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Novice Teachers' Online Discussions of School-Based Scenarios About Immigrant Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the discursive patterns of novice teachers as they engaged with, reflected on, and discussed school-based scenarios about immigrant students in an online, asynchronous course. The purpose of this graduate course was to examine culturally sustaining and critical pedagogies. Students completed various readings on multiple social identities. To reinforce theory to practice, students participated in scenario-based reflections. In these reflections they were asked to make connections to their own identities, consider biases, and brainstorm equitable outcomes. In the written reflections, researchers identified patterns related to avoidance and conflation. Participants used emotive language and personal connections to shield themselves from difficult conversations. They often did not discuss immigrant status as a factor in the scenarios and racialized social identities unrelated to race. While participants were able to recognize biased behaviors within singular incidents, they rarely connected those behaviors to the larger systems of oppression. This qualitative case study drew on written discussion posts from 19 early-career teachers enrolled in

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a graduate-level education course. Using discourse analysis and inductive coding, the research team identified key patterns and themes in participants' written responses. Findings from this study offer insights related to novice teachers' intentions and (mis)understandings when working with immigrant students and offer important implications.

Keywords: Teacher Education; Novice Teachers; Immigrant Students; Cultural Competence; Teacher Perspectives

1. Introduction

Accelerating global migration and geopolitical instability have resulted in a dramatically increasing number of immigrant and refugee students in schools across the United States (US). This presents an opportunity for teachers to audit their practice and reflect on how they can be more culturally responsive. This is especially important considering that the corpus of educators continues to be monolingual, middle-class white women who are often not equipped to support culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms [1].

This disparity, coupled with polarized national discourse on issues that interest a diverse student body, bears psychological and educational consequences for students with marginalized social identities [2]. The last several years have been particularly marked by anti-immigrant sentiment and linguistic discrimination, be it rolled back protections for migrants and asylum seekers [3], anti-AAPI racism during the COVID-19 pandemic [4], or unprovoked attacks on people speaking a language other than English [5].

While there is a growing body of literature on preparing teachers to work with diverse learners, more research examining teacher perceptions of immigrants is still needed [6]. This study strives to meet this need by examining how 19 novice teachers engaged with, reflected on, and discussed school-based scenarios about immigrant students. This examination may provide insight regarding teachers' intentions and (mis)understandings when working with immigrant students that can help teachers better respond to such learners. We ask: How do novice teachers' responses to school-based scenarios reflect their perspectives on immigrant students?

2. Literature Review

Immigrant students relocate to the US for a multiplicity of reasons, some coming willingly for better economic opportunities, others may have been forced to leave their homelands. Some are impacted by factors commonly associated with family immigration or displacement. These factors include language and cultural barriers, low socioeconomic status, trauma from past violence, and unfamiliarity with new educational systems [7]. Within schools, immigrant students experience language barriers, inappropriate assessment of their academic needs and performance, social isolation, bullying, disciplinary discrimination, racism, and other forms of bias [8]. We know that immigrant children often face significant challenges when adapting to new school systems [9] and many leave school without acquiring the necessary skills to be successful in a competitive workforce [10].

Teachers' and administrators' capacity to appreciate the complex and fluid needs of immigrant students can have an impact on students' social, emotional, behavioral, and educational outcomes [6]. Many do not feel confident working with students whose cultural, linguistic, and/or national identities differ from their own [11] and link low achievement to cultural deficit models, believing that deficiencies in home environments are the reason for learners' poor school performances [12]. Those who work closely with immigrant students have a better understanding of their needs but often feel isolated in their efforts due to a lack of school-wide commitment or disconnects between curriculum and learning needs [13].

Blanchard and Muller [6] refer to teachers as the gatekeepers of the American Dream, the ideal that every US citizen should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work and determination. While there is a strong literature base on the accuracy of teachers' perceptions of student effort and potential alongside measurable differences in academic achievement, little is known about the accuracy of teacher perceptions in cases where the teachers and students are from different

backgrounds [6]. Although the research base is limited, research does point to possible teacher biases with respect to students from other cultures, making further studies and awareness about teacher perceptions and expectations for cultural and linguistic minorities crucial [14].

Looking across literature on multicultural education [11], culturally relevant pedagogies [15], culturally responsive teaching [16], critical literacy [17–19], cultural sustaining pedagogies [20], critical language pedagogies [21], and racial literacies [22], we can glean practices that build teachers' critical sociocultural knowledge [23]. While most teacher education programs include multicultural education, these broad approaches do not guarantee that teachers are culturally competent to meet the needs of immigrant students [24]. A recent literature review highlighted frameworks and practices that help prepare culturally competent teachers [23]. Scholars agree that any practices cannot be standalone experiences [25].

Despite efforts to engage teachers in practices to build their cultural competence, barriers related to neutrality, deficit thinking, avoidance, and denial persist. Teachers often see themselves as similar to those from other cultures. Even in imagined experiences, teachers are likely to enact teaching practices that allow them to take a neutral stance [26]. Mosley Wetzel [27] attributes this to a "pervasive tendency to identify universality in US culture and schooling" (p. 309). Cook and colleagues [28] identify multiple kinds of "protective talk" that preservice teachers engage in to avoid or "shield" themselves from difficult conversations. Shielding is defined as "…the behavior of making intentional or unintentional discourse moves that work to interrupt criticality, insulate discussion participants, and transition discussions to more benign topics and foci" (p. 6).

This study took up an instructional practice (responding to imagined teaching scenarios) for educating culturally competent teachers and specifically examines the practice as it relates to working with immigrant students. Thus, our study was guided by the question: How do novice teachers' responses to school-based scenarios reflect their perspectives on immigrant students?

Finally, while much of the literature on teacher cultural competence focuses on in-person or synchronous learning environments, there is increasing recognition that asynchronous, online spaces shape the ways in which preservice teachers engage with culturally complex topics. The nature of interaction in online learning environments has evolved from individualistic, behaviorist models to more constructivist approaches that center on social learning and prior knowledge [29,30]. Constructivist perspectives emphasize the importance of building online learning communities that support collaboration and shared meaning-making [31]. Tu and Corry [32] define such communities as "a common place where people learn through group activity to define problems affecting them, to decide upon a solution, and to act to achieve the solution" (p. 1). These environments can both foster and constrain critical engagement, especially around emotionally or politically charged topics like immigration, race, and cultural identity [33]. At the same time, online learning environments can be harnessed as a context for building teachers' sociocultural knowledge. For instance, Skerrett and colleagues [34] found that online discussions about professional texts supported teachers' understandings of how sociocultural factors shape student learning. As such, the context of online asynchronous teacher education must be considered in how discourses are produced and interpreted.

Theoretical Framework

We draw on sociocultural views of literacy [35–37] to understand novice teachers' discourse patterns in which literacy "involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified" (p. 416) [37]. We also draw on Gee's [38] notion of Discourse to help us understand and describe teachers' distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, thinking, and believing through their discourse, written language-in-use.

Discourses are socially situated identities that mark individuals' belonging to social groups [38]. Gee [38] suggested that individuals use written and oral language to be recognized and identified as certain kinds of people. He theorized, "Discourses are ways of being 'people like us.' They are 'ways of being in the world'" (p. 3) [35]. For instance, a study on negotiating and performing "good" student identities found that females' Discourses included being organized, submissive, and valuing social success and cooperation [39]. These identities were socially acceptable to peers

and school staff. Gee [35] also theorized that individuals enact identities through oral and written language by positioning others, often comparing or contrasting their identities to the identities of others. Some identities cannot exist without positioning others as having related identities.

Often, Discourses are unconscious, unreflective, and uncritical [35]. Gee [35] suggested, "Each Discourse incorporates taken-for-granted and tacit 'theories' about what counts as a 'normal' person and the 'right' way to think, feel, and behave" (p. 4). For instance, many school-based Discourses, perhaps, unintentionally treat certain children as "other" (p. 4) [35]. We argue, by studying novice teachers' discourses, within their written reflections, regarding school-based scenarios about immigrant students may better prepare us, and other teacher educators, to dismantle Discourses that yield inequity to ultimately provide more equitable opportunities for all students in schools, especially immigrant students [40].

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design and Study Contexts

The data examined in this study come from a larger qualitative case study and were embedded in a graduate course offered within an online, asynchronous M.S.Ed. program at a regional university in the Northeast US. The course examines culturally sustaining and critical pedagogies. Each week, students completed theoretical readings on different social identities (e.g., dis/ability, socio-economic status, language, religion). To reinforce theory-to-praxis connections, students were prompted to select from scenarios related to the week's topic [41] and craft a written reflection on one scenario of their choosing. Students were asked to justify their choice, including identifying whether or how the scenario connected to their own social identities, to consider their potential biases and those of the characters, to try on multiple perspectives, and to brainstorm equitable outcomes (see **Appendix A**) [42].

3.2. Participants

[Author 1] was the instructor for the course, so she did not solicit participants until after final grades were posted. This was done to mitigate pressure that students might feel to consent to the study to please their instructor. Students in one section of the graduate course (n = 24) were solicited to have their data collected; 19 consented.

According to self-reported demographic data, all participants were women, native English speakers, and born in the US. Sixteen participants identified as white, two identified as white and Jewish, and one identified as Black and Haitian. All participants were 25 years of age or younger and living in the Northeast US. Their classroom teaching experience ranged from zero to three years in grades ranging from kindergarten to 6th. Most (n = 17) were full-time teachers or long-term substitute teachers. This data is consistent with enrollment demographic data for teacher education programs at the university and with national data on K-12 educators [1].

3.3. Data Analysis

The unit of analysis was a participant's complete post to the online forum, yielding 19 units. We first identified broad coding dimensions directly related to our research question and some inductive subcategories within each broad dimension based on what we anticipated seeing (e.g., scenario selection, justification, and perspectives) [43]. We also left space during our pilot coding to allow deductive subcategories to emerge. For intercoder reliability and to test the coding frame, the research team pilot-coded several data units together. Pre-consensus coding agreement between coders was 82%, calculated as a percent agreement across initial codes. Once we were confident in our consistency and the coding frame, pairs of researchers coded separately and met to negotiate and confirm interpretations. Discrepancies were reviewed collaboratively with the coding team until consensus was reached, to ensure multiple perspectives were represented in the final codebook. Afterward, the entire team met to review initial codes and discuss contested interpretations. Intercoder convergence was resolved to 100%. The final round of coding involved collapsing subcategories (e.g., sadness, frustration, embarrassment, surprise) into meaningful themes (e.g., emotive language) or patterns and writing descriptive memos to identify typologies and outliers within each selected scenario (see **Figure 1** for an example of collapsing codes). The team determined thematic saturation had been reached when no new codes or patterns emerged after cod-

ing approximately 75% of the data, and subsequent memos revealed consistent themes across participant responses.

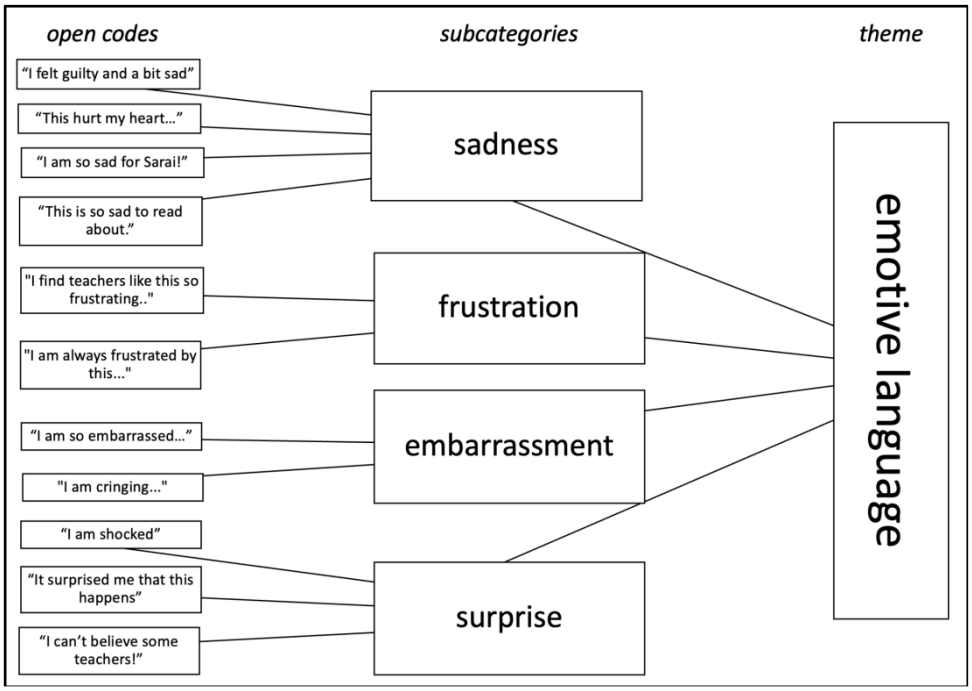

Figure 1. Example of Collapsing Codes.

3.4. Reflexivity

As a research team, we recognize that our positionalities shape how we interpreted the data. The first author, who served as the course instructor, identifies as a white, monolingual woman with experience in literacy teacher education and social justice pedagogies. She intentionally waited until final grades were submitted before soliciting participation to mitigate potential power imbalances. The second and third authors are also white, monolingual women who have backgrounds in language and identity research. The fourth author, a woman of color and L2 English speaker, is a graduate student and educator who works with a large population of immigrant students. Our diverse perspectives informed both the development of codes and our interpretations of participant responses. Throughout the analysis process, we engaged in ongoing critical reflection and peer debriefing to surface and interrogate our assumptions, particularly regarding race, immigrant status, and cultural competence in teaching. These practices helped us remain mindful of how our experiences and perspectives influenced both what we noticed and how we made meaning of participants' discourse.

3.5. Limitations

Limitations of this research relate to the study context. We consider the possibility of participants sharing responses that they believed would garner the highest grade, even if those responses or solutions did not reflect their sincere thoughts or feelings. We recognize that the discussion forum setting can impede vulnerability. Finally, interpretations of participants' perspectives are through the background and experiences of the research team.

4. Findings

The findings explore patterns present in participants' discourse as they engaged with, reflected on, and discussed school-based scenarios about immigrant students. We intentionally organized findings by scenario to contextualize participant data. In the discussion that follows, we draw conclusions about their perspectives and imagined actions, and we provide implications for practice and research.

4.1. An Assigned Nickname

More than half (n = 13) of participants elected to

discuss a scenario in which a teacher gives a student a nickname that is easier to pronounce than her given name. In this scenario, the teacher and classmates of immigrant student Sarai (/să-ră-ē/) felt her name was too challenging to pronounce. Someone suggested Sarai go by Sara instead, and Sarai agreed. Weeks later, when Sarai's mother came in for a conference with the teacher, she was visibly confused and uncomfortable to learn that her daughter was being called Sara.

Most participants reported selecting this scenario because they had previous experience with a similar situation. Some had their own names mispronounced, such as Desirae, who shared,

> "Going through school I was always correcting teachers and students on their pronunciation and bracing myself for the substitute teacher who would inevitably call me the wrong name that everyone would laugh at. In the third grade my teacher would only refer to me by [my last name]. It was a horrible feeling."

Several participants identified with the teacher in the scenario but were quick to defend their own good practices. Madelyn said,

> "I have new students every time I get called in to substitute teach. Before the students get to school, I check over the roster because I don't want to pronounce anyone's name wrong. I always apologize if I do end up mispronouncing a name, but then I usually don't have trouble for the rest of the day. "

Others were more vulnerable, like when Nina shared, "I know that I avoid having to say some students' names. Instead, I just point to them or don't call on them at all. After reading this scenario, I can see how that really could affect a student."

The consensus of the group was that the teacher, Ms. Goodwin, committed several missteps throughout the scenario. Participants felt that the teacher could have made more effort to accurately pronounce Sarai's name. Rachel commented, "It's just basic respect to learn someone's name." Several suggested strategies like writing down phonetic spellings or reaching out to Sarai's family. Some comments referenced how they perceived Sara to be a "whitewashed" version of Sarai, a name which they assumed carried cultural meaning. Ivy said, "It felt like the name change diminished a part of Sarai's identity." Delilah observed, "The mispronunciation of Sarai's name is likely representative of the multiple kinds of erasure that Sarai and her family experience."

Across the data, a pattern emerged related to the use of emotive language or descriptions of participants' emotional responses. Participants shared that the scenario left them "really upset," "sad for Sarai," and "frustrated by" or "embarrassed for" the teacher. The research team noticed moments when immigrant status was conflated with other social identities. For example, Lexi described herself as incapable of relating to Sarai because she is "not an immigrant or an outsider," perhaps missing the opportunity to connect with Sarai's multiple identities, but she felt connected to the scenario because she teaches in an "urban school district where many students are immigrants and struggle to adjust socially, academically, and linguistically."

Naomi expressed having a difficult time choosing any of the immigrant status scenarios because, "I teach in a school that is mainly white." This statement seems to suggest that Naomi perceives immigrant status and whiteness as mutually exclusive social identities. She reported that she ultimately selected this scenario because, "I do not have any 'unique' names in my classroom now, but I have in the past." We wondered about Naomi's use of quotes around the term "unique" and whether the decision was meant to communicate pejorative connotations.

4.2. Soccer Roster

Four participants chose to discuss a scenario about diversity on a soccer roster. In this scenario, a high school soccer coach was approached by the principal about his team roster. The principal shared that parents of white students were complaining that positions were increasingly going to undocumented Salvadorian and Mexican students. The parents were threatening to get a local anti-immigration organization to direct negative press to the school. The principal suggested the coach keep the roster even between white and Latine students to avoid controversy.

Two participants reported selecting this scenario because, as former athletes, it evoked strong feelings in them. Two other participants selected this scenario because they

felt it spoke to larger discourses around athletics. All four agreed that the coach holding spots for white students who were not the most talented was wrong. Allison expressed disdain at the principal's suggestion, saying, "Sports should come down to talent." Miranda echoed, "The best players should make the team, regardless of race or background."

Leah was more reticent to make waves in the community. She wrote:

> I am really not sure what I would do in this situation. My heart is telling me to pick the best girls that try out because it should be based on skill, but I also think I would be afraid of the backlash from the white parents, and they could have connections within the community that could make it difficult to do the job properly.

Miranda felt similarly, adding that "racist complainers shouldn't get special treatment."

Leah and Allison extrapolated their perspectives on the scenario to racial tensions in athletics more broadly and conceptions of meritocracy beyond athletics. Leah commented, "I often see sports teams of all levels and across sports having issues of race versus talent." Allison expressed the belief that pure meritocracy is the best approach in all instances, stating,

> Race should not play into whether you get hired for a job, get into college or make a team. The people with the best credential's [sic], resume and skills, should be the people making the team or getting the job. It's society that has been putting these pressures on making companies feel like they have to diversify. How can we combat race interfering with teams and colleges when there are clear credentials that can evaluate whether students should get in or be on the team? Should race be taken off college applications?

Allison's position on the issue seems to disregard the ways in which marginalized social identities might negatively influence one's credentials by limiting the opportunity to develop skills or gain experience.

However, Allison attempted to consider the advantages of having parents willing to advocate on one's behalf. She wrote, "Many students whose parents don't speak English will not feel comfortable speaking up and then those students end up being treated unfairly." This statement seems to assert that the Salvadorian and Mexican parents do not speak English, though no such thing is stated or implied in the scenario.

The emotive language around this scenario deviated from prior scenarios. The overall tone of participants' discourse left researchers with the impression that they were more angry than sad, markedly different from other scenarios. Leah repeatedly commented on her discomfort with placing herself in the coach's position and her fear of the complaining parents. Avery called the scenario "crazy" and "unbelievable," but the researchers inferred that this was a hyperbolic reaction to the behavior of the parents and principal rather than questioning the possibility that such a scenario would occur. This scenario does explicitly connect immigrant and racial social identities, so commentary on race and racism was not unexpected. However, it is notable that none of the participants commented on the students' undocumented status.

4.3. We're Not the Same

Two participants chose a scenario about a conflict between Black and Nigerian students. In this scenario, a teacher assigned a Black peer mentor, Warren, to a newly immigrated Nigerian student, Abiola. Warren refused, telling the teacher that the Nigerian students were condescending to the Black students. He said, "They think they're better than us. They think they're not Black." Abiola responded saying, "I'm not Black. I'm Nigerian." The teacher was confused by how little the two groups of students seemed to have in common but began brainstorming what she could do to facilitate relationship-building.

The participants elected to discuss this scenario for different reasons. Grace admitted that she "felt similar to the teacher in the sense that I did not understand why the African American and Nigerian students viewed themselves as different from each other." Simone was excited to discuss this scenario because she identifies as Black and Haitian, sharing, "Something that I have known for a while is that many non-Black people are unaware of the distinct cultural differences between Africans, Caribbeans, and Black Americans."

Simone shared an experience like Abiola's: "When I was in elementary school, someone referred to me as Af-

rican American, which I disagreed with because I am not African, I am Haitian. It is a label that has never felt applicable to me." Simone understood what Abiola meant when she said she was not Black, explaining, "Abiola believed that being Black was tied to being American. And she's not wrong. Blackness as we understand it is an American construction." Simone and Grace applauded the teacher for being reflective about the situation, "as well as her own mindset," and making plans to address it.

4.4. Family Night and Testing Task Force

The remaining participants (n = 3) were split between the two other provided scenarios, with two selecting a scenario about a "family night" event and one opting to discuss a scenario about a school task force. In the family night scenario, a school hosts an event for the parents and caregivers of ELs and sends home flyers in several languages. At the event, the teachers notice that not many families arrive at the start of the event but begin to trickle in as the first presenters are speaking. Most families remain standing in the back of the room, chatting together and disregarding the presentations. At the end of the event, the teachers expressed frustration at the perceived disinterest of many EL families.

In the task force scenario, a bilingual teacher attends the first meeting of a new task force focused on raising the standardized assessment test scores of ELs. The teacher notices that only one parent is present at the meeting and suggests to school leadership that more parents be involved. She is assured that all parents were provided with information about the meeting and suggests that she speak on their behalf, which makes her uncomfortable.

All three of the participants who selected these scenarios reported similar experiences. Nina described how she works with a high number of Spanish-speaking children and has experienced cultural conflicts with the children's parents and caregivers. Naomi chose to discuss the task force scenario because she was working in a district receiving "pressure from the state about raising low test scores, which in turn puts a lot of that pressure on the teachers."

The participants who selected the family night scenario seemed to want to give the non-English-speaking families in the scenario the benefit of the doubt that there were understandable reasons for their lateness and perceived recalcitrance to participate. Desirae speculated that attending families "probably did not understand the speaker, so instead of sitting in silence, they opted to engage with one another instead." Nina suspected that the tension was the result of a difference in culture—namely, that different cultures perceive time differently. She shared, "I would have students walk into my classroom 10 to 15 minutes late every week and I could not understand why. I finally worked up the courage to have a conversation with the parents, and they told me that in their culture it is not a big deal to be a few minutes late."

The sole participant who chose to discuss the task force scenario, Naomi, wished to shift the blame of poor test scores off ELs. She wrote, "I remember how hard the language on state tests was for me, a native English speaker. The language used is way above grade level! I can only imagine how students who are learning English as an additional language must feel when trying to take those tests." Naomi was distracted from the intended focus of the scenario because she felt the story was unrealistic: "The state threatened to 'intervene' if the test scores were not raised? Test scores are a big topic in my school district, but I have never heard of the state intervening. What does that even mean?"

5. Discussion

Nearly 70% of participants chose to discuss the nickname (n = 13) scenario. They generally agreed that the teacher made several missteps and mismanaged the situation in pronouncing Sarai's name but felt the teacher was forgivable. Many participants seemed to be able to relate to Sarai or to the teacher, and this seemed to give participants tangible experiences and emotions to relate to the scenario [44].

This scenario seemed reasonable to solve, and we think that might be why many participants chose it. While there was some discussion of the cultural significance of names, the commentary reflected concerns about multicultural inclusion rather than an awareness of linguistic inequity (e.g., participants did not acknowledge how some names' histories are steeped in colonialism, enslavement, lost history, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia).

We suspect that, among the scenarios they were offered, this one seemed to require the least risk of participants. Participants admitted having limited personal and teaching experiences with immigrant students [6]. Nobody remarked on the importance of home-school connections. Participants largely did not choose to discuss scenarios related to family involvement and school district-level challenges.

We encountered some of the same persistent barriers to developing cultural competence that are particularly salient in asynchronous, online learning environments, as outlined in the literature [23]. Participants frequently used emotive language to discuss the scenarios, and we theorize that this extends Cook and colleagues' [28] notions of engaging in "protective talk" as a way of "shielding" from difficult conversations. Participants described feeling embarrassed, upset, sad, and frustrated in response to the nickname scenario. Emotional language was ubiquitous in the data, and we began to wonder if participants were genuinely emotional. Consistent with "shielding" [28], participants overwhelmingly chose to discuss scenarios to which they could connect their own experiences, which often positioned them as sympathetic.

Emoting and connecting are not inherently bad practices. We want teachers to be emotionally invested in the comfort and success of their students, and we know that making personal connections is essential in both comprehension and developing cultural competence [45]. We acknowledge that feelings and personal connections cannot be perceived as "wrong" answers in a graded assignment because they are based on the individuals' experiences. When such language positions their experiences as the norm, and others' experiences as marked, we wonder whether participants' self-centering is interfering with developing cultural competence.

The data offered evidence of participants' trying on or taking up critical perspectives as they reflected on the scenarios. Some were able to explicitly identify or at least speculate about biases that might be driving the teachers' behavior. Several participants described the name change as "whitewashing" and Delilah felt that it represented deeper forms of identity erasure.

Many participants attempted to reflect on their own privileged positioning but had difficulty connecting their social identities to the underlying assumptions [44]. They often used language that exonerated them from the judgment being cast on the character (e.g., "I always check over my roster to make sure I get names right."). The solutions proposed by participants often focused on the immediate (e.g., writing out names phonetically). Their responses rarely addressed immigrant status. It seemed that a character's immigrant status was secondary to other social identities that are sometimes correlated with newcomers (i.e., racial minority, English learner), such as we saw in participant responses to the soccer roster scenario. Often, these social identities were not provided by the scenario, but participants still used language that assumed a character with one marginalized social identity possessed others [46].

We suspect that these patterns speak to the telescopic effects of inequity and the necessary skills to read operating systems of power. It is easier to identify a singular instance of injustice or inequity than it is to recognize the myriad policies, decisions, and actions that contribute to systemic injustice. Further, persistent binary and/or absolutist perspectives, like racializing social identities unrelated to race, reflect the racial paradigm that dominates social justice discourse [47].

6. Implications and Considerations for the Future

This study focused on how novice teachers responded to school-based scenarios about immigrant students. Participants grappled with the scenarios, even if, at times, a lack of sociocultural understanding impacted their implementation of culturally informed responses. The following implications are grounded in patterns across multiple findings. These cross-cutting insights reflect how intersecting dynamics—such as emotional responses, identity conflation, and cultural knowledge gaps—shaped participants' learning and reasoning.

We believe that participants might have benefited from more instruction and extended reflection about the scenarios [48] to consider new possibilities for their own teaching of marginalized students and families. Given the asynchronous nature of the course, opportunities for deep reflection were available, but may have also enabled emotional distancing or "shielding" from difficult conver-

sations [28]. Participants' emotional responses appeared to play a complex and sometimes contradictory role in their meaning-making. On one hand, the format allowed participants to craft thoughtful reflections at their own pace; on the other hand, the lack of real-time dialogue may have amplified emotion while reducing opportunities for critical pushback. In some cases, emotion acted as a barrier, particularly when discomfort or frustration led to avoidance, as seen in the nickname and soccer scenarios. Yet in other cases, emotion served as a resource, helping participants empathize, imagine equitable responses, or interrogate their own assumptions. Thus, emotion cannot be treated as uniformly protective or obstructive; its function depends on how participants positioned themselves within each scenario, and how the discussion environment structured their engagement. This echoes prior work on constructivist online learning, which emphasizes the need to design tasks that intentionally foster community, collaboration, and sociocultural meaning-making [30,32,34].

Instruction related to the assigned nickname scenario may include exploring text sets celebrating the history of children's names to build participants' cultural competence. For example, a text to include may be *Your Name is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow [49]. In this text, a little girl's name is mispronounced by teachers and classmates, much like Sarai's. To console the girl, her mother teaches her about the musicality of African, Asian, Black-American, Latine, and Middle Eastern names, highlighting the history and beauty in names. Use of this kind of text may also disrupt participants' assumptions about caregiver involvement. Further, participants could explore the history in their own names to better understand their own culture, identity, and history. Other texts that could be similarly used include *My Name is an Address* by Ekuwah Mends Moses [50], *Say My Name* by Joanna Ho [51], and *Tomatoes in My Lunchbox* by Costantia Manoli [52].

In the soccer scenario, participants seemed to conflate the multiple identities of the Salvadorian and Mexican students and caregivers, so participants would benefit from instruction to build background knowledge on culture and identity. Participants might explore their own identities by creating an identity map, a graphic that illustrates who individuals are and what shapes them. Examples developed by the University of Michigan's Inclusive Campus Collaborative [53] like personal identity wheel and social identity wheel activities, are a good starting point for educators thinking about this work. To connect identity to Discourse, participants might create an Identity Discourse Map [54] to explore their histories of ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, thinking, and believing, societal messages related to those ways of being, and how that relates to participants' identities [55].

Across scenarios, it seemed that participants lacked cultural knowledge, for instance, about Salvadorian and Mexican students and their caregivers and the Nigerian student. This highlights the necessity for all of us in teacher education to provide opportunities for students to build global cultural competence. Scholars continue to call for research that examines not just teachers' sense-making but also the teaching choices that place students on successful trajectories [56], particularly as it pertains to culturally responsive instruction [57,58]. Building global cultural competence pushes up against the tendency to identify universality in our culture and schools today [27]. While most teacher preparation programs include at least one course on diverse learners or culturally responsive teaching, they are often separated out from methods instruction, and explicit connections across courses are rare [59], perhaps exacerbating deficit perspectives about diverse learners [60]. These participants and students like them would benefit from programmatic commitments to exploring and researching the experiences of other cultures in the school contexts [61–63].

Finally, participants did not address the importance of home-school connections in their discourse, and they did not choose to discuss scenarios related to caregiver involvement and school district-level challenges. We theorize participants were not well-equipped to address these topics because of their limited teaching experience and maneuvering the hierarchies of schools [61]. In particular, extant research indicates coursework in teacher education programs inadequately prepares teachers to engage with caregivers and provides insufficient opportunities to examine their beliefs and attitudes toward families [64,65]. It is important that we audit our programs and subsequent curriculum to be sure we are preparing students as much as possible to engage caregivers and with strategies to deal with district-level challenges as they may arise [66].

Thinking about implications for future research, we

recognize it would be beneficial to interview participants about their discourses to better understand their identities and Discourses. We may invite participants to participate in retrospective interviews relative to the findings above, or in future semesters, we could have participants engage in a think-aloud protocol where they narrate their thinking as they participate in scenario discussions. This would allow us to ask probing questions in real time in order to discern some of our theories about why they used certain discourses.

We would be remiss not to mention the possible favorable responses written in the online discussions, as students may have been worried about their grade in the course or the idea of being right/wrong with their response [61]. Unlike face-to-face conversations in a class, online discussion posts can virtually live forever, causing some stress regarding perfectionism or fear of judgment. Writing an online post feels much more permanent and students may wish to be viewed as "good" students" and "pleasant" teachers [67].

7. Conclusions

Despite much of our analysis focusing on the shortcomings of participant responses, we hope this article also highlights the ways in which the scenario exercises helped participants gain a greater understanding of different perspectives [42]. There were notable patterns that emerged in this study. Participants used emotive language and personal connections to "shield" themselves from difficult conversations. They neglected the primary social identity and persistently racialized social identities. Participants were able to recognize biased behaviors within singular incidents but rarely connected those behaviors to the larger systems of oppression. These findings offer important implications for teacher educators as we renew our efforts to equip teachers to be critical, reflective educators who can leverage their cultural competence for the benefit of all learners, though we acknowledge that developing cultural competence is a long-term endeavor [68].

Author Contributions

B.A. was responsible for data collection and led the development of the manuscript. S.C.L. contributed to data analysis by assisting with coding. T.D. and E.Y.S. supported the writing process by contributing to the development and revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical restrictions and participant confidentiality, the data are not publicly available.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Example Weekly Task

Case Study Scenarios for (Dis)ability

Once you have completed your reading this week, you should read through all of the case study scenarios in Chapter 8 of Gorski and Pothini's *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education* [41]. Read each scenario carefully as well as the guiding questions at the conclusion of each scenario. Each week, you will read through all of the scenarios on a given topic and select one scenario to write about further.

In your written reflection, include the following:

1. Clearly identify which scenario you are writing about.
2. Briefly discuss how the scenario you selected connects to your social identities. (e.g., Did your social identities impact your initial reaction to the scenario? Is there a character you identify with?)
3. Reflect on biases present in the scenario or biases you detected in your response to the scenario.
4. Reflect on the multiple perspectives present in the scenario. Why do different characters approach/perceive the issue in different ways?
5. Identify challenges and opportunities you notice in the scenario. What would be an equitable outcome? What issues aren't easily solvable? Brainstorm possible immediate-term solutions and long-term solutions.
6. State any questions you still have about the scenario. What are you still wondering about?

Note: Even though these reflections are a place to test out ideas and thinking (and thereby far less formal than a paper), I do expect you to put some thinking into your posts and to edit them to be comprehensible to someone outside of your mind.

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