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Exploring the interplay of cultural capital, *habitus*, and field in the life histories of two West African teacher candidates

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This paper captures the life histories of two West African pre-service teachers pursuing their education in the United States. Based on a larger study examining the life histories of 45 undergraduate pre-service teachers, these narratives focus specifically on international student experiences in the US. Grounded in Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, capital, and field, the life histories of Bakar and Selma illustrate how their capital and *habitus* become contingent on the field(s) (i.e. sites, time, and agents within a specific context) in which they are situated. The narratives of Bakar and Selma captured their early educational experiences, teacher preparation practices, and future possibilities as they moved in and out of different fields where the exchange of capital occurred, which then led to restructuring and/or de-valuerization of certain *habitus*. The experiences of Bakar and Selma heighten our awareness of the capital and *habitus* deployed in a variety of contexts – fields – in the US and elsewhere. We conclude by incorporating discussion focused on working with international teacher candidates.

Keywords: cultural capital; *habitus*; English language teachers; life histories; West Africa

I won't teach my students the way I was taught. ... I suffered through [teacher-centered teaching], which makes you very lazy and you don't know how to think critically for anything ... , kind of a way to *disable somebody's ability to do something*. (Selma Li, 1/2009, italics added for emphasis)

The above epigraph, a segment of Selma's life history interviews, powerfully illustrates Selma's desire to be immersed in an environment where students are given opportunities to actively engage in dialogues around their learning. In particular, Selma wants to be immersed in an environment that would allow her to act/teach in certain ways, which focuses on aspects of *habitus* [certain ways of being/disposition as a result of being endowed with certain types of cultural capital] that have significant effect on practice within [teaching] contexts (i.e. social background, experience as a student and teacher, knowledge of theory, etc.) (Grenfell 1996, 292). Thus, exploring the life histories of Selma and others from similar backgrounds can lead

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to unpacking the forms of capital that have been bestowed on them throughout their journeys of socialization within their families, schools, and communities, thus illustrating a continuous accumulation of abilities, materials, talents, cultural practices, inherited behaviors, and so on (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1986, 1991). These accumulated capital have become part of Selma's disposition, which guided her to see the world with a particular lens, her *habitus*. Selma came to the United States and entered an undergraduate English Education (henceforth, EE) program with a desire to dismantle teacher-centered pedagogy and the hope of learning something new.

Like Selma, students from all over the world continue to access educational opportunities in the US for various reasons related to economy, technology, globalization, and their connections to English language education within Inner Circle Countries¹ like the US (Kachru 1986; Jenkins 2009). For these individuals, their educational opportunities in the US are translated into various forms of capital (e.g. linguistic/academic, objectified and embodied cultural, social, economic) that endow certain types of disposition, *habitus*. However, as these international graduate students cross transnational contexts, their accumulated capital and attitudinal and behavioral *habitus* become restructured due to how certain fields value certain capital and *habitus*, often wielding power and hegemonic practices (Luke 1996; Curry 2008; Messekher 2011).

Researchers have several theories as to why the US continues to be popular with international students. Most international students see post-secondary education as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) that would allow students to accumulate certain types of capital that would, then perhaps, translate into certain (pedagogical) *habitus*, a disposition for teaching/being in certain ways and possibly result in the students being perceived as legitimate individuals worthy to be heard and to speak (Bourdieu 1991). For instance, the Inner Circle higher education institutions are seen as a symbol of how English should be spoken, where ideal teachers of English are born and raised, and where the idealized and normalized assumptions that are connected to how native speakerism identity are enacted (Berns 2005; Park 2012, 2015). This is connected to how academic programs in US post-secondary education institutions are becoming the meeting place of cultures, education systems, and pedagogies brought by students around the globe (Beck et al. 2007; Kubota 2009; Chan 2011). In other words, international students believe that there is certain capital (traversing from linguistic, cultural, social, and ultimately to economic capital) to be gained by being educated in the US, and without questioning what these forms of capital can do for them in other spaces (i.e. West African schools), students like Selma are more than willing to move to the other side of the world to be educated in the US. Yet, there is little research evidence in understanding a growing group of international students who enrolled in US undergraduate teacher education programs and how the interplay of fields, capital, and *habitus* has impacted their educational journeys, which is the focus of the present article.

This paper presents one thread of a larger study entitled the Life Histories of Future Educators (LHFE) project, which captures life histories from 45 undergraduate teacher education students across three post-secondary education institutions in Pennsylvania, US. Specifically, we examine the ways in which the life histories and experiences of Bakar and Selma in an undergraduate EE program shaped their views on teaching English and plans for a teaching career grounded in a Bourdieusian framework. We begin with a brief discussion of the literature that captures Bourdieu's

work. Next, we discuss the themes emerging from Bakar's and Selma's narratives positioned across Bourdieu's interplay of capital, field, and *habitus* segmented into three interconnected stages. We conclude with discussion of these themes.

Relevant literature: a look at the interplay of field, *habitus*, and capital

This section briefly explores the literature grounded in Bourdieu's work illustrating how educational contexts (i.e. fields, which are often gated by how power is shared between individuals) have continued to impact individuals' access to forms of capital and *habitus*. Chronicling the teaching and learning of Bakar and Selma in West Africa and the broader sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts in which they function has been helpful in understanding how the interplay of capital and *habitus* is (re)structured and (re)assessed in varying fields throughout their educational journeys.

For Bourdieu (quoted in Grenfell 1996), *habitus* and field are 'ontologically complicit' (47), and he further explains the ways in which the two operate:

On the one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the *habitus*, which is product of the embodiment of immanent necessity of a field (or of a hierarchically intersecting set of fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: *habitus* contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one's practice (291).

In other words, the field and *habitus* interact in a dialectical relationship with one another (Kramsch 2008) to define and (re)define the ways in which capital is endowed.

For instance, Mutch (2006), in integrating social studies into New Zealand curriculum, used a Bourdieusian framework to explore how field, capital, and *habitus* interact and function fully in relation to one another, illustrative of the constant unfolding of power dynamics. Mutch clarified the construct of the field as 'a common ground on which the action occurs and this ground has boundaries where entry is blocked by existing holders of power. Within the field, players have ... [positional roles] to be enacted and status carried with them' (162). Connected to the field, she crystallized *habitus* as a 'set of dispositions that are commonly held by members of a social group and these subjectively created attitudes, beliefs, and practices bind the members together so that they can identify and communicate with each other' (163). Grenfell (1996) also used Bourdieu's theoretical framework of field, capital, and *habitus* to explore how teacher candidates were being trained to teach modern languages in an initial teacher education program in the United Kingdom. Grenfell, using case studies of students' experiences from their educational journeys, noted these case studies as 'an expression of their personal *habitus* in relation to teacher education training' (292). With these expressed personal *habitus*, these teacher candidates entered an initial teacher education program (i.e. field) where '*habitus* confronts what is demanded from students in the training field, which has specific outcomes for developing individuals' professional competence' (292). In this particular study, Grenfell utilized 'linguistic competence' (292) to depict the *pedagogical habitus* that is at the core of the field of initial teacher education, thus illustrating *habitus* as the core of becoming and being teachers of modern languages in a teacher education program.

Curry (2008), in her work with basic writers in a US community college, explored the basic writers' cultural capital and *habitus* as a way to understand how they 'do' school and 'be' a good student in the US. Specifically, Curry elaborated on 'embodied cultural capital' that is often handed down from previous generations to include '... intuitive understanding, or feel for the rules of the game, of the practices and procedures of the educational field' (282). In relation to embodied cultural capital, Curry explicated that having 'an intuitive sense of which classroom space to occupy [sitting at the front of the classroom] in order to' (285) be identified as an attentive student is a particular cultural capital called spatial competence. In addition to having spatial competence as one form of embodied cultural capital, Curry argued that some students with high educational attainment interacted with the teachers more frequently as well as volunteered more freely without being called upon. In particular, Curry shared an example where some students used their 'metalinguage of grammar and [other] language learning as another strategy to participate in the course' (288), which she labeled as being competent in classroom participation. Moreover, Curry's curricular competence as a form of cultural capital focused on how some students positioned different activities and assignments within the content of the course. And finally, institutional competence was about knowing how to draw on those institutional resources (e.g. faculty members' requirements and other resources available, etc.) to navigate how to be a good student. Curry argued that those who have cultural capital endowed in their native countries were often able to retain/transfer some of those into the US classrooms through different competences enacted in knowing how to do school.

With a brief illustration of how capital and *habitus* play out in a given field, dialectically structuring one another, chronicling teachers' life histories can be both a methodological and pedagogical tool in understanding how power dynamics embedded in certain fields can inevitably structure the teachers' *habitus*, their attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions, which in turn can contribute to structuring the field. Life histories or teachers' stories, 'as lived and told by teachers, serve as the lens through which they understand themselves personally and professionally and through which they view the content and context of their work, ...' (Drake, Spillane, and Hufferd-Ackles 2001, 2). All teachers in general, but international teacher candidates in particular, bring with them different forms of capital that allow them to see their world with a certain set of *habitus*. However, when contexts change for these teacher candidates, as was the case for Bakar and Selma going from West Africa to the US, there is a need for consciousness raising about how being in various social fields can lead to (de)valuerization, (re)structuring, and (re)assessment of their *habitus*. Hence, having teachers construct their life histories (i.e. past experiences to inform their present teacher education program experience to inform future goals in their home country contexts) can lead to unpacking the forms of capital and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986).

Methodology

Through the LHFE project, we conducted life history interviews with 45 pre-service teachers across three institutions. The audiotaped interviews lasted approximately two hours each, used a common interview protocol inquiring about previous family and educational background, experiences within the teacher education program, and future professional direction and practice (Casey 1993; Johnson 2007). In this work,

we primarily build on the assumption that a comprehensive life history interview can effectively capture educators' voices and interpret 'how these individuals have found their centers through their chosen profession' (Atkinson 1998, 16). In drawing upon this single-method data collection strategy, we acknowledge that a life history presents an individual's experiences in the way they would like them to be portrayed. While we ground ourselves in an attempt to capture the voices of international teacher candidates, we also incorporate a critical lens, highlighting points of dissonance where they emerge. The central research question for the larger study was: *How do prospective teachers' life histories and experiences in teacher education programs shape their views on teaching and plans for a teaching career?* With this central research question, we focused on the life history narratives of Bakar and Selma coming from Burkino Faso and Mali, respectively, into a US undergraduate English Education program in Pennsylvania. In particular, by using a Bourdieusian analytic framework to better understand how capital and *habitus* interact within specific fields, we respond to Albright and Luke's (2008) call for a continuous engagement in the work of Bourdieu to strengthen our scholarship in the field of language teacher education.

Data analysis incorporated within-case, within-institution, and cross-institutional phases (Miles and Huberman 1984) and used an analytic framework grounded in the life histories of teachers' career trajectory as well as, for this particular article, an added dimension of Bourdieusian framework (Albright and Luke 2008) by exploring the interplay of capital, *habitus*, and field in the life history narratives of Bakar and Selma.

The focal participants

Both Bakar and Selma are from West Africa, Burkina Faso and Mali, respectively. Both Bakar and Selma are from countries where French as well as their local African languages were predominant in their day-to-day functions. In addition to the language policy instituted in their local contexts, much of the educational realm focuses on dilapidated school buildings, underfunded teacher resources and professional development, and lack of authentic teaching materials for students to engage in language learning. According to Dembélé and Lefoka (2007), '... pedagogical renewal and teacher development are two sides of the same coin, and that the achievement of a universal primary education that is equitable and of acceptable quality in Sub-Saharan Africa will depend on both' (531). While Dembélé and Lefoka only discussed the educational realities in Sub-Saharan Africa, interesting parallels of the kinds of teaching that produces the types of learning can be seen and experienced by the life histories shared with us by Bakar and Selma. Furthermore, it is important to note that both Mali and Burkina Faso were colonized by France. With French as one of the main languages in both countries, other principal languages were Bambara, Fulfulde, and Arabic for Mali and Mossi for Burkina Faso (Adegbija 2000, 82).

Both Bakar and Selma came into the LHFE project, referred to the first author by a professional colleague at the university. At the time of data collection, they were both seniors and Fulbright students in the undergraduate English education program.

Bakar Johnson: Bakar was born in Burkina Faso, West Africa in 1981. The youngest of three children, he had the most education of everyone in his family.

His parents did not have any formal education; his father was a builder, and his mother worked part-time as a cook at the local high school. Bakar's early education merged both public and private (Catholic) schools, and he had always received excellent comments on his English papers while being immersed in what Bakar called a '... very teacher centered ...' educational system. Although he was a part of the teacher-centered educational system in earlier years, a type of education that Paulo Freire criticized, Bakar was introduced to debates and songs in the English language by an influential English teacher. And consequently, Bakar became a 'leader' among the neighborhood children while engaging them in using English as a conversational tool. Bakar also initiated an English Club in his high school to pull students into thinking about and using English communicatively. With his desire to continue learning and improving English and learning about how to teach English more effectively, Bakar applied to the Fulbright Student Program to gain admission into a university in the US.

Selma Li: Selma, also born in 1981, was raised in Mali, West Africa, the oldest of five children. She attended both public and private schools in Mali. Although Selma's educational upbringing was similar to Bakar, they came from different family backgrounds; her father was a soldier in the military, and her mother was a kindergarten teacher. Selma grew up in a home environment where the English language was spoken. Both Selma's father and brother were trained in the English language due to their roles and responsibilities in the West African military. Selma grew up hearing her father use the English language, and this was what brought her to focus on learning and teaching English. Due to her family's high socioeconomic background, Selma took private, after-school English classes at the English language institute and was able to learn English while matriculated in her high school academic program. Wanting to gain more tools to become an English teacher in a rural part of Mali, Selma applied to the Fulbright Student Program to gain admission into a US English Education (EE) program. We now turn to the life history narratives of Bakar and Selma, and in order to honor their voices, all interview excerpts have been left as they were originally captured for the sake of authenticity.

Understanding the life histories of Bakar Johnson and Selma Li

With a brief introduction to Bakar and Selma in the aforementioned section, we juxtapose Bakar's and Selma's narratives in an attempt to unfold their narratives into three distinct fields (e.g. home/school/community in West Africa, a US EE program, the future teaching in West Africa), and we explore the interplay of different forms of capital and *habitus* to make sense of dominant themes embedded in their life histories.

Interplay of capital and habitus located in home, school, and community

Both Selma and Bakar were socialized into thriving in a supportive familial and educational environment leading to gaining certain forms of capital and unconsciously developing 'a set of durable dispositions or tendencies to think and act in certain ways ~ an individual *habitus*' (Kramsch 2008, 38) that impacted their subsequent educational journeys.

Bakar's student-centered teacher used music to teach English. 'I really enjoyed because [the teacher] played the guitar. I actually almost learned English in song.

Like I learned to count in song. It was easy and very enjoyable ... and he was encouraging.' Bakar was enamored with this particular teacher from his high school because he was the only teacher who truly transformed the learning of English into something enjoyable and passionate. In addition to being supportive and encouraging as a teacher, Bakar stated that this teacher conducted his class in ways that helped his students think in and use English. Bakar said that 'the students were introduced to open debates less focus on teacher centered-ness, ... It was good to have student competitions [through debates].' It is important to note that Bakar became an agent in 'selecting' which pedagogical practices he would relate to in learning English, which allowed him to not only embody the cultural capital gleaned from these particular teachers but to convert them into 'symbolic power' in his future role as an English teacher (Bourdieu 1986; Kramsch 2008). It is also evident from Bakar's fondness of this particular student-centered pedagogy enacted by his teacher that Bakar was able to assess which pedagogical options suited his disposition as a learner/teacher.

Even though Bakar and Selma came from a similar environment where the classrooms were overcrowded and the English teacher/student ratio was high, Bakar's relationship with a few teachers truly fueled his passion for learning and teaching English and, perhaps, to be agentive in finding what was right for him (e.g. intuitive understanding and friendly disposition in approaching teachers) pedagogically. In essence, Bakar's learned ways of using English as both a user and teacher were illustrative of his ownership of the objectified form of capital that the English language accords. Although Selma did not have mentors from her schools, she shared the following about the passion and interest that was instilled in her by her father, which became a huge asset in accessing her capital and *habitus*:

So when I was growing up there are so many local languages that I can speak in addition to French and I started to tell myself that I am tired of all of these, I need something new, ... I need to learn to speak English ... My dad encouraged me to speak [English], he said if you can do this, you will be a better person. And I'll be proud of you.

As evident in Goldstein's (2008) work with Cantonese-speaking students in an US school system, the high value of the English language was the only way to be deemed as legitimate users and speakers of English for these Cantonese speaking students. Similarly, Selma made the choice to learn/use English in West Africa not only because of its linguistic capital and the market value around the globe but also because of her father's objectified and embodied cultural capital in understanding the value in knowing and navigating the English speaking communities as a military man. For Selma and her father, knowing and using English was a highly valued and privileged capital in global contexts, so Selma took private English lessons for 1½ years at the English language institute.

While Selma was committed to learning English to become an English teacher, she was interested in extracurricular activities, such as acting and running, to improve her voice and increase her overall confidence level. Selma stated:

I was telling [my father] that it wasn't something that I wanted to make a career out of, ... I just wanted to spend some time at it because I was very shy and my voice was very low and always people tell me, 'can you speak up?' I was telling myself that maybe something like that might help me raise my voice.

According to Selma, her father argued that she would develop more masculine traits if she became too involved in sports. Although Selma's father was supportive in many ways, it is paradoxical how he limited her professional opportunities. There was no room for Selma to advance her acting and athletic skills (objectified cultural capital and not something that is embodied) even though Selma was not planning to be a professional athlete or actor. Selma's father's perspective is consistent with a body of work that looks at how teaching can be perceived as a (feminine) gendered act (Maher and Ward 2002; Park 2009). More importantly, Bourdieu (1986) would argue that in Selma's father's world (both imagined and real), acting and running, though objectified cultural capital, would not translate into, and possibly limit her from continuing to access, the symbolic power associated with linguistic, cultural, and economic capital.

With the support and encouragement received from school and home, both Bakar and Selma were teaching and learning English outside the classroom. These opportunities were driven by their socioeconomic backgrounds that have continued to shape the ways in which they access capital, in turn structuring their *habitus*. Bourdieu (1986) would argue that Bakar's less-than-visible socioeconomic background of his parents has continued to shape his *habitus* to be agentive in his educational journey. And Bakar's particularly 'sociable and intuitive' *habitus* structured the way he positioned himself in his community as a teacher. As for Selma, her father's economic and professional privilege handed down to her has structured her *habitus* to continue to access English in private English language institutes.²

Bakar became a teacher in his neighborhood community for those who could not afford to take English tutorial classes and founded an English Club at his high school. Selma took private classes by enrolling in an English language institute. Bakar created these teaching opportunities for himself encouraged by his mentor English teacher, and Selma's father provided opportunities for her to take classes at the English language institute. For example, Bakar wanted to provide opportunities and space for himself and others interested in expanding their English skills:

We used to tell stories translated in English. That was the only way, or the only place that we could speak in English because we required them to speak English while in English club and we also studied song like Bob Marley song, we'd get a tape of it and play it so they'd know what they were saying and all the music they usually listen, but they don't understand so we tried to bring in English teacher and he would explain them, the meaning of the song.

Bakar naturally connected his lived experiences as a learner to his 'intuition toward teaching' and reminisced about his 'teacher roles' with the neighborhood children:

I used to tutor kids in my yard because I was like the elder. After school, [the neighborhood kids] would show me their [school work]. It was kind of like my game when I was a child and then it developed into a passion for me. I like to teach because it keeps me into the academic life.

On the other hand, Selma's father was more explicit on what she needed to focus on to be a 'better person.' Her discontent with the way English was taught in her school pushed her to learn something new, English, and she decided to focus on what her father had stated in [becoming] a *better person* [italics added for emphasis] by speaking English. Perhaps both consciously and unconsciously, Selma believed that her father's perception of her being fluent in English would inevitably make her a

‘better person’ by becoming an English teacher. Claiming this identity can be connected to privileging the native speaker identity and navigating the English speaking community through both objectified and embodied cultural capital. Although Selma was endowed with linguistic capital that would eventually translate into cultural and economic capital throughout her life, Selma became a victim of ‘symbolic violence’ exercised by her father in that he was the one who told her that learning English would make her a ‘better person,’ which might have resulted in her father’s fallen victim himself to how power and dominance were exercised and/or distributed. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (quoted in Grant and Wong 2008), Selma’s immediate acceptance of her father’s call to be a ‘better person’ is how symbolic violence ‘accomplishes itself through an act of cognition and of misrecognition that lies beyond – or beneath – the controls of consciousness and will’ (174).

For Bakar, his *habitus*, tendency to think that English should be best learned through communicative contexts, was the result of being mentored by particular teachers in his school. This mentoring, in turn, led to integrating music into teaching English to the children in the community. In many ways, Bakar took his *habitus* ‘to be the natural, universal way of [teaching English], a perception scheme that he would transpose to all other contexts’ (Kramsch 2008, 39). Similar to Kramsch’s (2008) own experience navigating the US higher education institution as a French-educated scholar, Bakar and Selma experienced their home and schooling to be less than homogeneous and sites of struggle that often pulled them in different directions. Selma wanted to balance her abilities by also getting involved in sports and theater to enhance her confidence in who she would become as an English user, speaker, and teacher. This desire was in total contrast to what her father perceived to be the best for Selma in regards to turning her into a ‘better person.’ For Bakar, teaching English through music might be appropriate and acceptable in certain educational fields with a certain age range of students, however, there might need to be a balance in teaching English to meet certain educational requirements (institutional capital) handed down by the larger institutional structure.

Interplay of capital and habitus located in the US English education program

Selma entered the program with the encouragement she received from her family, especially her father, coupled with her desire to be the kind of teacher who could motivate her students to be active, critical, and engage in their own learning. Selma applied to the Fulbright Student Program and gained admission to an undergraduate EE program. As for Bakar, his interactions with influential teachers led him to enter the Fulbright Student Program. Although through different backgrounds, both Bakar and Selma were able to turn their educational success (cultural capital) into symbolic capital (the Fulbright). And more importantly, their specific socioeconomic fields structured their *habitus* toward English language acquisition and teaching.

As Fulbright students, both Bakar and Selma were seeking an undergraduate TESOL program at the Western Pennsylvania University (WPU), and in fact, the Fulbright Office selected WPU for both Bakar and Selma. However, due to state mandates and other issues beyond their control, they were placed into a secondary English Education program since WPU did not have an undergraduate TESOL endorsement program. Being positioned in the EE program housed in WPU can be perceived as equally prestigious due to its EE program preparing teachers to teach English in the US secondary schools. However, what was lacking in this particular

program was the TESOL specialization, which would help teachers to work effectively with English Language Learners (ELLs). Nevertheless, both Bakar and Selma stated that they liked being in a new learning environment, specifically in an EE program. They enjoyed conducting observations of teachers at public school sites and doing their practicum with the EE faculty.

In reflecting on the overall goals for being in an EE program, Bakar affirmed that he did not want to be in a community where the ‘hegemony’ of English could be promoted, rather, he wanted to embrace English as a way to fulfill his need to communicate with people around the world:

People always say that if you know how to speak English in the 21st century, it means something. And I do not believe in the hegemony of English, so I don’t think we have to learn English to be in this world. I know people who work and have a very high income and they don’t know any word in English, but they can use computers.

In many ways, Bakar believed that English has gained dominance around the globe as a medium for managing and communicating in an international business market. His attitude was that there was no need to uphold English as a tool for survival since there were others in the business world with computer literacy without any English literacy. According to Bakar, communicating in English was one of many useful tools (e.g. French literacy, computer literacy, etc.) in navigating the business world. Specifically, navigating English literacy in multiple contexts led him to see this privilege as a form of objectified capital that would ultimately translate into his embodied cultural capital, thus *habitus*. Bakar’s *habitus* has allowed him to envision learning English as one of many forms of valuable objectified and embodied cultural capital he would continue to gain throughout his life.

Selma immediately began to think more about how she could transform her teaching and the ways in which students in Mali can learn English. She was encouraged in the EE program. She wanted to train herself to act on her teaching philosophy and integrate the fundamentals of her teaching philosophy into her lesson plans. She enjoyed and was encouraged by doing ‘teaching’ - related assignments (e.g. microteaching, teaching demonstrations, creating lesson plans, writing a teaching philosophy, etc.) in her EE courses. Furthermore, Selma was encouraged by the student-centered pedagogies and she said that ‘[student-centered pedagogies] will not oppress the students.’

However, both Bakar and Selma saw some limitation of the EE program in terms of their future teaching in West Africa. Selma did not feel that there was enough scaffolding for international teacher education students given their prior knowledge and experience. For instance, Selma could not understand the historical background and implications with the story of *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, due to her limited understanding of European history and culture. Therefore, she stated that she would not be able to transfer the knowledge and pedagogies gleaned from the discussions around the story of *Jane Eyre* into her future teaching. Selma may perceive the student-centered pedagogies in the US to be a form of empowerment for students. However, it may be difficult to transfer directly her pedagogies into an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, a reason for her to be more critical about her student-centered pedagogies. One challenge that Bakar raised multiple times was that his EE program relied too heavily on technology use in school. Bakar shared the following:

Even though I had a good experience here learning how to teach, but technology is given too much worth here and my problem is that I don't know how to adapt it to my department. I think, I am coming from a different country, we don't have that frequent access to technology and I would say I haven't seen any use of the computer in my entire high school and now I am going home with highly technological training, not all of it, but I have to adapt it to my environment, I have to make it practical, so that's the real dilemma.

However, Bakar did point out that in promoting academic English in EFL classes in Burkino Faso, he would integrate some use of technology into the realities of the classroom: 'I want to have connection in America for my school where they can chat online, they can write letters to communicate, just to be in touch.' As argued by Dressman and Wilder (2008), classroom teachers and institutions need to be mindful about the possibilities for using technology given the resources, in that the optimal use might occur if there were not enough classroom materials (e.g. textbooks and other resources), a 'virtue of necessity' (134).

Interplay of capital and habitus located in future teaching in West Africa

In imagining their future teaching roles and responsibilities, Bakar and Selma had specific ideas about promoting English using Freire's (2002) critical pedagogy in which teacher candidates like Bakar and Selma 'develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world . . . , as a reality in process, in transformation' (83, italics added). Bakar's ultimate goal as a teacher in Africa was to teach communicative English. In learning and teaching English, Bakar wanted to be 'a flexible pedagogue' and engage in a dialectical relationship of learning between the teacher and the students in authentic contexts full of chaos and interruptions. Bakar clarified what he meant:

I don't mean [learning English] has to be like being in America. I'd like to include culture to teach literacy in English, see what they can transfer from the culture to the language that they are learning. What they know in French can help them learn English. . . . I would like to teach them the explanations of English grammar, how it's spoken here and I would show them videos of people speaking English. I would have them in an internet café where they can interact with people. I want to have a connection in America for my school where they can chat online, they can write letters to communicate, just to be in touch.

Bakar's desire to bring about learning English naturally was important because he believed that language had meaning without seeing it as a subject to be mastered or memorized, 'I learned [English] as a subject not as a language. For me now I want to teach English as a language I want to go beyond this notion of a subject so that's what I mean.' From the aforementioned statement, we argue that Bakar had a clear understanding that his students in Burkina Faso would never be native English speakers, but they could be equipped to understand language as a system by tapping into their French language expertise (meta-language skills as a set of objectified cultural capital) as well as integrating cross-cultural awareness into English language teaching.

Specifically, Bakar, while not having read the work of Canagarajah (2013) and other scholars who promote translanguaging practices, in large part, desired to bring about linguistic transformation by privileging both French and English in learning and teaching English in his local contexts. Largely, his (pedagogical) *habitus* was molded by not only his Burkina Faso educational system but also by his EE

program. In particular, his pedagogical *habitus* emerged from his linguistic capital of being trained by his influential teachers in Burkina Faso and in the EE program.

While Bakar focused on his desire to help his Burkina Faso students understand how language and culture interact by tapping into one of their native languages, French, Selma focused on the geographic space and the type of students with whom she envisioned working. Her goal was to return to her home country and work in a small village with students from low socioeconomic and low literacy backgrounds. Her interest in teaching in a remote village came from her desire to make an impact in the lives of impoverished people as well as providing more opportunities for women in this region to access post-secondary education. Selma stated:

They [impoverished people living in remote areas] are the ones who need the most help from the government or from the teachers because how can we educated them if nobody wants to go there? And since they are living there I think that anybody can survive there if you want to and there is a purpose because most of the time you have women, children who are willing to do something, but there is no access and nobody is willing to go there so I think that if somebody can make that difference it can create other teachers to go to those areas and take care of those people and make sure they have education because education does not only have to be in big cities ...

Selma highlighted possibilities for villagers who were often neglected by educators. She believed that hope for the village students can begin with education. To Selma, education needed to be more accessible to this disenfranchised group of students. As a critical teacher in a remote village, her goal would be to teach differently from the way she was taught so as not to ‘oppress them.’ With this desire to share her educational experiences and knowledge with people in remote villages, she shared her short-term goals as a teacher:

My primary goals as a teacher would be to help my students make the most out of what we have learned in the classroom like learning in a very comfortable and easy way. A way that would not embarrass them in a way that would not put too much weight on them so that they would not be frustrated or think that I’m oppressive or that the teacher is just not paying attention.

Selma’s teaching focus was to make her students comfortable to maximize learning and minimize stress and frustration. In other words, Selma desired to have her students gain both objectified cultural capital (learning the skills of the English language) and embodied cultural capital (lead to *habitus*, certain tendency/disposition about learning English), which would probably occur as a result of learning in a comfortable and non-threatening classroom. In addition to creating this space to maximize learning, Selma saw herself as a role model for other women who wanted to pursue post-secondary education to become teachers in West Africa. She felt that women teaching in post-secondary education have been invisible compared to men teaching in post-secondary education, and she slowly came to question the field of post-secondary education for future women educators since the gatekeepers in post-secondary education, in her mind, seemed to be only men. By becoming part of the community of educators who provide equitable access to women in higher education, especially in the rural areas, she vowed to make them as competent as men who teach in higher education:

The most important thing for me would be to continue on my path of education and be an English teacher in my country as a woman because I haven’t seen any woman at

the university level teaching and even if they are they are not like men or seen at the same level as me because they are not much experienced to be teaching, ... That would be one [reason] and two would be to be able to contribute and help in the education [field] and be a real teacher and be able to help in the education of the woman who will be able to teach.

It can be argued that for Selma, her students' cultural capital and *habitus* can come directly from being in a non-threatening and comfortable English language learning atmosphere, but also indirectly from having more women teacher/educator role models who can continue to advocate for other women to obtain gendered *habitus* (disposition/tendency to see themselves beyond the norm of being a homemaker and child caretaker) for seeing themselves as just as capable of being educators in the future.

Discussion and conclusion

Through the life history narratives of Bakar and Selma, we come to understand to some degree the larger sociocultural and sociopolitical issues that are embedded in learning and teaching English within and beyond the US territories, specifically in terms of the interplay among capital, *habitus*, and field(s). By selecting to utilize a Bourdieusian framework in understanding the life history narratives of Bakar and Selma, our hope was to continue to extend the work of Bourdieu in 'preparing our future teachers to become committed' to doing teaching and research that promotes equality and equity in the lives of our students (Albright and Luke 2008). Furthermore, we hoped to uncover how issues of power were manifested in the lives and experiences of Bakar and Selma in their respective fields of education. While we acknowledge the limitations of exploring the data of two West African teachers' life history narratives in understanding their sociocultural and sociopolitical issues that come with learning and teaching English, we prioritize their stories as their lived experiences that may differ from other teachers' in similar contexts. Furthermore, the insights gained from their own lived experiences as traversing multiple linguistic contexts (i.e. French, African languages, English, etc.) focus on how those very linguistic fields ultimately informed the ways in which their cultural capital (both objectified and embodied) and *habitus* have been shaped.

In uncovering the work of critical race scholars, Grant and Wong (2008) discussed Bourdieu's work on power equated to access, which produces context-specific capital, and confirmed that 'such capital is not simply something one has, but something that has different value in different contexts, mediated by the relation of power and knowledge in different social fields (176). Because of the ways in which *habitus* is dialectically related to the field of education (in the case of Bakar and Selma, the US EE, Fulbright Students Program, etc.), the agents within the fields were placed on pedestals depending on how much capital they possessed, and in many ways, '[i]t [the educational field] is immersed in the larger field of power held by institutions that reproduce the value of those individuals who hold the most economic, cultural, and symbolic capital in a given society' (Kramsch 2008, 39).

In chronicling the earlier experiences of Bakar and Selma, we looked at the question posed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), 'who goes to university?' in deconstructing how language and education work for/against the under-represented, under-resourced, and marginalized groups in the academic community (Grant and Wong 2008, 162). Although Bakar and Selma came from different socioeconomic

and familial backgrounds, they were able to ‘develop capital resources to achieve and succeed in educational system’ (Grant and Wong 2008, 162). Specifically, it was important to highlight that although both families were supportive of their education in West Africa, only Selma was able to access direct objectified cultural capital from her family by attending after-school English language classes, which would not have been possible if the family had not been able to afford to send her to after-school private language classes. As for Bakar, it can be argued that his parents’ and siblings’ ‘lack of educational attainment’ and his interactions with a few influential teachers instilled in him an intuitive understanding or ‘embodied cultural capital’ as well as objectified cultural capital (learning English through media resources, which he used later to teach the neighborhood kids) in navigating and excelling in school. Bakar and Selma wanted to promote ‘critical thinking’ in their learning situations, as discussed in the opening epigraph by Selma. Both Bakar and Selma were pursuing ‘hopeful inquiry ... with the world ...’ (Freire 2002, 72). Although Selma perceived her learning space to be ‘disabling somebody to do something,’ the same educational space allowed Selma to be critical about how learning occurred. Coupled with other resources, this space ultimately ‘enabled’ her to move forward with pursuing post-secondary education in the US.

The very type of communicative language learning and teaching that Bakar and Selma wish to engage in has been criticized by scholars and teachers in non-US contexts. For instance, Kumaravadivelu (2003) noted that Communicative Language Teaching ‘has created a deep sense of disillusionment in certain parts of the world’ (171). Other scholars (Li 1998; Goto-Butler 2004, 2007) described Communicative Language Teaching in EFL contexts to be a failed approach to teaching English where the language is taught as a subject matter and not as a language used as a medium of daily communication. Furthermore, Kumaravadivelu (2006) explicated the ways in which teachers and teacher educators from all over the world can uphold the needs of students, their lived experiences, and the contexts in which they live and learn in finding a set of appropriate tools to prepare teachers to teach English in their own contexts. Kumaravadivelu (2006) and other scholars (Golombek 1998; Tsang 2004) have theorized their pedagogical practices as moving away from the theory and practice divide to hone in on what is central in teachers’ everyday practices – improvement in student achievement:

The parameter of practicality, then, focused on teachers’ reflection and action, which are also based on their insights and intuition. Through prior and ongoing experience with learning and teaching, teachers gather an unexplained and sometimes unexplainable awareness of what constitutes good teaching. (Kumaravadivelu 2006, 173)

Even though Bakar and Selma were exposed to teacher-centered pedagogies in West Africa, it would be difficult to consider them to be products of those pedagogies. Ironically, it was within these local education systems that Bakar found a mentor who inspired him, and that Selma, because of her ‘teacher-centered, disabling’ contexts, became more critical about pedagogy. It is important to state that even though both Bakar and Selma saw their educational experiences as somewhat ‘hopeless,’ it was within these contexts they found ‘hopefulness,’ which brought them to the US. All the acquired ‘ability, talent, and time investment’ led both Bakar and Selma to gain further access to the Fulbright Student Program and enter a US EE program, a pinnacle reached as a result of their acquisition of cultural capital. Their excellent academic records (academic capital) came not only from their hard work

but also from objectified cultural capital (skills, know-how/technical abilities) from working with influential teachers (Bakar) and after-school language preparation (Selma), which eventually molded them to acquire embodied cultural capital. As academic members of the Fulbright, both Bakar and Selma were bestowed ‘social capital,’ because the program provided them with a worldwide network of recognition, a lifetime of educational and professional resources, and a set of credentials gained from being immersed in the US EE program.

Both Bakar and Selma problematized the ways in which teacher-centered pedagogies enacted in their early learning experiences stifled their communicative competence in learning English as a language. Their desire and goals were to learn English to communicate with others in a natural and comfortable way. They both wanted to be empowered by moving away from memorization and rote-learning to dismantle the teacher-centered pedagogies by focusing more on Paulo Freire’s (1998) problem-posing education. However, while matriculated in the US EE program, they both came to critique their specific program and understand the meaning of upholding communicative competence in teaching English. Bakar noted the (over)reliance on technology and its disconnect to Burkino Faso. However, he visualized creating a natural learning environment with the help of technology, forgetting that, as he pointed out, he might not have access to this technology. Further, his desire to teach English as a language and not as a subject contradicted the linguistic realities of Burkino Faso. Furthermore, Bakar and Selma realized that it was important for each teacher candidate to make sure that Western pedagogies and materials could be adapted to make them more practical in West African contexts, which was aligned with an important reminder from Luke (1996) to deviate from a ‘hypodermic’ trap reifying and glorifying a particular way perceived to empower students and make them acquire English. Bakar and Selma’s desire to uphold the learner-centered pedagogy in West Africa underpinned the core of helping students to be communicatively competent in English by using those pedagogical approaches. However, an imported pedagogy, be it critical or communicative, may not be effective if it cannot be adapted to the local sociocultural norms (Li 1998; Goto-Butler 2004, 2007). Connected to the ways in which Bakar and Selma challenged their West African teacher-centered pedagogies in learning English (more by Selma than Bakar, while Bakar sought out other non-classroom activities as his language learning repertoire), they both focused on the parameter of particularity (Kumaravadivelu 2006) in order to understand how ‘particular’ students in ‘particular’ contexts with ‘particular’ pedagogical needs need to be prioritized without promoting the Western-based pedagogies.

The life history narratives of Bakar and Selma opened up ways to think more critically about what international undergraduate teacher education students bring to and get from US post-secondary education by deconstructing the interplay of capital, *habitus*, and social fields impacting their educational and teacher preparation journeys. These forms of social capital would inevitably provide them with further networks to English teachers in their local contexts, as well as in the US. In many ways, as was explicitly stated by Selma’s father, the notion of becoming or being a ‘better person’ became intimately equated with learning English and being educated in a US EE program. This process of ‘betterment’ played a central role in constructing their imagined English teacher identity in West Africa. Their accumulated sources of capital, coupled with their journeys to become ‘better people’ may be the core of their underdeveloped English teacher identity. Due to both the visible and

invisible nature of power embedded in the field of learning (English) in their respective countries, Bakar and Selma gained capital (e.g. linguistic, objectified cultural capital, embodied cultural capital, social capital, and institutional/social capital) and *habitus* (disposition) in a variety of social fields (e.g. West African education and US EE programs, etc.) to question their knowledge/practice (yet to be) constructed as teachers of English.

Teacher education programs can begin to be better equipped academically and professionally to address both affordances and constraints in working with international teacher candidates and help them to construct and unpack their life histories as future teachers of English. Specifically, their narratives remind us of the need to focus on the following areas in teacher education: (1) being aware of post-secondary education systems in non-US contexts, (2) integrating life history research into the teacher education curriculum, and (3) understanding the forms of capital impacting different points on the marginalization and privilege continuum.

First, there is a critical need for a thorough treatment of how educational systems work and how teacher candidates in those countries are being prepared to teach English. With this information, it would be beneficial for each US teacher education program to find out where their teacher candidates come from. This could be a joint venture between teacher education admission officers and international education officers housed in the university. The focus of this preliminary research would be on knowing more about who the prospective teacher candidates are and what their academic and cultural contexts entail. Teacher education programs can begin to be better equipped academically and professionally to address the dilemma that teacher educators face in working with international teacher candidates. Teacher educators can also do more to enact those same student-centered and multicultural practices they promote for future educators.

Secondly, these narratives suggest that US teacher education programs would benefit from integrating components of life history into coursework, as well as professional development workshops. The strengths of life history reflection in connecting teacher candidates' past-present-future stories can open up avenues for both teacher candidates and their program to understand how past experiences can ultimately influence and construct teacher candidates' teaching identities. Through reflexive analysis, life histories become a powerful theoretical and methodological tool in unpacking the different forms of capital bestowed on teacher candidates throughout their educational journeys. A goal for teacher education is to explore a variety of knowledge domains to strengthen praxis. Although all knowledge domains are important, it would be crucial to begin with who our learners are and what life histories (e.g. educational, personal, professional, sociocultural, and sociopolitical) they bring into their teacher education programs. Providing teacher candidates opportunities to tap into their life histories through reflective practices (Farrell 2010; Park 2013a, 2013b) can bring about self-awareness in (re)constructing their teacher identities.

Third, raising awareness of how the teacher candidates' education (both past and present to inform the future) created issues of marginalization and privilege that could further (dis)enfranchise constructions and negotiations of their teacher identity. Much work has been done to document the experiences of international teacher candidates working in a variety of educational settings. The prominent theme in these narratives is the ways in which teacher candidates have become marginalized due to their linguistic, racial, and non-native identities in teaching English (Braine 2010;

Park, 2013a; Varghese et al. 2016). The heart of the matter is that teachers from all walks of life navigate in the midst of the marginalization and privilege continuum, which is an important understanding for all teacher candidates to appreciate. Together, these four strategies may put teacher education more in line with the needs of international candidates and further enact in practice the critical perspectives so central to teacher education work.

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Notes

1. English speaking countries are denoted as the Inner Circle countries (Kachru 1986); the Outer Circle countries are former British colonies, and the Expanding Circle countries include areas in which English is studied as a foreign language.
2. After-school English conversation and tutorial sessions are costly to attend in most English as a Foreign Language countries.

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