herself as the perpetual newcomer who developed a rare flexibility and openness to new environments. This

upbringing shaped a profound empathy for MLs, many of whom experience transitions and linguistic displacement similar to her own. Her belief that learning happens everywhere and that cultural immersion is key to understanding others translates into her classroom allowing her to recognize the value of her students' identities and stories. In her learning environment, she reframes mistakes as learning opportunities and multilingualism is celebrated as a valuable asset. B loves teaching, exploration of languages, academic research, and is interested in neuroscience and cognitive sciences, which she linked to both learning and teacher wellness. Her greatest challenge is when the demands of the system collide with the vulnerabilities and needs of the students she serves. Her professional identity is not marked by dramatic transformation or theoretical articulation, but by the steady, grounded work of guiding MLs through a complex educational landscape.

I, as the facilitator/researcher, was an active participant in the ToL sessions and identified myself as Participant A for data collection and analysis purposes. Working with the revised participant demographics (see Table 4) raised methodological considerations regarding participant pool size, interpersonal dynamics, transferability, and baseline expertise in ML instruction (see Table 5).

Intervention and Implementation

To address Inquiry Question (IQ) 1, 1a, and 1b, data collection encompassed questionnaires, PL session transcripts, and reflective journals. The ToL PL consisted of four two-hour sessions held at two-week intervals. While the original design proposed monthly sessions to extend reflection time (see Appendix C), participants B and C exercised agency by selecting a more frequent meeting schedule. Each session followed a structured protocol: I introduced a tree component, participants engaged in 10 minutes of independent reflection and visual

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant	Position	Languages	Status	Gender	Experience
A	Researcher, PL Facilitator/Developer	English	Doctoral Candidate	Female	30+ years
B	Dual Language Teacher - 3rd grade	Spanish, English	International Teacher	Female	20+ years
C	Dual Language Teacher - 3rd grade	Spanish, English	International Teacher	Female	20+ years

Table 5

Research Concerns with Change in Participants

Consideration	Concern	Solution
Need for established relationship: Imperiale et al. (2021) stressed the importance of establishing a relationship with participants to support the self-reflective nature of the ToL work.	I only had an established relationship with one participant. The participants did not know each other.	Take time in the first ToL session to establish relationships with and between participants.
Impact and transferability: The grant group of twelve was made up of mostly monolingual or English-dominant participants with various experiences teaching ML in standard third through fifth-grade classrooms.	Both participants B and C are Spanish/English bilingual international teachers with extensive experience teaching MLs in dual-language classrooms	Allow for the use of Spanish in the discussions and journals. Discuss concerns about agency growth and the impact of ToL specifically (Session 3, part 4).

representation, and then up to 15 minutes of group discussion. This facilitated collective meaning-making around emerging insights and questions. Participants completed journals independently between sessions and submitted them for feedback (see Appendix D). All sessions were conducted via Microsoft Teams, resulting in audiovisual recordings and AI-generated transcripts. Electronic copies of journals and tree artifacts were archived for analysis. Concurrently, and in alignment with IQ2, 2a, and 2b, I, identified as Participant A, constructed a parallel ToL focused on my development as both scholarly practitioner and PL developer/facilitator. I also completed a research-focused journal.

Data Collection

Inquiry Question 1

Questionnaire

To address IQ1 and its sub-questions, an initial questionnaire (see Appendix H) assessed participant demographics, perceptions of ML student capabilities, and self-reported agency in supporting MLs. The instrument required approximately 20–30 minutes to complete. One participant completed the questionnaire in its entirety; the other provided partial responses. The questionnaire included: inquiry overview and instructions, teacher and student demographic data, perceived student abilities, self-assessed agency, professional learning history, and open-ended commentary. Administration occurred prior to ToL PL implementation.

The final questionnaire (see Appendix I) replicated the initial instrument with supplementary items. Demographic sections remained accessible but optional, as the single-semester timeframe rendered substantive changes unlikely. Additional items directly addressed IQ1a by soliciting participants' perceptions of ToL PL impact on both student capability

assessments and personal agency. Items targeting IQ1b queried which ToL components most significantly influenced participant thinking and practice.

ToL PL Transcripts

The ToL PL framework prioritized flexibility to honor teacher agency in determining session scheduling. While the session outline (see Appendix C) proposed two-hour sessions addressing two tree components each, the design accommodated one-hour alternatives focusing on a single component and allowed for more frequent sessions. Participants were not required to implement inquiry-related practices in their classrooms; however, organic integration was anticipated as self-reflection cultivated agency. This expectation informed the original monthly interval between sessions.

The four two-hour sessions yielded substantial data. Microsoft Teams facilitated video and audio recording alongside AI-generated transcripts. As participants constructed successive ToL components, they articulated insights regarding self-understanding and agency development, generating data relevant to both Inquiry Questions 1a and 1b.

Journals

Journal entries facilitated sustained reflection on PL sessions and documented organic transfer of reflective practices into classroom contexts (see Appendix D). Prompts mirrored PL session themes to ensure consistency and deepen exploration of content addressed through tree construction and group discussion. Participants submitted visual documentation of tree progress at each journal checkpoint and final tree artifacts upon completion. Entries were submitted two days before subsequent sessions, enabling my review, formative feedback, and preparation of session openings before introducing new tree components. Journal data addressed IQ1a and 1b, both corroborating session discourse and revealing additional insights.

Inquiry Question 2

During the pilot study, I facilitated PL sessions while simultaneously constructing my own tree as an ML educator, completing the full process and modeling artifact development for participants. In the primary inquiry, I engaged in a parallel reflective process, constructing a ToL centered on my identity as a scholarly practitioner and PL developer/facilitator to address IQ2, 2a, and 2b.

ToL PL Model

I participated in ToL sessions in dual roles as facilitator and researcher. During the ten-minute intervals allocated for participant tree construction, I concurrently developed a ToL focused on my identity as researcher and PL developer/facilitator (see Appendix F) addressing IQ2a and 2b. Session recordings and transcripts were analyzed to identify my statements during discussions that illuminated these focal areas.

Journal

I employed a journal template paralleling the participant format (see Appendix E) to document reflections on research logistics and each of the four sessions. Entries explored how materials development, session implementation, and participant responses informed my personal and professional growth.

Data Analysis

Inquiry Question 1

Questionnaire

Quantitative analysis examined Likert-scale item shifts between initial and final questionnaires, including magnitude coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Goodson, 2013; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2013). Open-ended responses underwent qualitative analysis

focusing on evidence of growth and change in perceptions of ML student capabilities and self-reported agency. Concepts were triangulated within the questionnaire and across the questionnaire, transcripts, and journals.

ToL PL Transcripts and Journals

Initial coding employed a deductive framework derived from Imperiale et al. (2021), conducted in NVivo. Emergent commonalities generated additional inductive codes. Codes were consolidated into categories and themes (see Appendix K). Consistent with the narrative epistemology underlying the PL intervention, narrative analysis was subsequently applied to construct individual and collective participant stories.

Inquiry Question 2

Narrative analysis was conducted on my journal entries, ToL artifacts, and transcript segments to construct a coherent account of my experience as a researcher and PL developer/facilitator, addressing my professional growth across both dimensions. Following individual narrative analysis, a collective narrative was constructed, integrating participant (Participants B and C) and researcher (Participant A) stories to illuminate shared themes, divergent pathways, and the co-constructed nature of the ToL PL experience.

Use of AI

AI was used as a support tool to further my insights after conducting initial analysis and drawing independent conclusions, maintaining my scholarly independence (Everson, 2025). The relevance and accuracy of AI suggestions were reviewed before being considered for integration into the manuscript.

For quantitative analysis, I used AI to review my analysis and representation of the data, to extend my understanding, and to recommend additional visual representations. AI was used in

qualitative analysis to explore alternative categorization of my codes, identify additional story components for the narrative analysis, and for style and tone analysis, including consistency and cohesion. I also used AI for cross-validation, reviewing my findings, identifying triangulation points I may have missed within and across the data sets, and identifying potential researcher bias.

Prompt writing was an important consideration in the use of AI, which was a system of trial and error. Including the appropriate context, audience, a logically focused request, and specific guidance on how to render the response were all important to the quality of the output. Often, refinement was required to hone the request and response to receive the depth and insight needed to enhance the original work.

Results

Inquiry Question 1

Quantitative Findings

Pre-post comparison of Likert-scale items revealed differential patterns in agency perception shifts. Participant B demonstrated marked increases across seven of ten agency dimensions, most notably in overall teaching effectiveness (Satisfactory → Excellent) and perceived influence over ML student outcomes. Participant C showed modest increases in three dimensions while maintaining baseline levels in others, suggesting a consolidation rather than expansion of existing agency. As seen in Table 6, Participant B showed increases in 4 dimensions, decreases in 2, and stability in 4, while Participant C showed stability across all 10 dimensions. Both participants maintained high agency in family outreach and resource access. The greatest divergence existed with B's categorical jump from Satisfactory/ Effective to Excellent/ Outstanding for overall teaching effectiveness.

Table 6

Pre-Post Shifts in Perceived Agency Across Ten Dimensions

Agency Dimension	Participant B	Participant C	Pattern
Understanding of academic English challenges	Somewhat high → High.	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Divergent: B increased
Understanding of culture's influence on learning	High → High	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Convergent: Both stable
Ability to differentiate instruction	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Convergent: Both stable
Ability to teach standards-based content	High → Somewhat high	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Divergent: B decreased
Use of language screener/proficiency test data	Somewhat low → Neither low nor high	Low → Low	Divergent: B increased
Knowledge of instructional strategies	High → Somewhat high	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Divergent: B decreased
Understanding of assessment issues	Low → Neither low nor high	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Divergent: B increased
Use of classroom-based assessments	Low → Somewhat high	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Divergent: B increased
Family outreach skills/strategies	High → High	Somewhat high → Somewhat high	Convergent: Both stable
Access to materials/ resources/ technology	High → High	High → High	Convergent: Both stable (high)
Overall Teaching Effectiveness	Satisfactory/ Effective → Excellent/ Outstanding	Satisfactory/ Effective → Satisfactory/ Effective	Divergent: Only B increased

Analyzing the same data using magnitude coding enhances the clarity of the shifts (see Table 7). Participant B shows a net positive shift (+4), suggesting targeted growth in assessment literacy. Note that assessment dimensions account for all of B's positive growth (+4 of +4). Decreases in B's "teaching standards" and "knowledge of strategies" may reflect increased metacognitive awareness of complexity rather than actual skill loss. Participant C demonstrates a stable profile (0), suggesting consolidation rather than expansion.

Table 8 addresses pre-post shifts in perceived influence over ML-related outcomes. Both participants showed high baseline agency across most dimensions, with the greatest convergence occurring in direct student impact areas (behavior, SEL, academic success). Both decreased for impact on absenteeism, suggesting realistic recalibration post-reflection. Participant B gained agency in institutional dimensions (policies, grading). Participant C gained in workload management (self-care dimension).

ML Student Capabilities are analyzed in Table 9. A dramatic shift from disagree to agree across all four items is seen for B, while C maintained a stable deficit-focus. Both acknowledge content-area differences (math vs. reading).

B stated, "All my ML learners are capable, but they always need support in reading comprehension."

C reflected, "Always my ML learners can grow and go forward in math. In reading is harder to obtain better understanding."

Overall, B's shift suggests asset-based reframing through ToL PL, while C's stability suggests beliefs may be deeply entrenched despite PL.

Table 7

Magnitude of Agency Shifts by Dimension

Agency Dimension	Participant B	Participant C	Total Change
Understanding of academic English challenges	+1	0	+1
Understanding of culture's influence on learning	0	0	0
Ability to differentiate instruction	0	0	0
Ability to teach standards-based content	-1	0	-1
Use of language screener/proficiency test data	+1	0	+1
Knowledge of instructional strategies	-1	0	-1
Understanding of assessment issues	+2	0	+2
Use of classroom-based assessments	+2	0	+2
Family outreach skills/strategies	0	0	0
Access to materials/resources/ technology	0	0	0
Total Shift Score	+4	0	+4

Table 8

Pre-Post Shifts in Perceived Influence Over ML-Related Outcomes

Area of Influence	Participant B	Participant C	Total Change
Making a difference in ML lives	Agree → Agree	Somewhat agree → Agree	Convergent: Both high/increased
Selecting PD content	Somewhat agree → Agree	Disagree → Disagree	Divergent: B increased
Impacting absenteeism	Agree → Neither disagree nor agree	Agree → Neither disagree nor agree	Convergent: Both decreased
Supporting SEL	Agree → Agree	Agree → Agree	Convergent: Both stable (high)
Impacting parental involvement	Somewhat agree → Agree	Agree → Agree	Convergent: Both high
Selecting teaching techniques	Somewhat agree → Agree	Agree → Agree	Convergent: Both high
Evaluating/grading students	Neither disagree nor agree → Somewhat agree	Agree → Agree	Divergent: B increased
Creating workplace policies	Neither disagree nor agree → Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree → Somewhat agree	Divergent: B increased
Managing workload	Somewhat agree → Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree → Agree	Divergent: C increased
Acquiring instructional materials	Agree → Agree	Agree → Agree	Convergent: Both stable (high)
Personal accomplishment	Somewhat agree → Agree	Agree → Agree	Convergent: Both high

Table 9

Pre-Post Beliefs About ML Student Capabilities

Belief Statement	Participant B	Participant C	Total Change
Capable of performing well on classroom assessments	Disagree → Agree	Somewhat agree → Agree	Divergent: B major shift
Accurately demonstrate knowledge on classroom assessments	Somewhat disagree → Somewhat agree	Neither disagree nor agree → Neither disagree nor agree	Divergent: B increased
Capable of performing well on state assessments	Somewhat disagree → Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree → Somewhat disagree	Divergent: B increased
Accurately demonstrate knowledge on state assessments	Disagree → Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree → Somewhat disagree	Divergent: B increased

Question 22 specifically addressed IQ1 b. It reads: “The ToL PL offered an opportunity to reflect on various aspects of your experience as a teacher of MLs through the roots, trunk, branches, flowers, ground, bugs, and storms. It also explored the communal aspect of the forest. How has the narrative PL impacted you and your work with MLs? How did it impact previous PL you have experienced through the grant or other ML-related PL. Please be specific.”

Both participants identified Roots, the biographical and cultural foundations of professional identity, as the most impactful ToL component (see Table 10). Participant B elaborated: “Everything comes from here (roots). My family, how I was raised. ...I've realized that my impact as a teacher is grounded in the values and strengths that guide my daily work.” and “Recognizing my roots, my upbringing, culture, and language, allowed me to validate the importance of honoring my students' identities as part of academic success. The bugs and storms reminded me that the challenges I've faced as an immigrant and educator are not weaknesses, but sources of empathy and strength.”

C states, “Enhancing my understanding of how telling and personal experiences can support acquisition and engagement to improve yourself. They provided confidence for connecting with multilingual learners' backgrounds, fostering a deeper sense of inclusion and motivation.”

Overall, both participants identified biographical grounding, their identity, as most impactful, with B engaging more comprehensively across multiple components. (see table 11). Table 12 depicts self-reported impacts on the perception of agency in the final questionnaire highlighted identity validation, including language and lived experience, a shift to more active agency, such as implementing new routines, increased confidence in supporting MLs, enhanced empathy for approaching challenges, and a vision to see the reflective practice expanded.

Table 10

ToL Component Impact: Participant Selection and Explanation

Component	Participant B	Participant C
Roots	Selected "Everything comes from here. My family, how I was raised."	Selected "It highlighted how acknowledging and valuing my roots related those with how I can drive engagement."
Trunk	Selected "Just like a tree cannot grow without a strong trunk, I've realized that my impact as a teacher is grounded in the values and strengths that guide my daily work. My trunk is not just what I do—it's who I am."	Not Selected
Branches	Selected "My branches represent the goals I keep working toward as a teacher. They show how I keep growing, learning new strategies, helping my students, and dreaming of a better future for them."	Not Selected
Flowers	Not Selected	Not Selected
Ground	Not Selected	Not Selected
Bugs	Not Selected	Not Selected
Storms	Not Selected	Not Selected
Forest	Not Selected	Not Selected

Table 11

Overall Impact Rating and Self-Assessment

Measure	Participant B	Participant C
Impact Level (Q21)	It strongly impacted my perception	It somewhat impacted my perception
Final Effectiveness Rating (Q19)	Excellent/Outstanding/Highly effective	Satisfactory/Effective
Change from Initial	+2	No change

Table 12

Self-Reported Impact Mechanisms

Theme	Participant B	Participant C
Identity validation	"Helped me realize that my identity as a native Spanish speaker and immigrant allows me to connect deeply with ML students."	"I remember many aspects that I learn in my country about the relation between myself development and my profession"
Shift in agency locus	<i>"Shifted my perception from a somewhat passive position to a much more active one."</i>	Not mentioned
Concrete practice changes	"I created a bilingual morning meeting routine."	Not mentioned
Increased confidence	"Increased my confidence in supporting MLs academically."	"I feel more confident after our conversation."
Enhanced empathy	<i>"Challenges...are not weaknesses, but sources of empathy and strength."</i>	"Fostering a deeper sense of inclusion and motivation"
Transferability beyond MLs	"Can be applied beyond supporting ML students—it invites deep personal reflection."	Not mentioned

Although participants were not asked to take the work into their classrooms you can see that it made its way in.

Analysis of evidence of growth in agency triangulated with action is depicted in Table 13. Participant B demonstrates alignment across self-report, quantitative measures, and behavioral indicators, suggesting authentic agency development. Participant C shows a selective impact primarily in confidence and identity validation.

Table 14 focuses on how IQ1, 1a, and 1b were answered through the questionnaire. Data showed that self-reports aligned with quantitative shifts for perceived influence of the ToL PL in IQ1. For IQ1a, there was an integration of the participants' identity and their practice, and for IQ1b, although both chose roots as the most impactful, the depth of engagement varied.

ToL PL Transcripts and Journals

Analysis of transcripts and journal entries was completed using NVivo. Deductive codes derived from Imperiale et al. (2021) provided the initial framework. The codes Agency, Challenge, and Collaboration, identified as prevalent in the foundational research, were also prominent in this inquiry. The code Identity was operationalized as Whole Person to capture the holistic integration of personal and professional selves and emerged as a significant pattern. Additional inductive codes developed during analysis included: Academic, Class Impact, Culture, Dual Language, Linguistic, MLs, Politics, SEL (Teacher), and SEL (Student). Codes were subsequently consolidated into two overarching categories: Teacher SEL and International Teachers, yielding two central themes: Resilience within Contextual Constraints and Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience (see Appendix K). Triangulation was performed across all sources of data.

Table 15 shows the occurrences for each code by participant. Participant B coded most

Table 13

Evidence of Agency Development: Questionnaire Data Triangulated with Action

Indicator	Participant B	Participant C	Analysis
Reported agency shift	Strong	Moderate	B shows greater perceived impact
Quantitative agency increases	+4 net shift score	0 net shift score	B shows measurable growth
Effectiveness rating change	+2 categories	No change	B shows a transformational shift
Concrete practice changes cited	Yes (bilingual morning meeting)	No	B demonstrates behavioral transfer
Family engagement outcomes	Yes (<i>"increased engagement from Hispanic families"</i>)	No	B reports systemic outcomes
Asset-based reframing	Yes (deficit → capability beliefs)	Limited	B shows cognitive restructuring
Components engaged with	3 (Roots, Trunk, Branches)	1 (Roots only)	B shows deeper engagement

Table 14

Inquiry Question 1: Evidence Summary

Inquiry Question	Quantitative Evidence	Qualitative Evidence	Triangulation
IQ1: Perceived influence of ToL PL on teacher agency	• B: +4 net agency shift • C: 0 net shift • B: Effectiveness ↑ 2 categories	• B: "Strongly impacted" • C: "Somewhat impacted" • Both report increased confidence	Self-report aligns with quantitative shifts
IQ1a: How teachers perceive changes in agency	• B: Increases in 4 dimensions (assessment focus) • B: Increased influence over institutional practices	• B: "Passive → active" • B: "Power to do" • C: "More confident" • Both: Identity validation	Mechanism = identity-practice integration
IQ1b: Elements contributing to changes	• Component selection: Both chose Roots	• Roots: Biographical grounding • Trunk (B only): Core identity • Branches (B only): Future orientation	Roots = universal; depth of engagement varies

Table 15

Code Frequency Comparative Analysis by Participant

Code	Participant B Frequency	Participant C Frequency	Participant A Frequency	Pattern
Agency	52 instances	18 instances	31 instances	B > A > C
Whole Person	43 instances	22 instances	27 instances	B > A > C
Challenge	34 instances	19 instances	41 instances	A highest (recruitment crisis)
Culture	47 instances	28 instances	19 instances	B > C > A
Linguistic	39 instances	31 instances	14 instances	Similar for participants
Politics	21 instances	8 instances	17 instances	B > A > C
SEL (Teacher)	29 instances	24 instances	36 instances	A highest (reflexivity)
SEL (Student)	33 instances	16 instances	8 instances	B emphasized most
Collaboration	18 instances	12 instances	23 instances	A emphasized (forest)
Resilience	26 instances	11 instances	19 instances	B > A > C

frequently for Agency, Whole Person, Culture, and Resilience, aligning with her "strongly impacted" self-assessment. Participant C showed moderate coding across most dimensions, aligning with her "somewhat impacted" self-assessment. I coded highest for Challenge and SEL (Teacher), reflecting the recruitment crisis and my dual facilitator-participant role.

Tables 16 and 17 depict how evidence from the codes was used to derive the categories and support the themes. For Theme 1, Resilience within Contextual Constraints, teachers navigate systemic barriers (hostile policies, biased assessments, political climates) by anchoring in personal identity (roots/trunk) and reframing constraints as contexts for creative agency rather than deterministic limitations. For Theme 2, Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience, teachers' biographical experiences as immigrants, bilinguals, and cultural outsiders create profound empathy for ML students, transforming personal history into a pedagogical asset and advocacy fuel. Table 18 triangulates data from across all sources, questionnaires, transcripts, and journals, to support thematic presence.

The questionnaires, codes, and themes provide a comprehensive structural understanding of the substantial data collected through the ToL PL. Likert-scale shifts document what changed, while code frequencies reveal how often particular concepts appeared. Thematic analysis synthesizes patterns into interpretive meaning. However, narrative analysis goes deeper, revealing the process of re-authoring (Denborough, 2008; Lock, 2016; Ncube, 2006), how teachers moved from problem-saturated narratives to alternative, agentic narratives through the reflective ToL process. While coding identifies that "Agency" appeared 52 times in Participant B's data, narrative analysis illuminates the transformation from *"things happen TO me"* (Session 1) to *"I make things happen"* (Session 3) to *"I've seen increased engagement from Hispanic families....stronger trust"* (Final Questionnaire). This temporal, processual understanding exceeds

Table 16

Theme 1: Resilience within Contextual Constraints – Codes to Themes

Contributing Codes	Category	Evidence from Data	Participant
Challenge + Agency	Teacher SEL	<i>"I can't control the EOG, but I CAN control how I prepare my students" (Session 2)</i>	B
Politics + Resilience	Contextual Constraints	<i>"The political climate is hostile to immigrants right now...that makes me fight harder" (Session 4)</i>	B
Challenge + Whole Person	Teacher SEL	<i>"The bugs in my tree—recruitment failing—that hurt. But I used narrative reframing to move forward" (Researcher journal)</i>	A
Challenge + Academic	Contextual Constraints	<i>"Standards don't fit MLs...I teach standards AND what they need" (Journal 3)</i>	B
Politics + MLs	Contextual Constraints	<i>"Policies about testing MLs are unjust...I advocate within my sphere" (Session 3)</i>	B
SEL (Teacher) + Resilience	Teacher SEL	<i>"This reflection reminded me why I'm here...reconnected me to my purpose" (Journal 4)</i>	C

Table 17

Theme 2: Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience – Codes to Themes

Contributing Codes	Category	Evidence from Data	Participant
Whole Person + MLs	International Teachers	<i>"I AM a multilingual learner...I get it from the inside"</i> (Session 1)	B
Linguistic + Empathy	International Teachers	<i>"I learned English as adult...I know the frustration my students feel"</i> (Session 1)	C
Culture + SEL (Student)	International Teachers	<i>"My cultural identity helps me create space for their identities"</i> (Journal 2)	B
Linguistic + Class Impact	International Teachers	<i>"Because I'm bilingual, I model that two languages are assets"</i> (Session 2)	B
Whole Person + Collaboration	International Teachers	<i>"I connect with ML families because we share language and immigration story"</i> (Session 4)	B
Culture + Academic	International Teachers	<i>"My education in Spain taught me to see whole child, not just test scores"</i> (Journal 1)	C
Empathy + Agency	Teacher SEL	<i>"My empathy isn't just feeling—it drives my advocacy"</i> (Session 4)	B

Table 18

Thematic Presence Across Data Sources

Theme	Questionnaire Evidence	Transcript Evidence	Journal Evidence	Triangulation
1 Resilience within Contextual Constraints	B: "Shifted from passive to active" B: Decreased belief that absenteeism is within her control (realistic resilience) C: Stable profile despite challenges	B: 28 coded instances across Sessions 2-4 C: 15 coded instances Researcher: 12 instances in reflexive memos	B: Every journal mentions challenge + response C: Journals 2-3 focus on constraints Researcher: Journal 2 on recruitment crisis	Strong convergence—theme present in all data types, all participants
2 Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience	B: "My identity as native Spanish speaker and immigrant allows me to connect deeply" C: Personal life experiences influence planning	B: 38 coded instances, primarily Sessions 1-2 C: 24 coded instances, primarily Session 1	B: Journals 1-2 extensive on immigration story C: Journal 1 on Spain background	Strong convergence—universal theme, differentially elaborated

what structural coding can capture.

Narrative Analysis

The narrative stories presented in the following sections demonstrate teachers' capacity to enhance agency through biographical grounding, identity integration, and the re-authoring of professional narratives within, and sometimes against, contextual constraints.

Narrative theory posits that individuals construct meaning through self-stories, which typically privilege a singular, problem-saturated account while marginalizing alternative narratives. Narrative approaches address this limitation through externalization, separating the person from the problem, and by surfacing counter-narratives that challenge dominant storylines (Denborough, 2018; Freedman & Combs, 2013; Rice, 2015). This process of reclaiming authority over their narrative ties directly with the previously mentioned Figure 9, which depicts the Narrative Therapy concept of taking life experiences and moving from a thin, often negative, story to understanding the multiple stories of our lives, building our sense of agency.

Narrative methodology operates from the premise that experiences acquire meaning through the stories individuals construct about them, which subsequently shape identity and relational perceptions (Lock, 2016). Narrative interventions, including the ToL approach, demonstrate that retelling enables "re-authoring," constructing alternative narratives that align with chosen identities (Lock, 2016; Ncube, 2006). The adapted ToL PL employed in this inquiry utilized metaphorical tree components as a reflective framework to cultivate teacher agency in ML instruction (Imperiale et al., 2021).

Drawing on ToL PL session transcripts and journal entries, I employed narrative analysis to construct participant and researcher stories documenting narrative expansion through the ToL PL process. Individual participant narratives are presented sequentially, followed by a synthesis

of collective themes. My narrative is then explored and integrated with the participants.

C's Story

Participant C, a female, Spanish-English bilingual international teacher from Colombia teaching third-grade DL/I, participated in the grant as a teacher-researcher. C received the grant-specific PL, implemented the grant classroom materials, and participated in classroom observations by grant staff, including me.

Themes of identity transformation, persistence, and cultural resilience frame Participant C's narrative. A native Spanish speaker and former university professor in Colombia, C reflected on her journey from an accomplished educator and researcher, deeply rooted in mathematics and linguistics, to an immigrant teacher rebuilding professional identity in the United States. C described this relocation as both humbling and painful, sharing that upon arrival, C felt invisible: "You don't exist. Literally, you don't exist." This vulnerability, however, became a source of motivation and empathy for C's MLs who face similar experiences of displacement and linguistic marginalization.

In examining roots, C identified her grandmother, a linguist and teacher, as a foundational influence who cultivated a deep respect for language and precision in communication. The transition from Colombia to the U.S. redefined her roots, expanding them to include cross-cultural adaptation, bilingual education, and an acute awareness of systemic inequities.

The trunk revealed persistence, problem-solving, creativity, and advocacy as core strengths. C discussed her passion for empowering students and families through culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and recognized how the grant had reshaped her classroom practices to integrate science, inquiry, and language meaningfully. C's reflections illuminated her

role as both an educator and a change agent, striving to humanize education in a system that often limits the opportunities for immigrant teachers. She views her classroom as both a sanctuary and a platform for equity, where students' identities are affirmed and their voices amplified. Through the ToL PL, C connected her personal journey of resilience with her pedagogical purpose, describing the interplay between self-reflection and transformation: "The plants create more roots than they have at the beginning." For her, professional growth and self-discovery were inseparable.

For C, Session 2 surfaced both personal turbulence and emergent transformation. Beginning the session, she described feeling "irritated" and emotionally unsteady, a state she linked to the convergence of personal events (becoming a grandmother, illness, family dynamics) and professional pressures (student testing, parent disengagement). Through dialogue, she realized that this irritation could also represent inner stirring, a signal from the subconscious calling her toward growth or change. The facilitator/A framed this as "something inside you trying to tell you to listen," leading C to consider whether her restlessness reflected a deeper calling to expand her professional engagement and influence.

As C developed her branches, her aspirations revealed a profound desire to contribute to educational equity and professional dignity, particularly for Latin American teachers. She articulated dreams of completing her Ph.D., finalizing a personal pedagogical theory ("the vital cycle of a class"), authoring additional books, and creating a legacy of educational leadership that uplifts multilingual educators. A recurring motif in her speech was the phrase "do more" and "be involved more," signaling her search for greater participation, validation, and structural empowerment within the U.S. educational system.

She envisioned branches representing innovation, advocacy, and cross-cultural

collaboration, grounding these in both her research background in Colombia and her current work in a DL/I context. Her ToL exercise thus became an act of identity reconstruction, bridging her academic identity as a professor and researcher in Colombia with her current identity as an immigrant teacher. Her reflections revealed the emotional and professional challenge of navigating a new educational culture while seeking to reclaim her sense of expertise and belonging.

Her leaves represented a dense network of gratitude and professional mentorship: colleagues from various Colombian universities, her husband and children, DPI collaborators, grant Staff, and academic mentors who modeled excellence in research and pedagogy. She included the grant and the ToL PL experience as sources of empowerment, acknowledging that these frameworks helped expand her confidence and agency as a multilingual professional. Despite this network, she expressed feelings of uncertainty about building new professional connections in the U.S., attributing challenges to language and unfamiliarity with academic networking norms. However, even amid these insecurities, she declared a vision of finding “people who will open the door,” demonstrating aspiration, persistence, and emerging confidence in navigating institutional spaces.

C’s session narrative portrayed teacher agency as a process of transformation through reflection: acknowledging emotional dissonance, reframing it as motivation, and identifying concrete aspirations rooted in her passion for research, inclusion, and intercultural education. Her reflections highlighted the interplay of vulnerability and empowerment, showing how professional agency evolves amid uncertainty.

In Session 3, C’s participation deepened into profound self-reflection and personal storytelling, where narrating her life became a form of healing and transformation. She began by

saying she “didn’t have many flowers.” The flowers she initially struggled to name, gradually emerged as she recognized the significance of her lifelong contributions to education, resilience, and leadership. C identified as her primary flowers the books she has written, the honors she has received (such as Teacher of the Year), and professional milestones, including receiving her U.S. teaching license and being part of national research projects. Although these achievements span decades, she confessed that with over 30 years in education, “it is hard to see the flowers... sometimes you confuse your experience with new ideas and try to merge both.” Her reflection captures a critical point in professional identity for veteran educators: the negotiation between legacy and continuous renewal.

Her narrative then took a deeply personal turn as she reflected on her ground, tracing its layers back to her childhood in Colombia. She described both love and trauma, growing up surrounded by a caring family, yet suffering persistent bullying at school for being young, brilliant, and having curly hair. These wounds scarred her early self-esteem, eventually leading to suicidal ideation and isolation. However, she reframed these painful experiences as fertilizer, saying, “It’s supposed to grow about that... I can do it,” leading to growth rather than shame.

C recounted how the unconditional support of her husband, encountered first when they met at the age of 16, became a turning point in her self-belief; one that later empowered her to rise as a university professor and community leader in Colombia. Her ground, then, is not merely environmental; it is psychosocial and emotional terrain rich with humility, pain, empathy, and cultural pride. C posed to herself the central question of this phase: “How can I use everything that I’ve done to be better right now?” This inquiry encapsulates her evolving sense of teacher agency as renewal through reflection, which honors her history while reclaiming her voice and purpose within a new system.

Her storytelling also revealed how personal hardship translated into pedagogical compassion and advocacy. Having experienced exclusion and emotional injury, she now centers self-esteem and respect in her teaching. She spoke passionately about ensuring her students feel valued and protected: “I do not permit bullying... I work so they feel happy because they are people. That is important.” This alignment between personal healing and professional care marks a critical transformation: the conversion of suffering into leadership, empathy, and advocacy for the dignity and belonging of MLs.

Within this landscape, C encounters the bugs that symbolize the subtle yet persistent challenges that erode her sense of professional belonging. These irritants take the form of micro-invalidations, assumptions about her linguistic background, and institutional practices that obscure her expertise. While individually minor, these experiences accumulate, producing a continuous undercurrent of discomfort. However, C responds to these irritations with reflective resilience. Rather than internalizing them, she draws upon her scholarly grounding and personal history to maintain a sense of purpose. The bugs, therefore, illuminate the tension between her internalized professional identity and the external constraints of her new environment.

The storms in C’s narrative represent the more significant disruptions that challenge her sense of self and professional agency. These storms arise from the emotional labor of rebuilding a career, the frustration of being positioned in ways that do not reflect her expertise, and the broader structural inequities that shape the experiences of multilingual educators. These moments destabilize her, prompting deep reflection on her place within the educational system. Yet, as storms often do, they also clear space. They compel C to rearticulate her commitments, reaffirm her pedagogical values, and reassert her identity as an educator committed to justice, empowerment, and intellectual rigor.

The forest, for C is the broader institutional and cultural context of U.S. schooling. Although initially disorienting, this environment gradually becomes a space where she cultivates new forms of agency. She integrates inquiry-based science lessons, fosters student voice, and constructs learning environments that honor MLs' identities. In doing so, she transforms the forest from a site of dislocation into a site of possibility. Her prior expertise does not disappear; instead, it becomes the root system that sustains her as she adapts to new soil. Through this process, C reconstructs her professional identity not by abandoning her past, but by weaving it into her present practice-based science lessons, fosters student voice, and constructs learning environments that honor MLs' identities. In doing so, she transforms the forest from a site of dislocation into a site of possibility. Her prior expertise does not disappear; instead, it becomes the root system that sustains her as she adapts to new soil. Through this process, C reconstructs her professional identity not by abandoning her past, but by weaving it into her present practice-based science lessons, fosters student voice, and constructs learning environments that honor MLs' identities. In doing so, she transforms the forest from a site of dislocation into a site of possibility. Her prior expertise does not disappear; instead, it becomes the root system that sustains her as she adapts to new soil. Through this process, C reconstructs her professional identity not by abandoning her past, but by weaving it into her present practice.

Viewed through the metaphors of bugs, storms, and the forest, Participant C's narrative emerges as a story of identity reconstruction grounded in resilience, scholarly purpose, and ethical commitment. The bugs test her sense of belonging, the storms test her professional resolve, and the forest becomes the environment in which she reclaims and redefines her role as an educator. Her journey illustrates the complex interplay between personal history, institutional context, and pedagogical vision in shaping the identities of multilingual educators.

B's Story

Participant B, a female, Spanish-English bilingual international teacher from Chile, teaches third-grade in a DL/I program and did not participate as a grant teacher-researcher. We discussed the inquiry parameters in an individual interest session and determined that B met the adjusted participation criteria and would be a good fit for the inquiry.

B's narrative centers on resilience, adaptability, and empathy cultivated through a life defined by constant movement. Having lived in 27 different homes across numerous countries due to her father's and husband's military service, she described herself as the perpetual newcomer who developed a rare flexibility and openness to new environments. This upbringing shaped a profound empathy for MLs, many of whom experience transitions and linguistic displacement similar to her own.

B's roots reveal a strong nuclear family bond that fostered trust, optimism, and curiosity, qualities she now brings to her classroom. Her upbringing instilled in her the belief that learning happens everywhere and that cultural immersion is key to understanding others. She emphasized that her lived experiences enable her to "see learning everywhere" and to recognize the value of her students' identities and stories.

Her trunk (strengths) extends directly from these roots: she identified herself as proactive, creative, protective, optimistic, flexible, and deeply caring. These attributes are reflected in her teaching as a student-centered and agency-oriented practice, where mistakes are reframed as learning opportunities and multilingualism is celebrated as a valuable asset. Her optimism and adaptability ground her pedagogical stance in the belief that growth happens through challenge and joyful risk-taking.

Through reflection, B acknowledged that the ToL PL made her more aware of the

connections between her life experiences and teaching philosophy. It affirmed her identity as an empathetic, reflective practitioner whose personal narrative directly informs her ability to foster student agency, trust, and self-efficacy.

In the second ToL session, B deepened her awareness of the ways her roots and trunk (past experiences and strengths) continue to influence her present identity and sense of agency as a teacher of MLs. As she reflected, B used vibrant colors to symbolize the multiplicity of her roots. She described the coloring process as a meditative, emotional experience that cultivated mindfulness and joy. This form of contemplative practice allowed her to move beyond cognition into emotional and embodied reflection, connecting her personal and professional selves.

B discussed that awareness itself, not necessarily behavioral change, was the most significant outcome of her engagement with the process. As she explained, “It reminds me of why I do what I do.” She framed this as a return to purpose rather than a modification of practice, suggesting a heightened teacher presence and intentionality.

When exploring her branches, B described multiple areas of aspiration and impact. The most prominent branch was “Impact,” a lifelong driving force she identified since childhood—the belief that she was “born for something important.” This desire extended through sub-branches: impact as a teacher, impact as a mother, and impact as an agent of change through kindness and empathy rather than confrontation. Additional branches included her love for teaching, exploration of languages, academic research, and interest in neuroscience and cognitive sciences, which she linked to both learning and teacher wellness. These ambitions portrayed her as a lifelong learner and agent of transformation, whose teaching stems from joy and curiosity rather than obligation.

Significantly, B expressed a growing interest in transitioning to higher education, thereby

facilitating the professional development of preservice and in-service teachers. She viewed this not as leaving the classroom but as expanding her sphere of influence to teacher preparation, a move she described as “jumping into academia” while preserving her passion for children. This represents a critical development in professional agency, repositioning her expertise from classroom-based impact to systemic capacity-building.

Her leaves (people and influence) further explained this transformative orientation. She named her principal, mentors, family, and professional communities, but also included less conventional leaves such as a yoga teacher on YouTube and a motivational podcaster, suggesting a holistic view of professional growth that values self-care and well-being alongside pedagogical knowledge. This awareness of interdependence reinforced her appreciation that professional identity is co-constructed through relationships, both personal and professional. B expressed gratitude and humility toward those who shaped her and reflected on the relational nature of influence, noting, “I wonder whose tree I might be a part of.”

Her growing sense of relational and reflective agency emerged as she recognized the reciprocal impact she had on others in education. The session reinforced her belief that authentic professional growth extends beyond technical mastery. It is sustained by emotional connection, reflection, and a sense of shared purpose with colleagues and students alike.

By Session 3, Participant B’s reflections demonstrated a deepened self-recognition and professional empowerment. The flowers and ground stages prompted her to consciously acknowledge her accomplishments; something she admitted had been personally challenging for her to list. She described initially drawing “small flowers,” hesitant to mark any of them as achievements, before gradually allowing them to “bloom bigger” as she recognized her growth and ongoing impact. Through this visualization, she redefined success not as external validation,

but as the courage and persistence to act on her convictions.

B identified several professional accomplishments (flowers), including her leadership in launching a DL/I program, mentoring international teachers, presenting at educational conferences, and writing articles that give voice to international educators' experiences. Each flower reflected her core values of initiative, advocacy, compassion, and service. The ToL PL provided both the language and the reflective distance for her to fully see herself as a transformative actor, not only nurturing students but also reshaping the systems around her.

Her reflections extended beyond personal pride to recognizing that self-celebration is both an act of gratitude and a form of resistance within a profession often dominated by stress, constraint, and undervaluation. As she put it, "It made me wonder why it is so hard to celebrate our accomplishments." The ToL PL positioned pride not as arrogance but as reclamation, a re-authoring, and an affirmation of teacher agency as ownership of one's growth, effort, and purpose.

When moving to the ground section, B visualized her soil as uneven and irregular, shaped by a lifetime of mobility, including 27 relocations, nine schools, and countless adjustments. Rather than viewing this instability as a deficit, she narrated it as an origin: "I am a builder of bridges, stairs, doors, and windows...where there is no path, I build one." This metaphor encapsulated her agentic stance within structural and emotional challenges. The terrain of her life symbolized the systemic complexities educators face, such as unpredictable conditions and inequitable systems, while her response, embodied through building and innovation, reflected agency as resilience-in-action.

She described her love, optimism, and problem-solving as the "nutrients" in her ground. These nourish both her and her MLs. Particularly moving was her acknowledgment of her

husband's belief in her, representing her "soil," and serving as the emotional and logistical foundation for her professional growth. This revealed her view of agency as relational and reciprocal.

Ultimately, B's reflections in Session 3 illuminated a sophisticated awareness of the interaction between inner strength and external constraint. She recognized that while systemic factors such as testing and policy are often outside her control, she maintains the power to shape how she responds, creates, and leads within her classroom. The ToL PL helped her see that the unevenness of her "ground" was also the source of her creativity, empathy, and persistence as a multilingual educator.

B encounters the bugs of persistent, low-level irritants that accompany teaching in a system not entirely designed for linguistic diversity, in her professional landscape. These include rigid pacing guides, standardized assessments that inadequately capture MLs' competencies, and curricular structures that leave little room for the flexibility required to support students with varied linguistic repertoires. While individually minor, these challenges accumulate, producing a continuous background friction. Nevertheless, B responds to these irritants not with resistance or frustration, but with pragmatic adaptation. She adjusts her instructional practices, modifies materials, and recalibrates expectations in ways that allow her to continue with purpose. The bugs, in this sense, illuminate B's capacity for resilience and her orientation toward problem solving as a central component of her professional identity level irritants that accompany teaching in a system not entirely designed for linguistic diversity, in her professional landscape. These include rigid pacing guides, standardized assessments that inadequately capture MLs' competencies, and curricular structures that leave little room for the flexibility required to support students with varied linguistic repertoires. While individually minor, these challenges

accumulate, producing a continuous background friction.

Nevertheless, B responds to these irritants not with resistance or frustration, but with pragmatic adaptation. She adjusts her instructional practices, modifies materials, and recalibrates expectations in ways that allow her to continue with purpose. The bugs, in this sense, illuminate B's capacity for resilience and her orientation toward problem-solving as a central component of her professional identity-level irritants that accompany teaching in a system not entirely designed for linguistic diversity, in her professional landscape. These include rigid pacing guides, standardized assessments that inadequately capture MLs' competencies, and curricular structures that leave little room for the flexibility required to support students with varied linguistic repertoires. While individually minor, these challenges accumulate, producing a continuous background friction. Nevertheless, B responds to these irritants not with resistance or frustration, but with pragmatic adaptation. She adjusts her instructional practices, modifies materials, and recalibrates expectations in ways that allow her to continue with purpose. The bugs, in this sense, illuminate B's capacity for resilience and her orientation toward problem-solving as a central component of her professional identity.

The storms in B's narrative represent more substantial emotional and pedagogical challenges — moments when the demands of the system collide with the vulnerabilities and needs of the students she serves. These storms arise when students experience frustration, when linguistic barriers impede participation, or when institutional pressures intensify. A steady, protective posture characterizes B's response to these storms. Rather than being destabilized by these moments, B positions herself as a stabilizing force, absorbing emotional turbulence so students can continue learning in a supportive environment. This orientation underscores the relational dimension of B's practice: her teaching is grounded not only in instructional adaptation

but also in a deep sense of care and responsibility for students' wellbeing.

The forest represented by the broader institutional and pedagogical context in which B works becomes the setting through which her professional identity is continually negotiated. B does not seek to transform the forest or challenge its structural design; instead, she focuses on making the terrain navigable for her students. Their expertise is situated, emergent, and deeply attuned to the immediate conditions of the classroom. Over time, B develops an intimate understanding of the forest's rhythms: the subtle cues that signal when students are struggling, the patterns of engagement that reveal when instructional adjustments are needed, and the environmental constraints that must be navigated rather than resisted.

Through this metaphorical lens, Participant B's narrative emerges as a portrait of practical resilience and relational commitment. The bugs test her patience, the storms test her emotional endurance, and the forest provides the context in which her adaptive expertise takes shape. Her professional identity is not marked by dramatic transformation or theoretical articulation, but by the steady, grounded work of guiding MLs through a complex educational landscape. In this way, B exemplifies a form of teacher professionalism rooted in responsiveness, humility, and sustained care, qualities often undervalued in formal discourse, yet essential to the success of MLs.

Merging the Stories

Taken together, B and C's experiences reveal multi-layered narratives of rootedness, identity, and empowerment. Both participants framed teaching as an extension of the self rather than a separate professional identity. Their roots (family influence, migration, adaptation, and cultural heritage) are intertwined with their trunks (strengths such as empathy, persistence, creativity, and reflective practice) to form the foundation of their teacher agency.

Both educators embody transnational identities, drawing on their lived experiences as “the newcomer” to nurture inclusive and compassionate classroom spaces. They approach teaching as relational and transformative, cultivating agency through empathy, reflection, and purposeful action.

While B emphasized adaptability and optimism born from mobility, C highlighted persistence and advocacy arising from displacement and perseverance. Their collective stories converge on a shared commitment to humanizing multilingual education, advocating for equity, belonging, and recognition for both students and themselves as educators within U.S. educational systems.

The ToL PL gave both participants language and imagery to articulate how their personal histories and professional agency are rooted in lived experience. It fostered a reflective awareness that teaching multilingual learners is not only about instructional skill, but about personal and collective identity, empowerment, and growth.

Together, B and C’s conversation during Session 2 illustrated a collective awakening to agency as transformation-in-community. The two women built relational resonance through shared values: passion for teaching, advocacy for MLs, love of languages, and curiosity about the brain and human behavior. Their discussion evolved into a vision for collective empowerment: C proposed creating an organization that champions teacher dignity, emotional development, and professional growth across borders. B responded enthusiastically: “If it doesn’t exist, we make it.”

Their dialogue blended personal narrative, social critique, and professional vision, situating the ToL PL as both a reflective and activist process. They voiced frustration with hierarchical systems that undervalue educators, identified the political undercurrents that silence

teachers' agency, and positioned education as a moral and humanistic mission to "create better human beings." These exchanges shifted the session from individual introspection toward collective consciousness, where professional learning becomes a vehicle for systemic change. In their symbolic expansion of the metaphor, B described each student as a "little tree": a complete, living being with their own roots, branches, and potential for growth. C extended the metaphor, explaining how teachers must "see more than the skills," perceiving the child as a holistic being whose physical, emotional, and cognitive systems are interconnected. Both participants conceptualized teaching as a process of attunement, empathy, and care that transcends pedagogy.

The dialogue culminated in a joint recognition that the ToL PL itself revitalized their professional purpose. It enhanced conventional skill-based PD with an introspective, human-centered professional learning model that cultivated emotional intelligence, reflection, and relational agency. Both teachers articulated that the non-traditional form of reflective inquiry PL, was ultimately more powerful than prescriptive training because it awakened their intrinsic motivation and reaffirmed their mission as educators.

As a collective, Session 3 showed the two participants not merely engaging with introspection but operationalizing self-awareness into transformation and confidence. This represents a shift from internal reflection (Sessions 1–2) to outward impact (Session 3). Both B and C used the metaphor of growth (flowers, soil, fertilizer) to symbolize the continuous evolution of teacher identity rooted in emotional honesty and relational strength. They articulated shared realizations about how difficult it is for teachers to honor their own achievements within an educational climate that often emphasizes accountability over appreciation. By verbalizing pride and expressing gratitude, they repositioned self-recognition as an act of agency, reclaiming

authority over their professional narratives. B's acknowledgment that "our flowers are personal" and C's admission that "ML is a door to obtain more flowers" both illustrate a growing self-compassion that allowed reflection to evolve into empowerment.

Moreover, both participants tied their ground directly to personal history as a source of empathy and social commitment. Each woman identified early experiences of exclusion or instability (mobility for B, bullying for C) as formative layers of their empathy for multilingual learners navigating displacement or marginalization. Both conceptualized their teaching as nurturing work: helping students build bridges (B) or self-esteem (C) using the wisdom earned through their own lived challenges. The personal became professional, and the professional became moral.

Session 3 also displayed reciprocal growth between the researcher and the participants. Their dialogue became increasingly equal and co-constructive, demonstrating relational trust, a cornerstone of the ToL PL and narrative pedagogy. Both participants explicitly named the research space as transformative: "You have motivated our educator hearts," B said, and C affirmed, "All the time we grow... we continue to think all week about our tree." This demonstrates how the reflective format itself served as PL through narrative co-construction, validating the emotional and cognitive labor of teachers that is rarely acknowledged in traditional PD.

In Session 4 dialogue, B and C built a shared ecology of meaning. B viewed the forest as balance and continuity; C viewed it as resistance and reconstruction. Together, they arrived at a synthesis: every teacher is both a singular tree and a vital part of a collective that shelters, nourishes, and regenerates itself.

The bugs they encounter (rigid pacing guides, inflexible assessments) are systemic

irritants, and the storms are emotional moments tied to student struggle. B's resilience is quiet, steady, and relational, rooted in a commitment to making the forest navigable for those they guide. C's journey, by contrast, is shaped by the tension between her past and present identities. She enters the forest with a well-established scholarly root system, only to find that the new environment does not immediately recognize or nourish it. The bugs she encounters are microinvalidations that challenge her sense of belonging, and the storms are moments of profound professional dissonance. Yet, her resilience is equally strong, though expressed differently: she draws upon her academic background, her immigrant experience, and her ethical commitments to reconstruct her identity within the forest. Over time, she transforms the landscape into a space where her expertise can take new forms.

Together, B and C illustrate how educators can inhabit the same forest while experiencing it through different lenses. B's expertise is emergent and situated, shaped by the forest itself. C's expertise is transplanted and reinterpreted, shaped by the interplay between her past and the new environment. Both paths are valid, both are complex, and both contribute to the broader ecology of multilingual education.

The combined narrative reveals that the forest metaphor is not merely descriptive but analytic: it highlights how institutional structures, personal histories, and pedagogical commitments intersect to shape teacher identity. The bugs and storms each participant encounters differ in form and intensity, yet both educators demonstrate resilience as they navigate them. They agreed that the forest's survival demands both individual cultivation (classroom level agency) and collective protection (institutional and systemic advocacy). Their stories underscore that effective multilingual teaching is not monolithic; it is a dynamic process shaped by educators' unique ways of moving through the forest, responding to its challenges, and

cultivating spaces where students can grow. B affirmed focusing on what can be controlled, “the daily miracle inside the classroom,” while C argued for looking “beyond what we have in front of us” to shape lasting structures. Their complementary perspectives illustrate multilayered agency: micro (classroom), meso (school), and macro (policy) levels functioning as interconnected parts of the larger forest level agency) and collective protection (institutional and systemic advocacy). Their stories underscore that effective multilingual teaching is not monolithic; it is a dynamic process layered agency: micro (classroom), meso (school), and macro (policy) levels functioning as interconnected parts of the larger forest.-level agency) and collective protection (institutional and systemic advocacy). Their stories underscore that effective multilingual teaching is not monolithic; it is a dynamic process -layered agency: micro (classroom), meso (school), and macro (policy) levels functioning as interconnected parts of the larger forest.

The survey data corroborate and enrich the qualitative findings for both participants, showing precise alignment between self-reported shifts in confidence, knowledge, and perceived influence and the narrative changes documented through the ToL PL. Both B and C endorsed increased awareness of how personal history informs practice (roots) and reported greater confidence in core instructional strengths (trunk), which aligns with their session accounts: B translated reflection into concrete classroom actions (bilingual morning meetings, a dictionary station) and proactive outreach to a school ESL specialist. At the same time, C described renewed clarity about how her cultural and professional history shapes content instruction and engagement. -reported shifts in confidence, knowledge, and perceived influence and the narrative changes documented through the ToL PL. Both B and C endorsed increased awareness of how personal history informs practice (roots) and reported greater confidence in core instructional

strengths (trunk), which aligns with their session accounts: B translated reflection into concrete classroom actions (bilingual morning meetings, a dictionary station) and proactive outreach to an ESL specialist. At the same time, C described renewed clarity about how her cultural and professional history shapes content instruction and engagement.

Survey items about aspirations, networks, and influence (branches and leaves) mirror their expressed projective plans and activated supports, and responses about observable effectiveness (flowers) align with the artifacts and classroom changes noted in the qualitative record. Notably, the survey also reflected concerns about structural constraints (ground) and the emotional labor of teaching (storms/bugs), validating participants' reports that systemic factors (testing policies, bureaucratic timelines) and ethically charged workplace experiences can limit agency unless explicitly addressed. In sum, the quantitative responses triangulate the narrative analysis: ToL PL appears to foster both intrapersonal (identity, confidence) and practical (classroom change, network mobilization) dimensions of teacher agency, while also underscoring the need for system-level supports and trauma-aware facilitation to sustain and scale those gains.

A's Story (Inquiry Question 2)

My professional identity, which integrates undergraduate training in psychology, experience as an ML academic coach and ML state consultant, credentials as a Certified Public Manager, and practice as a life coach, orients me toward approaches that cultivate self-understanding and agency. Dialogical and narrative PL approaches have demonstrated the capacity to facilitate educator self-discovery, positively influencing ML instruction (Imperiale et al., 2021; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). This inquiry enabled me to synthesize prior ToL scholarship (Imperiale et al., 2021; Lock, 2016; Mrema, 2023; Ncube, 2006; Wallen & Tormey, 2019), apply

improvement science principles (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Lewis, 2015), and integrate my grant leadership (NCDPI, n.d.-c) and other professional knowledge. This convergence represented both the culmination of accumulated professional experience and the inauguration of an expanded role as educator-researcher and coach.

Like participants B and C, I perceive my role as researcher and PL developer/facilitator as integral to, rather than separate from, my personal identity. Occupying dual facilitator/participant roles was both an honor and a methodological advantage, enabling rapport development and the co-construction of sessions essential to ToL PL and narrative pedagogy. It also allowed me to more deeply integrate the ToL experience from two different lenses, that of an educator (pilot ToL PL) and then that of a researcher and PL provider (Intervention ToL PL). Both experiences invigorated me as an educator who feels called to change the way we do education for our students and all who serve them.

From the beginning, the unpredictability of research was apparent. Recruitment deviated substantially from expectations. While all twelve grant teacher-researchers initially expressed interest in the inquiry, only one elected to participate. My immediate response followed a problem-saturated narrative characterized by anxiety. I feared that the inquiry required wholesale redesign! After a few deep breaths and reaching out to my CIPs, I applied the narrative re-authoring framework central to my research and identified alternative storylines that preserved the inquiry's integrity despite altered demographics. This was a powerful application of the narrative approach I had not expected to need in my research.

The next unexpected bump occurred in Session 1. Although I had meticulous session plans, I had not distributed preparatory materials before the first session. This caused a pause in the flow, which could have been detrimental to the initial relationship building and inquiry.

Instead, my vulnerability as the facilitator established psychological safety and accelerated relational trust. To offset this in the future, I revised facilitator protocols to provide materials in advance. I instituted reflexive memos for reminders such as explicitly welcoming multilingual contributions and modeling brief, strategic self-disclosure to foster rapport. I also noted how my positionality influenced various aspects of the inquiry such as recruitment, questioning, and interpretation, in addition to relationship building.

When participants articulated their trunk (core strengths and dispositions) their accounts linked biography to pedagogical posture (resilience, creativity, protective care). Mapping my own trunk (coaching orientation, EdD trajectory) clarified how my stance shaped the inquiry. I saw how targeted coaching prompts and strength-elicitation questioning intentionally leveraged participants' assets and drew out thicker descriptions of each aspect of the tree. This made me wonder how the scripts could be strengthened to reflect what I do instinctively to assist others as they lead the ToL PL.

As participants named aspirations (branches) and supports (leaves), the ToL PL generated projective data with practical implications: participants outlined realistic professional trajectories and identified networks that could enable those paths. This stage highlighted the PL's capacity to produce both immediate shifts and nascent professional projects. As a scholarly practice, I treated aspirations as legitimate indicators of agency and designed dissemination plans (conference and practitioner outlets) aligned to those trajectories. As a facilitation practice, I encouraged action-planning so participants could convert aspirations into concrete steps supported by identified network contacts (leaves). This led to the joint presentation at La Cosecha in November of 2025, with both participants co-presenting.

Discussions of accomplishments (flowers) yielded observable indicators of change

(lesson artifacts, classroom practices) while ground conversations foregrounded enabling and constraining contextual factors (conferences, policy, bureaucracy) for us all. By this point, the bond between the participants and me, as facilitator, left us all feeling like equals in the experience. Discussions flowed, and we even dreamed about starting a business together to meet the needs of MLs. I had not expected the ToL PL to take us to this level of reflection and re-authoring of our stories. As a researcher, I hope that my writing is able to reflect the impact the ToL PL had on us all regarding our sense of agency and motivation for our work.

When discussing bugs and storms, participants disclosed ethically and emotionally charged experiences such as professional betrayal, bureaucratic failures, and other frustrations that demonstrated the emotional intensity of identity-centered PL. These moments demanded trauma-aware analytic and facilitation responses, which need to be further explored. I am not a counselor and did not attempt to be. My background as an undergraduate Psychology major and as a life coach was helpful in these moments, as was the 20-hour Narrative Therapy course I completed online through the Dulwich Center in Australia. To protect confidentiality related to these events, I strengthened member-checking and anonymization protocols.

The final sessions reframed individual development as ecological and collective, with teachers as interdependent elements of a system. Participant B's metaphor of fallen trunks nourishing new growth and Participant C's assertion that "we are the system" crystallized an ecological model for agency that integrates past, present, and future action, showing the progressive impact of working through the parts of the tree with a focus on agency, not only for working with MLs, but in life in general.

After the completion of the ToL PL I reflected on what might come next, such as a tiered ToL package including classroom workshops, interschool networks, and district-level advocacy

cohorts. I dreamed of both participants serving as co-facilitators and expanding their self-discovery to help others. I also wondered if the format could be used in areas of my work, in addition to education, such as life coaching.

Addressing Researcher Bias and Ensuring Validity

ToL data revealed that educators can inhabit the same forest while experiencing it through different lenses, amplifying my awareness of potential researcher bias in narrative analysis. While my grant collaboration with Participant C established deep professional respect for her expertise, I recognized a greater affinity with Participant B's approach to the ToL PL. Participant B and I shared dispositional similarities in responding to challenges and opportunities, whereas Participant C and I diverged considerably. To mitigate bias, I subjected key transcript segments to AI-assisted comparative narrative analysis through Claude Opus 4.5, following initial coding (Everson, 2025). This process illuminated a pattern I had overlooked: both participants demonstrated robust resilience through divergent pathways to agency development.

Member Checking and Sustained Impact

Member checking proved integral to the narrative development, providing opportunities to discuss the ToL experience and analytic interpretations with participants. Learning of the intervention's sustained impact beyond the inquiry period has strengthened my commitment to disseminating the ToL PL framework beyond this dissertation. Through collective reflection, we developed individual and shared visions, interwove personal narratives, and engaged activist discourse regarding the contemporary political and sociocultural landscape affecting MLs.

Reflection

Over the ToL cycle, I moved from evaluating a novel PD model to iteratively refining a

practice architecture that functions as both method and intervention. Methodologically, this required heightened reflexivity, artifact triangulation, and robust member checking. As a scholarly practitioner, I have produced practice-oriented scholarship that connects narrative evidence to theory. As a coach and PL developer, I deliver PL that translates reflective insight into a crystallized format that aids in moving insight into concrete action and multilevel change. The ToL PL thus serves dual roles: an analytic instrument for researching teacher agency and a PD architecture that honors teachers' histories, leverages relational resources, and links classroom practice to systemic transformation. checking. As a scholarly practitioner, I have produced practice-oriented scholarship that connects narrative evidence to theory. As a coach and PL developer, I deliver PL that translates reflective insight into a crystallized format that aids in moving insight into concrete action and multilevel change. The ToL PL thus serves dual roles: an analytic instrument for researching teacher agency and a PD architecture that honors teachers' histories, leverages relational resources, and links classroom practice to systemic transformation. As a scholarly practitioner, I have produced practice-oriented scholarship that connects narrative evidence to theory. As a coach and PL developer, I deliver PL that translates reflective insight into a crystallized format that aids in moving insight into concrete action and multi-level change. The ToL PL thus serves dual roles: an analytic instrument for researching teacher agency and a PD architecture that honors teachers' histories, leverages relational resources, and links classroom practice to systemic transformation.

Across the ToL PL stages, clear overlaps emerge between my development as a scholarly practitioner and the two participants' evolving teacher agency: all three of us foregrounded personal history as constitutive data (roots), made explicit how dispositions and facilitation stance shape practice (trunk), projected concrete professional futures (branches), activated and

relied on networks to enable action (leaves), translated reflection into observable change (flowers), recognized the enabling and constraining role of context (ground), and grappled with emotional and ethical challenges that required trauma aware responses (storms/bugs), culminating in a shared, ecological view of agency (forest). These convergences support the ToL process as both method and intervention, with the reflective narrative work leading to perceived growth in teacher agency aware responses (storms/bugs), culminating in a shared, ecological view of agency (forest). These convergences support the ToL process as both method and intervention, with the reflective narrative work leading to perceived growth in teacher agency-aware responses (storms/bugs), culminating in a shared, ecological view of agency (forest). These convergences support the ToL process as both method and intervention, with the reflective narrative work leading to perceived growth in teacher agency.

Summary

This chapter presented results from a narrative inquiry examining the perceived influence of the ToL PL on teacher agency in working with MLs. Two third-grade DL/I teachers, both Spanish-speaking immigrants, participated alongside my parallel engagement as researcher and PL developer/facilitator. Data sources included initial and final questionnaires, four two-hour ToL PL session transcripts, participant journals, visual tree artifacts, and researcher reflexive documentation. Combined, the data sources addressed IQ1, 1a, and 1b related to participants, and IQ2, 2a, and 2b, related to me as the scholarly practitioner and PL designer and facilitator.

Quantitative analysis revealed divergent patterns. Participant B demonstrated a net positive shift (+4) across ten agency dimensions and increased from "Satisfactory/Effective" to "Excellent/Outstanding/Highly Effective" in overall teaching effectiveness. Her beliefs about ML student capabilities shifted from somewhat deficit-oriented to asset-based. Participant C

maintained stable self-assessments across all dimensions while reporting modest confidence gains. Both participants exhibited realistic recalibration in perceived influence over factors beyond direct control, suggesting deepened metacognitive awareness.

Qualitative analysis employed NVivo coding using deductive codes from Imperiale et al. (2021), Agency, Challenge, Collaboration, and Identity (operationalized as "Whole Person"), alongside inductive codes including Culture, Linguistic, Politics, and SEL (Teacher/Student). Codes consolidated into two categories, Teacher SEL and International Teachers, yielding two central themes: Resilience within Contextual Constraints and Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience.

Triangulation across data sources revealed strong convergence. Participant B's questionnaire report of shifting from "passive" to "active" agency aligned precisely with transcript evidence documenting her progression: biographical reconnection ("*My immigrant experience IS my teaching*") → cognitive reframing ("*I have more power than I thought*") → behavioral activation ("*I started bilingual morning meetings*") → institutional advocacy ("*I talked to my principal*"). Journals reflected concrete practice changes (bilingual morning meetings, family engagement strategies, secured interpretation services) and external validation through increased Hispanic family participation. Participant C's data demonstrated consistent triangulation of consolidation rather than transformation: her stable questionnaire profile aligned with transcript statements confirming existing practice rather than fundamental shifts.

Both participants identified Roots as most impactful, yet Participant B engaged comprehensively with Roots, Trunk, and Branches (coded 52 times for Agency, 43 for Whole Person), while Participant C engaged primarily with Roots (coded 18 times for Agency, 22 for

Whole Person). This differential engagement aligned with self-reported impact: "strongly impacted" (Participant B) versus "somewhat impacted" (Participant C).

Two mechanisms emerged as central to agency development. First, externalization enabled Participant B to separate systemic problems (biased assessments) from student capabilities, reframing deficit beliefs to an asset-based understanding. Second, identity-practice integration transformed biographical experiences from peripheral context to pedagogical resource, with Participant B articulating that *"every classroom decision is influenced by my life story and beliefs."*

As Participant A, my own reflexivity documented parallel agency development through the recruitment crisis and surfaced potential bias: greater affinity with Participant B's communication style and deeper relational trust from prior collaboration influenced facilitation depth. AI-assisted comparative analysis (Everson, 2025) and member checking confirmed that relational trust affects narrative PL outcomes. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of this inquiry and situate them within the larger literature base, examine implications for the findings for practice, and provide recommendations for future study

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Inquiry

This narrative inquiry examined the perceived influence of the Tree of Life (ToL) Professional Learning (PL) model on teacher agency among experienced Spanish–English bilingual educators working with multilingual learners (MLs). Grounded in narrative therapy traditions (Denborough, 2008; Ncube, 2006) and adapted for educator professional learning (PL) by Imperiale et al. (2021), this inquiry explored whether structured, metaphor-based reflective dialogue could deepen teachers’ self-awareness and enhance their sense of agency.

Two bilingual educators participated in four two-hour ToL sessions over a two-month period. Through visual and narrative representations of their professional journeys—Roots (origins), Trunk (strengths), Branches (aspirations), Leaves (relationships), Flowers (accomplishments), Ground (context), and Storms (challenges)—participants examined the interrelationship between identity and practice. Data sources included initial and final questionnaires, session transcripts, journals, visual artifacts, and reflexive documentation.

The inquiry addressed two primary inquiry questions:

1. What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life (ToL) Professional Learning (PL) on teacher agency?
 - a. How do teachers perceive changes in their sense of agency after participating in the ToL PL?
 - b. What elements of the ToL PL do teachers perceive as contributing to these changes?
2. How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?
 - a. As a scholarly practitioner?

b. As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?

This chapter synthesizes findings, interprets them through the conceptual framework and relevant literature, discusses implications for practice and policy, and offers recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

Findings indicate that the ToL PL enhanced teacher agency through biographical grounding, engagement with multiple components of the ToL framework, and integration of reflective insights into practice. Outcomes ranged from transformative (comprehensive engagement) to consolidative (reinforcement of existing strengths).

Quantitative findings revealed divergent but meaningful patterns. Participant B demonstrated a net positive shift (+4) across ten agency dimensions and moved from “Satisfactory/Effective” to “Excellent/Outstanding/Highly Effective” in overall teaching effectiveness. Her beliefs about multilingual learners shifted from partially deficit-oriented to explicitly asset-based. Participant C maintained stable ratings across agency domains but reported increased confidence, clarity, and affirmation of professional identity.

Both participants recalibrated their perceived influence over systemic constraints, reflecting increased metacognitive awareness rather than inflated self-perception. This suggests agency development as reflective discernment, not simply confidence growth.

Triangulated data across questionnaires, journals, and transcripts indicate that structured narrative reflection fostered self-awareness, which participants associated with renewed motivation and instructional intentionality.

Both participants identified Roots as the most impactful component, underscoring the importance of connecting personal history to professional identity. Participant B engaged

extensively across Roots, Trunk, and Branches, demonstrating transformative integration.

Participant C engaged primarily with Roots, resulting in consolidation rather than expansion of identity.

These findings extend the work of Imperiale et al. (2021), who found that narrative engagement with identity strengthened teachers' professional positioning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This inquiry adds that biographical grounding is essential, but insufficient on its own, for generating sustained action. Deeper engagement across multiple tree components appears necessary to complete the arc from reflection to implementation.

Consistent with scholarship on teacher identity as dynamic and relational, participants described identity not as fixed, but as continually shaped through relationships and contexts (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). Their narratives aligned with conceptualizations of identity as socially co-constructed and situated within institutional constraints.

Both participants expressed commitment to social transformation within multilingual education. They viewed themselves as educators operating both within and beyond the system—navigating bureaucracy while advocating for equity. This reflects literature positioning teacher agency as ecological and relational rather than purely individual.

Qualitative coding revealed two overarching themes:

1. Resilience within Contextual Constraints
2. Empathy for Multilingual Learners through Lived Experience

Participants reframed adversity as formative rather than limiting. For example, Participant C's reflections on childhood bullying and marginalization became metaphors for "fertilizer" that nourished her empathy for ML students. Although the ToL was not implemented as trauma therapy, its reflective nature surfaced deeply personal experiences. This aligns with

Denborough (2008) and Ncube (2006), who emphasize the therapeutic potential of narrative re-authoring. The present inquiry extends this work into educator professional learning contexts, highlighting the need for trauma-sensitive facilitation protocols.

Participation in the ToL process significantly influenced my own development as a scholarly practitioner, as explored in IQ 2 and 2a. Reflexive documentation revealed an increased awareness of facilitation bias and relational affinity, automatically seeing participants who are most like me in a positive manner when initially beginning meaning making from transcripts. In this case, AI proved invaluable in helping me tease out important aspects of responses from the participant I was less like; helping me see the value in the differences. IQ 2 and 2b were addressed most strongly through the topics of recruitment and facilitation/coaching. The recruitment crisis early in the inquiry catalyzed my own agency growth. Initially viewing limitations as failure, through the ToL, I reframed them as methodological opportunities for depth over breadth and was rewarded through the richness of the interactions and reflections. Participant reflections on the importance of my role as facilitator for the ToL PL highlighted the coaching aspect of facilitation as central to PL design. Leading participants through self-reflection, especially when it leads to trauma triggers, takes skills not all facilitators are equipped for. I found it powerful how my reflexive evolution mirrors participants' experiences and underscores the ecological nature of agency development. The depth of our co-created experience deepened my commitment to human-centered PL models and spurred me to consider additional ways to share the ToL PL.

Interpretation of Findings

This inquiry contributes to expanding the application of the ToL framework with adult educators, particularly those working with MLs. While traditionally used with children, prior

studies (e.g., Imperiale et al., 2021) demonstrated its effectiveness with educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study further supports its relevance in professional learning contexts.

The use of narrative artifacts (e.g., journals) functioned as *Documents of Knowledge* that supported reflection, identity retention, and agency development (Denborough, 2018; Freedman & Combs, 2013). These artifacts also helped teachers retain preferred identities and recall knowledge and skills, supporting the sense of agency (Fox, 2003). Within the inquiry, journals were essential for triangulation of data and evidence of concrete practice changes, including the institution of bilingual morning meetings, family engagement strategies, and secured interpretation services.

Findings align with scholarship from the fields of professional learning, teacher agency, and the narrative approach, framing teacher identity as self-reflective, contextual, and relational (Denborough, 2014; Learning Forward, 2022; Imperiale et al., 2021; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rice, 2015). Data analysis supported the influence of the external environment as depicted in the Conceptual Framework (see Figure 2). Community, district, home, school, classroom, and peer group were all addressed as factors impacting the tree, appearing as roots, leaves, ground, bugs, and storms.

The inner circles of the framework address working with MLs and show Teacher Agency, PL in general, and the ToL PL specifically, overlapping to support and enhance a growth asset mindset. This was exemplified through Participant C, who reconstructed her professional identity not by abandoning her past, but by weaving it into her present practice to foster student voice and construct learning environments that honor MLs' identities. Participant B shared that the ToL PL provided both the language and the reflective distance for her to fully see herself as a transformative actor, not only nurturing students but also reshaping the systems

around her by building bridges and stabilizing the environment for her students. This contributes to multilingual education literature by positioning teacher self-awareness as foundational to equitable practice.

Importantly, findings suggest that reflective, narrative-based PL complements, rather than replaces, skills-based training. Traditional PL often emphasizes strategies; ToL emphasizes identity coherence. When teachers integrate both, agency appears more sustainable.

For my own growth as the scholarly practitioner leading this inquiry, as posed in IQ 2, findings show that my participation in ToL sessions as both facilitator and researcher set the tone for relationship building and participation. The organization of the materials, based on previous work with ToL and familiarity with Narrative Therapy (Denborough, 2008; Imperiale et al., 2021; Lock, 2016; Ncube, 2006), built a solid foundation from which to work. While my understanding of Narrative Therapy, coaching, ML education, PL facilitation, trauma response, and my interaction with participants impacted the depth of exploration by participants as they built their individual trees, and the vulnerability shown in sharing.

Insights and implications I gathered from the inquiry are shared in Table 19. As a scholarly practitioner (IQ 2a) I realized how important it is to recognize personal histories as primary data when developing the roots. This information is built upon and influences all other parts of the trees. Participants may need to be coached to this realization, as well as to connect the parts of the tree as they develop each part, emphasizing the importance of the role of the facilitator (IQ 2b). Collecting the tangible artifacts in the form of the questionnaires, recordings, transcripts, and especially the trees, not only informs the research, but can be used in real time to highlight observable milestones and guide discussion and next steps. Realizing as a researcher and developer/facilitator that key concepts can be missed in planning is humbling and important

Table 19

Implications and Actions

	Journal Excerpt	Implication SP	Implication Coach	Action
Roots	“I expected a different sample...whole person immediately came to forefront.”	Reinforces need for reflexivity; treat personal histories as primary data.	Relationship-building is central to uptake; facilitator vulnerability fosters trust.	Add reflexive memos to audit trail; supply blank tree before session; explicitly invite cultural/linguistic sharing.
Trunk	“Connections between roots and trunk... my coaching orientation surfaced.”	Document researcher positionality and how facilitation stance shapes data.	Intentionally use coaching prompts to elicit strengths and values.	Record researcher trunk in methods; incorporate coaching questions into facilitator guide.
Branches	“Branches seeded ideas (EdD, publication, PD products).”	ToL generates projective data useful for dissemination planning.	Support participants to translate aspirations into concrete steps.	Create plan for dissemination (conferences /journals); add to PL.
Leaves	“Naming mentors and networks; B reached out to ESL teacher.”	Networks act as data and as mechanisms for knowledge mobilization.	Build networking exercises and follow-up templates into PD.	Add “identify 1–2 leaves” activity and sample outreach email template to materials.

Table 19 (Continued)

	Journal Excerpt	Implication SP	Implication Coach	Action
Flowers	“Participants struggled to name flowers but later celebrated classroom changes (dictionary station).”	Collect tangible artifacts as evidence of change; narrative vignettes as mixed-method evidence.	Use small, observable milestones as coaching goals and documentation prompts.	Require photo/artifact uploads in journal; add milestone checklist to coaching plans.
Ground	“Conferences fertilize soil; bureaucracy is a dry patch.”	Analyze structural/contextual constraints explicitly; include policy/context codes.	Design PD with system-navigation modules (how to work within/around constraints).	Add “systems check” prompt and advocacy coaching mini-module in PL curriculum.
Storms & Bugs	“Betrayal, bureaucracy, testing pressures; emotional disclosures emerged.”	Incorporate trauma-sensitive analytic categories and ethical protocols for reporting.	Prepare facilitators for heavy emotion (safety plan, referrals, grounding).	Develop facilitator trauma-informed checklist, safety/referral protocol, and grounding exercises.
Forest	“We are the system; build strong links; forest never stops.”	Adopt ecological/collective framing in analysis; plan multi-level dissemination (practitioner + policy).	Design multi-tier PD (classroom ↔ school ↔ district) and co-facilitation pathways.	Draft three-tier ToL package; pursue partnerships with ESL specialists and DL/I contacts; co-facilitation plan.

to the process of self-reflection. From things as simple as remembering to distribute the blank tree before session 1 to preparing for trauma reactions, structures must be put in place to support and guide future implementation. Seeing how my reflexive evolution mirrored the experiences of the participants, leads me to believe the nature of agency development as exemplified in the ToL PL has potential to be used broadly.

Limitations

This inquiry involved a small, purposive sample of two participants, prioritizing depth over generalizability. Participants were self-selected, experienced, and highly reflective, which may limit transferability.

The dual role of researcher and facilitator introduced potential bias; however, triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity mitigated this concern. The strong researcher/participant relationship enhanced depth but may also have influenced responses.

Although time intervals did not hinder growth in this inquiry, longer or shorter implementation periods may yield different outcomes. Ncube (2006) successfully led children through the development of a full tree in only one day, and the presentation at La Cosecha effectively developed two parts of the tree in 90 minutes.

Finally, the reflective nature of ToL carries potential for trauma activation (Denborough, 2008; Ncube, 2006), as it did for Participant C. This possibility underscores awareness of the possibility of triggers and the need for ethical facilitation protocols.

Implications for Practice

Teachers are one of our most important resources, yet teacher salaries in NC rank 43rd in the nation (NCAE, 2025). Inquiry participants reflected what has been shown nationally regarding under preparedness for working with MLs (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Mellom et al.,

2018; Sugimoto et al., 2017) despite the state and national accountability and legal requirements requiring equal access and rigorous education (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; ESSA, 2015; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982; NCP Test-011, 2022). NC has established SEL protocols for students to help meet these needs (CASEL, 2020), but little has been developed or offered for educators. Burnout and isolation, particularly among multilingual and international educators, require systemic attention. Programs, like the ToL PL, that celebrate personal narratives combat professional burnout and reaffirm meaning-making in teaching as well as enhance teacher agency.

To enhance teacher agency by supporting teacher wellness and strengthening relational and collaborative networks through embedding reflection into PL, and connecting those reflections to action (e.g., action research, collaborative projects) to reinforce agency development as cyclical and generative. We need to redefine PL to move beyond technical training toward reflective and human-centered approaches. The ToL PL demonstrates that structure for storytelling, metaphor, and self-exploration can lead to enduring shifts in teacher mindset and agency. Structured narrative reflection provides space for educators to reconnect personal meaning with professional action.

Rather than focusing solely on instructional strategies, the findings suggest that schools integrate structured narrative reflection that honors teachers' histories, emotions, and cultural knowledge, such as institutionalizing reflective inquiry through journaling, coaching cycles, and facilitated PL. The Tree of Life framework illustrates the transformative power of reflection-based PD and offers a tool for valuing narrative evidence alongside data-driven accountability systems.

Facilitators for the ToL PL will need to not only understand the session outline but also have specific skills for successful implementation. The ability to build relationships among participants and with themselves, strategies to encourage depth of self-reflection for each part of the tree, dialogical approaches for debriefing the tree entries, and an understanding of how to appropriately address trauma triggers that might arise.

International teachers bring unique lived experiences that can enrich ML education policy and practice. Recognizing and nurturing the unique contributions of bilingual and transnational teachers, including providing access to leadership opportunities, strengthens both equity and innovation.

Teacher preparation programs represent a critical entry point for this work. Integrating identity-focused reflection into pre-service education can better prepare educators to navigate complex classroom and systemic contexts.

Implications for Equity and Social Justice

Self-reflection through a non-traditional approach to PL, such as the ToL, can foster self-awareness, grow a sense of teacher agency in working with MLs, and promote equity in the classroom (Imperiale et al., 2021; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Combining the ToL PL with skills-based PL can, as C stated, mold “classrooms into platforms for equity, where students’ identities are affirmed and their voices amplified.” Both B and C highlighted how the ToL PL helps humanize ML education through advocating for equity, belonging, and recognition for both students and themselves as educators within U.S. educational systems.

The ToL PL as support for DL/I aligns with former Secretary of Education Cardona’s February 2023 address to the National Association of Bilingual Educators (NABE), where he

emphasized that “our agenda for action starts with funding and supporting the programs that are proven to work in multilingual education.” He highlighted bilingual education, including dual language/immersion (DL/I), as an approach that closes achievement gaps for MLs and benefits all students, including children of poverty, African American males, and students with special needs (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Collier & Thomas, 2020; Gándara & Escamilla, 2017).

Teacher education programs could be key in shaping teacher identity and sense of agency in working with MLs. Helping pre-service teachers unpack how the different contexts in which they operate are intertwined and what roles they play would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the classrooms they will enter, the students they will teach, and the impact they can have.

Implications for Policy

Findings suggest that policymakers and administrators should recognize narrative-based PL as a legitimate form of professional growth. Integrating reflective practices into evaluation frameworks can provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher development. Balancing accountability with self-assessment and narrative evidence of professional agency as part of the evaluation framework offers a more complete picture of an educator’s needs, actions, and impact.

Participant experience shows that elevating teachers’ lived experiences as resources for instructional and cultural transformation is essential for enhancing multilingual education policies. Purposefully integrating teacher voices into ML education reform through school improvement planning, Multitier Systems of Support (MTSS), scheduling, referrals, family outreach, DL/I establishment and programming, etc., increases opportunities for equitable access and achievement for MLs.

Findings suggest that State Education Agencies (SEAs), Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and others offering PL include reflective PL opportunities and communities for multilingual educators modeled on the ToL PL as a tool to integrate teacher voice and social emotional learning (SEL) for teacher reflection toward agency.

Findings support Collier & Thomas’s work (2017, 2020), showing that DL/I demonstrates long-term benefits for multilingual learners and offers an opportunity to close the achievement gap for MLs and all students. Continued commitment to strategic DL/I program creation, continuation, and expansion is recommended. Training DL/I teachers via the *National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards* (Guerrero & Lachance, 2018) would strengthen programs by enhancing teacher understanding of language acquisition and pedagogy. Implementing the *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (CAL, 2018) increases accountability for programmatic features. For my state of North Carolina, revisiting the 2013 Global Education Task Force Report, Commitment 2.1, which supports DL/I would be a research-based foundation for new work (NCSBE, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Study

Given the specificity and small size of the participant pool, future research should consider how the ToL PL model functions across broader contexts. It is important to look at how the findings might shift when the ToL PL is implemented with larger and more diverse educator populations. Expanding the inquiry to include a wider range of participants—such as elementary educators working with MLs across different instructional settings—would strengthen transferability. For example, dividing participants into cohorts (e.g., DL/I teachers and mainstream teachers) could allow for comparative analysis of impact.

The duration of the inquiry was relatively short. Exploring what longitudinal effects emerge when educators engage with the ToL PL over extended periods could be explored through future studies that examine how teacher agency evolves over time and with repeated exposure to reflective practices. Investigating cumulative effects across multiple ToL cycles may provide insight into sustained identity development and instructional change.

Findings suggest value in combining reflective and skills-based professional learning to explore how the integration of narrative-based PL with traditional skills-based PL influences teacher agency and instructional practice. Comparative studies examining skills-based PL alone versus combined models could generate evidence that is particularly relevant for administrators making decisions about resource allocation and program design.

The reflective nature of the ToL process presents the potential for trauma activation. Future research exploring what trauma-informed frameworks are necessary to support safe and ethical implementation of reflective PL models, leading to the development of trauma-sensitive facilitation protocols, including strategies for managing emotional responses and supporting participant well-being, would strengthen the facilitation process.

Transferability beyond multilingual education remains an open area of inquiry. Expanding the study to include general education teachers, administrators, and district-level staff would provide insight into its applicability across roles and systems and inform to what extent the ToL PL model can be adapted for broader educational contexts and diverse educator roles.

While this study relied primarily on qualitative data with supporting quantitative measures, additional metrics could strengthen future analyses by exploring the relationships that exist between reflective PL, teacher agency, and measurable educational outcomes. Incorporating data such as teacher retention, job satisfaction, and student achievement metrics

(e.g., EVAAS) could help establish correlations between reflective practice and broader educational impact.

Conclusions

This inquiry supports previous research showing that cognitive-based approaches have proven effective in increasing teacher agency (Imperiale et al., 2021; Molla & Nolan, 2020).

The ToL PL enhances teacher agency through biographical grounding, relational dialogue, and identity–practice integration. Agency development emerged as ecological, relational, and iterative. It was not a dramatic shift in confidence alone, but a deepened coherence between personal narrative and professional practice.

The universal resonance of *Roots* suggests that educators must first understand who they are before fully transforming what they do. However, comprehensive engagement across multiple ToL components appears necessary to move from reflection to sustained action.

Ultimately, this inquiry affirms that professional learning grounded in story, metaphor, and relational trust has the potential to humanize educator development, strengthen ML education, and sustain teacher commitment in complex systems.

REFERENCES

- Ado, K. (2016). From Pre-Service to Teacher Leader: The Early Development of Teacher Leaders. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 25(1), 3-21. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ej1100422>
- Arias, B. (September 2022). *Turning toward asset-based pedagogies for multilingual learners*. CAL Commentary. <https://www.cal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Turning-Toward-Asset-Based-Pedagogies-1.pdf>
- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), 164-180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2006.00011.x>
- Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 21(6), 624-640. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325>
- Byfield, L. (2019). Labeling English Learners: Teachers' Perceptions and Implications. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 7(4), 69-75. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.7n.4p.69>
- Calderón, M. E., & Slakk, S. (2016). *Expediting comprehension for English language learners (ExC-ELL) foundations manual*. Washington, DC: Margarita Calderón & Associates. <https://lmtlmt.com/exc-ell>
- Cardona, M. (2023). Remarks by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona at the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) 52nd Annual International Bilingual and Bicultural Education Conference. <https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/remarks-us-secretary-education-miguel-cardona-national-association-bilingual-education-nabe-52nd-annual-international-bilingual-and-bicultural-education-conference>

CASEL. (2020). *Social Emotional Learning Framework*. <https://casel.org/casel-sel-framework-11-2020/>

Castañeda v. Pickard. (1981). 79-2253.

https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2017/04/Castaneda_v_Pickard.pdf?id=58e2b46f6f53b71eb8265d6e

Center for Applied Linguistics, Dual Language Education of New Mexico, & Santillana USA.

(2018). *Guiding principles for dual language education* (3rd ed.). Center for Applied Linguistics. <https://www.cal.org/publications/guiding-principles-3/>

Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub.L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964).

<https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI>

Collier, V., & Thomas, W. (2017). Validating the power of bilingual schooling: Thirty-two years of large-scale, longitudinal research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37, 203-217.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/annual-review-of-applied-linguistics/article/abs/validating-the-power-of-bilingual-schooling-thirtytwo-years-of-largescale-longitudinal-research/909F284BFF9C327124AD08987143E677>

Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W.P. (2020). Why dual language works for everyone, PK-12.

Multilingual Educator, California Association for Bilingual Education, March 2020 annual edition.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d854ac170e64a71d1de71d3/t/641e2bb4c52fc7059772ed1c/1679698868844/2020+Multilingual+Educator+pub_compressed.pdf

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.

- Crow, R., Hinnant-Crawford, B. N., & Spaulding. (Ed.) (2019). *The educational leader's guide to improvement science: Data, design and cases for reflection*. Myers Education.
- Cugno, R. J., & Thomas, K. (2009). A book review of Laura Ellingson's Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research: An Introduction. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(2), 111-115. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2009.2837>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002). Variation in teacher preparation: How well do different pathways prepare teachers to teach? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(4), 286-315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053004002>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2020). Accountability in Teacher Education, *Action in Teacher Education*, 42(1), 60-71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2019.1704464>
- Denborough, D. (2008). *Collective Narrative Practice: Responding to individuals, groups, and communities who have experienced trauma*. Dulwich Center Publications.
- Denborough, D. (2014). *Retelling the stories of our lives: Everyday narrative therapy to draw inspiration and transform experience*. W. W. Norton & Co.
- Denborough, D. (2018). *Do you want to hear a story? Adventures in Collective Narrative Practice*. Dulwich Center Publications. <https://dulwichcentre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Tracing-the-history-of-tree-of-life-by-David-Denborough.pdf>
- Devine, P. G., Forsher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 1267–1278. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003>
- East Carolina University. (n.d.). *Dual Language Immersion Administration*. College of Education. <https://education.ecu.edu/dli-administration/>

- Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., Short, D., & Toppel, K. (2023). *Making content comprehensible for multilingual learners: The SIOP Model* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, P. L. 89-10. H. R. 2362, 89th Congress.
- Ellingson L. (2009). *Engaging crystallization in qualitative research: An introduction*. Sage Publishing. <https://archive.org/details/engagingcrystall0000elli/page/n7/mode/2up>
- Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review*, 10, 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001>
- Everson, K. (2025). *Enhancing Doctoral Dissertations Ethically with AI: A Comprehensive Guide*. Myers Education Press. <https://myersedpress.presswarehouse.com/browse/book/9781975506711/Enhancing-Doctoral-Dissertations-Ethically-with-AI>
- Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114–95, § 114, Stat. 1177 (2015). <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>
- Equal Rights Act of 1974, H.R. 14752 of the 93rd Congress (1974).
- Flores Peña, J., Sugarman, J., & Mancilla, L. (2023). *ESSER: Moving the Needle on Equitable and Adequate Education Funding for English Learners*. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/nciip_covid-esser-brief-2023_final.pdf
- Fox, H. (2003). Using therapeutic documents: A review. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. 2003 #4. www.dulwichcentre.com.au
- Freedman, J. & Combs, G. (2013). *Animated Narrative Therapy: Dot Exercise*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJ0WNIQonog>

- Gándara, P., Maxwell-Jolly, J., & Driscoll, A. (2005). Listening to Teachers of English Language Learners: A Survey of California Teachers' Challenges, Experiences, and Professional Development Needs. *UC Berkeley: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute*. <https://www.wested.org/resources/listening-to-teachers-of-english-language-learners-a-survey-of-california-teachers-challenges-experiences-and-professional-development-needs/>
- Garrett, R., Zhang, Q., Citkowicz, M., & Burr, L. (2021). *How Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning are associated with teacher instruction and student achievement: A meta-analysis*. Center on Great Teachers & Leaders, American Institutes for Research. https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/LF-2022-Standards-for-PL-Meta%20Analysis%20Report_Final.pdf
- González, N., Moll, L., & Amante, C. (2007). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Routledge.
- Goodson, B., Caswell, L., Dynarski, M., Price, C., Litwok, D., Crowe, E., Meyer, R., & Rice, A. (2019). Teacher preparation experiences and early teaching effectiveness (NCEE 2019-4007). National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598665.pdf>
- Goodson, I. F. (2013). *Developing narrative theory: Life histories and personal presentations*. Routledge.
- Gottlieb, M. (2024). *Assessing multilingual learners. Bridges to empowerment (3rd ed.)*. Corwin.
- Gottlieb, M., & Honigsfeld, A. (2025). *Collaborative assessment for multilingual learners and teachers*. Corwin.

- Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. K. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1464–1480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1464>
- Gunderson, L. (2020). The Consequences of English Learner as a Category in Teaching, Learning, and Research. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, (64)4, 431–439. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1116>
- Guskey, T. R. (2024). Look beyond the satisfaction survey: A framework to evaluate results of professional learning. *The Learning Professional*, 45(1), 28-33.
- Guskey, T. R., & Huberman, M. (1995). *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. Teachers College Press.
- Guerrero, M. & Lachance, J. (2018). *National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards*. Dual Language Education of New Mexico. Fuentes Press.
- Hemphill-Josephs, M. (2022, February 28). *Multilingual Learners*. Public Schools of North Carolina. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tQ1G8TbMiRknXDqaiIlOaYEjGzI4QAkV/view>
- Hiatt, J. E., & Fairbairn, S. B. (2018). Improving the Focus of English Learner Professional Development for In-Service Teachers. *NASSP Bulletin*, 102(3), 228-263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636518789261>
- Hinnant-Crawford, B. N. (2020). *Improvement science in education: A primer*. Myers Education Press.
- Imants, J., & Van der Wal, M. (2020) A model of teacher agency in professional development and school reform. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (52)1, 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1604809>

- Imperiale, G., Mander, S., & Ross D. (2021). *Early career English teacher identity project report. Exploring teacher identity and agency through the Tree of Life approach*. British Council.
- https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Early_career_English_teacher_identity_report.pdf
- Kibler, A., Karam, F., Futch Erlich, V., Bergey, R., Wang, C., & Molloy Elreda, L. (2018). Who are long-term English learners? Using classroom interactions to deconstruct a manufactured learner label. *Applied Linguistics*, 39, 741–765.
- <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw039>
- Lau v. Nichols. (1974). 414 U.S. 563. <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep414563/>
- Lavadenz, M. (2011). From Theory to Practice for Teachers of English Learners. *The CATESOL Journal*, 22(1), 18-47. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1112046.pdf>
- Lazarin, M. & Flores Peña, J. (2021). *Rebuilding the U.S. Education System for the Nation's English Learners*. Migration Policy Institute.
- <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/pandemic-investment-rebuilding-education-english-learners>
- Leandro v. State. (1997). 488 S.E.2d 249
- Learning Forward. (2022). Standards for Professional Learning. Author.
- <https://standards.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning/>
- Leider, C. M., Colombo, M. W., & Nerlino, E. (2021). Decentralization, teacher quality, and the education of English learners: Do state education agencies effectively prepare teachers of Els? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 29(100). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.29.5279>

- Lewis, C. (2015). What is improvement science? Do we need it in education? *Educational Researcher*, 44(1), 54–61. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X15570388>
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publication, Thousand Oaks.
- Lock, S. (2016). The tree of life narrative: A review of the collective narrative approach. *Educational Psychology Research and Practice*, 2(1), 2-20.
<https://uel.ac.uk/sites/default/files/educational-psychology-research-and-practice-2016-03-lock.pdf>
- López, F., & Santibañez, L. (2018). Teacher preparation for emergent bilingual students: Implications of evidence for policy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 26(36).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.2866>
- Mahzarin, B., Bhaskar, R., & Brownstein, M. (2015). When bias is implicit, how might we think about repairing harm? *Current Opinion in Psychology*, (6), 183-188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.08.01715>
- Martinez, R. (2018). Beyond the English Learner Label: Recognizing the Richness of Bi/Multilingual Students' Linguistic Repertoires. *Reading Teacher*, (71)5, 515-522.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1679>
- Mellom, P., Straubhaar, R., Balderas, C., Ariail, M., & Portes, P. (2018). "They come with nothing:" How professional development in a culturally responsive pedagogy shapes teacher attitudes towards Latino/a English language learners. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, (71). 98-107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.12.013>
- Mertler, C. A. (2022). *Introduction to educational research*. Sage Publications.
- Molla, T., & Nolan, A. (2020). Teacher agency and professional practice. *Teachers and Teaching*, (26)1, 67-87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2020.1740196>

- Mrema, D. (2023). Using narrative practices to support academic development in an after-school program. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, (1), 16–24.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.342052732604219>
- Nasheeda, A., Abdullah H.B., Krauss, S.E., and Ahmed, N.B. (2019) *Transforming Transcripts Into Stories: A Multimethod Approach to Narrative Analysis*. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. Volume 18: 1–9 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919856>
- National Association of English Learner Program Administrators. (n.d.). *About the National Association of English Learner Program Administrators*. <https://www.naelpa.org/>
- National Association of English Learner Program Administrators. (2023). Newsletter. August, 2023.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *In-Service Teacher EL Preparation Survey*. Institute of Education Sciences.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *National Teacher and Principal Survey 2020-2021 School Year*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/pdf/2021/Teacher_Questionnaire_2020_21.pdf
- National Professional Development Program. (2018). U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition.
- Ncube, N. (2006). The Tree of Life Project: using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in Southern Africa. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 3-16. <https://narrativetherapycentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tree-of-Life-by-Ncazelo-Ncube-2006.pdf>

Ngozi, A. (2009). *The danger of a single story*. Ted Talk.

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&p=Ngozi+Adichie+ted+talk&type=E211US105G0#id=1&vid=4495386f314003a07d231a1c9ccc0754&action=click>

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2002).

Nolan, A. & Molla, T. (2019). Supporting teacher professionalism through tailored professional learning. *London Review Of Education*, 17(2), 126-140.

<https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.17.2.03>

North Carolina Association of Educators [NCAE]. (April 29, 2025) *North Carolina Drops Five Spots in Annual Teacher Salary Rankings: Average Teacher Pay Now 43rd in the Nation, nearly \$14,000 Below National Average*. Press Release. <https://www.ncae.org/about-ncae/media-center/press-releases/north-carolina-drops-five-spots-annual-teacher-salary-rankings>

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI]. (n.d.-a) *NCDPI Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) Frequently Asked Questions*. Section 2: DL/I Programs. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nsnz4zclJP10xBbVHR24isBslxYUrS_G7YHzk4RIfeA/preview

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI]. (n.d.-b). *NCDPI Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) Program Directory*. Program Types. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1IsK82ybITzOPZNoKDB3CVQBbtYDoBwBtOaqrSjTNOEU/edit#gid=0>

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI]. (n.d.-c). *Multilingual Multimodal Science Inventory*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom->

resources/academic-standards/standard-course-study/english-language-development/m2-si-grant

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI]. (2021). *Report to the North Carolina General Assembly: Headcount of English Learners*. (SL 2014-115, sec 86,87 (HB 1133); SL 2007-323, sec 7.9 (a,b) (HB1473, 2007 Budget Act); SL 2003-284, sec 7.15(b) (HB 397, the 2003 Budget Act)). <https://webservices.ncleg.gov/ViewDocSiteFile/15640>

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI]. (2023). *Comprehensive Plan for Reading Achievement*.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x0ztSrF4rvllo6V0iwgJSvSQzyEWq71q/view>

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI]. (2023). *Multilingual Learner Institutes of Higher Education Committee: Phase One Report*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/academic-standards/standard-course-study/english-language-development/ml-program-quality#GrantsResearch-5090>

North Carolina Policy TEST-011. *Identification of English Learners Participation in the Statewide Testing Program, Eligibility for Testing Accommodations and Exit Criteria*. (2022). <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Policy/ViewPolicy.aspx?S=10399&revid=slshxhj7yfXAdsPCohujTbMslshA%3d%3d&ptid=amIgTZiB9plushNjl6WXhfiOQ%3d%3d&secid=jiVjHpxB9kAtgzKzg3GmpQ%3d%3d>

North Carolina State Board of Education. (2013). *Preparing Students for the World: Final Report of the State Board of Education's Task Force on Global Education*.

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/preparing-students-world-final-report/download>

- Office of Civil Rights Case Summary. *Rowan-Salisbury Settlement Agreement*. (June 17, 2021 a.). <https://www.justice.gov/crt/case-summaries#rowan>
- Office of Civil Rights Case Summary. *Rowan-Salisbury School System*. (June 17, 2021 b.). <https://www.justice.gov/crt/case-summaries#rowan>
- Okonofua, J. A., Walton, G. M., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2016). A Vicious Cycle: A Social–Psychological Account of Extreme Racial Disparities in School Discipline. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 11(3), 381-398. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616635592>
- Palmer, D., & Martínez, R. A. (2013). Teacher agency in bilingual spaces: A fresh look at preparing teachers to educate Latina/o children. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 269-297. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X12463556>
- Perry, J. A., Zambo, D., & Crow, R. (2020). *The improvement science dissertation in practice: A guide for faculty, committee members, and their students*. Myers Education Press.
- Plyler v. Doe. (1982). 457 U.S. 202. <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep457202/>
- Rafa, A., Erwin, B., Brixey, E., McCann, M., & Perez, Z. (2020). *50-State Comparison: English Learner Policies*. Education Commission of the United States. <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-english-learner-policies/>
- Rice, Robert H. (2015). "Narrative Therapy." *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Theory in Counseling and Psychology*, 2, 695-700. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346502.n250>
- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 923-948). Sage Publications, Inc. [http://www.iot.ntnu.no/innovation/norsi-common-courses/Lincoln/Richardson%20\(2000\)%20Writing.pdf](http://www.iot.ntnu.no/innovation/norsi-common-courses/Lincoln/Richardson%20(2000)%20Writing.pdf)

- Roberts, C. M. (2019). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation*. Corwin Press.
- Rodman A. (2019). *Personalized professional learning: A job-embedded pathway for elevating teacher voice*. ASCD.
- Rodriguez, V., Solis, L., Mascio, B., Kiely Gouley, K., Jennings, P., & Brotman, L. (2020). With Awareness Comes Competency: The Five Awarenesses of Teaching as a Framework for Understanding Teacher Social-Emotional Competency and Well-being. *Early Education and Development*, (31)7, 940-972. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2020.1794496>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Second Edition. Sage Publications.
- Saldaña, J. (2024, April 13). *Designing Conceptual Frameworks for Qualitative Research Studies. [Workshop]*. American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Schimmack, U. (2021). The Implicit Association Test: A Method in Search of a Construct. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(2), 396-414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619863798>
- Short, D. J. (2017). How to integrate content and language learning effectively for English language learners. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 13(7), 4237-4260. <https://www.ejmste.com/download/how-to-integrate-content-and-language-learning-effectively-for-english-language-learners-5232.pdf>
- Smith, L.S. (2023). Reframing reflective practices: using dual-process theory and areas of awareness to conceptualize teacher reflection. *SN Social Sciences*, 3(96). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-023-00676-w>

- Stufflebeam, D. & Zhang, G. (2017). *The CIPP Evaluation Model: How to Evaluate for Improvement and Accountability*. Guilford Publications.
- Sugimoto, A., Carter, K., & Stoehr, K. J. (2017). Teaching “in their best interest”: Preservice teachers' narratives regarding English Learners. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 179-188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.010>
- Tanguay, C., Ruchi, B., Barker, K., & Many, J. (2018). AAA+ Professional Development for Teacher Educators Who Prepare Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teachers. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 20(1), 87-104.
- Thompson, K. D., Umansky, I. M., & Rew, W. J. (2023). Improving Understanding of English Learner Education Through an Expanded Analytic Framework. *Educational Policy*, 37(5), 1315-1348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048221087214>
- Umansky, I., Thompson, K., Soland, J. & Kibler, A. (2022). Understanding newcomer English learner students’ English language development: Comparisons and predictors, *Bilingual Research Journal*, 45(2), 180-204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2022.2111618>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2021). The Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2016–2018. Washington, D.C. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/report-2016-2018-biennial-report-to-congress-on-the-title-iii-state-formula-grant-program>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2023). The Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2018–2020. Washington, D.C. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/report-2018-2020-biennial-report-to-congress-on-the-title-iii-state-formula-grant-program>

- Wallen, M., & Tormey, R. (2019). Developing teacher agency through dialogue. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 82, 129-139. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/208547/>
- Warikoo, N., Sinclair, S., Fei, J., & Jacoby-Senghor, D. (2016). Examining Racial Bias in Education: A New Approach. *Educational Researcher*, 45(9), 508-514. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16683408>
- Wessels, S., Trainin, G., Reeves, J., Catalano, T., & Deng, Q. (2017). Pre-service Teachers' Confidence and Attitudes toward Teaching English Learners. *Teacher Education Practice*, (30)3, 443-461. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1254&context=teachlearnfacpub>
- WIDA. (2019). *WIDA Guiding Principles of Language Development for ELLs*. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Guiding-Principles-of-Language-Development.pdf>
- WIDA. (2020). *WIDA English language development standards framework, 2020 edition: Kindergarten–grade 12*. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf>
- WIDA. (Oct 4, 2023). *WIDA's commitment to social justice and addressing inequities in education*. <https://wida.wisc.edu/news/widas-commitment-social-justice-and-addressing-inequities-education>

Wong, J. W., Athanases, S. Z., & Houk, J. (11 Jul 2024). *From Deficit to Asset-Based Perspectives on Multilingual Learners: A Critical Inquiry in Teacher Education*, The Teacher Educator, DOI: 0.1080/08878730.2024.2377778

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
Willis Building - Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard - Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·
redc.ecu.edu/umcibr/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Ivanna Anderson](#)
CC: [Marjorie Ringle](#)
Date: 1/3/2025
Re: [UMCIRB 24-002447](#)
Teacher Agency

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 1/2/2025. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2AB.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Appendix B Informed Consent - updated.docx.pdf(0.01)	Consent Forms
Appendix E Rooted Agency Lesson Plans.docx.pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Appendix F Rooted Agency Journal.docx.pdf(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Appendix I Rooted Agency Focus Group Protocol.docx.pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Appendix I Rooted Agency Focus Group Protocol.docx.pdf(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Final Questionnaire FINAL.pdf(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Final Questionnaire FINAL.pdf(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Initial Questionnaire FINAL.pdf(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Initial Questionnaire FINAL.pdf(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Ivanna Anderson Final Proposal 9 21 2024 Approved For IRB updated questionnaire.pdf(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Recruitment email.docx.pdf(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) 30RG0000418
IRB00000791 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) 30RG0000418

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

East Carolina University **Informed Consent to Participate in Research**

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Tree of Life: Growing Teacher Agency in Working with Multilingual Learners Through Non-Traditional Professional Learning

Principal Investigator: Ivanna Mann Thrower Anderson

Division: College of Education

Address: East 5th Street Greenville, NC 27858-4353

Telephone #: 704-258-1182

Please PRINT clearly

Participant Full Name:

Date of Birth:

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to explore teacher agency in working with multilingual learners (MLs). You are being invited to take part in this study because you are a science teacher in third through fifth-grade involved in the M2-Si grant. The decision to take part in this research is voluntary. By participating in this study our goal is to investigate the effects of an adapted Tree of Life narrative approach on teachers' self-perception, contextual understanding, and agency in relation to meeting the needs of multilingual learners. If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 6 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons why you should not participate in this inquiry.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted online in North Carolina. You will need to attend up to six online sessions during this study. Journal assignments will be completed on your own. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer will be up to 18 hours between October 2024 and May 2025.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following:

- Complete an initial and final questionnaire
- Participate in up to four two-hour adapted Tree of Life narrative sessions. These sessions serve as professional learning in which you will create a tree diagram as you are guided through a process of reflecting on your environment, strengths, dreams, and other aspects that impact you personally and professionally.
- Keep a journal of your experience including responses to the ToL PL and its impact, if any, on you personally and professionally between sessions.

- Participate in a final focus group session.
- Audio, video, and photos/scans of documents will be collected during the ToL sessions. The recordings will be used by the study team to analyze the data for trends. Participants' identities will be deidentified by an assigned number.
- Per checked participant agreement below, audio, video clips, and photos/scans of participants and documents may be used to recruit for further research or ToL PL sessions. Participants will be identified in this aspect of the work.
- Audio, video, and photos/scans of documents, other than those approved by participants for further use, will be deleted/shredded approximately three years after the conclusion of this research.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research.

- The people conducting this study and professors at East Carolina University.
- The research team members assisting with the data analysis
- No other person outside of the research team will have access to the study's data.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from interviews will be kept secure for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. Participants' identities will be masked by an assigned number. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the inquiry.

Per additional participant agreement, audio, video clips, and photos/scans of participants and documents may be used to recruit for further research or ToL PL sessions. Participants will be identified in this aspect of the work.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 704-258-1182, Monday-Friday between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM. If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the ECU University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT) Signature Date

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) Signature Date

APPENDIX C: TREE OF LIFE PL OUTLINE

Interest Session: Introduction

Topic	Time	Notes
Reintroductions	15 mins	This group has all worked together in the grant but may not know each other or me very well. Imperiale et al. (2021) point out the importance of relationships in using the ToL approach, so setting the tone is important. State: Name, school/district, if you were a tree what kind would you be and why. 1 min or less
Purpose of Inquiry	10 mins	The purpose of this research is to explore teacher agency in working with multilingual learners (MLs). When I use the term agency I mean, “The sense of being in control, or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006).” For the purpose of this inquiry, agency includes your perception of: 1. your understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, 2. your confidence in working toward addressing those needs 3. your ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs By participating in this inquiry our goal is to investigate the effects of an adapted Tree of Life narrative approach on teachers' self-perception, contextual understanding, and agency in relation to meeting the needs of multilingual learners. It is a reflective practice designed to explore various aspects of your persona as a teacher including the impact of the M2-Si PL on your work. So, what does that all mean? You know me as an NCDPI consultant, an M2-Si grant PI, and now a doc student. Another part of me is the owner and chief Luminary Officer of a life

Topic	Time	Notes
		coaching business, Luminary Insights. This dissertation work brings all of those parts of me together in a process I love! Helping people find their best selves whether through facilitating professional learning or coaching personal growth. The adapted ToL process I am calling the ToL PL does it all, not only for the participants but for me as well. I have grown so much through this process already! But we will talk about that more once we start our sessions. Are you familiar with the Tree of Life (ToL)? It has been used around the world throughout time for many different purposes. In 2006 Dr. Ncube published a paper about her work using the tree to help children in Africa reflect on their lives in a positive way during the height of the AIDS epidemic. The parts of the tree were used to represent different aspects of their lives to help them realize that there is more than one story taking place and that what they focused on makes a difference in how they survive or thrive. This use of the ToL has been adopted by Narrative Therapy, a type of psychological approach used worldwide. It is now used for many purposes in and out of therapeutic settings. Dr. Imperiale et al. recognized the power of the ToL process used by Dr. Ncube and adapted it to work with English as a foreign language teachers around the world during the pandemic. Her report is an easy and interesting read. Through the internet, she was able to build hope and community for the teachers in addition to helping them grow a sense of agency in their teaching. I have further adapted the process specifically to explore the impact of professional learning on teacher agency in working with MLs. The inquiry looks at two kinds of PL. Traditional skills and methods-based PL as you all have experienced with the M2-Si training and what is known as narrative-based PL. Narrative-based PL does not focus on skills and methods yet, through reflection is known to have an impact on the teacher and their craft.

Topic	Time	Notes
		Similar to Ncube and Imperiale’s approach we will work our way up the tree with the roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and flowers all representing aspects of who you are. We will center on who you are as a teacher of MLs but all parts of you will have a place on your tree of life. We will build our trees individually in synchronous sessions followed by discussion and asynchronous reflection including journaling. I will ask you to reflect on the impact the ToL PL has on you. I will not ask you to do anything in your classroom as part of the inquiry. I will, however, ask you to be mindful of any impact that you perceive the work may have on your teaching, students, etc. and to include it in the discussion and journal portions of the work. What questions do you have for me so far?
Participant Selection	3 mins	Why have you been invited to participate? You are being invited to take part in this inquiry because you are a science teacher in third through fifth-grade involved in the M2-Si grant. It is important for participants and researchers to have a relationship for this type of work (Imperiale et al., 2021) and I believe we have developed at least a solid foundation through the M2-Si PL, PLCs, and classroom observations. Self-reflection and group sharing about your perceived agency in working with MLs is a large part of this inquiry. As teacher-researchers for the M2-Si grant, I have seen how reflective you are in your practice and believe you would offer in-depth feedback for this work. My research questions are designed to look at the traditional and narrative-based PL as I mentioned above, as well as to look at the impact on me as a researcher, PL developer, and facilitator.

Topic	Time	Notes
		• What is the perceived influence of the ToL Professional Learning (PL) on teacher agency? • How do teachers perceive changes in their sense of agency after participating in the ToL PL? • What elements of the ToL PL do teachers perceive as contributing to these changes? • How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth? • As a scholarly practitioner? • As a coach and PL developer/facilitator? What questions do you have at this point?
Informed Consent	12 mins	The decision to take part in this research is voluntary. Let's take a look at the informed consent form. We have already covered some of it. Share confidentiality paperwork and walk through. This will be sent to you to sign once sessions are established and you indicate you are opting into the inquiry. Unlike the grant, this is not a paid project. I know how busy you all are, so I want to share a few quotes from the pilot: After exploring the roots, this participant shared their frustration as a new teacher during the discussion. In the journal, they wrote: "I still have so much to learn, that it can be overwhelming. I get discouraged often and think I can't do this anymore because the challenges are so great, and the expectations are too heavy to carry. Looking at these roots has given me more confidence and assurance. It's been a very good reminder of who I am, and where I am going."

Topic	Time	Notes
		After the second session, a long-time teacher stated, “This is really fun and is more informative for my teaching practice than most traditional PL I have taken.” The benefits stated by the pilot participants included the time for self-exploration, community building, and enhanced understanding of themselves and their practice. Questions or thoughts? So how long does it take? Review the form. Sign and return if participating in the work
Time Commitment	5 mins	The inquiry will take place from October 2024 - May 2025 and will be conducted on-line. Some aspects of the inquiry will be synchronous and others asynchronous.
Session Scheduling	8 mins	You do not have to make a commitment tonight. If you think you are interested let’s look at calendars and see if we can find some times that will work for us all. I will send a Doodle poll to finalize the sessions. Complete Doodle Poll by X date
Initial Questionnaire	2 mins	This questionnaire is designed to set a baseline describing your experience as an educator working with Multilingual Learners (MLs). There are four sections: Participant Information, Student Demographics, Perception and Agency, and Professional Learning. The closure section includes a request for attestation to accuracy and includes contact information.

Topic	Time	Notes
		Although your name and email will be included in the questionnaire, as indicated in the signed consent form, confidentiality protocol will be followed, and no personal information will be included in any publications. The questionnaire will take between 10 and 15 minutes depending on how in-depth you respond to the open-ended questions. Your time and responses are greatly valued. Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire, this research, and in my dream of growing teacher agency in working with MLs! *Agency: The sense of being in control or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006). **To take an assets-based approach and to value and honor language and culture to foster the academic and personal success of MLs, the term “multilingual learners” (MLs) will be used in this document to refer to students identified as “English learners” (ELs) Please contact me with any questions andersoniv17@students.ecu.edu Complete the initial questionnaire by X date - the actual link will be provided via email once you confirm your participation and complete the informed consent
Wrap Up	5 mins	Q&A Tasks Reminder • Review the form. Sign and return if participating in the work • Complete Doodle Poll by X date • Complete the initial questionnaire by X date - the actual link will be provided via email once you confirm your participation and complete the informed consent

Session 1: Intro, Roots, Trunk

Topic	Time	Notes
Intro to project	20 min	Welcome: Thank you for agreeing to participate in the ToL PL, an adapted Tree of Life professional learning project. Do we need to do reintroductions? Consent: Confirm all completed consent form and initial questionnaire Reminder of the purpose of the inquiry: We went into detail on the purpose at the interest session and it is also explained in the consent form you signed, but I want to remind you of some highlights here. The purpose of this research is to explore teacher agency in working with multilingual learners (MLs). When I use the term agency I mean, “The sense of being in control, or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006).” For the purpose of this inquiry, agency includes your perception of: • your understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, • your confidence in working toward addressing those needs • your ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs By participating in this inquiry our goal is to investigate the effects of an adapted Tree of Life narrative approach on teachers' self-perception, contextual understanding, and agency in relation to meeting the needs of multilingual learners. It is a reflective practice designed to explore various aspects of your persona as a teacher including the impact of the M2-Si PL on your work. We will build our trees individually in asynchronous sessions followed by discussion and asynchronous reflection including journaling. I will ask you to reflect on the impact the ToL PL has on you. I will not ask you to do anything in your classroom as part of the inquiry. I

Topic	Time	Notes
		will, however, ask you to be mindful of any impact that you perceive the work may have on your teaching, students, etc. and to include it in the discussion and journal portions of the work. What questions do you have for me so far? Roles: We each have different roles, mother, daughter, friend, parent, teacher, etc. They all mix together to make up the total of who you are, yet we can often tease out some aspects which are specific to a role. For this inquiry, we want to center on your role as a teacher, specifically a teacher of MLs. Professional Learning: Often when we think of PL related to MLs, we think of specific skills and methodologies. This type of PL is essential and can be enhanced through narrative-based PL like the ToL PL. The ToL PL does not directly address skills and methodologies but rather focuses on a narrative approach to telling your own story. This type of PL has been shown to be impactful for professional Identity exploration, Strengths-Based Professional Development, Peer Support and Collaboration, and even Coping with Challenges and Burnout Prevention. It can be used as a tool for Professional Goal Setting and Growth Planning and when focused on MLs can impact Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equity. Course outline for parts of the tree: The inquiry will take place during the Fall semester and will be conducted on-line. Some aspects of the inquiry will be synchronous and others asynchronous. Intro to you as a tree: Have you ever thought of yourself as a tree? Roots- where you came from, trunk - strengths that hold you tall and strong, dreams and those who support them as branches and leaves? What about the ground in which you are planted? What kind of soil surrounds you? We are going to explore your tree with the focus on you as a teacher of MLs but other aspects of who you

Topic	Time	Notes
		are as a whole will be part of the story. Include whatever comes to mind even if it seems totally unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs. Tol handout example blank: LINK You can use this sample or draw your own Sample(s): Link Quick walk-through
Roots	10 mins	Your roots represent where you come from. This can include locations, people, experiences, or anything else that has helped shape you into who you are today as a teacher of MLs, including your work with the M2-Si. You can begin with large roots such as education and then branch off into specific aspects of your education that specifically impact you as a teacher. (<i>Share my sample</i>) Consider how your cultural and linguistic roots influence your approach to teaching multilingual learners. Include whatever comes to mind even if it seems totally unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs. When we get to the discussion and journaling aspect of the session, you will have a chance to share more details about the ideas you place on the tree. You may write as much or as little on the tree as you feel comfortable with. Any questions before we begin?
Roots	10 mins	Individual Work Time This first work time is shorter than most, but you can add to each section of your tree at any time.
Roots	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs
Break	10 mins	
Trunk	10 mins	The trunk represents your strengths as a teacher of MLs. As always, all aspects of your life can be included.

Topic	Time	Notes
		(<i>my sample</i>) My first addition to the tree was my gift of growing people. I love finding strengths that others may not be aware that they possess and then helping them to develop in that area. It is not specific to teaching, but it is an integral part of who I am as an educator and can be very specific to MLs like when I was the SIOP coach. Reflect on the roots as you label the trunk. How are they connected? (<i>my sample</i>) My faith, education, and relationships are important parts of the growing people aspect of my trunk. You may want to add additional things to the roots as you grow your trunk. Consider things like core beliefs and values, aspects of your teaching practice, what you learned about yourself through the M2-Si work, etc.
Trunk	10 mins	Individual Work Time
Trunk	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Wrap Up	20 mins	Intro to Journal The journal is an opportunity for you to explore your responses to the ToL PL further. Only you and I will see your journal. Any quotes used in the report will be anonymous. Feel free to express yourself using multimodalities and your full linguistics repertoire! Remember, I am not asking you to do anything in your classroom, but I encourage you to pay attention to see if anything carries over from the work on the ToL PL. You can use your journal and our debrief time to share this carryover if it occurs. Q&A Asynchronous Complete the journal entry and add a photo of your tree.

Session 2: Branches and Leaves

Topic	Time	Notes
Recap Session 1	15 mins	Discuss participant journal entries and experiences with MLs since the last session. Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Branches	10 mins	The branches are your hopes, dreams, and aspirations as a teacher of MLs. What has sprouted from your strengths? Grown from your roots or trunk? Some branches are small. Some are strong. Others are waiting to grow. <i>(my sample)</i> One of my established branches is research related to teaching MLs. I am looking forward to branching out even more through this research and the M2-Si grant and this research. An example of new growth I am aspiring to is to learn Spanish to help me in my work. Connect to your roots and your trunk as you explore the branches. Although I am focused on my identity as a teacher, you can see how other aspects weave in. Consider strategies and skills you may want to develop or expand to work with MLs that could enhance your agency. Don't be afraid to add things that don't seem to be specifically related to you as a teacher of MLs.
Branches	15 mins	Individual Work Time
Branches	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Break	10 mins	
Leaves	10 mins	Leaves represent people or entities who have impacted your life as a teacher of MLs. They can be living or deceased. People you do or do not personally know. Think about the branches where these people have or could make an impact.

Topic	Time	Notes
		(<i>my sample</i>) On my tree, if I follow the branch about research I could add Dr. Joel Gomez at the Center for Applied Linguistics for being such an amazing mentor and giving me the opportunity to do the research. Consider people who have influenced your vision and confidence in creating a lasting impact on your ML students.
Leaves	15 mins	Individual Work Time Can add to other parts of the tree as well
Leaves	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs
Wrap Up	15 mins	Journal Reminder Q&A Asynchronous Complete the journal entry and add a photo of your tree

Session 3: Flowers and Ground

Topic	Time	Notes
Recap Session 2	15 min	Discuss participant journal entries and experiences with MLs since the last session. Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Flowers	10 mins	Flowers represent things you have accomplished, are working on accomplishing, gifts received, or things you are proud of as a teacher of MLs. You might want to trace from the roots up the trunk through the branches and leaves to get to the flowers to see how they are all connected.

Topic	Time	Notes
		(<i>my sample</i>) Following the same branch and leaves as last time, my flower would be the M2-Si grant with the coming fruit of the finished dissertation and a ToL PL I can use with other educators. Consider what the flowers are of your professional aspirations. What future goals do you have for your teaching career when working with MLs? All students?
Flowers	15 mins	Individual Work Time
Flowers	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Break	10 mins	
Ground	10 mins	The ground represents the environment you are planted in. It can be the immediate surroundings or things that have impacted you over time. What would you include in your ground? (<i>my sample</i>) I have a dry patch labeled with the city where I grew up. It is a dry patch because the only MLs who lived in my town growing up were Mexican migrant workers and we were told to stay away from them because they were dangerous. It impacted my roots in a negative way at the time, but it made me wonder and think and had a lasting impact on who I am today. I knew inside that just because they were different didn't make them bad. I was curious and wanted to know more. As a child, I had little control over where I lived or what others told me, but I had control over what I chose to think and how I chose to treat others. I also had the choice to learn more and become the ML advocate I am today, Making the once dry patch fertile soil! Consider things that impact you, your work, student learning, parents, other staff, etc. All aspects of the ground mix to make up the total of who you are. Include whatever comes to mind even if it seems unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs, however, don't forget to highlight aspects that are specific to your role as a teacher of MLs.

Topic	Time	Notes
Ground	15 mins	Individual Work Time Can add to other parts of the tree as well
Ground	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Wrap Up	15 mins	Journal Reminder Q&A Asynchronous Complete the journal entry and add a photo of your tree

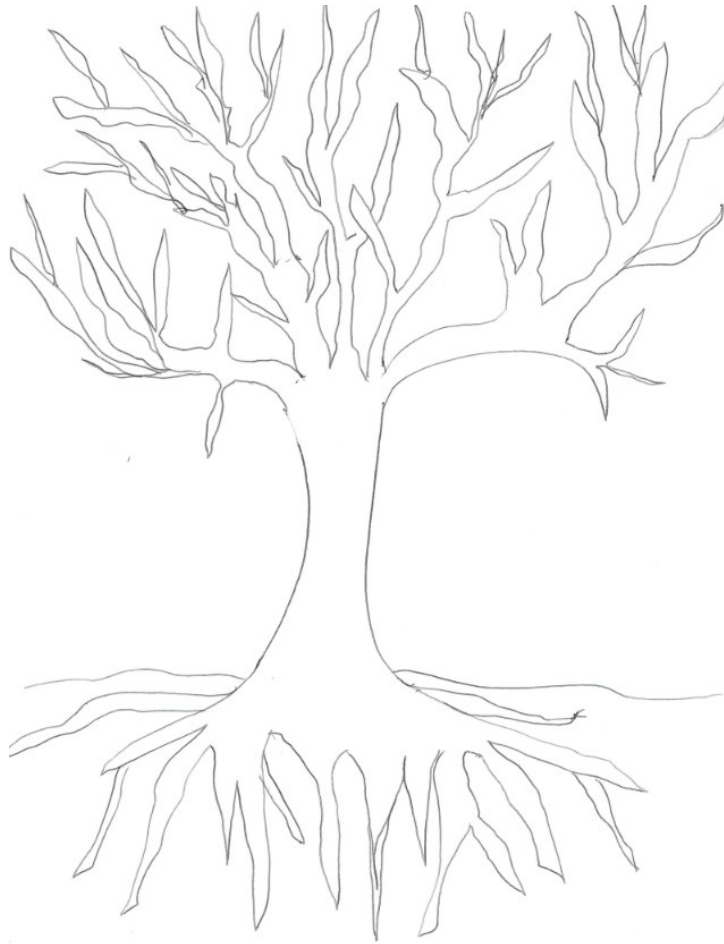
Session 4: Bugs and Storms; Forest and Trees

Topic	Time	Notes
Recap Session 3	15 mins	Discuss participant journal entries and experiences with MLs since the last session. Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Bugs	5 mins	Much of what we have added to our trees has been positive, but we all know that negative or seemingly negative events and people can impact our personal and professional lives in various ways. Bugs can be things that attack specific aspects of the tree, like a relationship (leaf) or a project (flower). Bugs for the grant can be delays in signing agreements or trouble setting up observations. Sometimes the bugs seem destructive, but they can be blessings in disguise that make us stronger. Think about the parts of your tree and how bugs might impact different parts. Don't forget about the importance of the ground.
Bugs	10 mins	Individual Work Time Can add to other parts of the tree as well
Bugs	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Storms	5 mins	Another possible negative or seemingly negative event is storms. Storms have a larger impact like the possibility of knocking the tree over, such as with a major health issue. Sometimes the storms seem insurmountable, but they too can make us stronger and even lead to positive outcomes.
Storms	10 mins	Individual Work Time Can add to other parts of the tree as well

Topic	Time	Notes
Storms	10 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs.
Break	10 mins	
Forest	10 mins	As individual trees we each have strengths. When we come together as a forest, our strength is multiplied. Watch the first 46 seconds of this video . Think about how tree roots interlock and how they communicate and support each other through storms. How can we help each other as we work to meet the needs of MLs? Think of some examples from the M2-Si work or from the earlier sessions we have shared. I have learned so much from each of you and from the M2-SI grant team and my dissertation team. I feel that my tree stands taller and is stronger.
Forest	15 mins	Group Share: Open-ended Guide as needed to tie to M2-Si or MLs
Wrap Up	15 mins	Thank you for sharing your experiences through the ToL PL. Recap some pertinent quotes. Ask for insights and quick feedback. Journal Reminder Q&A Asynchronous Complete the journal entry and add a photo of your tree Complete final questionnaire Prepare for Focus Group

APPENDIX D: TREE OF LIFE JOURNAL TEMPLATE

[Tree of Life Journal



Session 1

Roots

Your roots represent where you come from. This can include locations, people, experiences, or anything else that has helped shape you into who you are today as a teacher of MLs, including your work with the M2-Si.

You can begin with large roots such as education and then branch off into specific aspects of your education that specifically impact you as a teacher. Consider how your cultural and linguistic roots influence your approach to teaching multilingual learners. Include whatever comes to mind even if it seems unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs. You may write as much or as little as you feel comfortable with.

How do your roots impact who you are as a teacher of MLs?

Consider cultural and linguistic roots, significant life events and their impact, “ah-ha” moments that came through self-reflection during the ToL PL, a sense of agency in working with MLs, the impact of the M2-Si work, etc.

Free write additional thoughts about exploring your roots as a teacher of MLs.

Trunk

The trunk represents your strengths as a teacher (of MLs). As always, all aspects of your life can be part of the trunk. You may want to reflect on your roots as you think about your trunk. Allow the ideas to flow naturally and include what comes to mind even if it seems unrelated to you as a teacher or specifically as a teacher of MLs.

What are your strengths as a teacher (of MLs)?

How do they impact student well-being, achievement, relationships, etc.? Consider things like core beliefs and values, aspects of your teaching practice, what you learned about yourself through the ToL PL and/or the M2-Si work, etc.

Add a picture of your tree

Research Question: What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life professional learning on teacher agency?

Session 2

Branches

The branches are your hopes, dreams, and aspirations as a teacher of MLs. What has sprouted from your strengths? Grown from your roots or trunk?

Some branches are small. Some are strong. Others are waiting to grow. Connect to your roots and your trunk as you explore the branches. Don't be afraid to add things that don't seem to be specifically related to you as a teacher of MLs.

What branches have sprouted, or would you like to see sprout from your role as a teacher (of MLs)?

Consider strategies and skills you may want to develop or expand to work with MLs that could enhance your agency. Build on what you have already accomplished and start new growth. Include the impact of the M2-Si work and the ToL PL.

Free write additional thoughts about growing your branches!

Leaves

Leaves represent people who have impacted your life as a teacher of MLs. They can be living or deceased. Consider people you do or do not personally know. Think about the branches where these people have or could make an impact.

Remember to allow ideas to flow and include whoever comes to mind even if they seem unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs.

How have others (the leaves) impacted you and the lives of your students?

Consider people and entities who have influenced your vision and confidence in creating a lasting impact on your ML students. Include M2-Si, ToL PL, businesses, community or professional groups, and individuals.

Free write additional thoughts about the impact of others (leaves) on you as a teacher (of MLs).

Add a picture of your tree

Research Question: What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life professional learning on teacher agency?

Session 3

Flowers

Flowers represent things you have accomplished, are working on accomplishing, gifts received, or things you are proud of as a teacher of MLs. You might want to trace from the roots up the trunk through the branches and leaves to get to the flowers to see how they are all connected. Consider what the flowers are of your professional aspirations. What future goals do you have for your teaching career when working with MLs? All students? Feel free to interject whatever comes to mind whether or not it is related to teaching.

How have the flowers grown from the other parts of your tree?

Consider tracing the flowers/fruits back down the tree to a specific leaf, branch, aspect of the trunk, or root. Consider the source including M2-Si, ToL PL, etc.

Free write additional thoughts about your flowers.

Ground

The ground represents the environment you are planted in. It can be the immediate surroundings or things that have impacted you over time. What would you include in your ground?

Consider things that impact you, your work, student learning, parents, other staff, etc. All aspects of the ground mix to make up the total of who you are. Include whatever comes to mind even if it seems unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs, however, don't forget to highlight aspects that are specific to your role as a teacher of MLs.

What aspects of the ground, your environment, impact your ability to meet the needs of your (ML) students? Describe the impact.

Consider things you have control over as well as things you do not. Include PL, M2-Si, ToL PL, and other influences.

Free write additional thoughts about exploring the impact of the ground you are planted in.

Add a picture of your tree

Research Question: What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life professional learning on teacher agency?

Session 4

Bugs

Much of what we have added to our trees has been positive, but we all know that negative or seemingly negative events and people can impact our personal and professional lives in various ways. Bugs can be things that attack specific aspects of the tree, like a relationship (leaf) or a project (flower).

Sometimes the bugs seem destructive, but they can be blessings in disguise that make us stronger.

Think about the parts of your tree and how bugs might impact different parts.

How have/do bugs impact(ed) you in your educational career? (Working with ML students, etc.)

What have you attempted to overcome these bugs? How has the M2-Si work or ToL PL played a role? Consider any impact on your feeling of agency in working with MLs.

Free write additional thoughts about dealing with the bugs.

Storms

Another possible negative or seemingly negative event is storms. Storms have a larger impact like the possibility of knocking the tree over, such as with a major health issue.

Sometimes the storms seem insurmountable, but they too can make us stronger and even lead to positive outcomes.

How have/do storms impact(ed) you in your educational career? (Working with ML students, etc.)

What have you attempted to or actually overcome these storms? How has the M2-Si work or ToL PL played a role? Consider any impact on your feeling of agency in working with MLs.

Free write additional thoughts about weathering the storms (and bugs).

Forest

As individual trees we each have strengths. When we come together as a forest our strength is multiplied. Watch the first 46 seconds of this video. Think about how tree roots interlock and how they communicate and support each other through storms. How can we help each other as we work to meet the needs of MLs? Think of some examples from the M2-Si work or from the earlier sessions we have shared.

How has your tree and/or the forest been strengthened through the M2-Si and ToL PL?
Please share specific examples.

Free write additional thoughts about the impact of the forest.

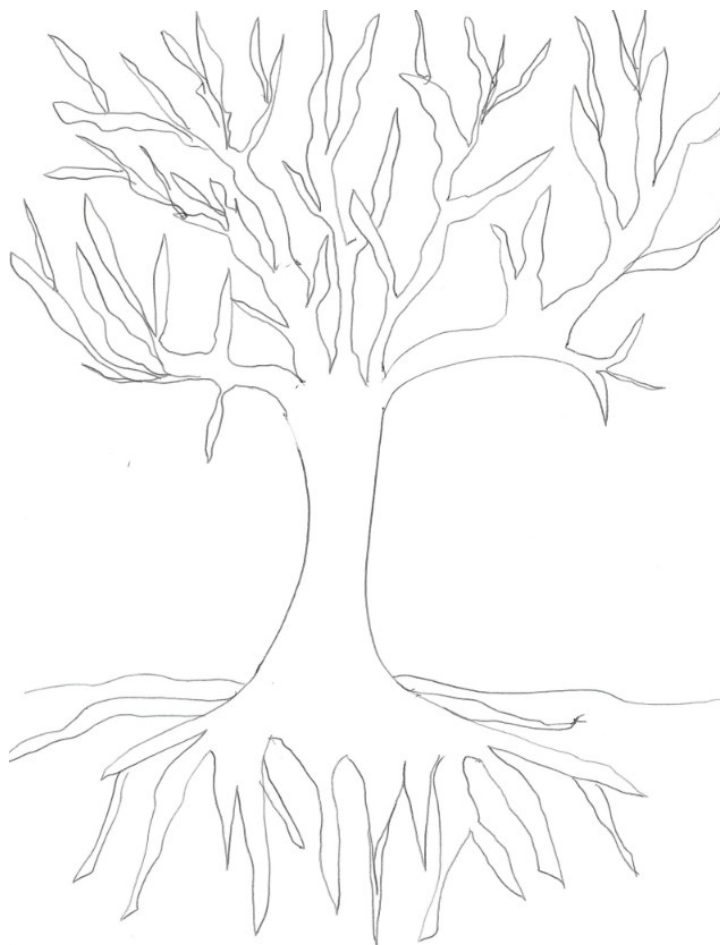
Add a picture of your tree

Add a picture of the forest

Research Question: What is the perceived influence of the Tree of Life professional learning on teacher agency?

APPENDIX E: TREE OF LIFE RESEARCHER JOURNAL TEMPLATE

Researcher Tree of Life Journal



Session 1

Research Question #2

How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?

- a. *As a scholarly practitioner?*
- b. *As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?*

Participant Prompt: Roots

Your roots represent where you come from. This can include locations, people, experiences, or anything else that has helped shape you into who you are today as a teacher of MLs, including your work with the M2-Si.

You can begin with large roots such as education and then branch off into specific aspects of your education that specifically impact you as a teacher. Consider how your cultural and linguistic roots influence your approach to teaching multilingual learners. Include whatever comes to mind even if it seems unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs. You may write as much or as little as you feel comfortable with.

How do your roots impact who you are as a teacher of MLs?

Consider cultural and linguistic roots, significant life events and their impact, “ah-ha” moments that came through self-reflection during the ToL PL, a sense of agency in working with MLs, the impact of the M2-Si work, etc.

Participant Prompt: Trunk

The trunk represents your strengths as a teacher (of MLs). As always, all aspects of your life can be part of the trunk. You may want to reflect on your roots as you think about your trunk. Allow the ideas to flow naturally and include what comes to mind even if it seems unrelated to you as a teacher or specifically as a teacher of MLs.

What are your strengths as a teacher (of MLs)?

How do they impact student well-being, achievement, relationships, etc.? Consider things like core beliefs and values, aspects of your teaching practice, what you learned about yourself through the ToL PL and/or the M2-Si work, etc.

Reflection Questions

1. What insights did I gain from the introduction, roots and/or trunk PL presentation and discussion?
2. How might I adjust the materials or presentation when doing the sessions again?
3. What surprised me? What went as planned?
4. What insights did I have as I worked on my own roots and trunk?
5. Other

Session 2

Research Question #2

How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?

- a. *As a scholarly practitioner?*
- b. *As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?*

Participant Prompt: Branches

The branches are your hopes, dreams, and aspirations as a teacher of MLs. What has sprouted from your strengths? Grown from your roots or trunk?

Some branches are small. Some are strong. Others are waiting to grow. Connect to your roots and your trunk as you explore the branches. Don't be afraid to add things that don't seem to be specifically related to you as a teacher of MLs.

What branches have sprouted, or would you like to see sprout from your role as a teacher (of MLs)?

Consider strategies and skills you may want to develop or expand to work with MLs that could enhance your agency. Build on what you have already accomplished and start new growth. Include the impact of the M2-Si work and the ToL PL.

Participant Prompt: Leaves

Leaves represent people who have impacted your life as a teacher of MLs. They can be living or deceased. Consider people you do or do not personally know. Think about the branches where these people have or could make an impact.

Remember to allow ideas to flow and include whoever comes to mind even if they seem unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs.

How have others (the leaves) impacted you and the lives of your students?

Consider people and entities who have influenced your vision and confidence in creating a lasting impact on your ML students. Include M2-Si, ToL PL, businesses, community or professional groups, and individuals.

Reflection Questions

6. What insights did I gain from the asynchronous journal review, synchronous reflection, branches and/or leaves PL presentation and discussion?
7. How might I adjust the materials or presentation when doing the sessions again?
8. What surprised me? What went as planned?
9. What insights did I have as I worked on my own branches and leaves?
10. Other

Session 3

Research Question #2

How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?

- a. *As a scholarly practitioner?*
- b. *As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?*

Participant Prompt: Flowers

Flowers represent things you have accomplished, are working on accomplishing, gifts received, or things you are proud of as a teacher of MLs. You might want to trace from the roots up the trunk through the branches and leaves to get to the flowers to see how they are all connected.

Consider what the flowers are of your professional aspirations. What future goals do you have for your teaching career when working with MLs? All students? Feel free to interject whatever comes to mind whether or not it is related to teaching.

How have the flowers grown from the other parts of your tree?

Consider tracing the flowers/fruits back down the tree to a specific leaf, branch, aspect of the trunk, or root. Consider the source including M2-Si, ToL PL, etc.

Participant Prompt: Ground

The ground represents the environment you are planted in. It can be the immediate surroundings or things that have impacted you over time. What would you include in your ground?

Consider things that impact you, your work, student learning, parents, other staff, etc. All aspects of the ground mix to make up the total of who you are. Include whatever comes to mind even if it seems unrelated to you as a teacher of MLs, however, don't forget to highlight aspects that are specific to your role as a teacher of MLs.

What aspects of the ground, your environment, impact your ability to meet the needs of your (ML) students? Describe the impact.

Consider things you have control over as well as things you do not. Include PL, M2-Si, ToL PL, and other influences.

Reflection Questions

11. What insights did I gain from the asynchronous journal review, synchronous reflection, flowers and/or ground PL presentation and discussion?
12. How might I adjust the materials or presentation when doing the sessions again?
13. What surprised me? What went as planned?
14. What insights did I have as I worked on my own flowers and ground?
15. Other

Session 4

Research Question #2

How has the ToL PL impacted my professional growth?

- a. *As a scholarly practitioner?*
- b. *As a coach and PL developer/facilitator?*

Participant Prompt: Bugs

Much of what we have added to our trees has been positive, but we all know that negative or seemingly negative events and people can impact our personal and professional lives in various ways. Bugs can be things that attack specific aspects of the tree, like a relationship (leaf) or a project (flower).

Sometimes the bugs seem destructive, but they can be blessings in disguise that make us stronger.

Think about the parts of your tree and how bugs might impact different parts.

How have/do bugs impact(ed) you in your educational career? (Working with ML students, etc.)

What have you attempted to overcome these bugs? How has the M2-Si work or ToL PL played a role? Consider any impact on your feeling of agency in working with MLs.

Participant Prompt: Storms

Another possible negative or seemingly negative event is storms. Storms have a larger impact like the possibility of knocking the tree over, such as with a major health issue.

Sometimes the storms seem insurmountable, but they too can make us stronger and even lead to positive outcomes.

How have/do storms impact(ed) you in your educational career? (Working with ML students, etc.)

What have you attempted to or actually overcome these storms? How has the M2-Si work or ToL PL played a role? Consider any impact on your feeling of agency in working with MLs.

Participant Prompt: Forest

As individual trees we each have strengths. When we come together as a forest our strength is multiplied. Watch the first 46 seconds of this video. Think about how tree roots interlock and how they communicate and support each other through storms. How can we help each other as we work to meet the needs of MLs? Think of some examples from the M2-Si work or from the earlier sessions we have shared.

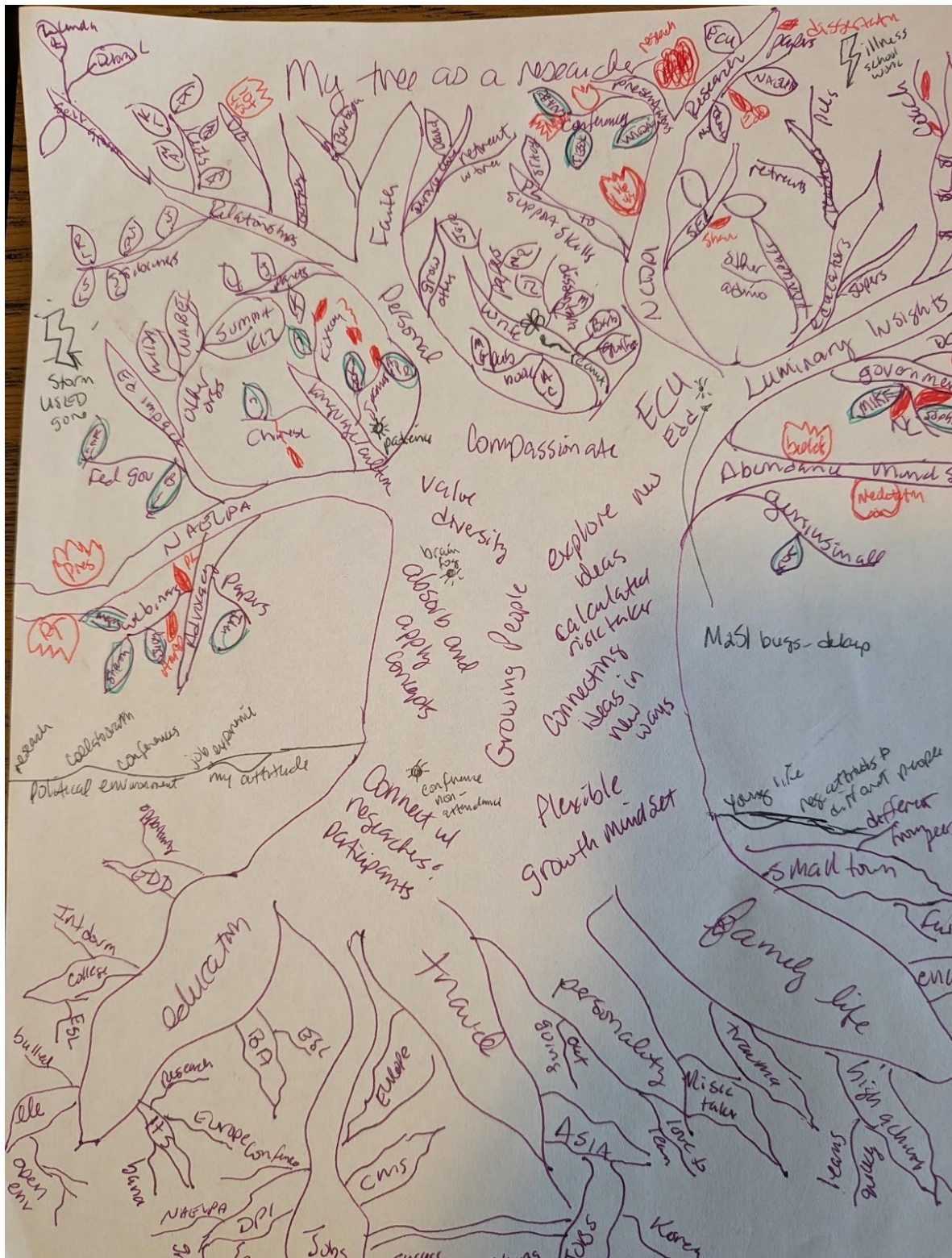
How has your tree and/or the forest been strengthened through the M2-Si and ToL PL?

Please share specific examples.

Reflection Questions

16. What insights did I gain from the asynchronous journal review, synchronous reflection, bugs, storms, and/or forest PL presentation and discussion?
17. How might I adjust the materials or presentation when doing the sessions again?
18. What surprised me? What went as planned?
19. What insights did I have as I worked on my own bugs, storms, and/or forest?
20. Other

APPENDIX F: RESEARCHER TREE OF LIFE



APPENDIX G: RESEARCH CRYSTALIZATION



APPENDIX H: INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Information

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation work on Tree of Life: Growing Teacher Agency in Working with Multilingual Learners Through Non-Traditional Professional Learning. This questionnaire is designed to set a baseline describing your experience as an educator working with Multilingual Learners (MLs). There are twenty-two (22) questions across five (5) sections: Participant Information, Student Demographics, Perception of Students, Perception and Agency, and Professional Learning. The questionnaire should take between twenty (20) and thirty (30) minutes. Time may vary depending on how detailed your responses are to the open ended questions. Your time and detailed responses are greatly valued. Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire, this research, and in my dream of growing teacher agency in working with MLs! Although your name and email will be included in the questionnaire, as indicated in the signed consent form, confidentiality protocol will be followed, and no personal information will be included in any publications.

*Agency: The sense of being in control or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006). For the purpose of this inquiry, agency includes your perception of: your understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, your confidence in working toward addressing those needs your ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs **To take an assets-based approach and to value and honor language and culture to foster the academic and personal success of MLs, the term “multilingual learners” (MLs) will be used in this document to refer to students identified as “English learners” (ELs)

Please contact me with any question andersoniv17@students.ecu.edu Thank you, Ivanna

Q1 Participant Information

- First Name (1)
- Last Name (2)
- eMail (3)
- Phone Number (4)

Q2 Gender

Female, Male, Non-binary, Prefer not to answer

Q3 Race

- American Indian or Alaskan Native (1)
- Asian (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- Mixed (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)
- White (6)
- Other (7)

Q4 Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

- Q5 What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Bachelor's Degree (1)
 - Master's Degree (2)
 - Doctoral Degree (3)
- Q6 In what content area is(are) your highest degree(s)?
- K-6 education (1)
 - Science (2)
 - ESL (3)
 - Other (4)
- Q7 What type of teaching certificate(s) do you have? (Choose all that apply. Add additional certification under other)
- ESL (1)
 - K-6 all subjects (2)
 - Content-specific (3)
 - Other (4)
- Q8 Do you work in a Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) program?
- Yes (1)
 - No (3)
 - Other (4)
- Q9 What grade(s) do you teach?
- 3 (5)
 - 4 (8)
 - 5 (9)
 - Other (4)

Student Demographics

- Q10 Of all the students you teach, how many have been identified as Multilingual learners (MLs)? Write '0' if you do NOT teach any ML students. (**the term “multilingual learners” (MLs) will be used in this document to refer to students identified as “English learners” (ELs))
- Q11 Please indicate the proficiency levels of your ML students. (Enter 0 when there are none)
 P Level 1 (1) P Level 2 (2) P Level 3 (3) P Level 4 (4) P Level 5 (5)
- # Students at this overall proficiency level (P Level) on ACCESS for ELLs or the placement test (1)
- Q12 What languages do the MLs in your classroom speak? (Enter 0 when there are none)
 # Students (1)
- Arabic/Egyptian/Lebanese/Syrian (1)
 - Cherokee (2)
 - Chinese (3)
 - French (4)
 - German (5)
 - Hindi/Indian/Urdu (6)
 - Japanese (7)
 - Korean (8)

- Spanish (9)
- Telugu (10)
- Vietnamese (11)
- Other (12)

Perception of Students

Q13 I believe my ML students

Disagree 1, Somewhat disagree 2, Neither disagree or agree 3, Somewhat agree 4, Agree 5

- are capable of performing well on classroom assessments. (2)
- accurately demonstrate their knowledge and abilities through their performance on classroom assessments. (3)
- are capable of performing well on statewide assessments. (3rd-5th grade EOG, DIBELS, etc.) (1)
- accurately demonstrate their knowledge and abilities through their performance on state assessments. (3rd-5th grade EOG, DIBELS, etc.) (4)

Q14 My perception of my ability to help prepare students to show their knowledge and abilities on classroom and state assessments was increased through the M2-Si PL. Briefly explain your response.

- Disagree (1)
- Neither disagree nor agree (2)
- Agree (3)

Perception and Agency

Q15 When considering making decisions while planning learning and teaching activities for MLs, I am influenced by:

Disagree 1, Somewhat disagree 2, Neither disagree or agree 3, Somewhat agree 4, Agree 5

- my confidence towards planning teaching and learning experiences for MLs (2)
- values and beliefs developed about MLs based on my personal life experiences (3)
- knowledge and skills developed about MLs based on my personal life experiences (1)
- values and beliefs developed about MLs during teacher training (4)
- knowledge and skills about MLs gained from teaching experiences (5)
- values and beliefs about MLs developed based on teaching experiences (6)
- goals related to ML learners' acquisition of content knowledge (7)
- goals related to supporting ML learners' motivation (8)
- classroom atmosphere (e.g., willingness to cooperate, welcoming multilingual and multimodal responses) (10)
- class structure (e.g., group size, percentage of boys and girls, attention to ML English proficiency levels) (11)
- school organizational culture (e.g., collaborative orientation, welcoming environment for diverse cultures and languages) (12)
- school administrative support (e.g., lesson plan, workload, support professionals, interpretation and translation for ML families) (13)
- support from colleagues at school (14)

Q16 Indicate your perceived level of agency in working with MLs for each area below.
(*Agency: The sense of being in control or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006). For the purpose of this inquiry, agency includes your perception of: your understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, your confidence in working toward addressing those needs, and your ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs.

Low 1, Somewhat low 2, Neither low nor high 3, Somewhat high 4, High 5

- My understanding of the nature of academic English and the challenges it poses for MLs (1)
- My understanding of how culture influences learning and classroom management (2)
- My ability to differentiate instruction for MLs with diverse language, educational, and cultural backgrounds (3)
- My ability to teach standards-based academic content to MLs from diverse language, educational, and cultural backgrounds (4)
- My ability to use results from a state's language screener and annual proficiency test of yearly growth to inform instruction in the classroom (6)
- My knowledge of a variety of instructional strategies or best practices for teaching MLs (7)
- My understanding of various assessment issues as they affect MLs (accommodations, use of language, unfamiliarity with test/item format, cultural bias) (8)
- My ability to use a variety of classroom-based assessments to measure content and language progress for MLs (9)
- My skills and strategies for reaching out to MLs' parents/guardians/family members to enhance learning (10)
- My ability to access and use a wide-range of materials, resources, and technologies for the instruction of MLs (11)

Q17 When working with MLs, I perceive that I have influence over...

Disagree 1, Somewhat disagree 2, Neither disagree or agree 3, Somewhat agree 4, Agree 5

- Making a difference in the lives of MLs (1)
- Selecting the content of in-service professional development programs on MLs (2)
- Impacting ML student absenteeism (6)
- Impacting ML student behavior (7)
- Impacting ML academic success (8)
- Supporting ML Social Emotional Learning (9)
- Impacting ML parental involvement (10)
- Selecting ML-specific teaching techniques (11)
- Evaluating and grading ML students (12)
- Creating ML-related workplace policies and practices (14)
- Managing my workload (17)
- Acquiring ML instructional materials, resources, and equipment for doing my job (19)
- Creating a sense of my own personal accomplishment in working with MLs (20)

Q18 In general, how effective do you perceive yourself to be as a teacher of MLs?

- Excellent / Outstanding / Highly effective (1)
- Satisfactory / Effective (2)
- Unsatisfactory / Not that effective (3)

Professional Learning

Q19 When studying to become a teacher, how many specific courses on teaching methods for working with MLs did you take? (To take an assets-based approach and to value and honor language and culture to foster the academic and personal success of MLs, the term “multilingual learners” (MLs) will be used in this document to refer to students identified as “English learners” (ELs))

- none (6)
- 1-2 (7)
- 3-5 (8)
- more than 5 (9)

Q20 Since becoming a teacher how many ML-specific professional learning sessions on teaching methods or strategies have you participated in? (Please do NOT include PL related to the M2-Si work)

- none (1)
- 1-2 (2)
- 3-5 (3)
- more than 5 (4)

Q21 The M2-Si grant has offered various ML-specific PL opportunities including: the NC Science Teachers Association Conference M2-Si presentation, the Workshops: Strategies for Meaningful Assessment, Assessment-based Approaches to Multilingualism, Communicating Creatively, Using Multimodalities, Science Learning Targets, Formative Assessment Activities, and PLCs. How have these additional PLs impacted you and your work with MLs? Please be specific.

Q22 Do you have any other comments or questions you would like to share?

Closure

Thank you: Thank you for participating in the Initial Questionnaire Contact info: If you have any questions, please contact, Ivanna Mann Thrower Anderson at 704-258-1182 or andersoniv17@students.ECU.EDU

End of Block: Closure

APPENDIX I: FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Information

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation work on Tree of Life: Growing Teacher Agency in Working with Multilingual Learners Through Non-Traditional Professional Learning. This questionnaire is an extension of the baseline questionnaire and is designed to measure and compare your perception of agency in working with Multilingual Learners (MLs) based on your experience with the ToL PL in addition to the M2-Si PL. The demographic questions from the initial questionnaire will be matched with the final questionnaire based on your name unless you indicate that significant changes have taken place on question number 1A. You will only complete the twelve (12) question in the Participant Information section if there were significant changes in your teaching environment. This leaves thirteen (13) questions to be completed across three (3) sections: Perception of Students, Perception and Agency, and Professional Learning. The questionnaire may take as much as thirty (30) to forty-five (45) minutes. Time may vary depending on how detailed your responses are to the open-ended questions. Your time and detailed responses are greatly valued. Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire, this research, and in my dream of growing teacher agency in working with MLs! Although your name and email will be included in the questionnaire, as indicated in the signed consent form, confidentiality protocol will be followed, and no personal information will be included in any publications. *Agency: The sense of being in control or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006). For the purpose of this inquiry, agency includes your perception of: your understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, your confidence in working toward addressing those needs your ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs **To take an assets-based approach and to value and honor language and culture to foster the academic and personal success of MLs, the term “multilingual learners” (MLs) will be used in this document to refer to students identified as “English learners” (ELs)

Please contact me with any questions: andersoniv17@students.ecu.edu Thank you, Ivanna

Q1 Participant Information

- First Name (1)
- Last Name (2)
- eMail (3)
- Phone Number (4)

Q1A Have there been any major changes in your position, work location , or students since you completed the initial questionnaire?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Q1A = No

Q2 Gender

Female, Male, Non-binary, Prefer not to answer

Q3 Race

- American Indian or Alaskan Native (1)
- Asian (2)

- Black or African American (3)
- Mixed (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)
- White (6)
- Other (7)

Q4 Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Bachelor's Degree (1)
- Master's Degree (2)
- Doctoral Degree (3)

Q6 In what content area is(are) your highest degree(s)?

- ☐ K-6 education (1)
- ☐ Science (2)
- ☐ ESL (3)
- ☐ Other (4)

Q7 What type of teaching certificate(s) do you have? (Choose all that apply. Add additional certification under other)

- ☐ ESL (1)
- ☐ K-6 all subjects (2)
- ☐ Content-specific (3)
- ☐ Other (4)

Q8 Do you work in a Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) program?

- Yes (1)
- No (3)
- Other (4)

Q9 What grade(s) do you teach?

- 3 (5)
- 4 (8)
- 5 (9)
- Other (4)

Student Demographics

Q10 Of all the students you teach, how many have been identified as Multilingual learners (MLs)? Write '0' if you do NOT teach any ML students. (**the term "multilingual learners" (MLs) will be used in this document to refer to students identified as "English learners" (ELs))

Q11 Please indicate the proficiency levels of your ML students. (Enter 0 when there are none)

P Level 1 (1) P Level 2 (2) P Level 3 (3) P Level 4 (4) P Level 5 (5)

Students at this overall proficiency level (P Level) on ACCESS for ELLs or the placement test (1)

Q12 What languages do the MLs in your classroom speak? (Enter 0 when there are none)

Students (1)

- Arabic/Egyptian/Lebanese/Syrian (1)
- Cherokee (2)
- Chinese (3)
- French (4)
- German (5)
- Hindi/Indian/Urdu (6)
- Japanese (7)
- Korean (8)
- Spanish (9)
- Telugu (10)
- Vietnamese (11)
- Other (12)

Perception of Students

Q13 I believe my ML students

Disagree 1, Somewhat disagree 2, Neither disagree or agree 3, Somewhat agree 4, Agree 5

- are capable of performing well on classroom assessments. (2)
- accurately demonstrate their knowledge and abilities through their performance on classroom assessments. (3)
- are capable of performing well on statewide assessments. (3rd-5th grade EOG, DIBELS, etc.) (1)
- accurately demonstrate their knowledge and abilities through their performance on state assessments. (3rd-5th grade EOG, DIBELS, etc.) (4)

Q14 My perception of my ability to help prepare students to show their knowledge and abilities on classroom and state assessments was increased through the ToL PL. Briefly explain your response.

- Disagree (1)
- Neither disagree nor agree (2)
- Agree (3)

Perception and Agency

Q15 When considering making decisions while planning learning and teaching activities for MLs, I am influenced by:

Disagree 1, Somewhat disagree 2, Neither disagree or agree 3, Somewhat agree 4, Agree 5

- my confidence towards planning teaching and learning experiences for MLs (2)
- values and beliefs developed about MLs based on my personal life experiences (3)
- knowledge and skills developed about MLs based on my personal life experiences (1)
- values and beliefs developed about MLs during teacher training (4)
- knowledge and skills about MLs gained from teaching experiences (5)
- values and beliefs about MLs developed based on teaching experiences (6)
- goals related to ML learners' acquisition of content knowledge (7)
- goals related to supporting ML learners' motivation (8)

- classroom atmosphere (e.g., willingness to cooperate, welcoming multilingual and multimodal responses) (10)
- class structure (e.g., group size, percentage of boys and girls, attention to ML English proficiency levels) (11)
- school organizational culture (e.g., collaborative orientation, welcoming environment for diverse cultures and languages) (12)
- school administrative support (e.g., lesson plan, workload, support professionals, interpretation and translation for ML families) (13)
- support from colleagues at school (14)

Q16 Having completed the ToL PL, indicate your perceived level of agency in working with MLs for each area below. (*Agency: The sense of being in control or being able to achieve something in a given context (Bandura, 2006). For the purpose of this inquiry, agency includes your perception of: your understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, your confidence in working toward addressing those needs, and your ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs.

Low 1, Somewhat low 2, Neither low nor high 3, Somewhat high 4, High 5

- My understanding of the nature of academic English and the challenges it poses for MLs (1)
- My understanding of how culture influences learning and classroom management (2)
- My ability to differentiate instruction for MLs with diverse language, educational, and cultural backgrounds (3)
- My ability to teach standards-based academic content to MLs from diverse language, educational, and cultural backgrounds (4)
- My ability to use results from a state's language screener and annual proficiency test of yearly growth to inform instruction in the classroom (6)
- My knowledge of a variety of instructional strategies or best practices for teaching MLs (7)
- My understanding of various assessment issues as they affect MLs (accommodations, use of language, unfamiliarity with test/item format, cultural bias) (8)
- My ability to use a variety of classroom-based assessments to measure content and language progress for MLs (9)
- My skills and strategies for reaching out to MLs' parents/guardians/family members to enhance learning (10)
- My ability to access and use a wide-range of materials, resources, and technologies for the instruction of MLs (11)

Q17 Share any impact of the ToL PL on the items above. Specify the item and details of the impact.

Q18 Having completed the ToL PL, when working with MLs, I perceive that I have influence over...

Disagree 1, Somewhat disagree 2, Neither disagree or agree 3, Somewhat agree 4, Agree 5

- Making a difference in the lives of MLs (1)
- Selecting the content of in-service professional development programs on MLs (2)
- Impacting ML student absenteeism (6)
- Impacting ML student behavior (7)
- Impacting ML academic success (8)

- Supporting ML Social Emotional Learning (9)
- Impacting ML parental involvement (10)
- Selecting ML-specific teaching techniques (11)
- Evaluating and grading ML students (12)
- Creating ML-related workplace policies and practices (14)
- Managing my workload (17)
- Acquiring ML instructional materials, resources, and equipment for doing my job (19)
- Creating a sense of my own personal accomplishment in working with MLs (20)

Q19 Share any impact of the ToL PL on the items above. Specify the item and details of the impact.

Q20 After completing the ToL PL, how effective do you perceive yourself to be as a teacher of MLs?

- Excellent / Outstanding / Highly effective (1)
- Satisfactory / Effective (2)
- Unsatisfactory / Not that effective (3)

Q21 How did the ToL PL impact your perception of yourself as a teacher of MLs? Consider things such as increased confidence, sense of agency, enhanced skill set, and other aspects of who you are as a teacher of MLs. For the purpose of this inquiry, agency includes your perception of: your understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, and your confidence in working toward addressing those needs your ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs.

- It did not impact my perception of myself as a teacher of MLs. (1)
- It somewhat impacted my perception of myself as a teacher of MLs. (2)
- It strongly impacted my perception of myself as a teacher of MLs. (3)

Professional Learning

Q22 The ToL PL offered an opportunity to reflect on various aspects of your experience as a teacher of MLs through the roots, trunk, branches, flowers, ground, bugs and storms. It also explored the communal aspect of the forest. How has the narrative PLs impacted you and your work with MLs? How did it impact previous PL you have experienced through the M2-Si or other ML related PL. Please be specific

Q23 Which component(s) of the ToL PL had the greatest impact on your sense of agency in working with MLs? Please explain.

- Roots (1)
- Trunk (2)
- Branches (3)
- Flowers (4)
- Ground (5)
- Bugs (9)
- Storms (6)
- Forest (7)
- Other (8)

Q24 What would you share with another teacher about your experience in the ToL PL?

Q25 Do you have any other comments or questions you would like to share?

Closure

Thank you: Thank you for participating in the Final Questionnaire Contact info: If you have any questions, please contact, Ivanna Mann Thrower Anderson at 704-258-1182 or andersoniv17@students.ECU.EDU

APPENDIX J: AI USE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This dissertation in practice involved the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support several stages of the research and writing process in ways consistent with ethical guidance and academic integrity. The tools used, scope of application, and safeguards are detailed below.

Tools Utilized:

- ChatGPT-4 (OpenAI, 2023)/Claude Opus 4.5: Used for brainstorming research questions, refining writing structure, improving clarity of expression, and suggesting revisions based on APA 7th edition conventions.
- Grammarly: Used for grammar, spelling, and sentence-level clarity checks.
- Purpose and Scope of Use:
- AI tools were used to: Generate and refine ideas during the conceptualization of the inquiry.
- Explore possible frameworks for the literature review.
- Identify synonyms, simplify wording, and enhance flow in early drafts.
- Provide feedback on grammar and adherence to APA formatting.
- Enhance depth, precision, and objectivity in the analysis and interpretation of data.

AI was not used for:

- Generating original findings, arguments, or conclusions.
- Writing literature review summaries without cross-verification.

Ethical and Academic Considerations:

All AI-generated content was critically reviewed, edited, and rephrased by the author. The AI tools used do not meet criteria for authorship.

This practice aligns with APA guidelines for acknowledging AI and reflects recommendations from Everson (2025) regarding the ethical integration of AI into practitioner scholarship.

Transparency and Responsibility:

I affirm that the final work is my own, and I accept full responsibility for all content, analysis, and conclusions. AI was used to support—not replace—my scholarly voice.

APPENDIX K: CODE BOOK

Theme	Category	Code Bold text indicates deductive codes (Imperiale et al., 2021)
Resilience within Contextual Constraints	Teacher SEL	Agency, Challenge, Collaboration , Politics, SEL (Teacher), Whole Person
Empathy for MLs through Lived Experience	International Teachers	Academic, Agency, Challenge , Class Impact, Culture, Dual Language, Linguistic, MLs, SEL (Student), Whole Person

Name	Description
Academic	Related to instructional content and student performance in subjects such as math, science, etc.
Agency	Participant perception of understanding of the specific linguistic, cultural, socio-emotional, academic, and/or other related needs of MLs, confidence in working toward addressing those needs, and ability to convey to others methods of supporting MLs
Challenge	Having a negative effect on the mind or body
Class Impact	Evidence that is reported of implementation of Tree of Life related ideas and their effect on students
Collaboration	Working together toward a goal
Culture	Related to the country or environment, such as school or classroom, from which a person has come
Dual Language	Learning environment or use of more than one language for communication (AKA Bilingual)
Linguistic	Related to language

Name	Description
MLs	Multilingual students, typically English Learners in a Dual Language Program (Both teachers in the research teach in DL programs)
Politics	Related to national, state, and local policy, procedures, and governmental environment
SEL (Student)	Related to the social and emotional needs of students
SEL (Teacher)	Related to the social and emotional needs of teachers
Whole Person	Considering all aspects of an individual including body, mind, and spirit