

## **Pre-Service International Teaching Assistant's (ITA's) investments in their ITA Training Course: A Multiple Case Study**

Dr. Roger Anderson \*

*Central State University, USA*

\*Corresponding author: Email: [randerson@centralstate.edu](mailto:randerson@centralstate.edu)

Address: 1389 Brush Row Road, Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, 45384 USA

### **ABSTRACT**

*Research has focused almost exclusively on International Teaching Assistants' (ITA) experiences as instructors, overlooking the ITA training class. This has led to the marginalization of Pre-Service ITAs in the literature. The locus of potentially important learning, a descriptive, multiple case study examined the investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) of three Pre-Service ITA's in their ITA training class over one semester at a large US university. Data included ITA's weekly journals, individual interviews/ stimulated recalls, class assignments, and field notes from classroom observations. Findings are presented as portraits of real, multifaceted ITA's, then from cross-case analyses. Participants experienced the same course very differently, impacted most prominently by their ITA educators' teaching approach, their exposure to teaching role models, and their home department structures. Recognizing the incredible diversity ITA's represent, pedagogical implications suggest an "intense exposure experience" or teaching-training focused pedagogy be implemented -instead of test-centric pedagogies, situating ITA's learning within un-simulated spaces with real undergraduates.*

Keywords: ESL, experience, ITA, identity, International Teaching Assistant, investment, Pre-Service ITA, second language acquisition

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## INTRODUCTION

International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) are graduate students admitted to study in the US and Canada (Gorsuch, 2016) who are often employed in various teaching roles (Gorsuch, 2012a). To this end, ITAs needing support in their instructional English often enroll in an English language class (Gorsuch, 2014). Sustaining the motivation of ITAs is of critical importance to ITA educators (Gorsuch, 2016). Their motivation cannot be assumed a priori: ITAs have diverse, complex, and evolving identities and relationships to teaching and thus to such courses. Moreover, research has marginalized ITAs who are not yet teaching, here referred to as “Pre-Service ITAs”, and generally has overlooked, the ITA training class, a space for potentially crucial learning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The ITA Training Class**

In the late 1980’s, the number of ITAs in North American universities rose (Gorsuch, 2016), prompting legislation in US states to mandate ITAs’ spoken English proficiencies (Hoekje & Linnell, 1994). This was the advent of ITA training classes, which resist simple categorization: they are sometimes classified as English for Academic Purposes (Myles & Cheng, 2003) or English for Specific Purposes (Byrd & Constantinides, 1988; Papajohn et al., 2002). Despite the variation, programs typically focus on instructional communication, involving grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Hoekje & Williams, 1994), most importantly focusing on discipline-specific discourse (Gorsuch, 2006; Wennerstrom, 1992). Some programs seek to develop ITAs’ overall speaking fluency (Mishima & Cheng ; Stevens, 1989; Papajohn, 2006; Gorsuch, 2011). Other programs target ITAs of specific fields or instructional settings (Cousins et al., 1988), such as math classrooms (Rounds, 1987), and office hours/labs (Tanner et al., 1993; Axelson & Madden, 1994).

### **Within the ITA Training Class**

Studies within ITA training programs have analyzed many topics, including ITA’s development of specific linguistic aspects, such as speaking fluency (Papajohn, 2006; Gorsuch, 2011); intonation (Gorsuch, 2013), discourse in simulations of situations (Reinhardt, 2010), and oral language vis-à-vis written language (Levis et al., 2012). Other studies have examined the programs’ use of technology (Crumley, 2010; Stenson et al., 1992; Zha, 2006). Examining socio-affective aspects of the ITA training class, research has examined the development of ITA’s confidence using English to teach (Salinas et al., 1999) and their intercultural competence and instructional practices (LeGros & Faez, 2012), their willingness to communicate (Compton, 2007) and learning strategies (Wallace, 2015). Notwithstanding, few studies have examined ITA’s experience with such courses.

### **ITA's Experiences of the ITA Training Class**

One focus of recent work is ITA's experiences as instructors of undergraduate students (Adebayo & Allen, 2020; Ashavskaya, 2015; Ates & Eslami, 2012; Hebbani & Hendrix, 2014; Numrich, 1993; Smith & Simpson, 1993; Williams & Case, 2015; Zhou, 2014), including autoethnographic work (Hao, 2009; Mutua, 2014). Studies also examined ITA's social lives beyond the classroom (Myles & Cheng, 2003). Few studies have examined ITA's experience of the ITA training class, most of which evaluated a pedagogical intervention (Stevenson & Jenkins, 1994; Zha, 2006). Jia and Bergerson's (2008) study investigated ITA's experiences with a one week-long training program at the start of their doctoral programs. The study found the program to have aided participants in orienting them on campus and building their networks, improving their presentation and teaching skills, and developing their awareness of cultural differences. Nonetheless, ITA participants expressed mixed feelings towards the structure of the orientation program (Jia & Bergerson, 2008). Similarly, Stevenson & Jenkins (1994) examined the impact of ITA's weekly journal-writing during a ten-week long ITA training class with 17 Pre-Service ITA's and three In-Service ITA's. The study examined journaling's efficacy in improving language proficiencies, teaching skills, cross-cultural communication, and stress management. Learners found journaling beneficial but were using it as a tool for stress relief rather than reflexivity.

## **THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT**

### **Investment in Language Learning**

One scholar posited, "the term 'motivation' is too weak to cover the strong feelings of attraction and rejection" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 205). To complement this psychological construct, Bonny Norton developed investment, which is situated at the nexus of ideologies, identities, and access to cultural capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This model aligns with calls for conceptual frameworks that embrace rather than gloss over the messy nature of identity work (Leung et al., 1997). A review of the investment literature found the concept used both as an exploratory and explanatory tool for research findings (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Within this research, investment was used to explore Pre-Service ITA's experience in their ITA training class. As described in the methods section, it informed data collection by providing the basis for interview protocols.

### **Scant Work on Pre-Service ITA's**

By focusing almost exclusively on beyond the ITA training class, research has overlooked Pre-Service ITAs. Within ITA training classes, Pre-Service ITAs were studied in relation to the development of their self-confidence as instructors (Salinas et al., 1999) and to their language learning strategies, learner autonomy, and uses of technology (Wallace, 2015). Beyond the ITA Training class, only a single, outdated study of ITA's personality types, was done with Pre-Service ITAs (Smith & Logan, 1995). As such, our understanding of Pre-Service ITA's development is woefully under informed, particularly around their "motivation" vis-à-vis their language development. This sub-group may receive fewer pedagogical opportunities (Hoekje & Williams, 1994) because In-Service ITA's engage in un-simulated, discipline-specific practica fields (Gorsuch, 2006). As such, research should focus more discerningly.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

Based on previous work using Darvin & Norton's (2015) model, the present study is a case study, an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity" and are "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources" (Merriam, 1998, p. 16) ". More specifically, as a descriptive case study, its goal was to produce a *thick description*, or the "complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Case study research affords a depth of analysis, readability, and may produce new understandings about processes when done longitudinally (Duff, 2008, p. 43). While some scholars see even a singular-case design as 'eminently justifiable,' a study involving two or more cases can be viewed as incorporating a form of replication (Duff, 2008, p. 113).

### **Participants**

As part of IRB-approved dissertation research, three Pre-Service ITAs volunteered for this project during Autumn 2018, all of whom had tested into and were enrolled in an ITA training course (ESL 9999). Paw Paw State University (PPSU) [pseudonym] is a large Midwestern university, that annually enrolls thousands of international students. Enrolled in three different sections of ESL 9999 taught by three different instructors, participants were recruited within ESL 9999 classrooms at the start of the semester. Sampling was considered, "purposive," which is appropriate within studies involving, "hard to find populations" (ibid, p. 145), here being Pre-Service ITAs. All three were serving as graders, which required no or much less oral communication with undergraduate students compared with ITAs leading labs, recitations, or student-teacher supervisions, based on *in situ* observations.

ESL 9999 was taught by four white, American men, one of whom was the researcher. No study participants were the researcher's students. All but the researcher also served as raters on the I-/ VA-TEACH Tests. Being deeply familiar with the research

context, being of a similar age, and being a fellow GTA/ graduate student afforded the researcher keener insight into the ITA's experiences with no believed negative consequences.

In accordance with state law, all international graduate students employed as instructors must take and become certified via the ESL department's assessments. The I-TEACH Test assesses ITA's English intelligibility/comprehensibility when explaining field-specific concepts. Some ITAs become certified for all instructional roles, yet others become certified for less communicatively demanding roles while required to take ESL coursework, after which their skills are re-assessed on the VA-TEACH Test. Once per semester -untethered to ESL 9999, ITAs were entitled to take the I-TEACH Test to become certified.

### **Data Collection**

This article reports only on the portion of dissertation research pertaining to Pre-Service ITAs. Collected data for this exploration included ITA's weekly journal entries (40), class assignments (40), Pre-Service ITA interviews (19 hours), ITA educator interviews (10 hours), home department interviews (3), and classroom observations of ESL 9999 (7 hours) and within home department courses (6 hours). Observations and home department interviews of Anne's department were unavailable as administrators declined participation. Interviews were semi-structured, two rounds of which were stimulated recall sessions, utilizing class assignments and field notes' observations. Interviews occurred towards the start, middle, and end of the ESL 9999, and at next semester's start, following the VA-TEACH Test. Interview protocols were designed using Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment, specifically eight statements theorizing identity, ideology, and capital within the process of language learning (see Appendix A). From them, interview protocols were produced and utilized in non-stimulated recall interviews. Altogether, the variety of data sources provided the study depth and triangulation, or "the use of multiple sources of data, or approaches, can bring greater plausibility to the interpretation of results" (Hyland, 2010, p. 195).

### **Analysis**

All data was indexed then uploaded into Transana Professional 3.32c, a qualitative analysis software. This included all interviews, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Coding of all data (field notes, journals, class assignments) was done using qualitative content analysis, which is interested in the communication of meanings, done by coding raw data, and constructing categories of interest (Merriam, 2009, p. 205). A priori categories initially guide the study, however additional categories are anticipated to emerge. Cross-case analysis was used, which involves the analysis of individual cases before conducting a comparative analysis of cases (Duff, 2008, p. 164). When reporting findings, categories often need to be woven into an argument or an

interpretation (Merriam, 2009, p. 189). To portray participants as multidimensional learners, findings are first presented as narratives, followed by those from cross-case analyses.

## RESULTS

### **Rodney**

A first-year, first-semester Chinese doctoral student of pharmacy, Rodney was 25 years old and experiencing his first time abroad. Pharmacy graduate students receive full funding for the duration of their studies. As a grader, Rodney attended the workshop portion of a course for professional degree students, an area in which he had no expertise or interest. Rodney only assisted in distributing materials during the workshop and grading.

### ***Optimistic for ESL 9999***

Rodney came to PPSU believing his English was deficient in specific ways. First, his own expertise in his field, medicinal chemistry, was developed using Chinese terminology, not English. To remedy this, he enrolled in an undergraduate-level Biochemistry course, even if not required to do so. Secondly, he perceived his lack of English fluency to inhibit his social life in Ohio, as did limitations of time. As such, he was open to ESL 9999, believing he had language difficulties he could improve.

### ***Teaching, a New Career Possibility***

At the onset of the semester, Rodney envisioned himself working for a big American pharmacy company post-graduation. He found his current role as a grader to be “useless,” and he was not excited about teaching PPSU undergrads, but was “willing” to do so. As the semester progressed, Rodney’s visions of his future, and his views on teaching, evolved due to his “amazing” experience within the undergraduate class he enrolled in. The instructor, Dr. Bluebird (pseudonym) used effective, interactive pedagogies that ignited Rodney’s interest in a teaching career. Particularly, the concern she demonstrated for students’ understanding and active learning strategies which employed technology. This left Rodney inspired. In his journaling, Rodney wrote of one ESL 9999 session:

*The discussion on ways to handle misbehaving students is also informative and helpful. When talking about teaching strategies, I keep thinking of Dr. Bluebird. I’m sure she employs at least 40 of those strategies. No wonder her teaching is so amazing.* (Journal 8)

Rodney also found the accompanying workshops to be engaging, useful, and entirely new. His education in China had not included a workshop-formatted class.

### ***Wanting to be a Fluent, Helpful Instructor***

Entering ESL 9999, Rodney most desired fluency of thought and speech, rooted in negative experiences he had within Chinese universities. There, he reported lecturers seemed totally unprepared or unfamiliar with their lecture's content. Moreover, he held negative views of the "broken" English of Chinese scholars whom he had encountered in the U.S. Consequently, Rodney feared that as a future workshop leader, his students would not understand him. Worse, he feared he would not be "helpful" to them, which was central to his view of good teaching.

### ***Making Gains through ESL 9999, Frustrated by Classmates***

Through ESL 9999, Rodney reported gaining a variety of skills. He found important linguistic -particularly suprasegmental features- and classroom management strategies. Moreover, Rodney found microteachings and subsequent tutorials to benefit his language development, particularly his fluency. Also facilitated by ESL 9999 were Rodney's observations of others' strong teaching practices. He noticed instructors' use of eye contact and calling on students by name. Moreover, he became sensitized to the centrality of visual aids within a lesson, and the learners' (in)ability to clearly view the visual aid. Through these and other assignments, Rodney was connecting ESL 9999 skills with those he observed in his effectively-taught undergraduate pharmacy lectures and workshops. He also saw ESL 9999 skills as useful for his future teaching, including positive interactions with undergrads, as required by ESL 9999.

Rodney became frustrated giving microteachings to ESL 9999 peers and to ESL testing raters because they were incapable of understanding even basic concepts from his field. In this way, the heterogeneity of ESL 9999's participants became an obstacle to his progress. Furthermore, Rodney grew frustrated with the weak commitment of his ESL 9999 classmates to ESL 9999. Peer feedback left him puzzled or was not offered to him, as assigned. Some classmates' microteachings exceeded their allotted time. The accents of some left him not understanding and even irritated, particularly Indian-accented English.

After ESL 9999, Rodney took the VA-TEACH Test and did not receive a certifying score, about which he was not upset. Instead, he saw his results as identifying his areas for growth. He continued his work as a grader but also was assigned to assist undergraduate labs. Rodney took the I-TEACH Test in Spring 2019 and received a certifying score. One year later, Rodney was serving as a grader for the exemplary course and instructor he so admired, whose material was within his interest.

### **Chanel**

A 25-year-old doctoral student of Sociology, Chanel was Chinese but had spent six years of her childhood in England where her parents were employed. She earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Math from a private, prestigious American college, having spent one year in Australia. PPSU's Sociology department identified itself as a top-tier U.S. program, fully funding its graduate students for six years of study. This included a first-year fellowship which allowed incoming students to acclimatize without fulfilling any departmental service. The majority of its cohorts are American students. Now in her second year, Chanel was serving as a grader for a large introductory course, in which she graded essays, held office hours, and attended lectures.

### ***A “Cultural Outlier”***

Having grown up in two different cultures, Chanel initially saw herself as a cultural “outlier,” not really belonging to either culture, which was isolating. This identity implicated her language skills, which she also recognized to be complex. She was confident in her Spoken English -despite not sounding native. Her self-perception as a competent, fluent English speaker was reinforced by peer's feedback on her teaching demonstrations: in one assignment, she summarized peer feedback she received in class, writing, “Average percentage understood: 88.75. Strength: good metaphor to introduce the topic; good examples; comprehension check; fluent” (Homework Clip #16). In another assignment, in response to a self-assessment of another in-class teaching demonstration, she wrote: “I don't think any of my errors hindered their understanding” (Homework Clip #27).

Rather than fluency, it was her shyness that hindered her speech. To her, uniqueness, and defying stereotypes, were valuable, making her impervious to ESL 9999's goals as she saw initially them: inculcating ITAs into ideologies of native *speakerism*. Within her department, Chanel had found a “family” amongst her peers and enjoyed a vibrant social life. Chanel shunned teaching, nor did she find benefit in being a grader. She preferred to be a graduate research assistant. After graduation, Chanel had no aspirations to teach, believing she lacked the patience needed to teach.

### ***Positively Orientated to ESL 9999***

Even if Chanel viewed the prospect of teaching unfavorably, her initial orientation to ESL 9999 was overwhelmingly positive. She believed it could strengthen her presenting skills and make her unique in her department: ESL 9999 could offer knowledge that she could share with her departmental colleagues. However, “failing” the VA-TEACH TEST would have been a blow to her self-perception. Strengthening her academic skills, ESL 9999 would by extension give her more of a voice within her family. Having highly accomplished, bilingual parents, Chanel's professional success was required to be deserving of a place within her family. And yet, Chanel felt torn between emulating her mother -a bilingual, well-published, physician/scholar, and Chanel's grandmother, whose

many hobbies and active social life defied “old lady” stereotypes. These two women represented a choice between professional success and enjoying life.

### ***Chanel’s Evolving Work Ethic in ESL 9999***

Initially, Chanel reported spending little energy on ESL 9999, hastily completing assignments. Yet she found specific activities and aspects of her instructor’s teaching to be particularly effective or enjoyable. His attentiveness to her speech impressed her, and she began to feel guilty for the meagerness of her efforts compared to his. Chanel sensed her peers put little effort into ESL 999 since it was “just a language class”, yet their instructor continued to leave detailed, individualized feedback. Chanel interpreted this as exemplary of good teaching, and she became grateful. She adopted a new approach with new rigor, even if it was much more time-consuming. She also noticed in her peers’ microteaching major progress, in addition to her own, which she saw as evidence of the course’s effectiveness.

### ***ESL 9999, Ultimately Meeting Chanel’s needs***

Chanel reported positive developments in her communication skills through course assignments. She viewed her shortcomings as congruent with what ESL 9999 offered. Believing herself to have strong pronunciation, Chanel realized that it was her own personality that was problematic. A self-identified “slacker-introvert,” Chanel initially designed the activities she led in ESL 9999 to intentionally minimize her amount of speaking and admitted her own laziness was impacting her work. During the class, Chanel realized that the course was not merely a “language class,” but rather a communication class, having associated “language [English] class” as disdainful. Instead, communication class was something she needed. When ESL 9999 focused on pronunciation, she tuned out, feeling it was meant for her peers, not her. Her communication challenges then did not flow from her deficient English, but rather from her psychology, which she felt she could control.

Chanel benefitted from ESL 9999 assignments that tasked her with observing herself, her peers, and her sociology professor *in situ*. She realized what she appreciated in others’ teachings, and in her own presentations. Particularly, observing the professor for whose Sociology class she was grading, but observing him through the ethnographic lens assigned by ESL 9999, drew her attention to specific traits of his exemplary teaching. Gradually, her awareness of these traits, particularly his humor, transferred into her own successful uses of humor, both in her microteaching and within the I-TEACH Test. For Chanel, he was her teaching role model.

Outside ESL 9999, Chanel was finding applicability in her scholarly activities beyond the classroom. That semester, Chanel attended conferences, gave round-table discussions, and planned poster sessions, all of which utilized skills she developed in ESL 9999. By the end of the semester, Chanel reported more comfort in watching recordings of herself and was becoming a confident public speaker. No longer a “cultural outlier,” she began to describe herself as a “cultural in-betweener”. In December 2018, Chanel received a certifying score on the VA-TEACH Test, yet the following semester, Chanel was serving as a Graduate Research Assistant, as she had hoped.

### **Anne**

A 30-year-old doctoral student, Anne was in her third year of studying economics. She earned a bachelor’s degree in her native China in Electrical Engineering before completing a master’s degree in PPSU’s economics department, totaling five years of being a PPSU student. The department’s website portrays the program as top-tier within the U.S. Anne was and had been serving as a grader for three years in various economics courses. Anne was not required to attend lectures and performed only minimal grading duties, describing them as “meaningless”. She had finished her own coursework.

### ***A Robust (Chinese) Community; Infrequent Interactions with Americans***

Anne’s doctoral cohort was all international students, and her advisor was a native Chinese speaker. This meant communication most often occurred in Chinese. She was not speaking English in her home or neighborhood: her husband, and her closest friends/ neighbors were also fellow doctoral students of economics and Chinese nationals. Interestingly, Anne avoided joining a Chinese-language church, preferring an English-language one, based on her distrust in Chinese translations of religious texts.

In English, Anne had previously experienced some negative interactions with American colleagues and within the department. Through misunderstanding, miscommunication, or duplicity, Anne’s academic trajectory at PPSU had been impacted negatively. She enrolled in an algorithm course for which she believed she was qualified but found it too advanced. She similarly misestimated or misunderstood the number of credit hours needed to complete a graduate specialization in computer science, which left her one credit short. As a grader, she reported negative experiences with her supervising American professor, who once chastised her for leaving inappropriate feedback on a student’s assignment, and again later for offering what she felt was constructive criticism of a professor’s teaching.

### ***Spoken English as an Asset***

Recognizing her misunderstanding with Americans, Anne devalued her interactions with fellow international students in ESL 9999. She also recognized that her exposure to and use of Spoken English was limited to ESL 9999. As such, she saw English speaking skills as an asset that must be maintained, which was shared by those closest to her, her husband, her family in China, and her academic advisor. For this reason, her advisor formed a group -all international students - to discuss economics primarily to maintain their oral English, including his own.

### ***Pursuing Higher -Life- Priorities***

Beyond graduation, Anne's first choice was to be an economics professor, yet she was skeptical this would happen. Not only a competitive job market would hinder her, but Anne remained skeptical of economics research generally. Additionally, Anne saw obtaining a Ph.D. as something others valued for her, and not necessarily something she valued, admitting she would have quit but for her family's recommendations. As an alternative to academia, she envisioned finding work as a computer programmer, her husband's profession, which she had studied.

Mid-semester, her husband accepted a job on the U.S. West Coast, and Anne decided that she would join him within twelve months. Anne's moving would require her to become a GRA rather than a GTA, which would require no instructional responsibilities. This obviated certification via ESL Testing, and thus ESL 9999. Moreover, Anne was planning her pregnancy. The previous academic year, Anne took a medical leave from her academics. Upon return, Anne approached her academics in a laxer way, which constituted a departure from her prior excellence-driven approach. Anne would inform her advisor towards the end of the semester of her move and felt empowered to decide for herself the type of departmental duty she would perform. She felt no fear in telling her advisor her decision.

### ***Approaching ESL 9999 Shrewdly/ Cynically***

These developments did not diminish her efforts in ESL 9999, which were already meager. Anne felt comfortable teaching undergraduates, should she ever need to, because teaching basic economics would be simple. Moreover, Anne viewed the language used in her field to be quotidian, contrary to the technical language used in other fields. What's more, Anne saw language learning as easy, not difficult like learning math. Learning language required no intelligence to be mastered, only practice. In this view, she described ESL 9999 as not being "a professional class," unlike her algorithm class. These binary views of ease and difficulty

contributed to her lukewarm efforts in ESL 9999. Anne's journaling, which elicited reflection on her learning through ESL 9999 routinely veered off to this algorithm class:

*I have a really hard computer science class to work on. I did not take such a hard class before. I also want to spend more time on my research, but there is an exam coming next week... Since the English class only meet at Thursday this week, it did not take a lot of time.” (Journal 3)*

The following week her reflection started on ESL 9999 then again veered: “Mini lectures went well and already finished the PPTs of the major lectures. The exam is very difficult. The hardest exam in CS classes I have ever had” (Journal 4). For these reasons, little of Anne's time during the semester was devoted to ESL 999.

Anne's ESL 9999 instructor was the only one among them who structured his sections of the class in a particular way. Rather than orienting the course towards the various skills and knowledge that ITAs need to successfully lead undergraduate classrooms, Anne's instructor structured his sections as a workshop exclusively practicing for the VA-TEACH Test with no other assignments or content. In his second year of teaching ESL 9999, he explained that he was asked by the department to develop an approach to teaching to the test and took pride in his design. To him, ESL 9999 is a burden on ITA's that distracts their energies away from their disciplinary research. Because they only care about the test, he saw his workshop approach as more effective and ethical for ITAs.

Over the course of ESL 9999, Anne adopted much of her instructor's views. She saw ESL 9999 only as a course intended to prepare her for certification on the VA-TEACH Test. She reported that the course did not assist in her language learning but would have had she been teaching. Anne came to appreciate her instructor a great deal, particularly that he avoided wasting her time with extraneous assignments. Consistently throughout the semester, Anne evaluated ESL 9999 assignments by how much time or energy it required of her: if little, it was beneficial. Likewise, Anne's sense of improvement was based on his confidence in her passing the VA-TEACH Test, communicated in feedback on her microteachings. In these ways, Anne and her instructor approached ESL 9999 with a shared cynicism or shrewdness.

Nonetheless, Anne reported deriving some benefits from ESL 9999 regarding giving microteachings. ESL 9999 diminished her nervousness giving them and appreciated receiving feedback. Taking the VA-TEACH Test, Anne did not receive a certifying score. However, the following semester, Anne was no longer serving as a grader, but as a Graduate Research Assistant and had not yet moved to the West Coast. Readyng herself for entering the job market, Anne reported undertaking her own language-developing activities, consuming economists' videos, and podcasts in English.

### **Cross-case Comparison Findings**

Comparing cases revealed the following insights into Pre-Service ITA's experiences. Each participant oriented idiosyncratically towards ESL assessment. None were excited at the possibility of teaching, and all enjoyed the security of being funded, yet each was oriented differently towards ESL testing. Confident, "cultural in-betweener" Chanel would have been damaged by a non-certifying score even if her funding for her studies would not be threatened. Conversely, Rodney saw his negative results as instructive for self-improvement. Uniquely, Anne had no use for the test, either practically or affectively. Her ability to choose her own role within her department permitted her to dismiss the exam's import entirely.

Comparing cases revealed that the trajectory of each participant included a change in roles. Partly because of this reality, participants sought different objectives in the ITA training class. Anne sought nothing more than passing ESL testing within ESL 9999, in part, because her short-term and longer-term future would not involve teaching. Conversely, Rodney, wanting to be a helpful instructor, sought to develop his fluency and suprasegmental features, whereas Chanel eschewed pedagogies to develop her pronunciation. Rather, she realized she needed to overcome psychological factors inhibiting her communication.

Relatedly, participants developed their language in ways that were relevant to their current and future needs, inside or outside ESL 9999. Rodney took an undergraduate course to build his vocabulary, and Chanel applied her ESL 9999 skills to conference presentations. Anne, not teaching yet developing teaching skills in ESL 9999, did not find relevance. Only the immediacy of future job interviews sparked her language learning. For these reasons, it is clear that the ITA training class, and its pedagogical goals of developing ITA's instructional communication for undergraduate teaching, do not align with the various linguistic needs that ITAs develop over the span of their doctoral careers.

Comparing cases revealed that two participants appreciated their ESL 9999 instructor for distinct reasons and absorbed their contradictory ideologies. Chanel appreciated Mr. Sam's commitment to her learning through his sustained practice of leaving detailed, individualized feedback, which was making her a better future instructor. Anne however appreciated her instructor's structuring of ESL 9999 as test prep for the VA-TEACH test. She appreciated his not wasting her time and his cynical/shrew views of language testing. Both women's views mirrored their respective instructors' regarding the purpose of ESL 9999, demonstrating the power to shape learners' perceptions of the learning and its ultimate objective.

Within non-test-centric sections, it was found that teaching role models and familiarity with undergraduate classes were powerfully influential. Through their ESL 9999 assignments, Rodney and Chanel found inspiration from exemplary instructors within their fields. This even led Rodney to consider teaching as a career! Rodney was not just observing an undergraduate course but was experiencing one. Conversely, Anne had no such observation assignments in her test-centric ESL 9999 course. Nor did she had she

ever attend an undergraduate economics course within the university or the U.S. As such, her perceptions of teaching such courses were not based on experience.

Another grouping of findings centered on the importance of others. Belonging to various communities was salient to the experience of each. Chanel felt well-integrated into her cohort “family,” most of whom were Americans. Conversely, Rodney was in the midst of his first experience living and studying among Americans. This was an epiphanic experience. Again unique, Anne had been living in the U.S. comfortably, within zones of Chinese people, without utilizing English much or interacting with Americans much. Understanding their present social networks, each ITA valued their ESL 9999 peers in disparate ways. Rodney, anticipating their contributions to his development, grew frustrated with his peers because they were not as invested as he was in ESL 9999. He also demonstrated unease with unfamiliar accents of English. Confident in herself, Chanel used her peers as a metric for the development of her own skills. Anne devalued her interactions with her ESL 9999 peers since it was Americans with whom she had previous troubles. Interestingly, this awareness did not lead her to seek out more interactions with Americans. It is clear that participants’ social networks, their personal goals for ESL 9999, and their perceptions of their ESL 9999 peers were all interwoven.

### **DISCUSSION**

This examination focused on an important sub-population of ITAs within an under-studied space. It revealed important conceptual and pedagogical insights regarding participants’ heterogeneous views of the ITA Training course, teaching, and testing. Studying their investments offered a more precise, and contextualized understanding of their identities as being, “multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (Norton, 2019, p. 303). While other, deep analyses of international students’ identities found them to be ‘otherized’ by inflexible, monocultural educational environments (Tavares, 2021, p. 93), these three Pre-Service ITA’s identities were found to be expanding and evolving in relation to their educational environment. Despite being Pre-Service ITAs enrolled in an ITA training class, teaching was not their “singular mission” (Mutua, 2014). Pedagogy must recognize and accommodate this complexity.

Research on language learners must “[take] into account forces beyond individual learners” (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 20). For ITA’s, such forces include departmental service /funding models as well as the ESL 9999 course itself. Two starkly different versions of the same course were found to be operating, one preparing ITA’s for undergraduate classroom-teaching broadly and one for the certification test. Each format determined the cultural capital -the knowledge, appreciation of cultural forms, and credentials (Bourdieu, 1986)- that ITAs could acquire through the course. As such, the impact of ESL 9999 instructors cannot be overstated. It remains critical to understand the practices, perspectives, and experiences of ITA educators (Gorsuch, 2003).

One Pre-Service ITA had no experience or interaction with U.S. undergraduates. If ITA educators ensure that course materials are relevant to ITA's future communication needs (Gorsuch, 2012b), pedagogy must facilitate ITA's interactions with real undergraduate learners (Ashavskaya, 2015). Assigning quasi-ethnographic field observations (Sequiera, 1988; Althen, 1991) proved impactful for Rodney and Chanel, and would have brought Anne into a U.S. undergraduate economics classroom for the first time. Educators must be aware of cases like Anne's and facilitate the critical learning opportunities that she is missing. Also beneficial would be the facilitation of their interactions with expert/ In-Service ITAs, and even teaching demonstrations by expert instructors from their fields (Ashavskaya, 2015). Through such interactions, ITAs could gain cultural insights, which scholars have found ITAs needing (Ates, Burcu & Eslami, 2012; Jenkins, 1997; Kang & Rubin, 2012).

Contrasting the cases of Anne and Chanel is informative for additional reasons. Anne's five years living in the U.S., within her near-exclusively Chinese-speaking communities (home, neighborhood, cohort, and department), juxtaposed with her infrequent and troubled interactions with Americans lends support to the view that an ITA's length of stay within the U.S. is not a heuristic of their cultural knowledge. It is their exposure to culture that matters (Adebayo & Allen, 2020). For her part, Chanel's self-perception evolved over the course of ESL 9999. A confident English user who enjoyed family cultural capital (Li, 2007), Chanel was not ashamed of her accent. Chanel viewed herself as a "cultural outlier" but, over the course of ESL 9999 this view changed to a "cultural in-between." As such, Chanel represents the embodiment of the power of global 'Englishes', tied to bicultural identities (Ashavskaya, 2015, p. 65).

Findings from this study support a package of pedagogies for Pre-Service ITAs that expose them to key stakeholders and actors within their individualized contexts. This package is akin to, "Intensive Exposure Experiences in Second Language Learning," to which Gorsuch likened ITA training courses in Canada (Gorsuch, 2014). All but one section of ESL 9999 was incorporating such exposure, which did not comport with an exclusively test-centric ITA training class. Microteachings are grounded in scholarship, having been connected to deliberate practice theory (Gorsuch, 2016, p. 286), and cycles of oral production and repetition have even been favored in ITA programs (Byrd & Constantinides, 1995; Gorsuch, 2012b; Papajohn et al., 2002). Notwithstanding, scholars have long called on pedagogy to focus "beyond microteaching" (Ross & Dunphy, 2007). Research has documented ITA's teaching frustrations resulting from pedagogical competencies (Zhou, 2009), particularly from lacking skills to facilitate discussions (Zhou, 2014, p. 189). Other skills important to ITAs are knowledge of the U.S. education system and classroom cultures, classroom management, and student-teacher relationships (Zhang, 2015), and particularly of differences in educational systems (Salomone, 1998, p. 563). Moreover, what counts as respectful across cultures has been raised as a flashpoint for ITAs (Adebayo & Allen, 2020).

For these reasons, this case study offers initial evidence of the efficacy of bringing Pre-Service ITAs into actual learning spaces, a practice of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Such an “Intensive Exposure Experiences” approach would afford ITA’s much richer, wider investments in their development versus a teaching-to-the-test approach. It would also fit within a teacher training approach (Tapper & Kidder, 2006), which may mitigate the stigmatizing views like Chanel’s that courses are only remediation of ITA’s deficient English (Gorsuch, 2012b). The published account of one ITA who reportedly benefitted from her ITA training program cited the course’s focus on cultural and classroom management practices (Mutua, 2014). Conversely, one scholar criticized ITA training classes for, “Americaniz[ing] [ITA’s] into the predetermined American classroom model,” which, “disrespects the culturally enriching perspectives that ITA’s can bring to American students” (Zhou, 2014, p. 188). This latter view seems too polarizing: appreciating ITA’s enriching insights and preparing ITAs for teaching within the existing American classroom models need not be mutually exclusive.

### **Limitations**

Case studies do not offer generalizable knowledge, but rather provide a richness of description that is highly contextualized (Duff, 2008, p. 59). Admittedly, they constitute “a small step towards grand generalization” (Stake, 2005, p. 448). With case study research, it is incumbent upon scholars, rather than the researcher, to assess the transferability of one case to another, judging their congruence for themselves (Duff, 2008, p. 51). Such scholars must remember the specifics of each Pre-Service ITA’s case, being first-, second-, and third-year doctoral students.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrated that Pre-Service ITA’s desires vis-à-vis their linguistic and teaching abilities are not necessarily congruous with the goals set forth in the ITA training class nor by language teaching. Measures such as pre-/post-test or interviewing could be implemented to elicit an understanding of what Pre-Service ITAs want for themselves, which could be used to better craft pedagogy. Notwithstanding, such measures would require additional staffing or support for instructors. Within ITA training, the stakes are high: instructors are not only responsible for ITA’s learning, but for the learning of ITA’s undergraduate students (Gorsuch, 2016, p. 287-8). ITA training cannot be a panacea for all needs of all ITA’s: there is even doubt that a semester-long ITA training course can sufficiently facilitate ITA’s development of crucial communication skills (Gorsuch, 2016, p. 285). Yet the even modest modifications suggested may be particularly impactful on this subset of ITAs.

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**ROGER ANDERSON**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at Central State University in Ohio (USA). His interests are in second world language pedagogies and intercultural/ global competence education. [randerson@centralstate.edu](mailto:randerson@centralstate.edu).

## Appendix A

Figure 0.1 Darwin and Norton's (2015) Model of Investment



Learners invest in particular practices because:

1. they desire the symbolic and material capital that will result;
2. because the capital they possess may afford them more learning;
3. because the ways their capital is valued affirms (denies) their identity;
4. also, ideologies value (or don't) their capital;
5. and/ or the capital learners desire is difficult to obtain because of "systematic patterns of control";
6. ideologies shape practices and institutions, and how learners are positioned/ position others within these institutions;
7. (/imagined) identities allow learners to utilize or resist these positions;
8. and learners negotiate capital and ideologies to claim their right to speak.

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol for ITA participants

#### Identities

Describe yourself as an ELL.

Describe yourself as a grad student.

Describe yourself as an international grad student.

Describe yourself as an ESL 9999 participant.

Describe yourself as a (future) instructor.

Describe the person who you want to be next year, after graduation, in twenty years.

How are you seen right now by undergrads?

How are you seen right now by other ITA's?

How are you seen right now by domestic TA's?

How are you seen right now by your professors?

How are you seen right now by your ESL 9999 instructor?

#### Ideologies

What do you want to be able to do with your English?

How does ESL 9999 help you do this? What outside ESL 9999 helps you do this?

What do you do to build your language? Your teaching skills? Your cultural knowledge?

Who are your professional role models?

Who are your personal role models?

How does ESL 9999 help you become like these role models?

What do you need to become like these role models? Do you have what you need/ can you get

what you need?

Describe your experience in ESL 9999.

Describe the I-TEACH Test / VA-TEACH Test exams.

Describe your experience in your graduate studies.

Describe your experience on campus as an international student.

Describe your view of teaching American undergraduates.

Describe a good instructor.

Describe the English spoken by good instructors.

Describe the English spoken by undergraduate students.

Describe the English spoken by your ESL 9999 teacher.

Describe the English spoken by your classmates.

Describe the English spoken in American news/ movies/ television.

Describe the English spoken by people from your country.

Are some types of English better than others? Which? Who speaks this type of English?

What do you think of when you think of these speakers?

Are some types of English worse than others? Which? Who speaks this type of English?

What do you think of when you think of these speakers?

### Capital

How will/ is/ did ESL 9999 helping you?

How will/ is/ did ESL 9999 helping you culturally?

How will/ is/ did ESL 9999 helping you socially?

How will/ is/ did ESL 9999 helping you economically?

What are you able to do with your English right now?

What are you not able to do with your English right now?

Is your intelligence being valued in ESL 9999? How?

Are your abilities being valued in ESL 9999? How?

How would you be able to make money using the languages you speak right now?

How would you be able to be appreciated using the languages you speak?

Do you have access to the social networks you want to right now? Why/ why not? Does language play a role in getting access to these networks?