



# ACADEMIA OAMENILOR DE ȘTIINȚĂ DIN ROMÂNIA

## Competiția de proiecte de cercetare a Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România destinată tinerilor cercetători „AOSR-TEAMS-III” EDIȚIA 2024-2025 – „Transformarea digitală în științe”

Sesiune științifică AOSR tineri cercetători etapa 4 – decembrie 2025

**Titlul proiectului:** Narativa cognitivă și emoțională a inegalităților educaționale în rândul tinerilor români

**Domeniul științific propus:** Științe socio-umane

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# Narativa cognitivă și emoțională a inegalităților educaționale în rândul tinerilor români

**Domeniul științific: 10. Științe socio-umane**

## Context

Prezentul raport de activitate sintetizează demersurile și rezultatele obținute în cadrul celei de-a patra etape de raportare. Activitatea desfășurată poate fi structurată în trei direcții principale:

1. A4.1 – Investigarea multimodală a reprezentărilor viitorilor profesori cu privire la justiția socială și relevanța educației ca mecanism de armonizare a inegalităților – **manuscris trimis spre publicare la Sage Open – prima revizie transmisă către jurnal pentru reevaluare;**
2. A4.2 – Colectarea de date primare prin aplicarea *Chestionarului Patternurilor Emoționale (EPQ)*; *Approaches to Learning Scale* (Biggs et al., 2001), *Situated Goals Questionnaire (SGQ-U)* (Alonso-Tapia et al., 2018) și Chestionarul strategiilor de învățare în profunzime (Manasia & Parvan, 2022; Panadero et al., 2021).
3. Activități complementare de diseminare a rezultatelor cercetării.

## Activitatea 4.1. Investigarea multimodală a reprezentărilor viitorilor profesori cu privire la justiția socială și relevanța educației ca mecanism de armonizare a inegalităților

Studiul abordează întrebarea **cum își construiesc viitorii profesori din România convingerile despre puterea educației de a combate inegalitățile sociale** și cum exprimă aceste convingeri prin „velfies” – scurte materiale video înregistrate de ei înșiși. Velfies – o adaptare digitală a metodei Photovoice – le conferă participanților control asupra narațiunii cercetării și îi transformă în interpreți activi; astfel ei pot integra voce, gest, imagine și mișcare pentru a transmite povești complexe. Cercetarea, desfășurată într-un program de formare inițială a cadrelor didactice (ITE) din România, a solicitat studenților să reflecteze într-o manieră embodied (prin corp) asupra relației dintre educație, recunoaștere, putere și identitate profesională.

La nivel practic, participanții au filmat 18 velfii (17 au fost analizate), cu durate între 1,5 și 5 minute. Analiza a identificat momente de intensitate emoțională și narativă, grupate ulterior în trei „trasee de devenire justă”: (1) „**Maria și povestea inegalității**”, (2) „**Te văd!**” (orientat spre recunoaștere și îngrijire) și (3) „**Sunt un creator de viitor**”, unde accentul cade pe acțiune și pe proiectarea unor viitoruri echitabile. Velfiile au funcționat nu doar ca date de cercetare, ci și ca **practici pedagogice**, făcând vizibile dimensiunile emoționale, etice și relaționale ale meseriei de profesor.

## Introducere

Articolul pornește de la premisa că pregătirea profesorilor pentru justiție socială (social justice-oriented teacher education – SJTE) cere mai mult decât dezvoltarea competențelor didactice; este nevoie de **conștientizare critică, angajare emoțională și un angajament etic pentru transformare**. Recenziile recente subliniază că practicile SJTE se caracterizează prin **identificarea inegalităților structurale, perturbarea ierarhiilor inechitabil construite și (re)centrarea perspectivelor marginalizante**, iar educatorilor li se recomandă să integreze aceste principii în raport cu contextul local și dinamica de putere. În România, politicile educaționale vorbesc despre „educație incluzivă”, dar formarea inițială integrează rareori pedagogii critice, iar studenții au puține ocazii de a reflecta asupra propriilor

poziționări în raport cu inegalitățile. Velfies oferă, astfel, o oportunitate de a conecta reflecția asupra justiției sociale cu expresia afectivă și performativă.

## Metodologie

**Participanți și context.** Toți cei 64 de studenți înscriși la disciplina „Fundamentele Pedagogiei. Teoria și metodologia curriculumului” dintr-un program de licență pentru formarea inițială a profesorilor au contribuit la realizarea de velfies. Studenții au putut lucra individual sau în grupuri auto-selectate; au rezultat 18 velfies (17 au fost analizate), realizate de 62 de participanți, cu durate între 92 și 340 de secunde. Fiecare film a primit un cod unic (VEL\_001 – VEL\_018). Tema propusă – „Educația care schimbă vieți” – i-a invitat să reflecteze asupra modului în care educația poate reproduce sau combate inegalitatea. Pentru eșafodajul sarcinii de lucru, studenții au avut la dispoziție un tutorial asincron cu patru pași: alegerea temei, elaborarea scenariului, selectarea locației și planificarea aspectelor tehnice; seminarul față în față a oferit clarificări (a se vedea **Figura 1**).

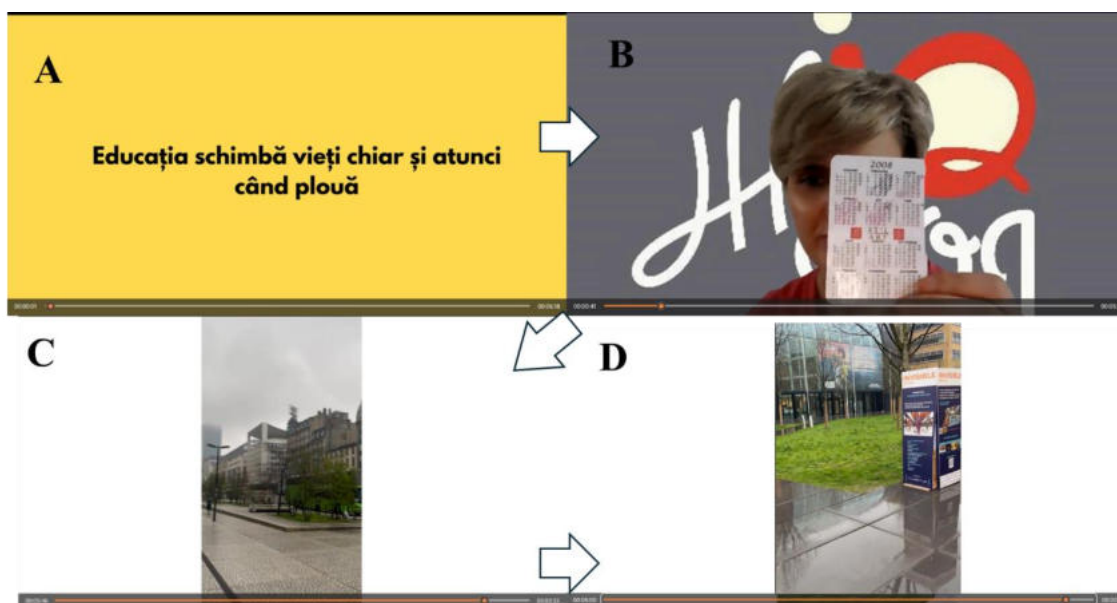
### Figura 1

*Secvențe din tutorialul oferit studenților*



**Reflexivitate și etică.** Echipa de cercetare este formată din specialiști în științele educației, lingvistică și drept, iar doi membri au fost și profesori ai cursului, ceea ce a facilitat încrederea, dar a necesitat un dialog reflexiv pentru a gestiona asimetriile de putere. Fiecare cercetător a creat un velfie personal (neinclus în analiză) pentru a modela introspecția - **Figura 2**. Proiectul a primit aprobare etică; participanții au semnat consimțământ informat.

**Figura 2**  
*Secvențe din velfie realizat de profesor*



### Analiza datelor

Pentru a interpreta velfies, cercetătorii au combinat **analiza video interpretativă (IVA)** cu un cadru de **semiotică socială multimodală**, explorând modul în care gesturile, vocea, spațiul și designul vizual transmit semnificație. Analiza a urmărit patru etape:

1. **Identificarea secvențelor dense.** Echipa a vizionat cele 17 velfies pentru a identifica „instanțe” de densitate emoțională/narativă (10–60 secunde fiecare). Au fost identificate 52 astfel de instanțe.
2. **Transcriere multimodală.** Pentru fiecare instanță s-a realizat o transcriere detaliată a vorbirii, gesturilor, privirii, compoziției spațiale, sunetului și atmosferei afective.
3. **Analiză colaborativă.** În sesiuni de lucru iterative, instanțele au fost re-vizionate, interpretările au fost rafinate, iar cercetătorii au construit **asamblaje** (stills + transcript + comentarii) pentru a urmări coerența sensului în timp. Un membru extern, care nu predase cursul, a asigurat o perspectivă critică suplimentară.
4. **Cartografierea „traseelor”.** Instanțele au fost apoi grupate după combinații recurente de formă narativă (voce fictivă, adresare directă), încadrare vizuală, ton afectiv (critică, empatie, speranță) și poziționare etică. Rezultatul a constatat din **trei trasee de creare de sens**, denumite după focusul lor: „**Maria – povestea ubicuă a inegalității**”, „**Te văd!**” și „**Creator de viitor**”.

Această abordare a respectat principiile metodologice ale analizei video interpretative, care nu urmărește codificarea standardizată, ci reconstruiește sensurile din perspectiva participanților. Reflecția și documentarea procesului au asigurat integritatea metodologică.

## Rezultate: trei trasee de construcție identitară a profesorilor pentru justiție socială

### 1. „Maria și povestea inegalității” – conștientizare critică

Primul traseu răspunde la întrebarea „**Ce înțeleg viitorii profesori prin inegalități educaționale și justiție socială?**” Astfel, studenții au creat personaje fictive (Maria, Ilona, Liliana) care întruchipează marginalizarea, sărăcia și accesul limitat la oportunități, în special în mediul rural. Aceste personaje funcționează ca ancore semantice, permițându-le

personificarea inegalităților structurale. Unele narațiuni au construit un arc redemptiv – educația - „cheia către o viață mai bună” – subliniind meritul individual; altele au expus traiectorii nerezolvate, arătând cum sistemul îi dezamăgește pe elevi și profesori deopotrivă. În anumite velfies, apar voluntari sau profesori care oferă „a doua șansă”, iar în altele, studenții creează un arc narativ care conectează experiențe personale cu narațiunea generic construită a Mariei. Traseul deconstruiește o pendulare **între speranță și critică**, între narațiuni de autodepășire și recunoașterea limitărilor structurale.

## 2. „Te văd!” – recunoaștere, grijă și empatie

Al doilea traseu explorează întrebarea „**Cum cultivă viitorii profesori relații etice cu elevii afectați de inegalitate?**” Instanțele de velfies și asamblajele au evidențiat **prezența pedagogică**: cadrele îi arată pe participanți apropiindu-se fizic de camera video, adresându-se direct „Mariei” sau altor personaje și oferind gesturi de încurajare. Într-un velfie, o profesoară spune unei fete care experimentează excluziune socială: „Îți oferim o a doua șansă ca să construim împreună un viitor nou”, iar cadrul final o surprinde pe elevă ridicată, cu un dispozitiv în mână, simbolizând accesul recâștigat. Alte velfies dau voce recunoștinței – profesori sau foști elevi povestesc cum sprijinul unei învățătoare le-a schimbat destinul. Traseul evidențiază **empowerment-ul ca act relațional**: transformarea nu este doar despre „Maria”, ci despre solidaritatea și susținerea din comunitate, inclusiv actul de a împărtăși propriile cunoștințe, ceea ce întărește atât pe „donator”, cât și pe „beneficiar”. Mesajul central este că **a vedea și a recunoaște** sunt premisa pentru orice schimbare justă.

## 3. „Sunt un creator de viitor” – proiectarea unor viitoruri echitabile

Al treilea traseu răspunde la întrebarea „**Cum își construiesc viitorii profesori o identitate profesională care să combată inegalitățile?**” Aici, velfies se transformă din narațiuni descriptive în **apeluri la acțiune**. Secvențele încep adesea cu un moment de recunoaștere a eșecului sistemic (de exemplu, un băiat cu capul plecat lângă formula „ $2+2=5$ ”) și evoluează către declarații explicite: „Investind în educație, investim în viitor”. Dialoguri filmate în aer liber prezintă profesori care oferă „a doua șansă” și elevi care își afirmă dorința de a citi, de a-și părăsi satul și de a-și găsi un loc de muncă. Către final, mesajele devin colective – „Fiecare dintre noi poate contribui... micile noastre acțiuni pot avea un impact mare asupra viitorului comun”, „Viitorul este în mâinile noastre”. Traseul arată cum participanții se văd **nu doar ca observatori ai inegalității**, ci ca **designeri ai unor practici și politici echitabile**, în care educația devine un drept practic și un instrument de transformare comunitară.

## Discuție

Analiza arată că velfies pot sprijini pregătirea profesorilor pentru justiție socială prin trei moduri principale:

1. **Articularea inegalității prin narațiuni revelatorii.** Recrearea povestilor Mariei și a altor personaje a permis studenților să treacă de la explicații abstracte la imagini concrete ale sărăciei, segregării și accesului limitat. Aceste narațiuni nu au idealizat sărăcia; ele au ilustrat tensiunea dintre autodeterminare și bariere structurale. Astfel, participanții au internalizat ideea de **echitate puternică**, care presupune lupta împotriva sistemelor de opresiune, nu doar să ajutarea indivizilor.
2. **Dezvoltarea unei etici a recunoașterii și a grijii.** În multe velfies, relația profesor–elev este redată prin contact vizual, gesturi de sprijin și mărturii de recunoștință. Această dimensiune emoțională susține argumentul că **profesia didactică se definește ca fiind și relațională, și morală**, iar profesorii trebuie să valorizeze perspectivele elevilor marginalizați. Velfies arată că recunoașterea persoanelor precum Maria reprezintă un prim pas către justiție.
3. **Construcția unei identități profesionale orientate spre schimbare.** Participanții și-au asumat rolul de „**creatori de viitor**”, imaginând practici pedagogice care să ofere

acces, sprijin și speranță tuturor elevilor. Ei s-au angajat să investească în educație și să lupte împotriva inegalităților structurale, aliniindu-se astfel principiilor formării pentru justiție socială, care vizează pregătirea profesorilor să recunoască și să combată sistemele opresive.

Prin combinarea narațiunii, gestului și designului vizual, velfies îi ajută pe viitorii profesori să își **negocieze identitatea profesională**, să își exprime emoțiile și să își conecteze experiențele personale cu problemele sociale mai largi. Acest lucru răspunde apelurilor cercetării internaționale de a integra reflecția critică, contextul local și parteneriatele comunitare în formarea pentru justiție socială.

### **Limite și implicații**

Studiul are mai multe limite. El a fost realizat într-o **singură universitate și într-un singur curs**, deci rezultatele nu pot fi generalizate la toate programele de formare. Tehnologia velfies poate avantaja participanții cu abilități digitale și îi poate inhiba pe cei care nu sunt confortabili cu contexte de autoprezentare. De asemenea, analiza interpretativă nu urmărește inter-codare, ceea ce poate limita comparabilitatea rezultatelor. Materialele vizuale ridică probleme etice de vulnerabilitate și expunere; participanții au control asupra montajului, dar distribuția ulterioară a imaginilor trebuie gestionată cu atenție. Pentru a aborda aceste limite, viitoare cercetări ar trebui să exploreze **efectele pe termen lung** ale velfies asupra identității profesionale și să compare rezultate în diverse contexte culturale și instituționale. De asemenea, sunt necesare studii cantitative sau mixte, de mai mare amploare, care să examineze modul în care competențele dezvoltate prin velfies se transferă în practica didactică.

### **Concluzii**

Cercetarea arată că **velfies, ca practici multimodale și performative, pot contribui la educația pentru justiție socială** prin stimularea reflecției critice, exprimarea emoțiilor și consolidarea identității profesionale. Fiind auto-înregistrate, velfies pun în centru agenția participantului și încurajează implicarea activă în analiza inegalităților. Ele permit viitorilor profesori din România să recunoască barierele structurale, să cultive relații empatică cu elevii și să își asume rolul de agenți ai schimbării. Astfel, cercetarea sugerează că programele de formare a cadrelor didactice ar trebui să includă **activități multimodale și bazate pe multiliterății**, integrate în curriculum și în contact cu comunitățile locale, pentru a transforma discursurile despre echitate în practici reale.

## Manuscris transmis spre evaluare și publicare

Manuscrisul integral, intitulat *I See You, We Become: Velfies and the Embodied Becoming of Justice-Oriented Teachers*, se regăsește în Anexa 1 (versiunea revizuită). Acesta a fost transmis spre evaluare și publicare la Sage Open ( $FI_{2024} = 2.0$ ). Manuscrisul a fost recenzat, iar versiunea revizuită a fost retransmisă (a se vedea **Figura 3**).

**Figura 3**  
*Manuscris transmis spre publicare la Sage Open*

The image shows the Sage Open Author Dashboard interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for Home, Author (selected), Review, and Article Editor Center. Below the navigation is the 'Author Dashboard' section, which includes a sidebar menu with options like 'Submitted Manuscripts', 'Manuscripts with Decisions', 'Start New Submission', '5 Most Recent E-mails', and 'English Language Editing Service'. The main content area is titled 'Submitted Manuscripts' and contains a table with the following data:

STATUS	ID	TITLE	CREATED	SUBMITTED
<a href="#">Contact Journal</a> ADM: Editorial Office, SAGE Open • In Review	SO-25-5110.R1	I See You, We Become: Velfies and the Embodied Becoming of Justice-Oriented Teachers <a href="#">View Submission</a>	09-Nov-2025	09-Nov-2025

Below the dashboard is an email notification from Sage Open. The email header includes the sender 'Sage Open', recipients 'LOREDANA MARIA MANASIA (77132)', 'OLIVIA PISICA (107701)', and 'tache.marta', and the date 'Sun 2025-11-09 18:25'. The body of the email reads:

09-Nov-2025

Dear Dr. MANASIA:

Your revised manuscript entitled "I See You, We Become: Velfies and the Embodied Becoming of Justice-Oriented Teachers" has been successfully submitted online and is presently being given full consideration for publication in Sage Open.

Your manuscript ID is SO-25-5110.R1.

You have listed the following individuals as authors of this manuscript:  
 MANASIA, Loredana ; Pisciă, Olivia; Tache, Marta

Please mention the above manuscript ID in all future correspondence or when calling the office for questions. If there are any changes in your street address or e-mail address, please log in to ScholarOne Manuscripts at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/sageopen> and edit your user information as appropriate.

You can also view the status of your manuscript at any time by checking your Author Center after logging in to <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/sageopen>.

## Activitatea 4.2 Colectarea de date primare

În etapa 4 a proiectului, unul dintre obiectivele centrale a fost implementarea procedurii de colectare de date primare prin administrarea chestionarelor prevăzute în propunerea de proiect: **Emotional Patterns Questionnaire (EPQ)**, **Approaches to Learning Scale, Situated Goals Questionnaire (SGQ-SHS\_ro)** și **Chestionarul strategiilor de învățare în profunzime**. Acest demers a fost construit pe baza fundamentelor metodologice stabilite în etapa anterioară, în care instrumentele au fost adaptate, traduse și validate pentru utilizarea în contexte educaționale românești, cu accent pe nivelul preuniversitar.

## Contextul general

Aplicarea chestionarelor în etapa 4 s-a realizat **exclusiv în unități de învățământ liceal**, în conformitate cu strategia de eșantionare stabilită în propunerea de proiect. Astfel, am colaborat cu licee selectate pentru a asigura diversitate geografică și socio-economică, respectând criteriul ca o parte semnificativă dintre aceste instituții să provină din zone cu nivel crescut de vulnerabilitate educațională (indicele de vulnerabilitate > 3), criteriu explicit din proiectul inițial .

Înainte de aplicare, au fost obținute toate aprobările instituționale necesare, precum și consimțământul informat din partea elevilor și a părinților pentru minorii incluși în studiu. Procedura a respectat integral prevederile etice menționate în propunerea de proiect, cu accent pe confidențialitate, anonim și posibilitatea retragerii voluntare în orice moment.

## Procedura de eșantionare

Pentru a construi un eșantion reprezentativ, am utilizat ca bază lista oficială a unităților de învățământ eligibile în cadrul Programului Național pentru Reducerea Abandonului Școlar (PNRAS), finanțat prin PNRR. Această listă, publicată de [Ministerul Educației în 2021](#), include structuri școlare din toate județele, împreună cu informații detaliate privind mediul (urban/rural), nivelul de învățământ și indicii de vulnerabilitate educațională, precum și categoria de vulnerabilitate aferentă (ridicată/medie). Am selectat exclusiv unitățile care oferă nivel liceal — licee teoretice, tehnologice, agricole, de arte sau profesionale — identificabile prin denumirea care include termenii „Liceul”, „Liceul Tehnologic”, „Liceul Teoretic”, „Liceul de Arte” sau echivalente.

Eșantionarea a fost realizată printr-un procedeu stratificat în trei trepte, urmărind asigurarea reprezentativității la nivelul celor opt macro-regiuni ale României, al mediului de rezidență și al vulnerabilității educaționale. În prima treaptă, am stratificat populația de licee din listă pe macro-regiuni (Nord-Vest, Centru, Nord-Est, Sud-Est, Sud-Muntenia, Sud-Vest Oltenia, Vest, București–Ilfov). Din fiecare regiune au fost selectate licee astfel încât structura lor să reflecte, pe cât posibil, proporția reală a unităților liceale eligibile existente în listă.

În interiorul fiecărei macro-regiuni, am efectuat stratificarea pe mediul urban/rural, deoarece mediul reprezintă un determinant puternic al accesului la resurse educaționale și influențează direct expunerea elevilor la experiențe relevante pentru obiectivele proiectului. Am asigurat includerea atât a liceelor urbane, cât și a celor rurale, selecția fiind proporțională cu distribuția reală.

A treia treaptă a stratificării a vizat nivelul de vulnerabilitate educațională, categorisit în listă ca „ridicată” sau „medie”, pe baza indicelui numeric de vulnerabilitate calculat pentru fiecare unitate. În acord cu obiectivele proiectului — care vizează în mod special înțelegerea modului în care elevii internalizează emoțional inegalitățile — am decis includerea obligatorie, în fiecare regiune, a cel puțin unui liceu cu vulnerabilitate ridicată. Astfel, eșantionul final este construit din perechi și triade de licee care includ reprezentanți ai ambelor niveluri de vulnerabilitate, selectați în mod aleatoriu din lista oficială, cu menținerea ponderii naturale a fiecărei categorii.

Rezultatul final constă într-un eșantion de **24 de licee**, repartizate în mod uniform între macro-regiuni și selectate astfel încât să ofere o imagine fidelă a peisajului educațional românesc în ceea ce privește accesul la resurse, diferențele de mediu și nivelurile de vulnerabilitate. Acest eșantion permite realizarea analizelor planificate privind expunerea la inegalități educaționale, patternurile emoționale ale elevilor și strategiile de învățare asociate.

## Procedura de aplicare

Pentru fiecare instituție, am convenit cu conducerea școlii și cu profesorii coordonatori asupra unui interval dedicat în orar (de regulă, în cadrul orei de dirigiență). Cercetătorii proiectului s-au deplasat fizic la licee și au coordonat întreg procesul de administrare a instrumentelor.

În toate unitățile, aplicarea s-a desfășurat **în format creion-hartie**, pentru a asigura acces egal la instrumente indiferent de infrastructura digitală a școlii. Completarea chestionarelor a avut loc **sub supravegherea directă a membrilor echipei de cercetare**, procedură menționată și în propunerea de proiect, care specifică faptul că elevii vor completa instrumentele „în prezența cercetătorilor și a profesorilor” pentru clarificări și acuratețe.

Fiecare sesiune a început cu o scurtă prezentare a studiului, în care le-am explicat elevilor:

- scopul cercetării (fără a influența răspunsurile),
- faptul că nu există răspunsuri „corecte” sau „greșite”,
- caracterul anonim al răspunsurilor,
- modul de completare a fiecărui tip de item.

Această explicație introductivă a fost esențială pentru a crea o atmosferă de încredere și pentru a reduce eventualele bariere emoționale, mai ales în cazul elevilor proveniți din medii vulnerabile, unde anxietatea evaluativă poate fi mai ridicată – aspect abordat în literatura de specialitate și integrat în proiectul nostru.

În continuare, instrumentele au fost administrate într-o **ordine standardizată**, gândită pentru a preveni interferența cognitivă sau emoțională între scale:

1. EPQ – Emotional Patterns Questionnaire
2. Approaches to Learning Scale
3. SGQ-SHS\_ro
4. Chestionarul strategiilor de învățare în profunzime

Ordinea a fost stabilită pentru a permite elevilor să înceapă cu sarcini introspective (EPQ), continuând apoi cu scale motivaționale și strategii de învățare.

### Aplicarea Emotional Patterns Questionnaire (EPQ)

Conform proiectului, EPQ include prompturi situaționale specifice mediului școlar și familial, la care elevii trebuie să rememoreze situații similare și să evalueze intensitatea trăirilor lor emoționale folosind un set de 17 emoții .

În etapa 4:

- elevii au primit exemple suplimentare pentru a înțelege corect tipul de situație solicitat,
- cercetătorii au monitorizat ca prompturile să fie înțelese uniform,
- elevii au lucrat individual, în liniște, pentru a facilita introspecția.

EPQ a fost administrat primul deoarece necesită atenție emoțională focalizată, neinfluențată de citirea altor itemi motivaționali sau referitori la performanță.

### Aplicarea Approaches to Learning Scale

Această scală a vizat identificarea orientărilor elevilor spre o învățare superficială sau profundă. Instrucțiunile au fost formulate simplu, iar elevilor li s-a cerut să răspundă în raport cu modul obișnuit de învățare, nu cu o situație punctuală.

Completarea scalei a decurs rapid, elevii fiind familiarizați cu itemi de tipul „de obicei...”, „mă preocupă...” sau „încerc să...”.

## Aplicarea SGQ-SHS\_ro

În etapa 3, SGQ-SHS\_ro fusese deja tradus, adaptat și validat pe un eșantion similar de elevi din ciclul gimnazial și liceal, rezultând un instrument robust, cu o structură factorială stabilă și consistență internă excelentă ( $\omega$  și  $\alpha$  între 0.86–0.88).

În etapa 4:

- elevii au completat chestionarul în funcție de situațiile școlare tipice (pregătirea examenelor, rezolvarea temelor, prezentări în fața clasei etc.).
- cercetătorii au asistat elevii în înțelegerea situațiilor descrise, fără a influența răspunsurile.

SGQ-SHS\_ro a reprezentat o componentă esențială pentru analiza orientărilor motivaționale situaționale și pentru construirea modelelor ierarhice prevăzute în proiect.

## Aplicarea chestionarului strategiilor de învățare în profunzime

Ultimul instrument administrat a fost cel privind strategiile de învățare de profunzime, dezvoltat de Manasia & Parvan (2022). Elevii au răspuns la itemi referitori la:

- autoreglarea învățării,
- elaborarea și sintetizarea informației,
- utilizarea strategiilor vizuale,
- colaborarea socială în învățare.

Completarea acestui chestionar a necesitat timp suplimentar, deoarece mulți elevi au solicitat clarificări despre termeni (e.g. „strategie de elaborare”, „sinteză vizuală”). Cercetătorii au oferit exemple neutre, nelegate de performanță școlară, pentru a menține integritatea răspunsurilor.

La finalul fiecărei sesiuni:

- chestionarele au fost colectate individual,
- cercetătorii au verificat gradul de completitudine,
- eventualele omisiuni au fost semnalate elevilor doar pentru confirmare (nu pentru modificarea răspunsului),
- toate materialele au fost transportate și depozitate în condiții de confidențialitate.

Ulterior, datele au fost codificate, numerizate și integrate în baza de date centrală a proiectului, în conformitate cu procedura prevăzută în propunerea de proiect privind analiza multilevel (participanți–clasă–instituție).

## Activități de diseminare a rezultatelor cercetării

### Participare la Conferința Internațională de Statistică Aplicată – ICAS 2025

În perioada 21-22 noiembrie 2025 a avut loc Conferința Internațională de Statistică Aplicată – ICAS2025, organizată de Academia de Studii Economice, la Predeal. Articolul prezentat, *Modeling the Impact of Deep Learning Strategies and Other Factors on Student Engagement in Academia: A Structural Equation Approach*, a vizat rezultatele proiectului prezentate în Etapa 1 – a se vedea **Figura 4**.

#### Figura 4

Certificat de participare la Conferința ICAS 2025



#### Participare la Co-Learning Lab

În perioada 30 septembrie – 2 octombrie 2025, directorul de proiect a participat la evenimentul internațional *ITU Co-Learning Lab 2025*, organizat de *Istanbul Technical University – Center for Excellence in Education (ITU CEE)*. Evenimentul a avut loc la sediul ITU, în campusul Ayazağa, și a reunit cadre universitare, cercetători și experți în domeniul educației pentru sustenabilitate, inovației pedagogice și învățării interdisciplinare.

Participarea a vizat diseminarea rezultatelor obținute în fundamentarea velfies ca instrumente de cercetare și reflecție. În calitate de keynote speaker, Loredana Manasia a susținut prezentarea plenară intitulată *“Hopscotching Innovation in Higher Education Pedagogy: Blending Embodiment and Experience through Velfies”*, prin care a explorat modalitățile de integrare a experienței și corporalității în procesul educațional universitar, utilizând instrumente digitale creative. Prezentarea a generat un dialog amplu privind noile direcții în pedagogiile active și rolul abordărilor centrate pe reflecție.

Deplasarea a oferit un context favorabil consolidării relațiilor academice, contribuind la creșterea vizibilității internaționale a proiectului. Interacțiunile cu cercetători și cadre universitare din Turcia, Franța, Spania și Germania au permis conturarea unor perspective de colaborare pentru viitoare proiecte comune în domeniul educației și al formării cadrelor didactice.



## Participare la Conferința Globalization and Higher Education in Economics and Business Administration- GEBA 2025

În perioada 16-18 octombrie 2025, a avut loc Conferința Globalization and Higher Education in Economics and Business Administration - GEBA 2025, organizată de Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza, la Iași. Lucrarea prezentată explorează măsura în care numele hagiografice sunt markeri sociali ai statutului social și pot influența așteptările profesorilor și rezultatele elevilor.

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NOTES ON REGRESSION-BASED ADVERSARIAL EXAMPLES FOR TIME SERIES CLASSIFICATION	MELISA GORON, RODICA IOANA LUNG
METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING A WORD FREQUENCY-BASED INCIDENCE FACTOR FOR DETECTING AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED TEXTS IN ROMANIAN	GREAVU-SERBAN VALERICA
THE IMPACT OF ESG RATINGS ON CORPORATE PERFORMANCE	VICTORIA GROITA
PRIORITIZATION OF SDGS IN THE OPINION OF ECONOMICS STUDENTS	MARIA GROSU, CAMELIA CATALINA MIHALCIUC, DUMITRITA APOSTOL
DO INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INFLUENCE ROMANIA'S DEBT SUSTAINABILITY? A TIME-VARYING SEMI-PARAMETRIC PERSPECTIVE	ALEXANDRA CLAUDIA GROSU
GENERATIONAL COLLABORATION AND MOTIVATION AMONG A NURSING STAFF IN PSYCHIATRIC WARDS IN ISRAEL	ELIZABETH HANUKAYEV
EXPLORING THE DRIVERS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: AN SOR-BASED ANALYSIS OF PISA RESULTS	MARIANA HATMANU, CRISTINA CAUTISANU
SAINTS' GIVEN NAMES AND THEIR (LACK OF) EFFECT ON NATIONAL EXAMS OUTCOMES	CLAUDIU HERTELIU, LOREDANA MANASIA, MARCEL AUSLOOS, BOGDAN VASILE ILEANU, VICTOR DRAGOTA, IONEL JIANU

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## Anexe

Anexa 1: Articol *I See You, We Become: Velfies and the Embodied Becoming of Justice-Oriented Teachers*

*A nu se publica pe website. Manuscrisul se află în proces de peer review*

**I See You, We Become: Velfies and the Embodied Becoming  
of Justice-Oriented Teachers**

Journal:	<i>Sage Open</i>
Manuscript ID	SO-25-5110.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Research Article
Main Discipline or Subject Area:	Education
Keywords:	pre-service teachers, velfies, embodied pedagogies, multimodality, social justice education, funds of identity
Approaches:	Qualitative
Methods:	narrative inquiry, multimodal research
Abstract:	<p>This study examines how pre-service teachers conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities, and how they articulate these understandings through video-selfies (velfies)—short, self-recorded multimodal performances combining voice, gesture, image, and affect. Conducted within an undergraduate teacher education program in Romania, the research engaged candidates in embodied, narrative, and performative reflection on issues of inequality, recognition, empowerment, and professional identity. Using interpretative video analysis (IVA) informed by multimodal social semiotics, we identified and examined moments of narrative and affective density (“instances”) across seventeen velfies. These were assembled into three recurring pathways of justice-oriented becoming: Maria and the stories of inequality, I see you, and I am a future creator. The pathways reveal how participants moved from recognizing structural inequities, to enacting pedagogical presence and care, to imagining themselves as agents of educational transformation. Beyond generating research data, velfies functioned as embodied pedagogies, making visible the emotional, ethical, and relational dimensions of teaching for justice. The findings demonstrate that multimodal, performative reflection can deepen critical awareness, disrupt deficit narratives, and support the formation of justice-oriented teacher identities.</p>

## SO-25-5110.R1

Plain Language Summary Title:

Stories on Camera: How Velfies Prepare Teachers to Tackle Inequality

Plain Language Summary:

This study explores how future teachers—also called pre-service teachers—understand and express ideas about social justice in education. We asked participants to create short video-selfies, or velfies, in which they reflected on how education can both reproduce and challenge inequality.

The velfies allowed these future teachers to combine spoken words, images, gestures, and emotions to tell stories about their experiences and values. In many of the videos, they imagined characters like Maria, a child facing poverty or exclusion, and reflected on how teachers can recognize such students and help them build better futures. Other videos focused on the teachers themselves—how they want to care for learners, act ethically, and create classrooms where everyone feels seen and valued.

By analyzing seventeen velfies using interpretative video analysis, we found three main ways the participants made meaning: telling stories of inequality (Maria and the stories of inequality), expressing care and recognition (I see you), and envisioning educational change (I am a future creator).

The study shows that creating velfies can help future teachers see education differently—not only as knowledge delivery, but as a way to practice empathy, fairness, and transformation. Through these short, self-recorded videos, they learned to connect their personal experiences with wider social issues and to imagine what it means to become a justice-oriented educator.

**! Review Team:** This document includes a **tracked changes copy** and a **clean copy of the manuscript** as well as any **tables, figures, and author response files**.

## I See You, We Become: Velfies and the Embodied Becoming of Justice-Oriented Teachers

### Abstract

This study examines how pre-service teachers conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities, and how they articulate these understandings through video-selfies (velfies)—short, self-recorded multimodal performances combining voice, gesture, image, and affect. Conducted within an undergraduate teacher education program in Romania, the research engaged candidates in embodied, narrative, and performative reflection on issues of inequality, recognition, empowerment, and professional identity. Using interpretative video analysis (IVA) informed by multimodal social semiotics, we identified and examined moments of narrative and affective density (“instances”) across seventeen velfies. These were assembled into three recurring pathways of justice-oriented becoming: *Maria and the stories of inequality*, *I see you*, and *I am a future creator*. The pathways reveal how participants moved from recognizing structural inequities, to enacting pedagogical presence and care, to imagining themselves as agents of educational transformation. Beyond generating research data, velfies functioned as embodied pedagogies, making visible the emotional, ethical, and relational dimensions of teaching for justice. The findings demonstrate that multimodal, performative reflection can deepen critical awareness, disrupt deficit narratives, and support the formation of justice-oriented teacher identities.

**Keywords:** velfies; multimodal pedagogy; embodied pedagogy; social justice; pre-service teachers; teacher agency; professional identity;

### Plain language summary

This study explores how future teachers—also called pre-service teachers—understand and express ideas about social justice in education. We asked participants to create short video-selfies, or velfies, in which they reflected on how education can both reproduce and challenge inequality.

The velfies allowed these future teachers to combine spoken words, images, gestures, and emotions to tell stories about their experiences and values. In many of the videos, they imagined characters like *Maria*, a child facing poverty or exclusion, and reflected on how teachers can recognize such students and help them build better futures. Other videos focused on the teachers themselves—how they want to care for learners, act ethically, and create classrooms where everyone feels seen and valued.

By analyzing seventeen velfies using interpretative video analysis, we found three main ways the participants made meaning: telling stories of inequality (*Maria and the stories of inequality*), expressing care and recognition (*I see you*), and envisioning educational change (*I am a future creator*).

The study shows that creating velfies can help future teachers see education differently—not only as knowledge delivery, but as a way to practice empathy, fairness, and transformation. Through these short, self-recorded videos, they learned to connect their personal experiences with wider social issues and to imagine what it means to become a justice-oriented educator.

## Introduction

As socio-economic disparities deepen and educational systems face mounting demands, the call for social justice-oriented teacher education (SJTE) has become urgent. Preparing pre-service teachers (PSTs) to address systemic inequality necessitates not only instructional competence but also critical consciousness, emotional engagement, and an ethical commitment to transformation (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Le et al., 2024; Roegman et al., 2021). Despite this broad consensus, a persistent gap remains between espoused commitments to social justice and the lived experiences of PST learning—especially in under-researched national contexts. Romania exemplifies this gap: although policy initiatives such as *Educated Romania* (Romanian Presidency, 2021) and the subsequent laws of education promote inclusion, policy approaches to SJTE often reduce equity to technical interventions, neglecting structural issues such as (learning) poverty, segregation, or ethnic marginalization (European Commission. Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2024). Critical pedagogies are rarely integrated into pre-service programs, and teacher candidates receive limited support to reflect on their own positionalities (Hosseini et al., 2025).

As Gandolfi and Mills (2023) emphasize, justice-oriented teaching is not only conceptual but grounded in situated, relational practice—an orientation largely absent in Romanian teacher preparation, where justice is often framed as abstract rather than pedagogically actionable. Empirical studies are still limited, and those that do address related themes tend to focus on specific aspects such as vulnerability or targeted support for students with special educational needs, often through technical or compensatory measures (Kiss et al., 2023; Luștea, 2023), leaving broader questions of structural inequality and teacher agency underexamined. Comparative research in Eastern Europe suggests that pre-service teachers' beliefs about justice are often shaped more by inherited hierarchies and cultural norms than by transformative pedagogical experiences (Koliqi et al., 2023; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2015).

This study addresses that gap by examining how PSTs conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities—such as engaging in education practices to support economically disadvantaged, low-achieving pupils or early school leavers—through the creation of video-selfies, or velfies. Velfies are short, self-recorded videos that allow students to narrate, embody, and reflect upon their professional identities using multiple communicative resources (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020). They exemplify multimodality, understood as meaning-making through the orchestration of linguistic, visual, gestural, auditory, and spatial resources within situated activity (Jewitt, 2017; Kress, 2010). While velfies have gained attention as pedagogical tools (Sterling-Fox et al., 2020), their analytical potential as research instruments remains under-theorized (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Lepp et al., 2023). We argue that velfies make visible the affective, embodied, and relational dimensions of teacher identity formation—dimensions that are often inaccessible through traditional written or monomodal data.

Conceptually, our study draws on Fraser's (1998) tri-dimensional model of justice—redistribution, recognition, and representation—and Bernstein's pedagogic rights framework (Duarte et al., 2024), which together frame justice not only in material terms but also as a function of symbolic and participatory inclusion. We further ground the analysis in the funds of identity approach – FOI - (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), which situates identity as socially and narratively constructed through autobiographical and cultural resources. These frameworks allow us to examine how PSTs perform and position themselves in relation to social justice in education, both cognitively and affectively.

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3 Through an interpretive case study situated in an undergraduate PST education course,  
4 we investigate how PSTs conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize  
5 social inequalities. In so doing, we seek to contribute to the literature on multimodal justice  
6 praxis in teacher education, particularly in regions where such approaches remain emergent.  
7

8 The study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

- 9 • *RQ1*: What is the nature of pre-service teachers' understandings of educational  
10 inequalities and social justice?
- 11 • *RQ2*: How is teacher agency multimodally constructed in relation to addressing or  
12 mitigating socio-economic inequalities?
- 13 • *RQ3*: How do pre-service teachers build their professional identity in response to  
14 structural inequalities encountered in educational contexts?  
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16 To contextualize this inquiry, the following section reviews existing literature on SJTE,  
17 the role of multimodality in identity construction, and the emerging use of velfies as pedagogical  
18 and research tools.  
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## 20 **Literature review**

### 21 *Socio-Economic Inequalities and Social Justice in Teacher Education*

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25 SJTE is shaped by intersecting systems of power, privilege, and exclusion. Early liberal  
26 theories, such as Rawls' (1999) model of justice as fairness, emphasized equality as a moral  
27 imperative, yet largely framed injustice as the unequal distribution of resources. While  
28 influential, this distributive view has been critiqued for overlooking how cultural and symbolic  
29 exclusions structure educational experiences. Critical theorists have extended the conversation  
30 by foregrounding how injustice is also a matter of recognition—whose identities are valued—  
31 and representation—whose voices shape institutions. Fraser's (1998) triadic model of  
32 redistribution, recognition, and representation offers a powerful lens to analyze the complex and  
33 overlapping dimensions of inequality.  
34

35 In teacher education, Fraser's model helps unpack how well-intentioned concepts such as  
36 "inclusion" or "diversity" are frequently depoliticized. These terms are often framed as  
37 professional competencies or attitudes rather than indicators of structural critique and  
38 transformation (Dunn, 2024; Hosseini et al., 2024, 2025). In contrast, the equity tradition within  
39 teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022) insists on *justice as praxis*: a sustained  
40 pedagogical commitment to interrogating and disrupting systems of oppression. SJTE aims thus  
41 to support PSTs in confronting how privilege and marginalization shape learning and  
42 professional becoming. Hosseini et al. (2024) identify key commitments across SJTE programs:  
43 naming structural inequities, centering marginalized perspectives, engaging affect and  
44 reflexivity, and modeling justice through pedagogy. These principles reimagine teacher  
45 education as a transformative, dialogic space where professional learning is inseparable from  
46 social consciousness (Bondy et al., 2017, 2022; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).  
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49 Despite growing theoretical consensus, the global development of SJTE remains uneven.  
50 The field is dominated by scholarship from Anglophone contexts, particularly the United States,  
51 Canada, and Australia, while regions such as Eastern and Southern Europe remain  
52 underrepresented (Hosseini et al., 2024; Leite et al., 2023; Purdy et al., 2023). Even where  
53 reforms promote equity or inclusion, social justice is often treated as a rhetorical value or  
54 technical outcome, disconnected from broader institutional critique (Monge et al., 2022). Purdy  
55 et al. (2023) note that many European teacher education systems continue to prioritize  
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3 competency-based, instrumental models that marginalize ethical, relational, and critical  
4 dimensions of teaching. As a result, justice-oriented work is often positioned at the margins of  
5 formal curricula, relying on the commitment of individual instructors or isolated initiatives.

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7 Romania offers an especially relevant context for this kind of inquiry. Shaped by post-  
8 socialist reforms and transnational policy borrowing, Romanian teacher education has formally  
9 adopted inclusive language, yet often lacks the pedagogical depth and institutional commitment  
10 to meaningfully address systemic inequities. Manasia and Parvan (2025) show that many PSTs  
11 enter the profession with limited exposure to structural critiques of inequality and continue to  
12 hold deficit-based views of marginalized groups, particularly students at risk of poverty and  
13 those from rural backgrounds. Furthermore, inherited beliefs about merit, neutrality, and cultural  
14 hierarchy are rarely interrogated in coursework. These dynamics make it crucial to explore how  
15 justice becomes meaningful—or remains elusive—in the everyday thinking and identity work of  
16 Romanian PSTs.

17  
18 Understanding how PSTs navigate these tensions requires engaging with the affective  
19 and embodied dimensions of justice. As Gandolfi and Mills (2023) illustrate, teachers committed  
20 to social justice often confront competing demands between their ethical commitments and  
21 institutional constraints. These insights resonate with Matias's (2016) framing of *emo-social*  
22 *justice*, which emphasizes the interplay of knowledge, feeling, and self in justice-oriented  
23 teaching. Dunn (2024) similarly argues that teacher education must cultivate the emotional  
24 literacy and ethical awareness required to navigate discomfort, contradiction, and vulnerability in  
25 pursuit of equity. Without such engagement, equity discourses risk becoming affirmed in theory  
26 but disavowed in practice.

27  
28 Pedagogical frameworks like funds of knowledge and funds of identity (FoK/I) offer  
29 practical entry points for embedding justice in teacher preparation. These approaches challenge  
30 deficit views by centering students' lived experiences and cultural practices as sources of  
31 knowledge and agency (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Volman et al., 2023). When integrated  
32 into co-constructed, relational curricula, FoK/I strategies have been shown to improve student  
33 engagement, self-efficacy, and belonging (Volman et al., 2023). Yet their effectiveness depends  
34 on sustained critical reflection and collaboration. As Zhang-Yu et al. (2023) and Liao et al.  
35 (2022) caution, these approaches risk being reduced to superficial gestures if not grounded in  
36 deep partnerships with families and communities. In this sense, justice-oriented pedagogies  
37 require more than methodological tools—they demand shifts in stance, structure, and  
38 institutional culture.

### 39 40 41 42 *Emotional and Embodied Dimensions of Inequity in Teacher Education*

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44 Injustice is not only structural or cognitive; it is also emotional and embodied. Zembylas  
45 (2020) conceptualizes the “emotional geographies” of injustice, demonstrating how shame, fear,  
46 and inadequacy circulate in educational spaces, reinforcing hierarchies of worth and belonging  
47 (Safta-Zecheria et al., 2025). Jasini et al. (2019) and De Leersnyder et al. (2020) show that  
48 emotional repertoires are socially patterned: affiliative emotions like gratitude or compliance are  
49 often expected from marginalized individuals, while disengaging emotions—anger, frustration—  
50 are pathologized or suppressed within institutional norms.

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52 These dynamics are mirrored in teacher education. PSTs are typically encouraged to  
53 express empathy and care, yet emotions crucial for perceiving and naming injustice—such as  
54 anger, grief, or vulnerability—are frequently marginalized (Charteris & Gregory, 2024; Datnow  
55 et al., 2023). As Dunn (2024) argues, developing critical emotional literacy—the ability to  
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3 examine how emotions are entangled with power—is essential for justice-oriented practice.  
4 Without this, social justice discourse becomes less pedagogically transformative. This focus  
5 stands in contrast to dominant models of teacher education that continue to privilege knowledge  
6 to practice approaches (Donath et al., 2025). In this context, Purdy et al. (2023) highlight how  
7 current European teacher education policy frameworks often center on technocratic  
8 accountability, sidelining more expansive, value-driven models that engage teachers as  
9 emotional, relational, and moral agents. Against this backdrop, emotional and embodied  
10 pedagogies offer a corrective and necessary condition for meaningful teacher formation.  
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### 13 *Multimodality in PST education*

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16 In the past decade, multimodal approaches have gained traction in initial teacher  
17 education (ITE), often promoted as tools to foster inclusion, engagement, and reflective practice  
18 (Almumen, 2023; Barton & Ryan, 2014; Cook & Chisholm, 2025; Salo & Kajamies, 2024). Yet  
19 their implementation remains uneven. A persistent tension concerns whether multimodality is  
20 understood as a technical extension of literacy into visual and digital domains or as a  
21 transformative stance that reconfigures how knowledge, identity, and power operate in  
22 education. Many programs adopt the former, offering digital storytelling or infographics as  
23 creative supplements to written reflection while leaving text-based norms and assessment  
24 hierarchies intact (Ajayi, 2017; K. A. Mills & Exley, 2014). This risks aestheticizing  
25 multimodality, treating alternative forms as decorative rather than epistemic (Jewitt, 2017; Kress,  
26 2010).  
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28 In contrast, a growing body of work frames multimodality as a relational, ethical, and  
29 affective mode of knowledge-making. Drawing on a/r/tography and ecological theories, Brooke  
30 et al. (2024) conceptualize multimodality as grounded in embodied practice and situated within  
31 complex institutional and social ecologies (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004; Springgay, 2008).  
32 Similarly, Pandya and Ávila (2014) and Almumen (2023) show how multimodal composition  
33 enables teacher candidates to bring their cultural histories and emotional experiences into  
34 professional reflection—surfacing the affective labour of reconciling personal and institutional  
35 expectations. However, scholars caution that without critical framing, multimodal work can  
36 flatten complexity or reproduce dominant narratives under the guise of creativity (C. Walsh,  
37 2023; Z. Walsh et al., 2020). To avoid this, intentional scaffolding and dialogic critique are  
38 essential. When facilitated well, multimodal reflection becomes a form of emotional inquiry,  
39 where vulnerability, discomfort, and identity tensions become generative rather than threatening  
40 (Martínez Carratalá & Miras, 2025; Smith, 2022). Collaborative interpretation and structured  
41 feedback can transform emotional friction into insight, fostering solidarity and deeper reflection  
42 (Brooke et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2020).  
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45 Despite its potential, multimodality's connection to social justice remains underexplored.  
46 Most research highlights creativity and engagement (Kress, 2010) but rarely investigates how  
47 multimodal practice shapes equity-focused teaching. Ávila and Pandya (2014) link critical digital  
48 literacies to analyses of race, migration, and language politics, while Volman et al. (2023),  
49 building on funds of knowledge (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), illustrate how multimodal work  
50 bridges home-school divides. These works reposition multimodality as a justice praxis centered  
51 on participation, recognition, and epistemic plurality (Jacobs & Rowsell, 2020; Kuby & Rowsell,  
52 2017). Still, structural barriers remain. Standardized curricula, disciplinary silos, and monomodal  
53 assessment regimes privilege written literacy and marginalize embodied or visual modes (Walsh  
54 et al., 2020). Teacher educators often lack the support needed to assess multimodal work with  
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3 theoretical depth (Ajayi, 2017), reinforcing its status as enrichment rather than core pedagogy.  
4 Recent scholarship counters this by advocating for embodied, justice-oriented multimodality that  
5 foregrounds affect, ethics, and cultural sustainability (Brooke et al., 2024; Kuby & Rowsell,  
6 2017). When approached this way, multimodality enables teacher candidates not only to  
7 represent learning but to rehearse new relational and epistemic possibilities—acts of listening,  
8 witnessing, and reimagining authority (Jacobs & Rowsell, 2020).

9  
10 This reconceptualization grounds the present study. We approach velfies—short, self-  
11 recorded video reflections—as multimodal practices that enact these principles. Velfies extend  
12 reflection beyond text into embodied, performative engagement, integrating voice, gesture, and  
13 spatial context. In doing so, they invite PSTs to experience and articulate justice as a lived,  
14 emotional, and relational practice.  
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### 16 17 *Learning about Social Justice via Embodied Pedagogies: From Social Media to Pedagogical* 18 *Velfies* 19

20 Recent scholarship has examined how teachers engage with social justice through digital  
21 media, particularly on social platforms. Shelton et al. (2022) explored culturally relevant  
22 professional learning on *Instagram*, revealing how teacher-influencers curate equity-focused  
23 content and communities of practice. Davis and Yi (2022) critiqued the commercialization of  
24 teacher activism online, highlighting tensions between authentic advocacy and platform-driven  
25 branding, while Peterson (2024) showed how algorithmic visibility and aesthetic appeal shape  
26 what counts as “activist” teaching.  
27

28 However, such scholarship centers on public-facing performances—spaces where  
29 teachers negotiate visibility, branding, and algorithmic pressures. By contrast, the use of velfies  
30 (*video-selfies*) in PST education operates in a pedagogical, private, and reflective context. Within  
31 this setting, velfies function as low-tech, self-recorded videos through which PSTs narrate and  
32 perform their developing professional and ethical identities (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025). As part of  
33 a broader digital turn in reflective practice, velfies enable candidates to document learning in  
34 ways that are situated, embodied, and affectively charged. Empirical research demonstrates that  
35 such video-based reflection enhances self-awareness and pedagogical noticing (Tripp & Rich,  
36 2012) and provides access to the tacit, emotional dimensions of teacher identity formation  
37 (Gaudin & Chaliès, 2015; Lepp et al., 2023).  
38

39 Unlike written journals or public social media posts, pedagogical velfies engage an  
40 expanded semiotic repertoire—facial expression, gesture, voice, rhythm, and spatial  
41 positioning—allowing PSTs to make visible what is often silenced in teacher talk: emotion,  
42 uncertainty, and embodied knowing (Esteban-Guitart, 2023; Jewitt, 2017). This multimodal  
43 expressiveness is particularly relevant for SJTE, where affective tension, empathy, and  
44 vulnerability are integral to unlearning deficit discourses (Brooke et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2020).  
45 Whereas social-media activism privileges visibility and curation, velfies in coursework boost  
46 authenticity, reflexivity, and exploratory meaning-making within a protected learning  
47 environment (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025).  
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49 Drawing on Ciolan and Manasia’s (2025) typology, velfies cluster into *echo* and  
50 *performative* modes. Echo velfies foreground introspection—static framing, slow pacing, direct  
51 address—while performative velfies employ dynamic movement, spatial transitions, and  
52 collaborative expression. Both modes are interpretive rather than hierarchical, offering distinct  
53 ways of articulating professional becoming. Cook and Chisholm (2025) found that such  
54 embodied video reflection helped PSTs connect social-justice concepts with lived classroom  
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3 realities. Similarly, Lepp et al. (2023) observed that first-time video reflection provoked  
4 discomfort and self-consciousness but ultimately deepened relational understanding when  
5 facilitated through trust and feedback. These findings underscore that velfies, though emotionally  
6 demanding, cultivate the critical emotional literacy essential to justice-oriented practice (Dunn,  
7 2024).

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9 The rationale for using velfies as research instruments stems from their multimodal  
10 affordances. As performative tools, they generate data that capture both what PSTs articulate and  
11 how they express affective and embodied stances toward social justice. Video affords visibility  
12 into embodied hesitation, confidence, and empathy—dimensions inaccessible through text alone  
13 (Chilton & Leavy, 2020). Analyses of teacher-education videos have shown how gesture, gaze,  
14 and pacing reveal shifts in pedagogical stance (Gaudin & Chaliès, 2015; Loughran & Berry,  
15 2005), validating velfies as robust multimodal data sources. At the same time, lessons from  
16 social-media scholarship remain instructive. Davis and Yi (2022) warn against the  
17 commodification of advocacy, while Shelton et al. (2022) highlight inequities in digital capital—  
18 insights relevant to PSTs' varied comfort with self-representation. Accordingly, velfie pedagogy  
19 must emphasize process over production, valuing sincerity, emotional honesty, and critical  
20 framing above technical polish. As Lepp et al. (2023) suggest, scaffolding, guided feedback, and  
21 collaborative viewing help normalize vulnerability and transform video reflection into a  
22 collective, ethical practice rather than a performative exercise.

23  
24 This study offers empirical insight into how PSTs in Romania used velfie-based  
25 reflection to navigate and perform justice-oriented becoming, extending current understandings  
26 of reflective practice through affective and embodied modalities.  
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### 29 30 **Inquiry context**

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32 The study was conducted within *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory*, a  
33 14-week core course in an ITE program at a large public university in Romania. The course was  
34 redesigned using a curriculum grounded in experiential and embodied pedagogies (Anonymized  
35 & Anonymized, 2024). It integrated challenge-based learning and velfies (Ciolan & Manasia,  
36 2025; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020), organized around seven macro-level educational challenges  
37 such as digitalization, inclusive curriculum design, and education for sustainability. Each unit  
38 opened with a fictionalized vignette authored by the instructors (Anonymized, 2025), drawing on  
39 personal experience and literary inspiration to surface themes of inequality, memory, hope, and  
40 belonging. These vignettes were rooted in traditions of narrative inquiry and reflective pedagogy  
41 (Barkhuizen, 2011; Huber, 2013; Leavy, 2015), and were complemented by optional cultural  
42 prompts—curated films, novels, and music—that extended emotional engagement and critical  
43 reflection (see Figure 1).  
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**Figure 1**  
*Recommendations featured in the course*



**Source:** Anonymized Author 1 and Anonymized Author 2 (2024, p. 71)

**Note.** The titles in this image appear in Romanian and are translated as follows: *Dimineți în Jenin* (*Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa), *Neliniște* (*Disquiet* by Zulfü Livaneli), the film *Roma* (directed by Alfonso Cuarón), and the song *Canción sin miedo* (*Song Without Fear* by Vivir Quintana). Translations are provided for clarity.

A cap activity was the Week 12 LEARNATHON, a hackathon-style event where student teams addressed real-world educational problems. Velfies served as a core reflective practice throughout the course. PSTs were invited to create short, self-recorded video responses to the open-ended prompt *Education changes lives*—a phrase deliberately framed to prompt reflection on how education can reproduce or disrupt systemic inequality. The task was scaffolded through an instructor-created tutorial velfie (see Figure 3), which modeled how educational experiences may shape individual or collective trajectories marked by privilege or exclusion. This tutorial explicitly guided PSTs to draw on personal, relational, or community-level experiences in which education intersected with social advantage or marginalization. To support authenticity and expressive freedom, no technical or aesthetic standards were imposed; instead, students were encouraged to respond creatively, using voice, body, and space to convey affective depth and critical insight.

Velfies enabled PSTs to embody emotion, articulate emerging stances on justice, and navigate the tensions between personal conviction and professional formation. Drawing on these artifacts, the study analyzes how PSTs expressed and negotiated their understandings of the

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3 power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities within a curricular space  
4 where such reflection remains emergent.  
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## 6 7 **Method**

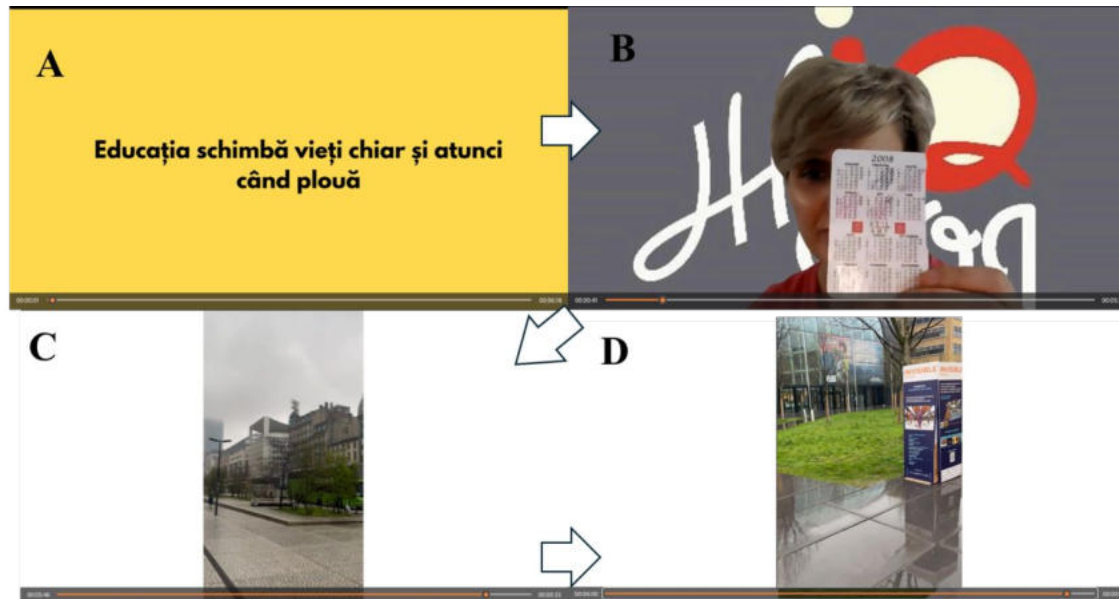
### 8 9 *Researcher reflexivity*

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11 We approached this study as teacher educators and qualitative researchers with firsthand  
12 experience facilitating discussions on inequality, justice, and belonging in pre-service teacher  
13 education (Bondy et al., 2022). Our team spans education sciences, linguistics, and law, bringing  
14 distinct disciplinary lenses to our analysis. Two members of the research team were course  
15 instructors who facilitated the course and were familiar with the institutional and pedagogical  
16 context. The third researcher, who did not participate in course delivery, brought an outsider  
17 perspective and acted as an interpretive auditor, reviewing velfies and analytic memos  
18 independently. This configuration supported reflexive dialogue and strengthened interpretive  
19 credibility through critical distance. We recognize that our dual role as instructors and  
20 researchers offered opportunities for trust-building, but also carried risks of reinforcing power  
21 asymmetries. Rather than claim neutrality, we viewed our positionality as constitutive of the  
22 research process.  
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24  
25 To model reflective and embodied inquiry, each of us recorded a personal velfie at the  
26 beginning of the course—excluded from analysis—which illustrated how our educational  
27 trajectories shaped our orientations toward justice (*Figure 2*). These recordings functioned as  
28 both instructional tools and reflexive acts, foregrounding our affective investments in the work.  
29 During analysis, we wrote analytic memos to capture thematic insights and emotional  
30 responses—moments of resonance, resistance, and discomfort. Throughout, we remained  
31 attentive to the ethics of representation, continually questioning whose voices were amplified  
32 and how our interpretive decisions shaped justice narratives. Although formal ethics approval  
33 was secured (see Method section), we approached reflexivity as an ongoing ethical practice—  
34 integral to both our analytical process and our relational engagement with the data (Holmes et  
35 al., 2022; Savolainen et al., 2023).  
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**Figure 2**

*Selected frames from a researcher's velfie illustrating affective memory and mobility*



**Contextual description:** The velfie opens with a textual slide (A) declaring that "Education changes lives even when it rains". Holding a student calendar from 2008 (B), the researcher anchors the narrative in a formative moment abroad. Rain-soaked footage of Brussels streets (C) and an installation titled *Invisible* (D) frame the story, as the song *Il pleut sur Bruxelles* becomes the guiding metaphor of the entire experience.

**Excerpt:** "Each day marked in that calendar was a step toward my visibility. That's what education does—it doesn't just inform, it makes you seen."

### *Study participants and data collection*

All 64 PSTs enrolled in *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory*, a core undergraduate course in a Romanian ITE program, participated in a velfie task integrated into the course design. Students chose to work individually or in self-selected small groups, resulting in the creation of 18 velfies: 2 produced individually and 16 collaboratively by 62 participants. One video was excluded due to technical issues, yielding a final dataset of 17 velfies submitted for analysis. Each video was assigned a unique code (VEL\_001 to VEL\_018) and ranged in length from 92 to 340 seconds, demonstrating varied expressive formats such as direct-to-camera narration, peer dialogue, and performative storytelling.

The velfies were created between March and May 2024 in response to the open-ended prompt *Education changes lives*, which invited personal, relational, or systemic reflections on how education can reproduce or disrupt inequality (see the *Inquiry context* for reference). To support this task, PSTs received an asynchronous tutorial video introducing four key production steps—selecting a theme, crafting a script, choosing a location, and considering basic technical setup. The tutorial emphasized authenticity and emotional engagement over production polish (Figure 3). Although the tutorial was asynchronous, in-person seminars offered opportunities for clarification and discussion. Velfies were submitted via Moodle or a secure video-sharing platform and stored in compliance with institutional data protection protocols.

While other course artifacts were generated (e.g., Learnathon presentations), this study focuses exclusively on the velfies. All contributors provided written informed consent for the use of their work in the research, and ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee (Approval No. 10533, November 2023).

### Figure 3

*Selected screenshots from the velfie tutorial video illustrating the four production steps*



**Note.** The Romanian text in the frames corresponds to the steps outlined in the video tutorial on velfie creation: (A) Pasul 1: Alegeți tema – *Step 1: Choose your theme*; (B) Pasul 2: Creați un scenariu – *Step 2: Create a script*; (C) Pasul 3: Alegeți locația – *Step 3: Choose the location* (D) Pasul 4: Echipamentul – *Step 4: Equipment*

### Analysis

This study employed interpretive video analysis (IVA) (Knoblauch et al., 2014) to investigate how PSTs reflected on and performed their understandings of the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities. IVA, grounded in interpretive sociology and video ethnography, does not treat video as objective data to be coded but as a form of social performance requiring contextual, situated interpretation. Meaning is not extracted through abstraction but reconstructed from within participants' lived experiences and expressive practices. As Knoblauch and Schnettler (2012) noted, IVA centers on participants' "first-order constructs"—their own understandings and expressions—which researchers interpret through theoretically informed, second-order constructs.

To analyze how meaning was conveyed in the velfies, we combined IVA with a multimodal social semiotic framework (Jewitt & Price, 2012), enabling us to examine how gesture, voice, spatial organization, and visual design worked together to produce layered meaning. Our analytic approach integrated four interrelated dimensions, drawn from Ciolan and Manasia's (2025) velfie typology and expanded through multimodal inquiry frameworks (Q.

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3 Wang & Hannes, 2020): (1) *sequentiality* (the temporal unfolding of meaning through rhythm,  
4 silence, and verbal cues), (2) *spatial configuration* (bodily orientation, framing, distance), (3)  
5 *interactional dynamics* (gaze, address, and engagement), and (4) *production aesthetics* (editing,  
6 lighting, and color, which shape tone and atmosphere).  
7

8 Analysis unfolded in *four stages*. First, each of the 17 velfies was reviewed—individually  
9 and collaboratively—to identify segments marked by expressive intensity or affective charge.  
10 These were designated as *instances*. In line with multimodal video analysis (Jewitt & Price,  
11 2012), we defined instances as short, semiotically dense episodes marked by shifts in  
12 interactional order or expressive conventions. We identified 52 such instances (10–60 seconds;  
13  $M_{length} = 28.6$ ), each representing a condensed multimodal expression of justice-oriented  
14 reflection.  
15

16 *Second*, each instance was transcribed using a *multimodal matrix* (available in OSF  
17 [repository](#)) detailing speech, gesture, gaze, spatial composition, sound, and affect. These were  
18 interpretive reconstructions attentive to how modes interacted over time. For example, slow  
19 pacing, minimal movement, and dim lighting connoted introspection and critique, while direct  
20 gaze, expansive gestures, and saturated color schemes produced atmospheres of connection or  
21 hope. Meaning was read from the affective-emotive whole, interpreted through recursive  
22 viewing and team dialogue.  
23

24 *Third*, we conducted collaborative analysis through five iterative sessions. Here, selected  
25 instances were revisited, interpretations refined, and visual-narrative assemblages constructed.  
26 These assemblages (e.g., Figure 4, Figure 10)—comprising stills, multimodal transcripts, and  
27 annotations—enabled us to trace how meaning cohered across sequences. This practice reflects  
28 Knoblauch’s emphasis on “slow analysis,” allowing emergent interpretation to stay grounded in  
29 participants’ expressive logic rather than externally imposed codes (Knoblauch et al., 2015). One  
30 member of the research team, who was not involved in course delivery, acted as an external  
31 reviewer. She independently viewed all velfies, examined selected multimodal transcripts, and  
32 reviewed analytic memos during the collaborative sessions. Her outsider position enabled critical  
33 questioning of emerging interpretations, surfaced alternative perspectives, and supported  
34 reflexive dialogue within the team.  
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37 In the *final stage*, we examined how instances connected across velfies by mapping their  
38 narrative content, multimodal features, and ethical orientations. We noticed that certain  
39 expressive and thematic elements tended to cluster together—often appearing in similar  
40 sequences across different videos. To explore these patterns systematically, we grouped  
41 instances based on recurring combinations of narrative form (e.g., fictional voice, direct address),  
42 visual framing (e.g., camera proximity, gaze direction), affective tone (e.g., critical, empathic,  
43 hopeful), and articulated stance (e.g., critique of injustice, recognition of learner, projection of  
44 future self). These groupings were refined through iterative comparison and discussion, and  
45 developed into three recurring trajectories of meaning-making, which we termed *pathways*. We  
46 named the pathways based on the dominant focus of their sequences: “Maria” (focused on  
47 structural injustice and fictionalized figures), “I See You” (centered on recognition and relational  
48 presence), and “Future Creator” (emphasizing agency, aspiration, and pedagogical change). Ten  
49 velfies followed the full sequence of these three frames, five concluded with the second, and two  
50 deviated.  
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### *Methodological integrity*

We maintained methodological integrity by ensuring a consistent connection between the study's framework and its research inquiries, as detailed by Levitt et al. (Levitt et al., 2021). Our objective—to investigate how pre-service educators express social justice in education through velfies—required close attention to variations in expressive forms, emotional tone, and narrative composition. We validated data adequacy by examining the complete collection of velfies created, which encompassed both echo responses and more dynamic, multimodally rich pieces, as outlined in the *Literature review*. This thorough inclusion enabled us to interact with a wide array of justice-centric expressions. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee (Approval 10533/2023), and all participants willingly provided written consent for the usage of their videos, still images, and interpretative excerpts. Reflexivity was upheld throughout the research process through shared memos, positional debriefings, and collaborative interpretation sessions, in alignment with interpretive methodologies that emphasize researcher positionality (Savolainen et al., 2023). Analytical procedures were directed by a multimodal mapping matrix that outlined how meaning was formed across sequential, spatial, gestural, and technological aspects. Sections of increased semiotic intensity—designated as instances—were assembled into interpretive collections to enable cross-modal and cross-case analysis. In accordance with interpretive video hermeneutics (Knoblauch, 2014), the analysis included multiple viewings, layered annotations, and the pinpointing of instances (Jewitt & Price, 2012). Divergent interpretations were viewed as analytically beneficial and incorporated into the interpretive process. To enhance transparency and traceability, all analytical resources—including the matrix template, transcripts, and assemblages—are accessible in the [OSF repository](#).

### **Findings**

We present the findings as three meaning-making pathways that reflect how velfies expressed PSTs' evolving justice orientations and professional identities. Each pathway—*Maria and the ubiquitous story of inequality*, *I See You!*, and *I Am a Future Creator*—represents a distinct configuration of critique, care, and aspiration as articulated through narrative, gesture, and design.

#### **Maria and the ubiquitous story of inequality**

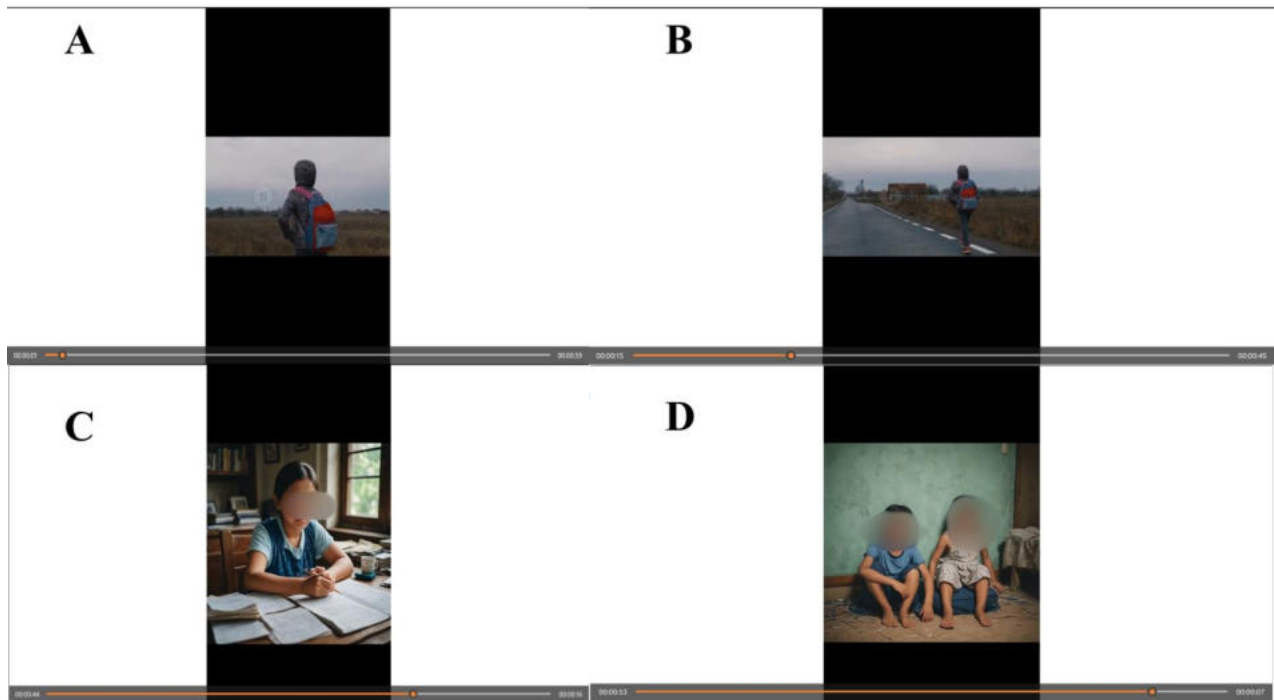
In response to RQ1—*What is the nature of pre-service teachers' understandings of educational inequalities and social justice?*—one meaning-making pattern emerged: the construction of fictionalized, emotionally resonant characters, most notably Maria, as recurring narrative anchors. Across 11 instances, Maria appears as a semiotic figure through whom pre-service teachers articulate their engagements with marginalization, poverty, and limited access to opportunity—particularly in rural or under-resourced contexts. In other velfies, the names of Ilona and Liliana are introduced to symbolize underprivileged children and youth.

These characters operate as focal points that allow pre-service teachers to articulate understandings of inequality through situated, emotionally resonant narratives. In VEL\_007, Seq\_1 (Figure 4), the narrator explains: *'Her options were limited. Maria knew that to escape poverty, she had to continue learning.'* The tone is reflective and didactic, constructing a clear

moral arc anchored in personal perseverance. The sequence constructs a linear success narrative, underlining persistence and self-education in overcoming adversity. While the tone is hopeful, it also subtly reinforces meritocratic assumptions—education as a matter of individual will—without attending to deeper structural constraints. However, the transition from personal advancement to community engagement offers a nuanced expansion of justice as relational and collective. The use of third-person narration (rather than first-person testimony) introduces narrative distance, allowing Maria to become a symbolic figure—an archetype of transformation through education.

**Figure 4**

*Assemblage of Maria's journey in VEL\_007, representing rural marginalization and educational aspiration.*



**Contextual description:** Maria's trajectory in *VEL\_007* visualizes the emotional and structural contours of educational inequality. Frames A and B show her walking alone through a rural landscape, symbolizing isolation and limited access. Frame C presents a moment of focused study, framing education as both aspiration and burden. Frame D returns to scenes of poverty, reinforcing the material constraints that persist despite individual effort. The sequence constructs a redemptive arc while subtly gesturing toward the enduring presence of structural barriers.

**Excerpt:** 'Her options were limited. Maria knew that to improve her life, she had to find a way to continue learning. Determined not to give up, she pursued every opportunity: taking free online courses, studying on her own, climbing slowly, one step at a time. Despite the obstacles, her passion for learning never faded. Maria managed to improve her skills and open up new horizons.'

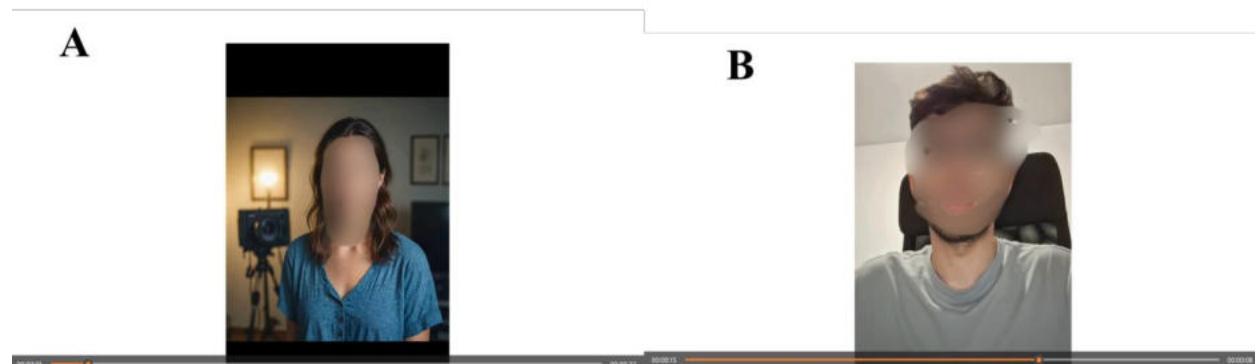
**Source:** *VEL\_007*, Seq\_1\_VEL\_007, 01:01 – 02:02

This framing intensifies in *VEL\_007*, Seq\_2 – see Figure 5, where the line *Education was the key that opened doors to a better life* signals belief in education as inherently transformative—a sentiment supported visually by static, composed settings that suggest calm

and resolution. The assemblage reinforces this message through a deliberate shift in visual voice: Frame A presents Maria speaking in the first person, positioning the statement as lived experience and grounding it in an intimate, personal register. Frame B then introduces the narrator, whose voice and stable framing operate as an authoritative echo, amplifying and legitimizing Maria's words. The pairing of these perspectives—embodied testimony followed by narrative affirmation—creates a layered rhetorical effect, blending personal conviction with external validation. Yet this framing risks overemphasizing individual effort as the primary path through structural barriers.

### Figure 5

*Assemblage from VEL\_007, Seq\_2, showing the shift from Maria's first-person testimony to the narrator's reinforcement of the message*



**Contextual description:** In Frame A, Maria speaks directly to the camera, embodying the line “Education was the key that opened doors to a better life” as a personal statement. Frame B introduces the narrator, whose direct gaze and static framing underscore and validate Maria's claim, visually reinforcing the belief in education as inherently transformative.

**Excerpt A:** ‘Education was the key that opened doors to a better future for me. I know that every child deserves this chance, and I will keep fighting for it.’

**Excerpt B:** ‘For Maria and for all those like her, education is now hope. Education is the key! Support access to education for all children!’

At the same time, other velfies introduce more complex or contradictory readings of justice. In VEL\_008, Seq\_1, the tone shifts: “*With a heavy heart, Maria accepted her fate and took up work in the fields.*” The affective register here is melancholic, and the narrative halts without resolution or recovery. This moment disrupts the redemptive arc by presenting Maria's resignation as both a personal and structural loss. Maria is neither saved nor triumphant; instead, she embodies deferred aspiration and institutional neglect.

**Figure 6**

*Assemblage from VEL\_008, Seq\_1, showing the two narrators delivering the voice-over that recounts Maria's trajectory*



**Contextual description:** In frames A and B, each narrator addresses the camera directly, their steady, front-facing posture mirroring the solemnity of the script

**Excerpt A:** ‘With a heavy heart, Maria accepted her fate and began working alongside her family in agriculture.’

**Excerpt B:** ‘Without access to education, her dream of becoming a doctor seemed more distant. Yet, she did not lose hope and continued reading and studying on her own using old books she found around the village’

This growing awareness of systemic entanglement becomes more explicit in the second instance—VEL\_008, Seq\_2—where the narrator observes: “*The teachers failed to truly help Maria. But the system failed them, too.*” The scene develops as a pointed juxtaposition: on one side, a portrayal of structural incapacity that constrains teachers’ agency; on the other, the sudden appearance of a volunteer who recognizes Maria’s potential and offers direct support. In the narration—“*With their help, Maria was able to return to school*”—the volunteer’s intervention functions as a decisive narrative pivot, recasting the possibility of justice as emerging from community-based, non-formal actors rather than from the institutional apparatus meant to ensure it. The affective tone is hopeful yet shaded by regret, acknowledging both the transformative potential of human connection and the insufficiency of formal educational structures.

A distinct articulation of this relational framing appears in VEL\_004, Seq\_2, which introduces Ilona as a figure of educational exclusion. The teacher character states: “*We offer a second chance to people like Ilona—to support them in building a new future.*” As illustrated in Figure 7, this narrative unfolds through a sequence of visual and embodied shifts. In Frame A, Ilona is seated in isolation beneath a tree—withdrawn and grounded, echoing the narrative claim that the system “didn’t give [her] a first chance.” The teacher’s entrance in Frame B and their direct encounter in Frame C mark a pivotal turning point. In Frame D, Ilona appears upright and in motion, holding a tablet—symbolizing renewed access and tentative transformation. This visual transition from stillness to movement is portrayed as enabled through recognition and relational attention.

**Figure 7***Ilona as a figure of exclusion and imagined transformation*

**Contextual description:** In VEL\_004, Seq\_2, Ilona is depicted as both excluded and potentially recoverable. Frame A shows her seated beneath a tree, withdrawn, embodying the claim that “the system didn’t give [her] a first chance.” By Frame D, she stands in motion with a tablet, signaling renewed engagement. This transformation is mediated through the teacher figure, who enters in Frames B and C, not as a savior but as one who recognizes and relates. The shift from stillness to movement, isolation to participation, underscores transformation as grounded in pedagogical recognition and care.

**Excerpts:** A: ‘Without knowing how to read, it’s impossible to find a job or build a better life.’

B: ‘We offer a second chance to people like Ilona—to support them in building a new future.’

D: ‘I learned how to read, and I was accepted to the best high school in Bucharest.’

**Source:** VEL\_004, Seq\_2, 00:32–00:53

In contrast to earlier performative yet fictionalized depictions, in VEL\_012 Maria appears as a real participant, interacting directly with the narrator and another pupil. This blurs the boundary between constructed character and lived subject, embedding the narrative of inequality in documented, co-present reality. The connection is made explicit in the narrator’s self-disclosure: “*As a small addition to Maria’s response, I am the godmother of this girl and I truly wished she could learn more if school doesn’t allow it. I wanted her to have a good future, and not one lacking education. I decided to offer her extra lessons like math and Romanian. When she wants, I also teach her dance, and in the future I’d like to teach her to sing or even play an instrument.*” (VEL\_012, Seq\_3, 03:10 – 04:00).

Maria’s additional appearances further consolidate recurring patterns of inequality. In VEL\_010, Seq\_2 (01:20–02:07), the re-entry script is stated explicitly: “She began to attend school.” In VEL\_010, Seq\_3 (02:10–02:35), redirected aspiration is named directly: “Maria’s dream was to become an engineer.” Inclusion paired with ongoing barriers recurs in VEL\_013, Seq\_1 (00:30–00:40), while VEL\_008, Seq\_3 (02:15–02:45) closes on persistence amid deferred

goals. A system-facing register frames VEL\_009, Seq\_4 (02:20–03:00), and a peer/meta voice answers Maria in VEL\_012, Seq\_5 (03:10–04:00). Across these instances, modal instances covary with stance: third-person narration clusters with institutional commentary; first-person address underwrites perseverance narratives; movement sequences index transition; static, front-facing shots sustain a reflective tone.

### Figure 8

*Assemblage of Maria's appearances illustrating re-entry, aspiration, and persistence across varied registers*



**Contextual description:** This assemblage follows Maria's story from institutional constraints (A) and civic calls for systemic reform (B) to schooling amid material scarcity (C) and a resilience-focused conclusion (D). Across segments, personal testimony intertwines with structural critique, framing education as both a right and a catalyst for change.

**Excerpts:** A – “We observe the lack of time school allocates for proper education and the pressure placed by the Ministry on teachers to complete the curriculum and teach children everything necessary. Despite their young age, the girls are unaware of the learning gaps being created; B – “Romania needs a paradigm shift.” / “Education is a matter of human dignity.”; C – “She didn't always have books or notebooks.”; D – “Her story is a testament to resilience... access to education... can transform lives.”

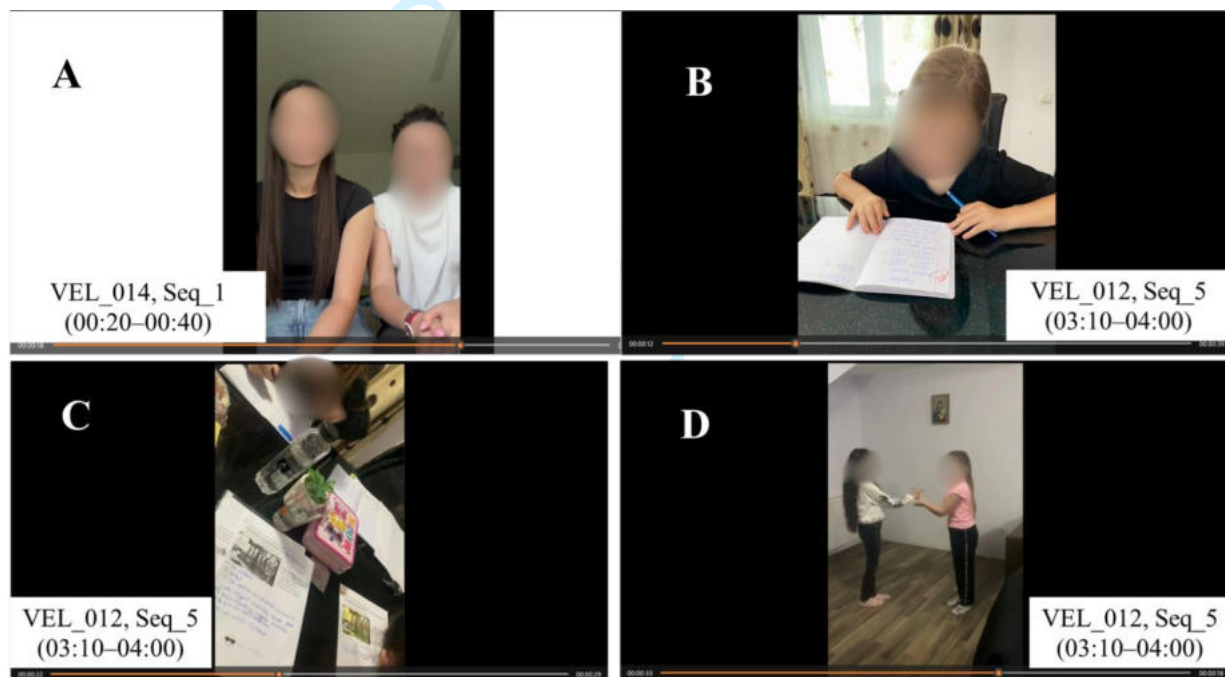
### I see you! Recognition, Empowerment, and Pedagogical Presence

In addressing RQ2—*How is teacher agency multimodally constructed in relation to addressing or mitigating socio-economic inequalities*—our analysis examines recognition and empowerment as interrelated components of the “I see you” meaning-making path. Within this framing, velfies depict teacher agency through multimodal enactments of *recognition*—the sustained witnessing of learners and affirmation of their worth—and *empowerment*—the fostering of learners' capacity to act, often through mentorship, shared learning, and expanded horizons.

Recognition is constructed through self-disclosure, attentive presence, and the provision of personalized support (Figure 9). In one instance, a narrator, speaking plainly from a domestic setting, commits to continuing academic and creative lessons for a pupil she identifies as her goddaughter (VEL\_012, Seq\_5). Minimalist production, and vocal tremors convey sincerity, situating teacher identity in both care and agency while foregrounding intergenerational support as a counterbalance to institutional gaps. In another example, a teacher is depicted noticing and nurturing a student's artistic potential (VEL\_014, Seq\_1). The warm, affirming tone and stable, centered framing construct the teacher as a benevolent guide, but the narrative follows a familiar "teacher-as-rescuer" arc—positioning justice as individual mentorship rather than systemic transformation. Across these examples, recognition is mediated through intimate framing, controlled affect, and relational investment, producing powerful images of care while leaving broader structural inequities unchallenged.

### Figure 9

*Assemblage illustrating recognition as pedagogical presence*



**Contextual description:** **Frame A** narrates a teacher nurturing a pupil's artistic potential, framing justice as individual mentorship. **Frames B–D** show a godmother–teacher supplementing formal schooling with academic and creative lessons, blending familial care with pedagogical commitment.

**Excerpts:** **A** – ‘During an art class, Ms. Elena notices Andrei's potential and starts giving him attention and encouragement. She offers him a safe space to express his creativity and explore his passion for art.’; **B–D** - As a small addition to Maria's response, I am the godmother of this girl and I truly wished she could learn more if school doesn't allow it. I wanted her to have a good future, and not one lacking education. I decided to offer her extra lessons like math and Romanian. When she wants, I also teach her dance, and in the future I'd like to teach her to sing or even play an instrument.

In this path, *empowerment* emerges as a relational, cyclical process in which the act of receiving support becomes a catalyst for offering it to others. Rather than being an abstract ideal,

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3 empowerment is made visible through concrete encounters—moments where agency is affirmed,  
4 practiced, and passed on.

5 In VEL\_003 (Figure 10, frame A), a teacher guides Liliana, a student enrolled in a  
6 remedial programme at her former teacher’s urging. The scene culminates with Liliana reading a  
7 line from Malala Yousafzai’s *We Are Displaced*—“When I close my eyes and think of my  
8 childhood, I see pine forests and snow-capped mountains.” The camera lingers as the teacher  
9 gently caresses her hair, the embodied gesture reinforcing the spoken act as both an achievement  
10 and an opening into possibility. Thus, empowerment is staged as recognition, intimacy, and  
11 affirmation against the backdrop of early school leaving.

12 As we observed in VEL\_009 (Figure 10, frame B), this principle takes on an  
13 intergenerational dimension. Mrs. Ionescu, the teacher figure, recounts her journey from  
14 childhood poverty to becoming a teacher: “I had to work hard to get into school and then into  
15 university... now I’ve come back to help children in similar situations.” Delivered directly to  
16 camera in a static outdoor setting, her testimony reframes personal struggle as a resource for  
17 motivating others, foregrounding the moral duty to “give back” as a defining element of  
18 professional identity.

19 Empowerment also appears as a reflexive practice. In VEL\_011 (Figure 10, frame C), the  
20 narrator reflects, “When I started to share what I had learned with others, I realized how  
21 powerful that was—not just for them, but for me too.” This framing dissolves the teacher–learner  
22 binary: knowledge circulates, and in sharing, the giver deepens her own understanding.

23 Finally, VEL\_014 (Figure 10, frame D) locates empowerment in metaphor and spatial  
24 transformation. Moving from the “darkness” of hardship to the light of an art gallery, the narrator  
25 closes with gratitude to a teacher whose belief made her dreams tangible. The shift in location—  
26 from an intimate interior to a public cultural space—visually encodes the expansion of horizons,  
27 suggesting that empowerment is as much about access to new worlds as it is about personal  
28 resilience.  
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**Figure 10**

*Assemblage illustrating empowerment as collaborative engagement and expanded horizons*



**Contextual description:** This assemblage shows empowerment through mentorship, personal testimony, shared learning, and cultural exploration. **A** depicts a teacher guiding a student in a remedial program. **B** features a teacher sharing her journey from poverty to giving back to her community. **C** presents a reflection on how teaching others deepens one's own learning. **D** captures a shift from personal narrative to an art gallery visit, symbolizing growth and new possibilities.

**Excerpts:** **A:** 'When I close my eyes and think of my childhood, I see pine forests and snow-capped mountains'; **B:** 'Let me tell you what I went through. I came from a very poor family and had to work hard to get into school and then into university. That's how I became a teacher and now I've come back to help children in similar situations.'; **C:** 'When I started to share what I had learned with others, I realized how powerful that was—not just for them, but for me too.'; **D:** 'Education is about finding light in the midst of darkness. Thanks to a special teacher and her unconditional support, I discovered that art can be a refuge amid a tumultuous world. Thank you, Ms. Elena, for showing me that dreams can become reality when someone believes in you.'

### **I am a future creator**

In relation to RQ3—*How do pre-service teachers build their professional identity in response to structural inequalities encountered in educational contexts?*—this meaning-making path frames teaching as a forward-projecting act. Thus, the velfies served to narrate current practice and to envision the teacher's role in shaping equitable futures. The future creator orientation often begins with direct, declarative commitments to action, gradually moving from an acknowledgment of systemic failure to the enactment of practical support and collective advocacy. As observed in VEL\_001, Seq\_3 (Figure 11, frame A), the absence of speech and ambient sound shifts the viewer's attention to the image of a boy with his head bowed beside the digitally superimposed "2 + 2 = 5." This silent moment operates as a visual metaphor for systemic educational failure, signaling both cognitive disruption and emotional withdrawal, establishing the moral urgency that underpins later commitments to change.

Building on this urgency, VEL\_002 (Figure 11, frame B) introduces a structured, reasoned appeal. Two narrators take turns outlining education's transformative benefits—personal development, health awareness, poverty reduction, and emotional intelligence—framing these as investments in the future. The static indoor setting, steady framing, and absence of visual embellishment keep the focus on the clarity and sincerity of the spoken message, positioning teaching as a deliberate, well-informed, and future-oriented practice.

This forward-looking stance is further embodied in VEL\_004, Seq\_2 (Figure 11, frame C), where a staged dialogue between “Maria” and “Ilona” dramatizes the teacher's role in opening “a second chance” for learning. The use of an outdoor setting and empathetic body language positions education as mobile, accessible, and grounded in human connection. Ilona's scripted aspirations—“I want to learn to read... leave this village, and find a job”—anchor educational justice in concrete, life-changing outcomes rather than abstract ideals.

The trajectory culminates in VEL\_009, Seq\_3 (Figure 11, frame D), where a direct outdoor appeal links personal transformation to societal responsibility: “Let us invest in education to offer all young people the chance for a better life.” The minimal gestures and steady eye contact maintain a persuasive tone, transforming individual stories like Cristina's into a collective call for systemic commitment.

### Figure 11

*Assemblage of velfie sequences articulating commitment to education as a transformative and justice-oriented force*



**Contextual description:** Frame A uses silence, the bowed head of a boy, and the chalked error “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ” to symbolize systemic failure. Frame B delivers a structured monologue on education's personal and societal benefits. Frame C stages a supportive teacher–learner exchange, framing justice as sustained accompaniment. Frame D offers a direct call to invest in education as a collective responsibility.

**Excerpts:** **A** – ‘Parents’ illiteracy and lack of education limit their ability to support their children’s schooling’; **B** – ‘Education is a powerful tool that can transform individual lives and make a positive impact on society as a whole. Investing in education is, in fact, investing in the future.’; **C** – ‘We offer a second chance to people like Ilona—to support them in building a new future.’ /

‘You’re not alone—we’re here to support you.’; **D** – ‘The story of Cristina proves that it is never too late to change your destiny through education. Let us invest in education to offer all young people the chance for a better life.’

A further development of this orientation appears when the imagined future centers on *learner self-direction*. The assemblage in **Figure 12** (frames A and B) voices the story of Edi, now older, who speaks in the first person, acknowledges the teacher’s formative role, and claims his own trajectory. The brighter palette, close/mid shots, upright posture, and steady gaze stage maturation and agency, while gratitude marks recognition as the scaffold for autonomy. As observed in VEL\_015, Seq\_3 (frame C), the sequence shifts to a broaden agency from “I” to “we”: “Each of us can contribute to education—... simply encouraging children around us to pursue their studies.” / “Our small actions can have a big impact on lives and our shared future.” / “Teachers’ actions can change the future.” Surfaced in VEL\_013, Seq\_2 (frame D), collective empowerment is a catalyst for deconstructing inequalities: “We can build a better future for all children...”. The decisive tone hands agency to teachers collectively.

**Figure 12**

*Assemblage of velfie sequences where pre-service teachers transfer agency to future learners*



**Contextual description:** The assemblage shows pre-service teachers framing learners as active agents in their own education. In frames A–B, (“Don’t give up!”) transitions to a classroom role-play modeling encouragement. Frame C offers direct, personal reassurance, while frame D delivers an outdoor call to persistence and inclusion. Together, they present teacher agency as fostering learner self-determination. **Excerpts:** **A** – The text in Romanian reads “Don’t give up!”; **B** - “I am here because of you and of the other great teachers.”; **C** - “Each of us can contribute to education—through volunteering, donations, or simply encouraging children around us to pursue their studies.”/ “Our small actions can have a big impact on lives and our shared future.”/ “Teachers’ actions can change the future.”; **D** – ‘We can build a better future for all children in Romania. The future is in our hands!’

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3 The production of velfies provided means for pre-service teachers to consider and  
4 performatively voice the co-construction of future and the collective de-construction of  
5 inequalities. Unlike *Maria and the ubiquitous story of inequality*, which centers on narrating  
6 barriers, or *I see you!*, which foregrounds recognition and empowerment in the present, *I am a*  
7 *future creator* meaning making path positions the teacher as an active designer of futures—  
8 futures where equity is embedded in pedagogy, sustained through enduring relationships, and  
9 enacted in partnership with learners.  
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## 11 Discussion

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14 This study examined how pre-service teachers conceptualize the power of education to  
15 challenge and delegitimize social inequalities—such as supporting economically disadvantaged,  
16 low-achieving pupils or early school leavers—through the creation of velfies as part of ITE  
17 coursework. These velfies functioned simultaneously as pedagogical tools and as multimodal  
18 research artifacts. Our design was grounded in the understanding that learning is inherently  
19 multimodal (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), and that justice-oriented reflection emerges through verbal  
20 reasoning and embodied, aesthetic expression. Using IVA (Knoblauch, 2014) and multimodal  
21 analysis (Jewitt & Price, 2012), we identified and assembled meaning-dense instances to  
22 examine how participants expressed, performed, and projected justice-oriented identities. In what  
23 follows, we discuss the three emergent meaning-making pathways and reflect on the pedagogical  
24 significance of velfies as embodied practices.  
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### 28 **Maria speaks for many: How PST Represent Structural Injustice**

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30 Across the velfies, narratives of inequality frequently crystallized around recurring  
31 fictional characters—most notably Maria—who embodied intersecting disadvantages such as  
32 poverty, geographic isolation, and systemic neglect. These characters functioned as semiotic  
33 anchors, allowing PSTs to externalize abstract concepts of injustice into situated, emotionally  
34 resonant stories. Unlike prior research that identified a tendency among teacher candidates to  
35 individualize inequality (Hosseini et al., 2024; Lemley, 2014), these representations  
36 foregrounded structural barriers—such as underfunded schools, teacher shortages, and unequal  
37 access—thus aligning with Fraser’s (1998) theory that justice must encompass both  
38 redistribution and recognition.  
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40 The recurrence of Maria as a shared figure of exclusion suggests a deliberate pedagogical  
41 move, echoing Avraamidou’s (2020) argument that repeated character use supports symbolic  
42 coherence and narrative identity work. In this sense, storytelling emerged not only as an  
43 expressive modality but as a critical pedagogical strategy. As Picower (2021) and Cochran-Smith  
44 et al. (2016) contend, narrative practices can disrupt deficit framings and create openings for  
45 structural critique. These findings echo broader calls in teacher education to move beyond  
46 surface-level engagement with diversity toward deeper justice-centered pedagogies (C. Mills &  
47 Ballantyne, 2016; Purdy et al., 2023).  
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49 Yet, a recurring tension persists: although PSTs identified systemic injustice, the  
50 interventions they proposed were predominantly localized and individualistic. Figures like  
51 godparents, volunteer mentors, or idealized teachers were cast as the primary agents of change.  
52 This reflects international critiques that social justice in teacher education often remains confined  
53 to “pedagogies of care” or “rescue,” where structural transformation is substituted by acts of  
54 personal compassion (Cerna et al., 2021; C. Mills, 2013; Zeichner, 2019). Such narratives risk  
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3 reproducing neoliberal tropes of heroic individualism that obscure the need for institutional  
4 accountability and collective action (Purdy et al., 2023).

5 The velfies' multimodal affordances intensified the affective and political force of these  
6 stories. Visual choices—like Maria walking alone through a rural village or Ilona's stillness  
7 beneath a tree—were not arbitrary. These curated assemblages (Rowell & Pahl, 2015) reflect a  
8 growing justice literacy among participants, one aligned with Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017)  
9 notion of inequality as historically produced and institutionally maintained. In this sense, the  
10 velfies allowed PSTs to move beyond performative reflections, enacting instead what Lemley  
11 (2014) describes as the "naming" of structural violence—a foundational step toward justice-  
12 oriented praxis.  
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### 15 **Recognition and agency: Pathways of justice-oriented becoming**

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18 Two interconnected meaning-making pathways—*I See You* and *I Am a Future Creator*—  
19 illustrate how PSTs cultivated recognition and agency through their velfie-based reflections.  
20 These trajectories show how multimodal storytelling can serve as a site for professional identity  
21 rehearsal and pedagogical positioning, supporting the development of justice-oriented  
22 dispositions (Gandolfi & Mills, 2023; Purdy et al., 2023).

23 In the *I See You* pathway, recognition emerged as a foundational pedagogical stance—an  
24 affirmation of students' dignity, struggles, and aspirations. Through direct gaze, steady framing,  
25 and empathetic address, participants enacted 'ethical witnessing' (Picower, 2021). Rather than  
26 offering abstract commentary, PSTs engaged in imagined dialogues with students, positioning  
27 themselves relationally. These enactments resonate with Fraser's (1998) conception of  
28 participatory parity and Esteban-Guitart and Moll's (2014) emphasis on affirming funds of  
29 identity. The *I Am a Future Creator* pathway extended this recognition into projective agency  
30 (Priestley et al., 2015), as PSTs imagined education as a catalyst for transformation. Velfies in  
31 this category emphasized outcomes such as literacy, civic engagement, and social mobility. In  
32 VEL\_009, for example, a participant's public call to "invest in education" linked personal  
33 experience to societal responsibility, suggesting a vision of teaching as advocacy. These  
34 narratives align with Datnow et al.'s (2023) argument that teacher education must connect micro-  
35 level care with macro-level critique.  
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38 These pathways served as identity rehearsal mechanisms, enabling participants to test and  
39 refine emerging professional orientations. From a FOI perspective (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), the  
40 movement from recognition to agency marks a shift from deficit-oriented interventions toward  
41 capacity-building. This trajectory reflects Markus and Nurius's (1986) theory of possible selves  
42 and aligns with evidence that emotionally engaged, reflective learning fosters professional  
43 alignment with equity goals (Almumen, 2023; Cerna et al., 2021). The embodied and aesthetic  
44 form of velfies—through gesture, voice, spatial framing—enabled participants to communicate  
45 meaning beyond verbal reasoning (Perry, 2023; Springgay & Freedman, 2012).  
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48 This process signals a broader reorientation in teacher education: from content delivery to  
49 reflexive transformation. As discussed by Donath et al. (2025), practices that emphasize situated,  
50 emotionally resonant learning promote deeper internalization of inclusive values and ethical  
51 commitments. Velfies supported this by allowing PSTs to move beyond theoretical engagement  
52 with inequality, instead rehearsing justice-oriented teaching identities in contextually grounded,  
53 embodied ways (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025).  
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55 Finally, the two trajectories reveal that recognition and agency are co-constitutive  
56 dimensions of socially just teaching. Recognition grounds pedagogical relationships in respect  
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and attentiveness; agency projects those relationships toward transformation. Together, they underscore that SJTE is iterative, affective, and relational—shaped by how teachers imagine, position, and perform their roles in relation to others (Masud & Marsoobian, 2024; Volman et al., 2023; Z. Walsh et al., 2020).

### **Velfies as pedagogies that bring body in**

The velfies produced in this study illustrate how ITE can enact embodied pedagogy—approaches that position the body as central to learning, knowing, and teaching (Bondy et al., 2022; Perry, 2023; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; C. Walsh, 2023). Embodiment encompasses the teacher candidate's physical presence and the affective intensities of gaze, voice modulation, posture, and gesture, which, as Walsh (2023) argues, carry epistemic weight in justice-oriented pedagogy. Velfies represent a digital evolution of participatory visual methodologies—such as Photovoice (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017; C. Wang & Burris, 1997)—but their performative, time-based nature transforms them into dynamic identity enactments (Choi & Rho, 2021; Lyle et al., 2020). Through the layering of verbal narrative, bodily expression, and environmental cues, participants constructed self-authored professional identities grounded in lived experience, community knowledge, and aspirations for justice (Esteban-Guitart, 2023; Zhang-Yu et al., 2023).

The embodied nature of velfies also highlighted the affective labor of becoming a justice-oriented educator—labor that requires emotional attunement, ethical reflexivity, and vulnerability. As Matias (2016) and Bondy et al. (2022) argue, engaging with inequity in teacher education is cognitively and emotionally demanding, often surfacing discomfort, fragility, or anger (Avraamidou, 2020). Our analysis found that such emotional registers were often embedded in bodily presence—leaning forward to convey urgency, averting the gaze to express empathy, or pausing to allow visual resonance.

### **Limitations**

This study is situated within a single institutional and cultural context, which may limit the transferability of findings to other ITE programs. Its design, embedded in one course and involving a single cohort of PSTs, fosters analytical depth over generalizability and does not allow for comparative or longitudinal claims. As a method, velfies privilege participants who are digitally fluent and comfortable with self-presentation, potentially marginalizing those less at ease with performative modes (Almumen, 2023; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010). Aesthetic and technical decisions—such as framing, editing, or setting—may also reproduce dominant cultural norms, constraining the range of multimodal expression (Kress, 2010; Rowsell & Pahl, 2015).

While IVA enables in-depth exploration of embodied meaning-making (Knoblauch, 2014), its interpretive orientation resists standardization and does not pursue inter-coder agreement, which may affect transparency and comparability (Jewitt & Price, 2012). Finally, the personal and visual nature of velfies raises enduring ethical challenges around vulnerability, emotional exposure, and the circulation of digital artifacts—issues widely noted in participatory visual research (Choi & Rho, 2021; Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Wang & Burris, 1997). These considerations shaped what participants chose to disclose and how they positioned themselves within the task.

## Conclusions and implications for future research and practice

This study highlights the pedagogical value of multimodal, embodied practices—specifically velfies—in supporting SJTE. Future research should explore how these practices influence teacher identity and praxis over time, particularly in varied institutional and cultural contexts (Cerna et al., 2021; Gandolfi & Mills, 2023). Longitudinal studies are needed to examine whether such reflexive, arts-based tasks facilitate shifts from awareness to sustained action (Almumen, 2023; Picower, 2021). Moreover, aligning professional learning models with multimodal approaches can foster more holistic engagement by attending to emotion, motivation, and ethical stance as drivers of pedagogical change (Kennedy, 2018; Priestley et al., 2015).

At the policy level, the findings suggest a move toward value-centered frameworks that recognize teaching as emotional, relational, and moral work (Purdy et al., 2023; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). Explicit knowledge alone is insufficient; countering the dominance of rescue pedagogies requires systemic attention to inclusion and equity (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; C. Mills, 2013). Within practice, embedding arts-based, reflexive modalities in ITE programs can deepen PSTs' sense of agency and moral responsibility, especially when coupled with safeguards that ensure emotional safety and diverse representation (Choi & Rho, 2021; Avraamidou, 2020).

To evaluate SJTE effectively, research must move beyond measuring knowledge acquisition to examine the development of professional dispositions, including willingness to change, self-efficacy, and critical justice orientation (Datnow et al., 2023; Masud & Marsoobian, 2024). As the *I Am a Future Creator* trajectory illustrated, PSTs' transformative intentions must be matched by opportunities and support to enact change. Finally, this study echoes calls for greater methodological rigor in teacher education research. As noted by Nīmante et al. (2025) and Kowalski et al. (2020), there remains a scarcity of large-scale, longitudinal, and comparative studies that include both teacher and student outcomes. Evaluating the transfer of ITE into classroom practices requires more robust designs, particularly those capturing complex, nonlinear processes across multiple dimensions (Donath et al., 2025; King et al., 2023). In an era of accelerating educational reform, understanding how teachers internalize and apply social justice principles is essential for building responsive, equitable systems of learning.

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## I See You, We Become: Velfies and the Embodied Becoming of Justice-Oriented Teachers

### Abstract

This study ~~investigates~~examines how pre-service teachers conceptualize ~~and perform~~ justice in the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities, and how they articulate these understandings through ~~the creation of~~ video-selfies (velfies). ~~Within a~~—short, self-recorded multimodal performances combining voice, gesture, image, and affect. Conducted within an undergraduate teacher education program, in Romania, the research engaged candidates engaged in multimodal embodied, narrative, and performative self-representations to explore reflection on issues of inequality, recognition, empowerment, and professional identity. ~~Drawing on interpretive~~Using interpretive video ~~hermeneutics~~analysis (IVA) informed by multimodal social semiotics, we ~~analyzed meaning-rich~~identified and examined moments of narrative ~~or~~and affective density (*i.e.*, (“instances) ~~and~~”) across seventeen velfies. These were assembled ~~frames that revealed into~~ three recurring pathways of meaning-making justice-oriented becoming: *Maria and the stories of inequality, I see you, and I am a future creator*. ~~These~~The pathways ~~sequence~~reveal how participants ~~recognized system~~emoved from recognizing structural inequities, ~~articulated to enacting~~ pedagogical presence and ~~recognition, and envisioned futures where learners become active care, to imagining themselves as~~ agents of change-educational transformation. Beyond ~~serving as~~generating research data, velfies also functioned as embodied pedagogies, highlighting the role of voice, gesture, and affect in shaping teacher agency. While offering powerful opportunities for multimodal reflection, velfies also raise methodological and making visible the emotional, ethical challenges, including unequal digital fluency and heightened personal exposure. This study contributes to scholarship on and relational dimensions of teaching for justice. The findings demonstrate that multimodal pedagogy and justice-oriented teacher education by showing how embodied, performative ~~practices~~reflection can ~~foster~~deepen critical awareness, disrupt deficit narratives, and support the becoming formation of justice-oriented ~~teacher~~teacher identities.

**Keywords:** velfies; multimodal pedagogy; embodied pedagogy; social justice; pre-service teachers; teacher agency; professional identity;

### Plain language summary

This study explores how future teachers ~~think about inequality in education and how they see their role in creating fairer schools~~. To do this, we used *velfies*—short video-selfies that allowed students to tell stories, act out situations, and reflect on their own ideas of teaching.

We analyzed 17 velfies made by—also called pre-service teachers during their studies. These videos showed powerful stories, such as “Maria,” a character representing children who face poverty, exclusion, and lack of support in schools. Through these stories, students highlighted how inequality is not just about individual struggles but also about larger systemic problems—understand and express ideas about social justice in education. We asked participants to create short video-selfies, or velfies, in which they reflected on how education can both reproduce and challenge inequality.

At the same time, the videos also revealed how students see themselves as The velfies allowed these future teachers. Some emphasized recognizing and supporting learners (“I see you”), while others projected themselves into the future as change-makers (“I am a future

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3 creator”). These two orientations showed a continuum—from acknowledging learners’ present  
4 struggles to imagining ways to empower them for the future.

5 ~~By combining~~combine spoken words, images, gestures, and emotions, ~~velfies gave body~~  
6 and voice to these reflections. They allowed students to move beyond theory, experimenting with  
7 to tell stories about their experiences and values. In many of the videos, they imagined characters  
8 like *Maria*, a child facing poverty or exclusion, and reflected on how teachers can ~~act with care,~~  
9 responsibility recognize such students and help them build better futures. Other videos focused on  
10 the teachers themselves—how they want to care for learners, act ethically, and ~~creativity~~create  
11 classrooms where everyone feels seen and valued.

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13 Our findings suggest ~~By analyzing seventeen velfies using interpretative video analysis,~~  
14 we found three main ways the participants made meaning: telling stories of inequality (*Maria*  
15 *and the stories of inequality*), expressing care and recognition (*I see you*), and envisioning  
16 educational change (*I am a future creator*).

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18 The study shows that ~~creating velfies can be powerful tools in teacher education: they~~  
19 help students reflect on inequality, ~~help future teachers see education differently—not only as~~  
20 knowledge delivery, but as a way to practice empathy, fairness, and transformation. Through  
21 these short, self-recorded videos, they learned to connect their personal experiences with  
22 larger ~~wider~~ social issues, and ~~rehearse to imagine~~ what it means to ~~be an~~become a justice-  
23 oriented educator ~~committed to justice~~.

## Introduction

At a time when global crises intensify long-standing educational disparities, the stakes for teacher education have never been higher. Preparing pre-service teachers to recognize and challenge systemic injustice requires more than mastering instructional strategies—it demands the cultivation of critical consciousness, reflective practice, and an commitment to equity and transformation (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Le et al., 2024; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021; Roberts, 2021; Salo & Kajamies, 2024). Despite a growing consensus around the need for justice-oriented teacher education, research continues to highlight the disconnect between stated commitments to social justice and the lived realities of pre-service teacher learning (Bondy et al., 2017; Zeichner, 2019). A key challenge remains: *how can teacher education meaningfully engage pre-service teachers in exploring their beliefs, identities, and roles as agents of educational change?*

This study responds to the challenge by investigating the use of *velfies*—short, self-recorded video performances (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025)—as both pedagogical tools and multimodal research instruments (Regueira et al., 2023; Rush & Stott, 2014; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020). In this dual role, *velfies* supported learning, reflection, and identity construction while also offering insight into pre-service teachers' understandings of social justice. Specifically, this research explores *how pre-service teachers conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities, and how they express this through multimodal narrative and performative self-representation.*

While initial and continuous teacher education in Romania has been shaped by policy shifts toward evidence-based practices (David, 2025; Educated Romania: National Vision and Strategic Framework for Education, 2021), explicit curricular attention to social justice remains minimal. The term itself is often treated as *education's latest catchphrase* (North, 2008), a broad and ambiguous signifier for any and all diversity-related concerns (Le et al., 2024; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). This conceptual vagueness is compounded by the affective dimensions of inequality, which often manifest as shame, fear of failure, and feelings of inadequacy—particularly among those positioned outside dominant cultural norms of competence and success (Jasini et al., 2019; Vučković Juroš, 2022). As recent research highlights, inequalities manifest equally materially and affectively, reinforcing learning patterns of failure, and self-doubt (Charteris & Gregory, 2024; Hutton, 2019; Leyton et al., 2025; Manasia & Parvan, 2025). For pre-service teachers to navigate and counteract such patterns, identity work must be central to their formation.

In view of these tensions, we argue that justice-oriented teacher education must go beyond abstract theorization. It must offer authentic, participatory spaces for students to reflect, question, and perform their values. Building on recent developments in multimodal and participatory research (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Fazeli et al., 2023; Jewitt, 2017), this study situates *velfies* as a form of expressive, embodied, and socially situated pedagogy. As identity artifacts (Esteban-Guitart, 2023), *velfies* offer a narrative medium through which participants position themselves in relation to social justice.

The study is informed by funds of identity theory (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), justice praxis frameworks in teacher education (Bondy et al., 2017, 2022; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), and the recognition that autobiographical, multimodal practices can serve as powerful vehicles for transformative learning (Bagnoli, 2004, 2009; Xing et al., 2025). Through an interpretative case study and interpretive video analysis (Knoblauch et al., 2014), we investigate how pre-service teachers reflect on and represent their understandings of inclusive education, equity, emotional labor, and their emerging roles as justice-oriented educators.

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Aligned with the assumption that *'human learning and behaviour are visual, actional and linguistic, i.e., multimodal'* (Esteban-Guitart, 2023, p. 159), this study is guided by the following research questions:

As socio-economic disparities deepen and educational systems face mounting demands, the call for social justice-oriented teacher education (SJTE) has become urgent. Preparing pre-service teachers (PSTs) to address systemic inequality necessitates not only instructional competence but also critical consciousness, emotional engagement, and an ethical commitment to transformation (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Le et al., 2024; Roegman et al., 2021). Despite this broad consensus, a persistent gap remains between espoused commitments to social justice and the lived experiences of PST learning—especially in under-researched national contexts. Romania exemplifies this gap: although policy initiatives such as *Educated Romania* (Romanian Presidency, 2021) and the subsequent laws of education promote inclusion, policy approaches to SJTE often reduce equity to technical interventions, neglecting structural issues such as (learning) poverty, segregation, or ethnic marginalization (European Commission. Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2024). Critical pedagogies are rarely integrated into pre-service programs, and teacher candidates receive limited support to reflect on their own positionalities (Hosseini et al., 2025).

As Gandolfi and Mills (2023) emphasize, justice-oriented teaching is not only conceptual but grounded in situated, relational practice—an orientation largely absent in Romanian teacher preparation, where justice is often framed as abstract rather than pedagogically actionable. Empirical studies are still limited, and those that do address related themes tend to focus on specific aspects such as vulnerability or targeted support for students with special educational needs, often through technical or compensatory measures (Kiss et al., 2023; Luștrea, 2023), leaving broader questions of structural inequality and teacher agency underexamined. Comparative research in Eastern Europe suggests that pre-service teachers' beliefs about justice are often shaped more by inherited hierarchies and cultural norms than by transformative pedagogical experiences (Koliqi et al., 2023; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2015).

This study addresses that gap by examining how PSTs conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities—such as engaging in education practices to support economically disadvantaged, low-achieving pupils or early school leavers—through the creation of video-selfies, or velfies. Velfies are short, self-recorded videos that allow students to narrate, embody, and reflect upon their professional identities using multiple communicative resources (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020). They exemplify multimodality, understood as meaning-making through the orchestration of linguistic, visual, gestural, auditory, and spatial resources within situated activity (Jewitt, 2017; Kress, 2010). While velfies have gained attention as pedagogical tools (Sterling-Fox et al., 2020), their analytical potential as research instruments remains under-theorized (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Lepp et al., 2023). We argue that velfies make visible the affective, embodied, and relational dimensions of teacher identity formation—dimensions that are often inaccessible through traditional written or monomodal data.

Conceptually, our study draws on Fraser's (1998) tri-dimensional model of justice—redistribution, recognition, and representation—and Bernstein's pedagogic rights framework (Duarte et al., 2024), which together frame justice not only in material terms but also as a function of symbolic and participatory inclusion. We further ground the analysis in the funds of identity approach – FOI - (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), which situates identity as socially and narratively constructed through autobiographical and cultural resources. These frameworks allow

us to examine how PSTs perform and position themselves in relation to social justice in education, both cognitively and affectively.

Through an interpretive case study situated in an undergraduate PST education course, we investigate how PSTs conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities. In so doing, we seek to contribute to the literature on multimodal justice praxis in teacher education, particularly in regions where such approaches remain emergent.

The study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

- *RQ1*: What is the nature of pre-service teachers' understandings of educational inequalities and social justice?;
- *RQ2*: How is teacher agency multimodally constructed in relation to addressing or mitigating socio-economic inequalities?;
- *RQ3*: How do pre-service teachers build their professional identity in response to structural inequalities encountered in educational contexts?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we examine key perspectives on socio-economic inequalities and their implications for teacher education. Second, we make the case for integrating multimodal approaches into pre-service teacher preparation, introducing *velfies* as identity-building artifacts (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020). We then present the research design, analyze the sequencing of pathways and the unfolding of pre-service teachers' understandings, and conclude with the pedagogical value of embodied, multimodal practices for justice-oriented teaching.

To contextualize this inquiry, the following section reviews existing literature on SJTE, the role of multimodality in identity construction, and the emerging use of *velfies* as pedagogical and research tools.

## Literature review

### *Socio-Economic Inequalities and Social Justice in Teacher Education*

The concept of social justice in education has evolved into a multi-dimensional construct shaped by intersecting systems of power, privilege, and exclusion. While scholars have long emphasized fairness in the distribution of educational opportunities (Arar & Mifsud, 2024; Berkowitz et al., 2017; Smith & Gümüş, 2022), contemporary research stresses the need to interrogate the complementary epistemological, cultural, and emotional dimensions of justice (Bondy et al., 2022; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Sensoy & Lenges, 2021). Rawls' (1999) model of *justice as fairness* remains influential—grounding equality in inviolable moral rights—but is insufficiently responsive to the affective and symbolic violence perpetuated through normative schooling systems. Structural disadvantage, as Fraser (1998, 2009) argues, must be analyzed through the interlocking dimensions of *redistribution* (material access), *recognition* (cultural value), and *representation* (voice in shaping institutions). This triad is particularly salient in teacher education, where policies and pedagogies too often depoliticize inequality, obscuring the relational and emotional harms of marginalization.

The current field literature increasingly calls for a paradigmatic shift from compensatory models of inclusion to relational, justice-oriented frameworks (Dunn, 2024). As highlighted in Hosseini et al. (2024, 2025), this entails repositioning teacher education as a transformative space where power, identity, and equity are critically negotiated (Zhang-Yu et al., 2023). Affective experiences of injustice—often silenced in academic discourse—are central to transformation. Emotional fit theory frames emotions as culturally patterned responses to social

environments rather than private states (De Leersnyder et al., 2020; Jasini et al., 2019). Socio-economic inequalities shape these patterns: affiliative emotions such as gratitude, deference, or compliance emerge under dependency or constrained choice, while disengaging emotions—anger, frustration, sadness—arise from exclusion, injustice, or loss of control (De Leersnyder et al., 2020; Mesquita et al., 2017). Distribution is uneven, conditioned by one’s position within systems of advantage and marginalization. In schools, such emotional repertoires often clash with institutional norms, positioning teachers to manage emotionally charged dynamics (Collins, 2019; Dunn, 2024). As Jasini et al. (2019) show, mismatches between these repertoires and dominant expectations can lead to enduring disconnection or misrecognition. This largely invisible emotional labor is central to how inequality is lived, negotiated, and at times reinforced in educational spaces.

Charteris and Gregory (2024) and Leyton et al. (2025) document how students internalize systemic inequalities through feelings of shame, inadequacy, and self-silencing. The emotional dimensions of marginalization are structural—what Zembylas (2007) terms “emotional geographies” of injustice. Datnow et al. (2023) similarly underscores the affective labor demanded of teacher candidates navigating the dissonance between equity commitments and institutional constraints. These tensions point to the urgent need for teacher education to cultivate critical emotional literacy: the capacity to understand and interrogate how emotion, power, and positionality shape classroom dynamics and professional identities.

At the curricular and pedagogical level, the funds of knowledge and identity (FoK/I) approaches (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Volman et al., 2023) have offered a robust framework for addressing these justice challenges in concrete educational practice. Volman et al. (2023) highlight how FoK/I interventions bridge cultural discontinuities between home and school by centering students’ lived experiences and epistemologies. Importantly, they demonstrate that social justice entails actively resisting deficit perspectives and reframing cultural difference as pedagogical resource. In the Dutch ERLA project (Volman & Veerman, 2023), FoK/I-based practices increased student engagement, self-efficacy, and peer collaboration, especially when integrated into flexible, relationally oriented curricula.

Moreover, these approaches offer a valuable lens for rethinking teacher preparation. As Dunn (2024) shows, many pre-service teachers enter the profession with limited exposure to structural critiques of inequality. Salo et al. (2024) further emphasize that justice-oriented teacher education must be experiential, dialogic, and emotionally attuned, enabling candidates to reflect not only on what they teach, but who they are becoming in the process.

However, the transformative potential of such work hinges on institutional and pedagogical conditions. As Zhang-Yu et al. (2024) warn, FoK/I strategies can easily be co-opted into tokenistic or folklorizing practices if not grounded in sustained critical reflection and collaborative inquiry. Research revealed that meaningful transformation occurred only when teachers engaged in long-term dialogue with families and communities, unsettling their own assumptions and co-constructing culturally sustaining curricula. This relational, iterative process aligns with the emphasis in Liao et al. (2022) on context-sensitive, collaborative approaches to equity work, where teachers engage with structural challenges through locally grounded, co-designed professional learning.

Thus, we approach social justice as a situated, emotional, and embodied process, an ‘emo-social justice’ (Matias, 2016, pp. xiii–xiv). It entails a shift in how knowledge, emotion, and identity are conceptualized and practiced in teacher education. By foregrounding the affective and epistemic dimensions of inequality, this research argues for embodied pedagogies

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2  
3 that foster multimodal engagements with justice—pedagogies that recognize difference and are  
4 structurally committed to dismantling the conditions that produce educational harm.

5 SJTE is shaped by intersecting systems of power, privilege, and exclusion. Early liberal  
6 theories, such as Rawls' (1999) model of justice as fairness, emphasized equality as a moral  
7 imperative, yet largely framed injustice as the unequal distribution of resources. While  
8 influential, this distributive view has been critiqued for overlooking how cultural and symbolic  
9 exclusions structure educational experiences. Critical theorists have extended the conversation  
10 by foregrounding how injustice is also a matter of recognition—whose identities are valued—  
11 and representation—whose voices shape institutions. Fraser's (1998) triadic model of  
12 redistribution, recognition, and representation offers a powerful lens to analyze the complex and  
13 overlapping dimensions of inequality.

14 In teacher education, Fraser's model helps unpack how well-intentioned concepts such as  
15 "inclusion" or "diversity" are frequently depoliticized. These terms are often framed as  
16 professional competencies or attitudes rather than indicators of structural critique and  
17 transformation (Dunn, 2024; Hosseini et al., 2024, 2025). In contrast, the equity tradition within  
18 teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022) insists on *justice as praxis*: a sustained  
19 pedagogical commitment to interrogating and disrupting systems of oppression. SJTE aims thus  
20 to support PSTs in confronting how privilege and marginalization shape learning and  
21 professional becoming. Hosseini et al. (2024) identify key commitments across SJTE programs:  
22 naming structural inequities, centering marginalized perspectives, engaging affect and  
23 reflexivity, and modeling justice through pedagogy. These principles reimagine teacher  
24 education as a transformative, dialogic space where professional learning is inseparable from  
25 social consciousness (Bondy et al., 2017, 2022; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

26 Despite growing theoretical consensus, the global development of SJTE remains uneven.  
27 The field is dominated by scholarship from Anglophone contexts, particularly the United States,  
28 Canada, and Australia, while regions such as Eastern and Southern Europe remain  
29 underrepresented (Hosseini et al., 2024; Leite et al., 2023; Purdy et al., 2023). Even where  
30 reforms promote equity or inclusion, social justice is often treated as a rhetorical value or  
31 technical outcome, disconnected from broader institutional critique (Monge et al., 2022). Purdy  
32 et al. (2023) note that many European teacher education systems continue to prioritize  
33 competency-based, instrumental models that marginalize ethical, relational, and critical  
34 dimensions of teaching. As a result, justice-oriented work is often positioned at the margins of  
35 formal curricula, relying on the commitment of individual instructors or isolated initiatives.

36 Romania offers an especially relevant context for this kind of inquiry. Shaped by post-  
37 socialist reforms and transnational policy borrowing, Romanian teacher education has formally  
38 adopted inclusive language, yet often lacks the pedagogical depth and institutional commitment  
39 to meaningfully address systemic inequities. Manasia and Parvan (2025) show that many PSTs  
40 enter the profession with limited exposure to structural critiques of inequality and continue to  
41 hold deficit-based views of marginalized groups, particularly students at risk of poverty and  
42 those from rural backgrounds. Furthermore, inherited beliefs about merit, neutrality, and cultural  
43 hierarchy are rarely interrogated in coursework. These dynamics make it crucial to explore how  
44 justice becomes meaningful—or remains elusive—in the everyday thinking and identity work of  
45 Romanian PSTs.

46 Understanding how PSTs navigate these tensions requires engaging with the affective  
47 and embodied dimensions of justice. As Gandolfi and Mills (2023) illustrate, teachers committed  
48 to social justice often confront competing demands between their ethical commitments and  
49

1  
2  
3 institutional constraints. These insights resonate with Matias's (2016) framing of *emo-social*  
4 *justice*, which emphasizes the interplay of knowledge, feeling, and self in justice-oriented  
5 teaching. Dunn (2024) similarly argues that teacher education must cultivate the emotional  
6 literacy and ethical awareness required to navigate discomfort, contradiction, and vulnerability in  
7 pursuit of equity. Without such engagement, equity discourses risk becoming affirmed in theory  
8 but disavowed in practice.

9  
10 Pedagogical frameworks like funds of knowledge and funds of identity (FoK/I) offer  
11 practical entry points for embedding justice in teacher preparation. These approaches challenge  
12 deficit views by centering students' lived experiences and cultural practices as sources of  
13 knowledge and agency (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Volman et al., 2023). When integrated  
14 into co-constructed, relational curricula, FoK/I strategies have been shown to improve student  
15 engagement, self-efficacy, and belonging (Volman et al., 2023). Yet their effectiveness depends  
16 on sustained critical reflection and collaboration. As Zhang-Yu et al. (2023) and Liao et al.  
17 (2022) caution, these approaches risk being reduced to superficial gestures if not grounded in  
18 deep partnerships with families and communities. In this sense, justice-oriented pedagogies  
19 require more than methodological tools—they demand shifts in stance, structure, and  
20 institutional culture.

### 21 *Emotional and Embodied Dimensions of Inequity in Teacher Education*

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25  
26 Injustice is not only structural or cognitive; it is also emotional and embodied. Zembylas  
27 (2020) conceptualizes the “emotional geographies” of injustice, demonstrating how shame, fear,  
28 and inadequacy circulate in educational spaces, reinforcing hierarchies of worth and belonging  
29 (Safta-Zecheria et al., 2025). Jasini et al. (2019) and De Leersnyder et al. (2020) show that  
30 emotional repertoires are socially patterned: affiliative emotions like gratitude or compliance are  
31 often expected from marginalized individuals, while disengaging emotions—anger, frustration—  
32 are pathologized or suppressed within institutional norms.

33  
34 These dynamics are mirrored in teacher education. PSTs are typically encouraged to  
35 express empathy and care, yet emotions crucial for perceiving and naming injustice—such as  
36 anger, grief, or vulnerability—are frequently marginalized (Charteris & Gregory, 2024; Datnow  
37 et al., 2023). As Dunn (2024) argues, developing critical emotional literacy—the ability to  
38 examine how emotions are entangled with power—is essential for justice-oriented practice.  
39 Without this, social justice discourse becomes less pedagogically transformative. This focus  
40 stands in contrast to dominant models of teacher education that continue to privilege knowledge  
41 to practice approaches (Donath et al., 2025). In this context, Purdy et al. (2023) highlight how  
42 current European teacher education policy frameworks often center on technocratic  
43 accountability, sidelining more expansive, value-driven models that engage teachers as  
44 emotional, relational, and moral agents. Against this backdrop, emotional and embodied  
45 pedagogies offer a corrective and necessary condition for meaningful teacher formation.

### 46 *Multimodality in pre-service teacher PST education*

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51 As we have observed and other scholars pointed out (Almumen, 2023; Barton & Ryan,  
52 2014; Cook & Chisholm, 2025; Salo & Kajamies, 2024), the integration of multimodal  
53 approaches in initial teacher education has gained prominence over the past decade, promoted as  
54 a means to support inclusive, participatory, and socially responsive pedagogies. Yet a critical  
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2  
3 examination reveals persistent ambiguities in how multimodality is conceptualized,  
4 operationalized, and assessed within teacher preparation programs.

5  
6 A foundational tension lies in the positioning of multimodality: is it a technical extension  
7 of literacies into digital and visual domains, or a transformative pedagogical stance that reorients  
8 how knowledge, identity, and power circulate in education? Many programs lean toward the  
9 former, adopting multimodal tools (e.g., digital storytelling, comics, infographics) as  
10 enhancements to existing curricula without fully embracing the epistemological and ethical shifts  
11 they imply (Mills & Exley, 2014; Ajayi, 2011). This risks reducing multimodality to a set of  
12 stylistic choices, rather than a deep engagement with how meaning is made across diverse  
13 semiotic, cultural, and embodied practices.

14  
15 In contrast, Brooke et al. (2024) advance a deeper, ecological framing of multimodality  
16 as relational inquiry—one that blurs the boundaries between cognition, emotion, and materiality.  
17 Their work with a/r/tography (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004; Springgay, 2008) shows how  
18 collaborative arts-based practice can reconfigure preservice teachers' relationships with  
19 knowledge, communities, and themselves. This ecological approach positions teachers as  
20 embodied, ethical agents navigating intersecting personal, institutional, and social ecologies.

21  
22 Other scholars similarly emphasize the affective and identity-forming dimensions of  
23 multimodal practice. Pandya & Ávila (2014) argue that multimodality allows pre-service  
24 teachers to bring their full cultural selves into pedagogical reflection, particularly through  
25 narrative and visual modalities that transcend the limits of academic discourse. However, such  
26 work demands intentional framing; without critical grounding, multimodality risks aestheticizing  
27 social issues or reinforcing dominant narratives under the guise of creative freedom (Walsh et al.,  
28 2020).

29  
30 Crucially, studies point to the emotional labor and vulnerability involved in multimodal  
31 self-representation. Encounters with modalities like video or visual art often surface identity  
32 tensions, cultural dissonance, and affective dissonance—especially for students whose  
33 backgrounds, languages, or beliefs do not align with institutional norms (Smith, 2022; Martínez-  
34 Carratalá et al., 2024). While discomfort can be generative, it must be scaffolded through  
35 dialogic processes that foster trust, critique, and reflexivity (Low et al., 2020).

36  
37 Moreover, a critical gap persists in connecting multimodality to justice-oriented teaching.  
38 While there is ample evidence that multimodal strategies can enhance engagement and  
39 expression (Kress, 2010), fewer studies examine how they cultivate dispositions for equity-  
40 focused practice or prepare teachers to disrupt structural inequality in schools. One exception is  
41 Ávila & Pandya (2014), who show how critical digital literacies can enable preservice teachers  
42 to explore themes of race, migration, and language politics in nuanced, agentic ways. Yet such  
43 work remains underrepresented in mainstream teacher education literature and practice.

44  
45 Institutional constraints further complicate implementation. Standardized curricula,  
46 disciplinary silos, and assessment regimes still favor monomodal, text-centric knowledge  
47 production (Walsh et al., 2020). Teacher educators often struggle to justify multimodal  
48 assessment, or lack the professional development needed to scaffold such work with theoretical  
49 and ethical depth (Ajayi, 2017). As a result, multimodality is often marginalized as “optional” or  
50 “extra,” rather than integral to epistemological and pedagogical transformation.

51  
52 In light of these findings, recent research call for a rethinking of multimodality not just as  
53 a set of techniques but as a justice-oriented pedagogical disposition (Jacobs & Rowsell, 2020;  
54 Kuby & Rowsell, 2017). This includes an expanded commitment to relationality, affect, voice,  
55 and cultural sustaining pedagogy. As multimodal meaning-making becomes increasingly central  
56

to how knowledge is produced and contested in society, initial teacher education (ITE) programs must grapple with the political, emotional, and ethical stakes of how—and whose—knowledge is made visible, valued, and legitimated.

Our study contributes to this conversation by exploring velfies as expressive, multimodal practices that surface how preservice teachers negotiate identity, inequality, and agency through self-authored, embodied performances. In the following section, we examine how velfies disrupt monologic forms of reflection, providing a pedagogical space for voice, emotion, and transformation.

### *Learning about social justice via embodied pedagogies: Echo and Performative Velfies*

Among the expanding landscape of multimodal approaches in teacher education, *velfies*—self-recorded video reflections produced with minimal technical mediation—have emerged as pedagogical and research tools with unique affordances for exploring the affective and identity-related dimensions of teaching for justice (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025). As part of a broader digital transformation of visual data, velfies provide teacher candidates with the means to document, narrate, and perform their learning in ways that are at once situated, emotional, and self-curated.

Unlike traditional written reflections, velfies invite participants to engage a broader semiotic repertoire—including facial expression, gesture, spatial positioning, rhythm, sound, and silence—thereby creating *multimodal identity artifacts* that crystallize emergent views on education, society, and the self (Esteban-Guitart, 2023; Jewitt, 2017). This representational richness is particularly significant in the context of social justice, where emotional labor, embodied contradictions, and voice suppression are often central but underexamined features of teacher formation (Brooke et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2020).

Drawing on Ciolan and Manasia's (2025) typology, velfies cluster into *echo* and *performative* modes. *Echo velfies* privilege introspection: linear, steady pacing; static, close framing; direct-to-camera monologue; minimal movement. *Performative velfies* mobilize dynamic sequencing, spatial transitions, gesture, and interaction with peers or settings—often co-constructed and audience-oriented. The distinction is analytic, not hierarchical: both are native video artifacts and identity performances whose meaning emerges through *sequentiality*, *spatial configuration*, and *interactional dynamics*.

In the broader context of teacher education, this approach aligns with calls to move beyond rationalist, decontextualized reflection toward *affective* and *relational* practices that account for how students *feel*, not just *think*, their way into professional subjectivities (Avraamidou, 2020; Kuby & Rowsell, 2017; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020; Zembylas, 2020). It also resonates with work on digital storytelling and narrative inquiry that frames identity as a dynamic, storied, and contextually produced construct (Acosta et al., 2023; Bagnoli, 2009).

Velfies do not offer direct access to belief or identity; rather, they are shaped by the affordances and constraints of digital tools, institutional expectations, and peer norms. What participants choose to show, say, or perform reflects ongoing negotiations between personal conviction and pedagogical framing—between agency and perceived acceptability. In this study, velfies are treated as expressive and interpretive artifacts through which pre-service teachers make visible their evolving understandings of social justice and educational transformation. As such, they become situated performances that surface how justice is imagined, felt, and contested within the affective and relational spaces of teacher education.

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4 In the past decade, multimodal approaches have gained traction in initial teacher  
5 education (ITE), often promoted as tools to foster inclusion, engagement, and reflective practice  
6 (Almumen, 2023; Barton & Ryan, 2014; Cook & Chisholm, 2025; Salo & Kajamies, 2024). Yet  
7 their implementation remains uneven. A persistent tension concerns whether multimodality is  
8 understood as a technical extension of literacy into visual and digital domains or as a  
9 transformative stance that reconfigures how knowledge, identity, and power operate in  
10 education. Many programs adopt the former, offering digital storytelling or infographics as  
11 creative supplements to written reflection while leaving text-based norms and assessment  
12 hierarchies intact (Ajayi, 2017; K. A. Mills & Exley, 2014). This risks aestheticizing  
13 multimodality, treating alternative forms as decorative rather than epistemic (Jewitt, 2017; Kress,  
14 2010).

15  
16 In contrast, a growing body of work frames multimodality as a relational, ethical, and  
17 affective mode of knowledge-making. Drawing on a/r/tography and ecological theories, Brooke  
18 et al. (2024) conceptualize multimodality as grounded in embodied practice and situated within  
19 complex institutional and social ecologies (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004; Springgay, 2008).  
20 Similarly, Pandya and Ávila (2014) and Almumen (2023) show how multimodal composition  
21 enables teacher candidates to bring their cultural histories and emotional experiences into  
22 professional reflection—surfacing the affective labour of reconciling personal and institutional  
23 expectations. However, scholars caution that without critical framing, multimodal work can  
24 flatten complexity or reproduce dominant narratives under the guise of creativity (C. Walsh,  
25 2023; Z. Walsh et al., 2020). To avoid this, intentional scaffolding and dialogic critique are  
26 essential. When facilitated well, multimodal reflection becomes a form of emotional inquiry,  
27 where vulnerability, discomfort, and identity tensions become generative rather than threatening  
28 (Martínez Carratalá & Miras, 2025; Smith, 2022). Collaborative interpretation and structured  
29 feedback can transform emotional friction into insight, fostering solidarity and deeper reflection  
30 (Brooke et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2020).

31  
32  
33 Despite its potential, multimodality's connection to social justice remains underexplored.  
34 Most research highlights creativity and engagement (Kress, 2010) but rarely investigates how  
35 multimodal practice shapes equity-focused teaching. Ávila and Pandya (2014) link critical digital  
36 literacies to analyses of race, migration, and language politics, while Volman et al. (2023),  
37 building on funds of knowledge (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), illustrate how multimodal work  
38 bridges home-school divides. These works reposition multimodality as a justice praxis centered  
39 on participation, recognition, and epistemic plurality (Jacobs & Rowsell, 2020; Kuby & Rowsell,  
40 2017). Still, structural barriers remain. Standardized curricula, disciplinary silos, and monomodal  
41 assessment regimes privilege written literacy and marginalize embodied or visual modes (Walsh  
42 et al., 2020). Teacher educators often lack the support needed to assess multimodal work with  
43 theoretical depth (Ajayi, 2017), reinforcing its status as enrichment rather than core pedagogy.  
44 Recent scholarship counters this by advocating for embodied, justice-oriented multimodality that  
45 foregrounds affect, ethics, and cultural sustainability (Brooke et al., 2024; Kuby & Rowsell,  
46 2017). When approached this way, multimodality enables teacher candidates not only to  
47 represent learning but to rehearse new relational and epistemic possibilities—acts of listening,  
48 witnessing, and reimagining authority (Jacobs & Rowsell, 2020).

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51 This reconceptualization grounds the present study. We approach velfies—short, self-  
52 recorded video reflections—as multimodal practices that enact these principles. Velfies extend  
53 reflection beyond text into embodied, performative engagement, integrating voice, gesture, and  
54 reflection beyond text into embodied, performative engagement, integrating voice, gesture, and  
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3 spatial context. In doing so, they invite PSTs to experience and articulate justice as a lived,  
4 emotional, and relational practice.  
5

6 *Learning about Social Justice via Embodied Pedagogies: From Social Media to Pedagogical*  
7 *Velfies*  
8

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10 Recent scholarship has examined how teachers engage with social justice through digital  
11 media, particularly on social platforms. Shelton et al. (2022) explored culturally relevant  
12 professional learning on *Instagram*, revealing how teacher-influencers curate equity-focused  
13 content and communities of practice. Davis and Yi (2022) critiqued the commercialization of  
14 teacher activism online, highlighting tensions between authentic advocacy and platform-driven  
15 branding, while Peterson (2024) showed how algorithmic visibility and aesthetic appeal shape  
16 what counts as “activist” teaching.  
17

18 However, such scholarship centers on public-facing performances—spaces where  
19 teachers negotiate visibility, branding, and algorithmic pressures. By contrast, the use of velfies  
20 (*video-selfies*) in PST education operates in a pedagogical, private, and reflective context. Within  
21 this setting, velfies function as low-tech, self-recorded videos through which PSTs narrate and  
22 perform their developing professional and ethical identities (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025). As part of  
23 a broader digital turn in reflective practice, velfies enable candidates to document learning in  
24 ways that are situated, embodied, and affectively charged. Empirical research demonstrates that  
25 such video-based reflection enhances self-awareness and pedagogical noticing (Tripp & Rich,  
26 2012) and provides access to the tacit, emotional dimensions of teacher identity formation  
27 (Gaudin & Chaliès, 2015; Lepp et al., 2023).  
28

29 Unlike written journals or public social media posts, pedagogical velfies engage an  
30 expanded semiotic repertoire—facial expression, gesture, voice, rhythm, and spatial  
31 positioning—allowing PSTs to make visible what is often silenced in teacher talk: emotion,  
32 uncertainty, and embodied knowing (Esteban-Guitart, 2023; Jewitt, 2017). This multimodal  
33 expressiveness is particularly relevant for SJTE, where affective tension, empathy, and  
34 vulnerability are integral to unlearning deficit discourses (Brooke et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2020).  
35 Whereas social-media activism privileges visibility and curation, velfies in coursework boost  
36 authenticity, reflexivity, and exploratory meaning-making within a protected learning  
37 environment (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025).  
38

39 Drawing on Ciolan and Manasia’s (2025) typology, velfies cluster into *echo* and  
40 *performative* modes. Echo velfies foreground introspection—static framing, slow pacing, direct  
41 address—while performative velfies employ dynamic movement, spatial transitions, and  
42 collaborative expression. Both modes are interpretive rather than hierarchical, offering distinct  
43 ways of articulating professional becoming. Cook and Chisholm (2025) found that such  
44 embodied video reflection helped PSTs connect social-justice concepts with lived classroom  
45 realities. Similarly, Lepp et al. (2023) observed that first-time video reflection provoked  
46 discomfort and self-consciousness but ultimately deepened relational understanding when  
47 facilitated through trust and feedback. These findings underscore that velfies, though emotionally  
48 demanding, cultivate the critical emotional literacy essential to justice-oriented practice (Dunn,  
49 2024).  
50

51 The rationale for using velfies as research instruments stems from their multimodal  
52 affordances. As performative tools, they generate data that capture both what PSTs articulate and  
53 how they express affective and embodied stances toward social justice. Video affords visibility  
54 into embodied hesitation, confidence, and empathy—dimensions inaccessible through text alone  
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(Chilton & Leavy, 2020). Analyses of teacher-education videos have shown how gesture, gaze, and pacing reveal shifts in pedagogical stance (Gaudin & Chaliès, 2015; Loughran & Berry, 2005), validating velfies as robust multimodal data sources. At the same time, lessons from social-media scholarship remain instructive. Davis and Yi (2022) warn against the commodification of advocacy, while Shelton et al. (2022) highlight inequities in digital capital—insights relevant to PSTs’ varied comfort with self-representation. Accordingly, velfie pedagogy must emphasize process over production, valuing sincerity, emotional honesty, and critical framing above technical polish. As Lepp et al. (2023) suggest, scaffolding, guided feedback, and collaborative viewing help normalize vulnerability and transform video reflection into a collective, ethical practice rather than a performative exercise.

This study offers empirical insight into how PSTs in Romania used velfie-based reflection to navigate and perform justice-oriented becoming, extending current understandings of reflective practice through affective and embodied modalities.

### **Inquiry context**

This study was conducted within the undergraduate course *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory*, a 14-week core component of an ITE program at a large public university in Romania. As recent critiques highlight, social justice in ITE is often framed in depoliticized or generalized terms, lacking both conceptual clarity and pedagogical depth (David, 2025; Le et al., 2024). Pre-service teachers typically enter the program with diverse biographies but limited engagement with structural analyses of inequality. Their professional identity formation is frequently shaped by dominant discourses of meritocracy, affective restraint, and pedagogical neutrality.

To disrupt these normative framings, the course was substantially redesigned using a new curriculum (Anonymized & Anonymized, 2024) that combined experiential and embodied pedagogies. The revised design integrated challenge-based learning with velfies (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020). The content was organized around seven macro-level challenges (e.g., digitalization in education, inclusive curriculum design, education for sustainability), each anchoring one thematic unit.

Each unit began with a short fictionalized vignette created by the first author (Anonymized, 2025; Anonymized & Anonymized, 2024). These narratives drew on personal experience and literary inspiration. Rooted in traditions of narrative inquiry and reflective pedagogy (Barkhuizen, 2011; Huber, 2013; Leavy, 2015), they functioned as affective entry points into issues of inequality, hope, memory, and belonging.

In addition, each unit concluded with optional cultural prompts—curated films, music, and novels—that extended the thematic and emotional engagement initiated by the stories (see Figure 1).

The study was conducted within *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory*, a 14-week core course in an ITE program at a large public university in Romania. The course was redesigned using a curriculum grounded in experiential and embodied pedagogies (Anonymized & Anonymized, 2024). It integrated challenge-based learning and velfies (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020), organized around seven macro-level educational challenges such as digitalization, inclusive curriculum design, and education for sustainability. Each unit opened with a fictionalized vignette authored by the instructors (Anonymized, 2025), drawing on personal experience and literary inspiration to surface themes of inequality, memory, hope, and belonging. These vignettes were rooted in traditions of narrative inquiry and reflective pedagogy

(Barkhuizen, 2011; Huber, 2013; Leavy, 2015), and were complemented by optional cultural prompts—curated films, novels, and music—that extended emotional engagement and critical reflection (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
*Recommendations featured in the course*





31 **Source:** Anonymized Author 1 & Anonymized Author 2 (2024, p. 71)

32 **Note.** The titles in this image appear in Romanian and are translated as follows: *Dimineți în Jenin*  
33 (*Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa), *Neliniște* (*Disquiet* by Zulfü Livaneli), the film *Roma* (directed  
34 by Alfonso Cuarón), and the song *Canción sin miedo* (*Song Without Fear* by Vivir Quintana).  
35 Translations are provided for clarity.

36  
37 ~~The course combined individual and collaborative inquiry. Over ten weeks, students~~  
38 ~~engaged with macro-challenges through seminars and interactive classes, culminating in a~~  
39 ~~weekA cap activity was the Week 12 LEARNATHON—, a hackathon-style event where student~~  
40 ~~teams tackledaddressed real-world educational problems.~~

41  
42 ~~Complementarily, velfies were embeddedVelfies served as a core reflective practice~~  
43 ~~throughout the course and introduced as expressive, multimodal. PSTs were invited to create~~  
44 ~~short, self-recorded video responses to the generalopen-ended prompt Education changes lives.~~  
45 ~~Students were encouraged to approach the task creatively and autonomously, while the course~~  
46 ~~instructor provided content-related guidance and a—a phrase deliberately framed to prompt~~  
47 ~~reflection on how education can reproduce or disrupt systemic inequality. The task was~~  
48 ~~scaffolded through an instructor-created tutorial velfie (see the Data collection section, Figure~~  
49 ~~3). No formal aesthetic or technical criteria were imposed, to avoid standardizing affective~~  
50 ~~expression and to preserve students' agency in how they engaged with the task.~~

51  
52 ~~Supporting the process of “becoming pedagogical” (Gouzouasis et al., 2013), velfies in~~  
53 ~~this course functioned as evolving performances—sites of struggle, possibility, and meaning-~~  
54 ~~making. They enabled students to embody their emotions, and experiment with emerging~~  
55 ~~positions on education and justice.~~  
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This inquiry investigates how pre-service teachers navigated and expressed their understandings of justice, inequality, and Figure 3), which modeled how educational transformation in a curricular space where such conversations remain nascent. Velfies are examined as multimodal acts through which teacher candidates critically perform and reimagine their roles amid persistent socio-economic inequalities.

### Method

This article seeks to address the abovementioned gaps in ITE by exploring the utility of velfies (Chan & Wong, 2023; Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020) as multimodal learning experiences for building pre-service teachers' preparedness and readiness to understand and navigate socio-economic inequalities.

The methodological orientation of this study is grounded in a sociocultural epistemology that conceptualizes learning as situated, affective, and multimodal. Informed by the FoI framework (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Volman et al., 2023), this approach views teacher identity as a dynamic construct shaped by autobiographical memory, cultural repertoires, and emotional responses to schooling may shape individual or collective trajectories marked by privilege or exclusion. This tutorial explicitly guided PSTs to draw on personal, relational, or community-level experiences. From this perspective, reflection is central to meaning-making, enacted through narrative, gesture, in which education intersected with social advantage or marginalization. To support authenticity and expressive freedom, no technical or aesthetic standards were imposed; instead, students were encouraged to respond creatively, using voice, and spatial positioning.

By integrating velfies into the ITE course of *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory*, we aimed to shift reflection from monologic, written tasks to dialogic, embodied inquiry (Bondy et al., 2022).

The study aligns with a growing body of multimodal and arts-based inquiry that challenges linear, text-centric models of professional learning (Jewitt, 2017; Kuby & Rowsell, 2017). As Ciolan & Manasia (2025) argue, velfies enable "the performance of reflection" and expose the affective contours of teacher identity formation, particularly in relation to emotionally charged themes such as inequality, failure, and hope.

Our interpretive framework thus foregrounds meaning-making as a multimodal and embodied process. The analysis does not aim for abstraction or generalization, but for situated, and space to convey affective depth and critical insight into how pre-service teachers negotiate the tensions of teaching for justice—within themselves, through their voices, and in the relational spaces opened by velfie practice.

Velfies enabled PSTs to embody emotion, articulate emerging stances on justice, and navigate the tensions between personal conviction and professional formation. Drawing on these artifacts, the study analyzes how PSTs expressed and negotiated their understandings of the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities within a curricular space where such reflection remains emergent.

## Method

### *Researcher reflexivity*

We ~~came to~~ approached this ~~workstudy~~ as higher education professionals, teacher educators, and qualitative researchers ~~who have sat across from students in moments of openness and in moments of silence (Bondy et al., 2022)~~—when the air in the room seemed to tighten as topics of inequality, belonging, and justice took center stage. We have seen the hesitant smile, the pause before speaking, and we have felt the weight of these pauses as both pedagogical challenges and invitations.

~~Our team of three with firsthand experience facilitating discussions on inequality, justice, and belonging in pre-service teacher education (Bondy et al., 2022). Our team spans education sciences, linguistics, and law, and qualitative research. Two of us were the instructors for *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory*, where the velfie activity was embedded; the third joined during data analysis, bringing discourse-sensitive and cross-distinct disciplinary insight. We acknowledge~~ lenses to our analysis. Two members of the research team were course instructors who facilitated the course and were familiar with the institutional and pedagogical context. The third researcher, who did not participate in course delivery, brought an outsider perspective and acted as an interpretive auditor, reviewing velfies and analytic memos independently. This configuration supported reflexive dialogue and strengthened interpretive credibility through critical distance. We recognize that our dual role as instructors and researchers offered opportunities for trust-building opportunities, but also risked-carried risks of reinforcing power imbalances/asymmetries. Rather than seeking-a-falseclaim neutrality, we treated this viewed our positionality as integral-to-constitutive of the research process.

~~Early in the course~~ To model reflective and embodied inquiry, each of us recorded a personal velfie (see-at the beginning of the course—excluded from analysis—which illustrated how our educational trajectories shaped our orientations toward justice (Figure 2-for an example)—excluded from analysis—to model the reflective, affective, and performative nature of the task. In one, a rain-soaked street in Brussels and a worn 2008 student calendar anchored the narrative: “Each day marked in that calendar was a step toward my visibility. That’s what education does—it doesn’t just inform, it makes you seen.” These velfies were not only instructional tools but acts of situated reflexivity, revealing how our own histories shape what we notice and value in others’ stories.

Throughout analysis, we worked in assemblage—collating selected instances into thematic clusters and revisiting them together, sometimes in comfortable agreement, other times in dissonance. After each review, we wrote memos capturing not just interpretive insights but our affective responses—the moments a frame made us pause, the ways a silence pressed against our own assumptions. Differences in disciplinary background or prior relationships with participants often surfaced in these discussions, becoming analytical cues rather than conflicts to resolve.

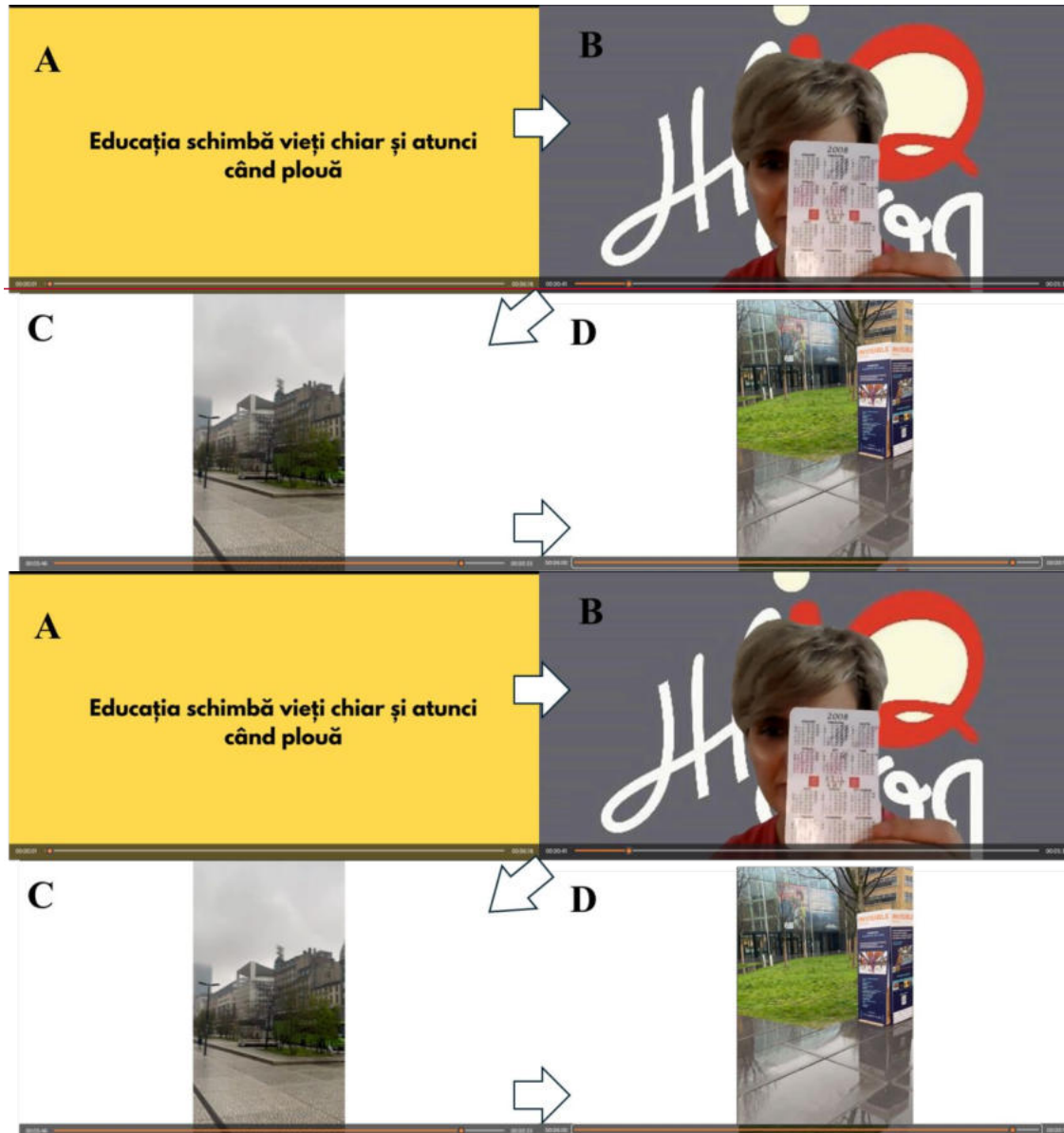
This reflexive stance shaped also how we wrote: we asked what our excerpting amplified, whose voices we centered, and what narratives of justice we might be privileging. Following Savolainen et al. (2023) and Holmes et al. (2022), we approached reflexivity as embedded in the grammar of our analysis, not as a discrete step. In this multimodal work with identity-rich artifacts like velfies, we were co-present—seeing, feeling, and narrating.

). These recordings functioned as both instructional tools and reflexive acts, foregrounding our affective investments in the work. During analysis, we wrote analytic memos

to capture thematic insights and emotional responses—moments of resonance, resistance, and discomfort. Throughout, we remained attentive to the ethics of representation, continually questioning whose voices were amplified and how our interpretive decisions shaped justice narratives. Although formal ethics approval was secured (see Method section), we approached reflexivity as an ongoing ethical practice—integral to both our analytical process and our relational engagement with the data (Holmes et al., 2022; Savolainen et al., 2023).

**Figure 2**

*Selected frames from a researcher's velfie illustrating affective memory and mobility*



**Contextual description:** The velfie opens with a textual slide (A) declaring that "Education changes lives even when it rains". Holding a student calendar from 2008 (B), the researcher anchors the narrative in a formative moment abroad. Rain-soaked footage of Brussels streets (C) and an installation titled *Invisible* (D) frame the story, as the song *Il pleut sur Bruxelles* becomes the guiding metaphor of the entire experience.

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3 **Excerpt:** “ Each day marked in that calendar was a step toward my visibility. That’s what education  
4 does—it doesn’t just inform, it makes you seen. ”  
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### 6 *Study participants and ~~Data sources~~ data collection*

7

8 The study involved 64 undergraduate students from an ITE program at a public  
9 university, all taking the course All 64 PSTs enrolled in *Fundamentals of Education and*  
10 *Curriculum Theory*:  
11

12 Students were invited to create velfies in response to the prompt *Education changes lives*.  
13 These videos could be, a core undergraduate course in a Romanian ITE program, participated in  
14 a velfie task integrated into the course design. Students chose to work individually or in self-  
15 selected small groups, resulting in the creation of 18 velfies: 2 produced individually or in small  
16 peer groups, depending on students’ preferences. Participation in the research component of the  
17 activity was entirely voluntary.  
18

19 A total of 18 velfies were submitted for analysis, ranging from 92 to 340 seconds in  
20 duration. Each velfie received a unique code in the form VEL\_001 to VEL\_018. One velfie was  
21 removed from the analysis due to poor image and sound quality ( $n = 17$ ). The videos  
22 demonstrated a range of expressive formats, including 16 collaboratively by 62 participants. One  
23 video was excluded due to technical issues, yielding a final dataset of 17 velfies submitted for  
24 analysis. Each video was assigned a unique code (VEL\_001 to VEL\_018) and ranged in length  
25 from 92 to 340 seconds, demonstrating varied expressive formats such as direct-to-camera  
26 narration, dialogic interaction peer dialogue, and performative storytelling. All participants  
27 provided informed consent for their work to be included as research data, with ethical approval  
28 secured in advance from the institutional review board.  
29  
30

### 31 *Data collection*

32

33 The primary data for this study consisted of The velfies were created by students between  
34 March and May 2024 as part of the *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory*  
35 course in response to the open-ended prompt *Education changes lives*, which invited personal,  
36 relational, or systemic reflections on how education can reproduce or disrupt inequality (see the  
37 *Inquiry context* for reference). To support this process, participant task, PSTs received an  
38 asynchronous video tutorial designed to familiarize them with the basic principles of video  
39 storytelling and video introducing four key production steps—selecting a theme, crafting a script,  
40 choosing a location, and considering basic technical setup. The tutorial emphasized authenticity  
41 and emotional engagement over production polish (Figure 3). Although the tutorial was  
42 asynchronous, in-person seminars offered opportunities for clarification and discussion. Velfies  
43 were submitted via Moodle or a secure video-sharing platform and stored in compliance with  
44 institutional data protection protocols.  
45  
46

47 While other course artifacts were generated (e.g., Learnathon presentations), this study  
48 focuses exclusively on the velfies. All contributors provided written informed consent for the use  
49 of their work in the research, and ethical approval was obtained from the university’s research  
50 ethics committee (Approval No. 10533, November 2023).  
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**Figure 3**

Selected screenshots from the velfie tutorial video illustrating the four production steps



**Note.** The Romanian text in the frames corresponds to the steps outlined in the video tutorial on velfie creation: (A) Pasul 1: Alegeți tema – *Step 1: Choose your theme*; (B) Pasul 2: Creați un scenariu – *Step 2: Create a script*; (C) Pasul 3: Alegeți locația – *Step 3: Choose the location*; (D) Pasul 4: Echipamentul – *Step 4: Equipment*

The training video offered a step-by-step guide, structured around four main components: selecting a theme (*frame A in Figure 3*), creating a narrative script (*frame B in Figure 3*), choosing a location (*frame C in Figure 3*), and considering technical setup (*frame D in Figure 3*). The tutorial encouraged students to prioritize authenticity and spontaneity over scripting, foregrounding the affective and experiential dimensions of the task.

Although the tutorial was non-interactive and asynchronous, in-person seminars offered space for clarification and deeper engagement. Participation was voluntary: all students were informed about the research and provided written consent for inclusion. Velfies were submitted via Moodle or a secure video-sharing platform, then downloaded and stored in compliance with institutional ethics protocols.

### Analysis

Our analytical approach combined Knoblauch's (2014) interpretive video hermeneutics with a multimodal social semiotic framework (Jewitt & Price, 2012), enabling us to examine velfies as situated meaning-making acts. We viewed velfies as expressive, compositional, and embodied performances through which identity, critique, and pedagogical intent intersected.

Building on Ciolan and Manasia's (2025) typology and the framework provided by Wang and Hannes (2020), we adapted four interpretive dimensions—*sequentiality, spatial configuration, interactional dynamics, and production aesthetics*—which functioned as flexible

lenses for analyzing how teacher candidates navigated tensions around inequality, aspiration, and professional identity.

The analysis was conducted in three iterative phases. This study employed interpretive video analysis (IVA) (Knoblauch et al., 2014) to investigate how PSTs reflected on and performed their understandings of the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities. IVA, grounded in interpretive sociology and video ethnography, does not treat video as objective data to be coded but as a form of social performance requiring contextual, situated interpretation. Meaning is not extracted through abstraction but reconstructed from within participants' lived experiences and expressive practices. As Knoblauch and Schnettler (2012) noted, IVA centers on participants' "first-order constructs"—their own understandings and expressions—which researchers interpret through theoretically informed, second-order constructs.

To analyze how meaning was conveyed in the velfies, we combined IVA with a multimodal social semiotic framework (Jewitt & Price, 2012), enabling us to examine how gesture, voice, spatial organization, and visual design worked together to produce layered meaning. Our analytic approach integrated four interrelated dimensions, drawn from Ciolan and Manasia's (2025) velfie typology and expanded through multimodal inquiry frameworks (Q. Wang & Hannes, 2020): (1) *sequentiality* (the temporal unfolding of meaning through rhythm, silence, and verbal cues), (2) *spatial configuration* (bodily orientation, framing, distance), (3) *interactional dynamics* (gaze, address, and engagement), and (4) *production aesthetics* (editing, lighting, and color, which shape tone and atmosphere).

Analysis unfolded in four stages. First, we viewed each of the 17 velfies repeatedly as reviewed—individually and collectively collaboratively—to identify moments of narrative segments marked by expressive intensity or affective density ("charge. These were designated as *instances*");. In line with multimodal video analysis (Jewitt & Price, 2012). Within each velfie, we delimited, we defined instances as units of meaning-shift and coded them as Seq\_N\_Start-End using on-screen timecodes (e.g., Seq\_5\_03:10-04:00). In total, we selected 52 instances (ranging from 10 to 60 seconds; mean duration = 28.6 seconds, SD = 12.4). Each sequence was then segmented into frames (A, B, C, D), which marked semiotic turns and were accompanied by verbatim transcriptions of speech and on-screen text.

In the *second phase*, these sequences and frames were examined through the multimodal matrix (see Supplementary\_material\_1), attending to *sequentiality*, *spatial configuration*, *short*, *semiotically dense episodes* marked by shifts in *interactional dynamics*, and *production aesthetics*, alongside *stance*, *voice*, and *affective tone*. Interpretation was dialogic and iterative: we revisited each instance together, pausing on still frames and visual motifs to unpack alternative readings. Divergent or complementary perspectives were preserved in the matrix's *Interpretative Comments* column order or expressive conventions. We identified 52 such instances (10–60 seconds;  $M_{length} = 28.6$ ), each representing a condensed multimodal expression of justice-oriented reflection.

Finally, *Second*, each instance was transcribed using a *multimodal matrix* (available in the *third phase*, representative stills, excerpts OSF repository) detailing speech, gesture, gaze, spatial composition, sound, and contextual notes-affect. These were collated into interpretive reconstructions attentive to how modes interacted over time. For example, slow pacing, minimal movement, and dim lighting connoted introspection and critique, while direct gaze, expansive gestures, and saturated color schemes produced atmospheres of connection or hope. Meaning

was read from the affective-emotive whole, interpreted through recursive viewing and team dialogue.

*Third*, we conducted collaborative analysis through five iterative sessions. Here, selected instances were revisited, interpretations refined, and visual-narrative assemblages, enabling analysis within instances and across cases, constructed. These assemblages revealed (e.g., Figure 4, Figure 10)—comprising stills, multimodal transcripts, and annotations—enabled us to trace how meaning cohered across sequences. This practice reflects Knoblauch’s emphasis on “slow analysis,” allowing emergent interpretation to stay grounded in participants’ expressive logic rather than externally imposed codes (Knoblauch et al., 2015). One member of the research team, who was not involved in course delivery, acted as an external reviewer. She independently viewed all velfies, examined selected multimodal transcripts, and reviewed analytic memos during the collaborative sessions. Her outsider position enabled critical questioning of emerging interpretations, surfaced alternative perspectives, and supported reflexive dialogue within the team.

In the *final stage*, we examined how instances connected across velfies by mapping their narrative content, multimodal features, and ethical orientations. We noticed that certain expressive and thematic elements tended to cluster together—often appearing in similar sequences across different videos. To explore these patterns systematically, we grouped instances based on recurring combinations of narrative form (e.g., fictional voice, direct address), visual framing (e.g., camera proximity, gaze direction), affective tone (e.g., critical, empathic, hopeful), and articulated stance (e.g., critique of injustice, recognition of learner, projection of future self). These groupings were refined through iterative comparison and discussion, and developed into three recurring trajectories of meaning-making, which we termed *pathways*:-. We named the pathways based on the dominant focus of their sequences: “*Maria and the ubiquitous story inequality (narratives of systemic disadvantage)*,” (focused on structural injustice and fictionalized figures), “*I See You: Witnessing, Recognition, and Pedagogical Presence*” (centered on recognition and relational recognition-presence), and “*Future Creator*” (emphasizing agency, aspiration, and pedagogical stance), and *I Am a Future Creator* (projective identity and empowerment)-change). Ten velfies followed the full sequence of these three frames, five concluded with the second, and two deviated.

### *Methodological integrity*

We ensured methodological integrity through fidelity to the study’s focus and its utility in addressing the research questions (Levitt et al., 2021). Our aim—to explore how pre-service teachers articulate justice through velfies—required sensitivity to variation in expressive form, affective tone, and narrative structure. Data adequacy was achieved by including both echo and performative velfies (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025). All participants gave informed consent for participation and for the publication of excerpts, still frames, and descriptions.

Reflexivity was maintained through shared memos, positional debriefs, and collaborative interpretation, making researcher positionality visible and accountable (Savolainen et al., 2023). Analysis drew on a multimodal mapping matrix to trace meaning across sequential, spatial, gestural, and technological modes. Selected instances were collated into assemblages, enabling examination of meaning across modes and moments. Following interpretive video hermeneutics (Knoblauch, 2014), we engaged in iterative viewing, layered annotation, and the identification of “dense moments” (Jewitt & Price, 2012). Divergent interpretations were retained as analytically productive.

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The multimodal matrix, assemblages, and supporting materials are available in our OSF repository (Anonymized, 2025).

We maintained methodological integrity by ensuring a consistent connection between the study's framework and its research inquiries, as detailed by Levitt et al. (Levitt et al., 2021). Our objective—to investigate how pre-service educators express social justice in education through velfies—required close attention to variations in expressive forms, emotional tone, and narrative composition. We validated data adequacy by examining the complete collection of velfies created, which encompassed both echo responses and more dynamic, multimodally rich pieces, as outlined in the *Literature review*. This thorough inclusion enabled us to interact with a wide array of justice-centric expressions. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee (Approval 10533/2023), and all participants willingly provided written consent for the usage of their videos, still images, and interpretative excerpts. Reflexivity was upheld throughout the research process through shared memos, positional debriefings, and collaborative interpretation sessions, in alignment with interpretive methodologies that emphasize researcher positionality (Savolainen et al., 2023). Analytical procedures were directed by a multimodal mapping matrix that outlined how meaning was formed across sequential, spatial, gestural, and technological aspects. Sections of increased semiotic intensity—designated as instances—were assembled into interpretive collections to enable cross-modal and cross-case analysis. In accordance with interpretive video hermeneutics (Knoblauch, 2014), the analysis included multiple viewings, layered annotations, and the pinpointing of instances (Jewitt & Price, 2012). Divergent interpretations were viewed as analytically beneficial and incorporated into the interpretive process. To enhance transparency and traceability, all analytical resources—including the matrix template, transcripts, and assemblages—are accessible in the OSF repository.

## Findings

We present the findings as three *meaning-making paths* to reflect how velfies enact situated expressions of justice and teacher identity. Drawing on Jewitt's (Jewitt, 2017; Jewitt & Price, 2012) and Knoblauch's (Knoblauch et al., 2014, 2015; Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2012) work, this term captures the fluid, unfolding nature of multimodal meaning. These paths—*Maria and the ubiquitous story of inequality*, *I see you!*, and *I am a future creator*—represent distinct ways participants staged critique, care, and professional intent across modes and moments.

We present the findings as three meaning-making pathways that reflect how velfies expressed PSTs' evolving justice orientations and professional identities. Each pathway—*Maria and the ubiquitous story of inequality*, *I See You!*, and *I Am a Future Creator*—represents a distinct configuration of critique, care, and aspiration as articulated through narrative, gesture, and design.

### **Maria and the ubiquitous story of inequality**

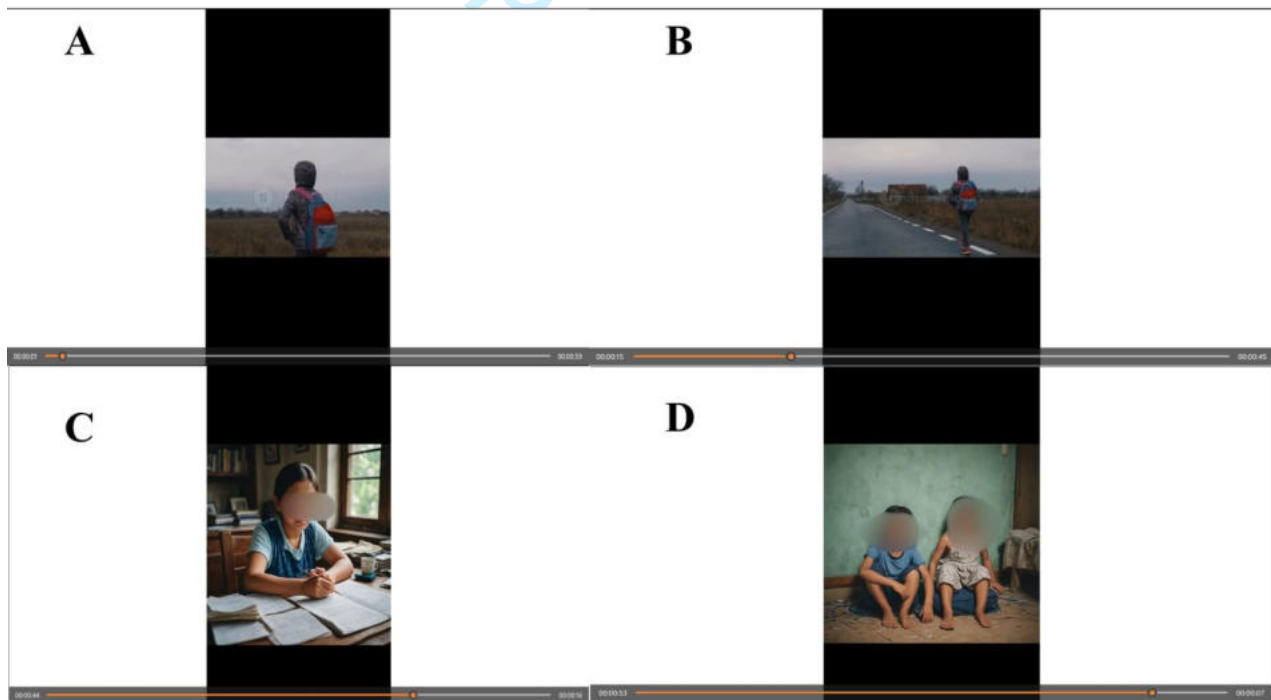
In response to RQ1—*What is the nature of pre-service teachers' understandings of educational inequalities and social justice?*—one meaning-making pattern emerged: the construction of fictionalized, emotionally resonant characters, most notably Maria, as recurring narrative anchors. Across 11 instances, Maria appears as a semiotic figure through whom pre-service teachers articulate their engagements with marginalization, poverty, and limited access to

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3 opportunity—particularly in rural or under-resourced contexts. In other velfies, the names of  
4 Ilona and Liliana are introduced to symbolize underprivileged children and youth.  
5

6 These characters operate as focal points that allow pre-service teachers to articulate  
7 understandings of inequality through situated, emotionally resonant narratives. In VEL\_007,  
8 Seq\_1 (Figure 4), the narrator explains: *‘Her options were limited. Maria knew that to escape*  
9 *poverty, she had to continue learning.*’ The tone is reflective and didactic, constructing a clear  
10 moral arc anchored in personal perseverance. The sequence constructs a linear success narrative,  
11 underlining persistence and self-education in overcoming adversity. While the tone is hopeful, it  
12 also subtly reinforces meritocratic assumptions—education as a matter of individual will—  
13 without attending to deeper structural constraints. However, the transition from personal  
14 advancement to community engagement offers a nuanced expansion of justice as relational and  
15 collective. The use of third-person narration (rather than first-person testimony) introduces  
16 narrative distance, allowing Maria to become a symbolic figure—an archetype of transformation  
17 through education.  
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20  
21 **Figure 4**

22 *Assemblage of Maria’s journey in VEL\_007, representing rural marginalization and educational*  
23 *aspiration.*  
24



47 **Contextual description:** Maria’s trajectory in *VEL\_007* visualizes the emotional and structural contours  
48 of educational inequality. Frames A and B show her walking alone through a rural landscape,  
49 symbolizing isolation and limited access. Frame C presents a moment of focused study, framing  
50 education as both aspiration and burden. Frame D returns to scenes of poverty, reinforcing the material  
51 constraints that persist despite individual effort. The sequence constructs a redemptive arc while subtly  
52 gesturing toward the enduring presence of structural barriers.

53 **Excerpt:** *‘Her options were limited. Maria knew that to improve her life, she had to find a way to*  
54 *continue learning. Determined not to give up, she pursued every opportunity: taking free online courses,*  
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3 studying on her own, climbing slowly, one step at a time. Despite the obstacles, her passion for learning  
4 never faded. Maria managed to improve her skills and open up new horizons.’

5 **Source:** VEL\_007, Seq\_1\_VEL\_007, 01:01 – 02:02  
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8 This framing intensifies in *VEL\_007, Seq\_2* – see Figure 5, where the line *Education was*  
9 *the key that opened doors to a better life* signals belief in education as inherently  
10 transformative—a sentiment supported visually by static, composed settings that suggest calm  
11 and resolution. The assemblage reinforces this message through a deliberate shift in visual voice:  
12 Frame A presents Maria speaking in the first person, positioning the statement as lived  
13 experience and grounding it in an intimate, personal register. Frame B then introduces the  
14 narrator, whose voice and stable framing operate as an authoritative echo, amplifying and  
15 legitimizing Maria’s words. The pairing of these perspectives—embodied testimony followed by  
16 narrative affirmation—creates a layered rhetorical effect, blending personal conviction with  
17 external validation. Yet this framing risks overemphasizing individual effort as the primary path  
18 through structural barriers.  
19  
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### 21 **Figure 5**

22 *Assemblage from VEL\_007, Seq\_2, showing the shift from Maria’s first-person testimony to the*  
23 *narrator’s reinforcement of the message*  
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37 **Contextual description:** In Frame A, Maria speaks directly to the camera, embodying the line  
38 “Education was the key that opened doors to a better life” as a personal statement. Frame B introduces the  
39 narrator, whose direct gaze and static framing underscore and validate Maria’s claim, visually reinforcing  
40 the belief in education as inherently transformative.  
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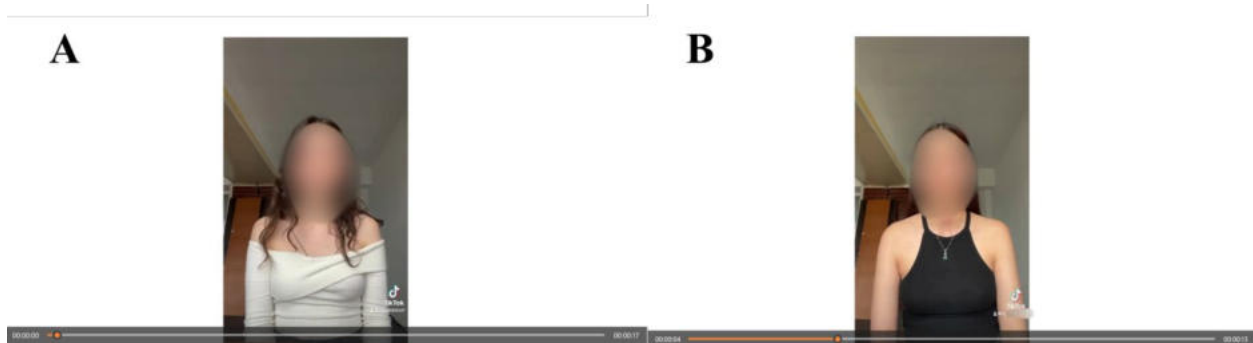
42 **Excerpt A:** ‘Education was the key that opened doors to a better future for me. I know that every child  
43 deserves this chance, and I will keep fighting for it.’

44 **Excerpt B:** ‘For Maria and for all those like her, education is now hope. Education is the key! Support  
45 access to education for all children!’  
46

47 At the same time, other velfies introduce more complex or contradictory readings of  
48 justice. In *VEL\_008, Seq\_1*, the tone shifts: “*With a heavy heart, Maria accepted her fate and*  
49 *took up work in the fields.*” The affective register here is melancholic, and the narrative halts  
50 without resolution or recovery. This moment disrupts the redemptive arc by presenting Maria’s  
51 resignation as both a personal and structural loss. Maria is neither saved nor triumphant; instead,  
52 she embodies deferred aspiration and institutional neglect.  
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**Figure 6**

*Assemblage from VEL\_008, Seq\_1, showing the two narrators delivering the voice-over that recounts Maria's trajectory*



**Contextual description:** In frames A and B, each narrator addresses the camera directly, their steady, front-facing posture mirroring the solemnity of the script

**Excerpt A:** ‘With a heavy heart, Maria accepted her fate and began working alongside her family in agriculture.’

**Excerpt B:** ‘Without access to education, her dream of becoming a doctor seemed more distant. Yet, she did not lose hope and continued reading and studying on her own using old books she found around the village’

This growing awareness of systemic entanglement becomes more explicit in the second instance—VEL\_008, Seq\_2—where the narrator observes: “*The teachers failed to truly help Maria. But the system failed them, too.*” The scene develops as a pointed juxtaposition: on one side, a portrayal of structural incapacity that constrains teachers’ agency; on the other, the sudden appearance of a volunteer who recognizes Maria’s potential and offers direct support. In the narration—“*With their help, Maria was able to return to school*”—the volunteer’s intervention functions as a decisive narrative pivot, recasting the possibility of justice as emerging from community-based, non-formal actors rather than from the institutional apparatus meant to ensure it. The affective tone is hopeful yet shaded by regret, acknowledging both the transformative potential of human connection and the insufficiency of formal educational structures.

A distinct articulation of this relational framing appears in VEL\_004, Seq\_2, which introduces Ilona as a figure of educational exclusion. The teacher character states: “*We offer a second chance to people like Ilona—to support them in building a new future.*” As illustrated in Figure 7, this narrative unfolds through a sequence of visual and embodied shifts. In Frame A, Ilona is seated in isolation beneath a tree—withdrawn and grounded, echoing the narrative claim that the system “didn’t give [her] a first chance.” The teacher’s entrance in Frame B and their direct encounter in Frame C mark a pivotal turning point. In Frame D, Ilona appears upright and in motion, holding a tablet—symbolizing renewed access and tentative transformation. This visual transition from stillness to movement is portrayed as enabled through recognition and relational attention.

**Figure 7***Ilona as a figure of exclusion and imagined transformation*

**Contextual description:** In VEL\_004, Seq\_2, Ilona is depicted as both excluded and potentially recoverable. Frame A shows her seated beneath a tree, withdrawn, embodying the claim that “the system didn’t give [her] a first chance.” By Frame D, she stands in motion with a tablet, signaling renewed engagement. This transformation is mediated through the teacher figure, who enters in Frames B and C, not as a savior but as one who recognizes and relates. The shift from stillness to movement, isolation to participation, underscores transformation as grounded in pedagogical recognition and care.

**Excerpts:** A: ‘Without knowing how to read, it’s impossible to find a job or build a better life.’

B: ‘We offer a second chance to people like Ilona—to support them in building a new future.’

D: ‘I learned how to read, and I was accepted to the best high school in Bucharest.’

**Source:** VEL\_004, Seq\_2, 00:32–00:53

In contrast to earlier-performative yet fictionalized depictions, in VEL\_012 Maria appears as a real participant, interacting directly with the narrator and another pupil. This blurs the boundary between constructed character and lived subject, embedding the narrative of inequality in documented, co-present reality. The connection is made explicit in the narrator’s self-disclosure: “*As a small addition to Maria’s response, I am the godmother of this girl and I truly wished she could learn more if school doesn’t allow it. I wanted her to have a good future, and not one lacking education. I decided to offer her extra lessons like math and Romanian. When she wants, I also teach her dance, and in the future I’d like to teach her to sing or even play an instrument.*” (VEL\_012, Seq\_3, 03:10 – 04:00).

Maria’s additional appearances further consolidate recurring patterns of inequality. In VEL\_010, Seq\_2 (01:20–02:07), the re-entry script is stated explicitly: “She began to attend school.” In VEL\_010, Seq\_3 (02:10–02:35), redirected aspiration is named directly: “Maria’s dream was to become an engineer.” Inclusion paired with ongoing barriers recurs in VEL\_013, Seq\_1 (00:30–00:40), while VEL\_008, Seq\_3 (02:15–02:45) closes on persistence amid deferred

goals. A system-facing register frames VEL\_009, Seq\_4 (02:20–03:00), and a peer/meta voice answers Maria in VEL\_012, Seq\_5 (03:10–04:00). Across these instances, modal instances covary with stance: third-person narration clusters with institutional commentary; first-person address underwrites perseverance narratives; movement sequences index transition; static, front-facing shots sustain a reflective tone.

### Figure 8

*Assemblage of Maria's appearances illustrating re-entry, aspiration, and persistence across varied registers*



**Contextual description:** This assemblage follows Maria's story from institutional constraints (A) and civic calls for systemic reform (B) to schooling amid material scarcity (C) and a resilience-focused conclusion (D). Across segments, personal testimony intertwines with structural critique, framing education as both a right and a catalyst for change.

**Excerpts:** A – “We observe the lack of time school allocates for proper education and the pressure placed by the Ministry on teachers to complete the curriculum and teach children everything necessary. Despite their young age, the girls are unaware of the learning gaps being created; B – “Romania needs a paradigm shift.” / “Education is a matter of human dignity.”; C – “She didn't always have books or notebooks.”; D – “Her story is a testament to resilience... access to education... can transform lives.”

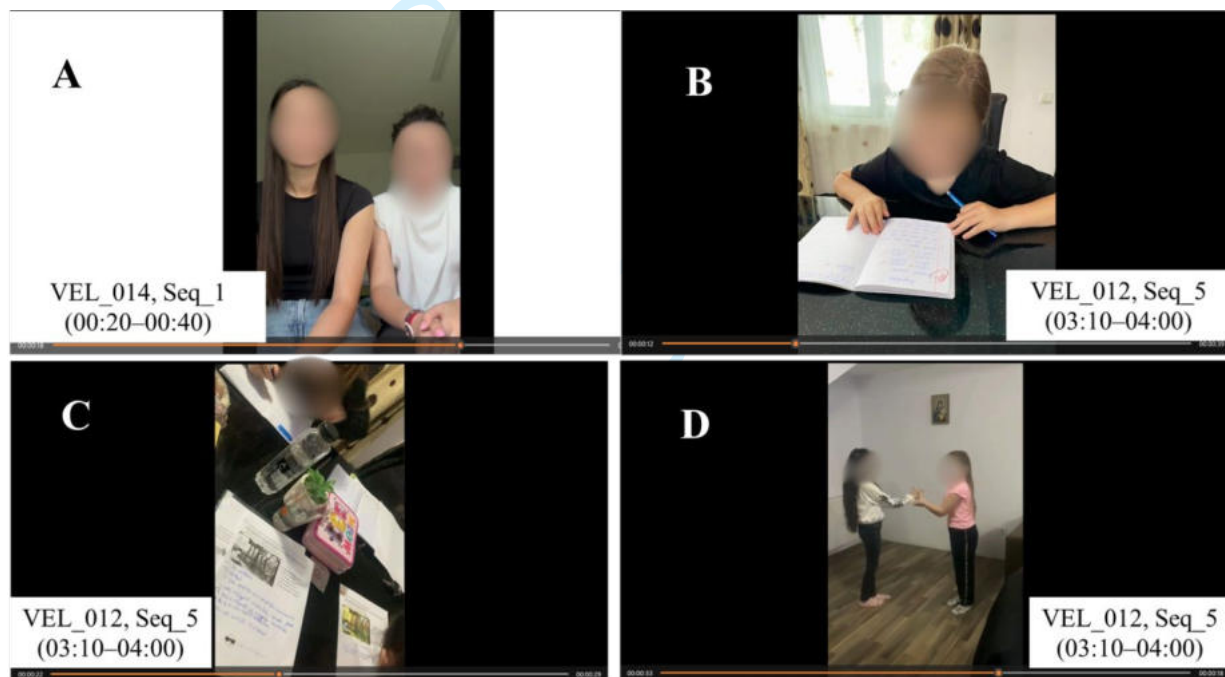
### I see you! Recognition, Empowerment, and Pedagogical Presence

In addressing RQ2—*How is teacher agency multimodally constructed in relation to addressing or mitigating socio-economic inequalities*—our analysis examines recognition and empowerment as interrelated components of the “I see you” meaning-making path. Within this framing, velfies depict teacher agency through multimodal enactments of *recognition*—the sustained witnessing of learners and affirmation of their worth—and *empowerment*—the fostering of learners' capacity to act, often through mentorship, shared learning, and expanded horizons.

Recognition is constructed through self-disclosure, attentive presence, and the provision of personalized support (Figure 9). In one instance, a narrator, speaking plainly from a domestic setting, commits to continuing academic and creative lessons for a pupil she identifies as her goddaughter (VEL\_012, Seq\_5). Minimalist production, and vocal tremors convey sincerity, situating teacher identity in both care and agency while foregrounding intergenerational support as a counterbalance to institutional gaps. In another example, a teacher is depicted noticing and nurturing a student's artistic potential (VEL\_014, Seq\_1). The warm, affirming tone and stable, centered framing construct the teacher as a benevolent guide, but the narrative follows a familiar "teacher-as-rescuer" arc—positioning justice as individual mentorship rather than systemic transformation. Across these examples, recognition is mediated through intimate framing, controlled affect, and relational investment, producing powerful images of care while leaving broader structural inequities unchallenged.

### Figure 9

*Assemblage illustrating recognition as pedagogical presence*



**Contextual description:** Frame A narrates a teacher nurturing a pupil's artistic potential, framing justice as individual mentorship. Frames B–D show a godmother–teacher supplementing formal schooling with academic and creative lessons, blending familial care with pedagogical commitment.

**Excerpts:** A – ‘During an art class, Ms. Elena notices Andrei's potential and starts giving him attention and encouragement. She offers him a safe space to express his creativity and explore his passion for art.’; B-D - As a small addition to Maria's response, I am the godmother of this girl and I truly wished she could learn more if school doesn't allow it. I wanted her to have a good future, and not one lacking education. I decided to offer her extra lessons like math and Romanian. When she wants, I also teach her dance, and in the future I'd like to teach her to sing or even play an instrument.

In this path, *empowerment* emerges as a relational, cyclical process in which the act of receiving support becomes a catalyst for offering it to others. Rather than being an abstract ideal,

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3 empowerment is made visible through concrete encounters—moments where agency is affirmed,  
4 practiced, and passed on.

5 In VEL\_003 (Figure 10, frame A), a teacher guides Liliana, a student enrolled in a  
6 remedial programme at her former teacher’s urging. The scene culminates with Liliana reading a  
7 line from Malala Yousafzai’s *We Are Displaced*—“When I close my eyes and think of my  
8 childhood, I see pine forests and snow-capped mountains.” The camera lingers as the teacher  
9 gently caresses her hair, the embodied gesture reinforcing the spoken act as both an achievement  
10 and an opening into possibility. Thus, empowerment is staged as recognition, intimacy, and  
11 affirmation against the backdrop of early school leaving.

12 As we observed in VEL\_009 (Figure 10, frame B), this principle takes on an  
13 intergenerational dimension. Mrs. Ionescu, the teacher figure, recounts her journey from  
14 childhood poverty to becoming a teacher: “I had to work hard to get into school and then into  
15 university... now I’ve come back to help children in similar situations.” Delivered directly to  
16 camera in a static outdoor setting, her testimony reframes personal struggle as a resource for  
17 motivating others, foregrounding the moral duty to “give back” as a defining element of  
18 professional identity.

19 Empowerment also appears as a reflexive practice. In VEL\_011 (Figure 10, frame C), the  
20 narrator reflects, “When I started to share what I had learned with others, I realized how  
21 powerful that was—not just for them, but for me too.” This framing dissolves the teacher–learner  
22 binary: knowledge circulates, and in sharing, the giver deepens her own understanding.

23 Finally, VEL\_014 (Figure 10, frame D) locates empowerment in metaphor and spatial  
24 transformation. Moving from the “darkness” of hardship to the light of an art gallery, the narrator  
25 closes with gratitude to a teacher whose belief made her dreams tangible. The shift in location—  
26 from an intimate interior to a public cultural space—visually encodes the expansion of horizons,  
27 suggesting that empowerment is as much about access to new worlds as it is about personal  
28 resilience.  
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**Figure 10**

*Assemblage illustrating empowerment as collaborative engagement and expanded horizons*



**Contextual description:** This assemblage shows empowerment through mentorship, personal testimony, shared learning, and cultural exploration. **A** depicts a teacher guiding a student in a remedial program. **B** features a teacher sharing her journey from poverty to giving back to her community. **C** presents a reflection on how teaching others deepens one's own learning. **D** captures a shift from personal narrative to an art gallery visit, symbolizing growth and new possibilities.

**Excerpts:** **A:** 'When I close my eyes and think of my childhood, I see pine forests and snow-capped mountains'; **B:** 'Let me tell you what I went through. I came from a very poor family and had to work hard to get into school and then into university. That's how I became a teacher and now I've come back to help children in similar situations.'; **C:** 'When I started to share what I had learned with others, I realized how powerful that was—not just for them, but for me too.'; **D:** 'Education is about finding light in the midst of darkness. Thanks to a special teacher and her unconditional support, I discovered that art can be a refuge amid a tumultuous world. Thank you, Ms. Elena, for showing me that dreams can become reality when someone believes in you.'

### **I am a future creator**

In relation to RQ3—*How do pre-service teachers build their professional identity in response to structural inequalities encountered in educational contexts?*—this meaning-making path frames teaching as a forward-projecting act. Thus, the velfies served to narrate current practice and to envision the teacher's role in shaping equitable futures.

The future creator orientation often begins with direct, declarative commitments to action, gradually moving from an acknowledgment of systemic failure to the enactment of practical support and collective advocacy. As observed in VEL\_001, Seq\_3 (Figure 11, frame A), the absence of speech and ambient sound shifts the viewer's attention to the image of a boy with his head bowed beside the digitally superimposed "2 + 2 = 5." This silent moment operates as a visual metaphor for systemic educational failure, signaling both cognitive disruption and

emotional withdrawal, establishing the moral urgency that underpins later commitments to change.

Building on this urgency, VEL\_002 (Figure 11, frame B) introduces a structured, reasoned appeal. Two narrators take turns outlining education's transformative benefits—personal development, health awareness, poverty reduction, and emotional intelligence—framing these as investments in the future. The static indoor setting, steady framing, and absence of visual embellishment keep the focus on the clarity and sincerity of the spoken message, positioning teaching as a deliberate, well-informed, and future-oriented practice.

This forward-looking stance is further embodied in VEL\_004, Seq\_2 (Figure 11, frame C), where a staged dialogue between “Maria” and “Ilona” dramatizes the teacher's role in opening “a second chance” for learning. The use of an outdoor setting and empathetic body language positions education as mobile, accessible, and grounded in human connection. Ilona's scripted aspirations—“I want to learn to read... leave this village, and find a job”—anchor educational justice in concrete, life-changing outcomes rather than abstract ideals.

The trajectory culminates in VEL\_009, Seq\_3 (Figure 11, frame D), where a direct outdoor appeal links personal transformation to societal responsibility: “Let us invest in education to offer all young people the chance for a better life.” The minimal gestures and steady eye contact maintain a persuasive tone, transforming individual stories like Cristina's into a collective call for systemic commitment.

### Figure 11

*Assemblage of velfie sequences articulating commitment to education as a transformative and justice-oriented force*



**Contextual description:** Frame A uses silence, the bowed head of a boy, and the chalked error “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ” to symbolize systemic failure. Frame B delivers a structured monologue on education's personal and societal benefits. Frame C stages a supportive teacher–learner exchange, framing justice as sustained accompaniment. Frame D offers a direct call to invest in education as a collective responsibility.

**Excerpts:** **A.** The text in Romanian reads: ‘Parents’ illiteracy and lack of education limit their ability to support their children’s schooling’; **B** – ‘Education is a powerful tool that can transform individual lives and make a positive impact on society as a whole. Investing in education is, in fact, investing in the future.’; **C** – ‘We offer a second chance to people like Ilona—to support them in building a new future.’ / ‘You’re not alone—we’re here to support you.’; **D** – ‘The story of Cristina proves that it is never too late to change your destiny through education. Let us invest in education to offer all young people the chance for a better life.’

A further development of this orientation appears when the imagined future centers on *learner self-direction*. The assemblage in **Figure 12** (frames A and B) voices the story of Edi, now older, who speaks in the first person, acknowledges the teacher’s formative role, and claims his own trajectory. The brighter palette, close/mid shots, upright posture, and steady gaze stage maturation and agency, while gratitude marks recognition as the scaffold for autonomy. As observed in VEL\_015, Seq\_3 (frame C), the sequence shifts to a broaden agency from “I” to “we”: “Each of us can contribute to education—... simply encouraging children around us to pursue their studies.” / “Our small actions can have a big impact on lives and our shared future.” / “Teachers’ actions can change the future.” Surfaced in VEL\_013, Seq\_2 (frame D), collective empowerment is a catalyst for deconstructing inequalities: “We can build a better future for all children...”. The decisive tone hands agency to teachers collectively.

**Figure 12**

*Assemblage of velfie sequences where pre-service teachers transfer agency to future learners*



**Contextual description:** The assemblage shows pre-service teachers framing learners as active agents in their own education. In frames A–B, (“Don’t give up!”) transitions to a classroom role-play modeling encouragement. Frame C offers direct, personal reassurance, while frame D delivers an outdoor call to persistence and inclusion. Together, they present teacher agency as fostering learner self-determination.

**Excerpts:** **A** – The text in Romanian reads “Don’t give up!”; **B** - “I am here because of you and of the other great teachers.”; **C** - “Each of us can contribute to education—through volunteering, donations, or simply encouraging children around us to pursue their studies.” / “Our small actions can have a big impact

on lives and our shared future.” / “Teachers' actions can change the future.”; **D** – ‘We can build a better future for all children in Romania. The future is in our hands!’

The production of velfies provided means for pre-service teachers to consider and performatively voice the co-construction of future and the collective de-construction of inequalities. Unlike *Maria and the ubiquitous story of inequality*, which centers on narrating barriers, or *I see you!*, which foregrounds recognition and empowerment in the present, *I am a future creator* meaning making path positions the teacher as an active designer of futures— futures where equity is embedded in pedagogy, sustained through enduring relationships, and enacted in partnership with learners.

## Discussion

This study explored how initial teacher education can support pre-service teachers in examining their beliefs, identities, and roles in challenging educational inequalities. Using velfies as both a learning activity and a multimodal research tool, participants expressed how they saw education as a means to disrupt injustice. Our learning and research design, grounded in the idea that learning is multimodal (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), was embedded in *Fundamentals of Education and Curriculum Theory* courses.

We analysed the velfies using Knoblauch's (2014) interpretive video hermeneutics and Jewitt and Perry's (2012) multimodal approach, identifying “meaning dense” moments, that is instances, and creating assemblages of frames, excerpts, and contextual descriptions.

The discussion addresses the three meaning-making pathways that emerged, and velfies as embodied pedagogies, before considering the study's limitations.

### **Maria speaks for many**

The narratives of inequality constructed by participants revealed symbolic female figures—most prominently Maria—who embody intersecting disadvantages including poverty, low parental education, and the chronic underfunding of schools (Cobb, 2017). These figures function as semiotic anchors through which teacher candidates externalize complex socio-economic realities into tangible, affect-laden stories. While prior research suggests that pre-service teachers often conflate systemic disadvantage with isolated incidents of mistreatment (Hosseini et al., 2024, 2025; Lemley, 2014), our findings point to a more systemic reading: participants explicitly framed inequality as embedded within structural conditions rather than reducible to interpersonal failings.

This narrative positioning resonates with Fraser's (1998) claim that justice demands attention to both redistribution and recognition, as participants consistently acknowledged structural barriers while situating them in lived, embodied experiences. Moreover, the symbolic construction of Maria aligns with findings by Picower (2021) and Cochran-Smith et al. (2016) that storytelling can act as a critical pedagogical tool for surfacing deficit discourses and reframing them toward systemic critique. In our study, however, countervailing forces emerged: while systemic causes were recognized, solutions were more often envisioned through individual interventions—a tendency noted in other teacher education contexts where structural analysis is not fully matched by structural action plans (Datnow et al., 2023; Sleeter, 2023).

Participants' representations also reflect what Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) term “critical social justice literacy,” in which inequality is understood as socially constructed, pervasive, and

upheld by institutions. The choice to present Maria's experiences across multiple velfies and modalities suggests that pre-service teachers were actively curating a recurring cultural figure to stand for broader patterns of exclusion. Such semiotic recurrences parallel findings from Avraamidou (2020) on identity construction, where repeated character use fosters narrative coherence and symbolic resonance.

At the same time, the reliance on personal or community-based interventions—volunteers, godparents, or individual teachers—mirrors trends identified in international teacher education literature, where structural inequities are acknowledged yet addressed through localized, relational forms of support (Cerna et al., 2021; Zeichner, 2019, 2020). While such approaches can be transformative for individual learners, they risk perpetuating the pedagogies of rescue (Mills, 2013) in which the teacher is positioned as savior rather than as an actor embedded within—and potentially capable of reshaping—the system.

Finally, the multimodal composition of the velfies—the use of sequential framing, visual symbolism, and affective tone—functions as “curated assemblages of meaning” (Rowse & Pahl, 2015), in which aesthetic choices (e.g., Maria walking alone through rural landscapes, or Hona sitting hopelessly under a tree) amplify the emotional and political dimensions of the message (Avraamidou, 2020).

### From seeing to becoming

The trajectories represented in the *I See You* and *I Am a Future Creator* pathways reveal a developmental continuum in how pre-service teachers in our study constructed their professional agency in relation to socio-economic inequality. At the initial stage, recognition functions as a form of *witnessing* (Picower, 2021)—acknowledging the learner's dignity, presence, and potential within the constraints of the present moment. Over time, this recognition is extended into a projected horizon in which learners are actively positioned as capable agents in shaping their own futures.

This progression begins in the *I See You* path, where recognition was multimodally enacted through direct-to-camera address, intimate spatial framing, and narrative positioning that foregrounded care and relational accountability. In sequences such as VEL\_004, the teacher figure addressed Hona's aspirations directly, offering sustained support rather than a one-off intervention. This aligns with Fraser's (1998) framing of recognition as a structural component of justice—necessary for equitable participation—and with Esteban-Guitart and Moll's (2014) notion of identifying and affirming *funds of identity* as pedagogical resources. Here, learners' lived histories were not treated as background context but as active assets for learning and engagement.

Building from this stance, the *I Am a Future Creator* orientation transforms recognition into intentional future-building. In VEL\_002, benefits of education—ranging from personal development to health literacy and poverty reduction—were presented as actionable possibilities. Such forward-looking commitments resonate with Priestley et al.'s (2015) conception of *teacher agency as projective*, where professional practice involves shaping conditions for learners' future capabilities. Similarly, in VEL\_009, the creator's public appeal to “invest in education” linked personal transformation with systemic responsibility, echoing Datnow et al.'s (2022) argument that socially just teaching requires connecting micro-level relationships with macro-level advocacy.

The connection between these meaning-making paths is epistemological. Within a *funds of identity* framework (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), the process of recognising existing learner

resources is inseparable from creating conditions that expand those resources toward new imagined selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In our assemblages, multimodal strategies made this trajectory visible: steady framing and unbroken shots signalled credibility; collaborative address suggested solidarity; and symbolic visual shifts—such as movement from nonsignificant places to universities or schools—rendered the future tangible. These aesthetic choices surface an *embodied pedagogy*, where meaning is lived in gesture, spatial arrangement, and sensory detail rather than confined to verbal narration (Bondy et al., 2022; Perry, 2023; Springgay & Freedman, 2012).

In conjunction, *I See You* and *I Am a Future Creator* illustrate that *recognition and empowerment* are not discrete acts but mutually reinforcing practices. Recognition grounds the pedagogical relationship in dignity and mutual regard; empowerment extends it into the future, mobilizing both teacher and learner toward shared educational horizons (Volman et al., 2023; Z. Walsh et al., 2020). This continuum foregrounds professional identity formation as a temporal, multimodal process—rooted in the present yet oriented toward the possible—in which pre-service teachers learn to inhabit the dual role of witness and catalyst for transformation (Masud & Marsoobian, 2024; Picower, 2021).

This study examined how pre-service teachers conceptualize the power of education to challenge and delegitimize social inequalities—such as supporting economically disadvantaged, low-achieving pupils or early school leavers—through the creation of velfies as part of ITE coursework. These velfies functioned simultaneously as pedagogical tools and as multimodal research artifacts. Our design was grounded in the understanding that learning is inherently multimodal (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), and that justice-oriented reflection emerges through verbal reasoning and embodied, aesthetic expression. Using IVA (Knoblauch, 2014) and multimodal analysis (Jewitt & Price, 2012), we identified and assembled meaning-dense instances to examine how participants expressed, performed, and projected justice-oriented identities. In what follows, we discuss the three emergent meaning-making pathways and reflect on the pedagogical significance of velfies as embodied practices.

### **Maria speaks for many: How PST Represent Structural Injustice**

Across the velfies, narratives of inequality frequently crystallized around recurring fictional characters—most notably Maria—who embodied intersecting disadvantages such as poverty, geographic isolation, and systemic neglect. These characters functioned as semiotic anchors, allowing PSTs to externalize abstract concepts of injustice into situated, emotionally resonant stories. Unlike prior research that identified a tendency among teacher candidates to individualize inequality (Hosseini et al., 2024; Lemley, 2014), these representations foregrounded structural barriers—such as underfunded schools, teacher shortages, and unequal access—thus aligning with Fraser's (1998) theory that justice must encompass both *redistribution and recognition*.

The recurrence of Maria as a shared figure of exclusion suggests a deliberate pedagogical move, echoing Avraamidou's (2020) argument that repeated character use supports symbolic coherence and narrative identity work. In this sense, storytelling emerged not only as an expressive modality but as a critical pedagogical strategy. As Picower (2021) and Cochran-Smith et al. (2016) contend, narrative practices can disrupt deficit framings and create openings for structural critique. These findings echo broader calls in teacher education to move beyond surface-level engagement with diversity toward deeper justice-centered pedagogies (C. Mills & Ballantyne, 2016; Purdy et al., 2023).

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Yet, a recurring tension persists: although PSTs identified systemic injustice, the interventions they proposed were predominantly localized and individualistic. Figures like godparents, volunteer mentors, or idealized teachers were cast as the primary agents of change. This reflects international critiques that social justice in teacher education often remains confined to “pedagogies of care” or “rescue,” where structural transformation is substituted by acts of personal compassion (Cerna et al., 2021; C. Mills, 2013; Zeichner, 2019). Such narratives risk reproducing neoliberal tropes of heroic individualism that obscure the need for institutional accountability and collective action (Purdy et al., 2023).

The velfies’ multimodal affordances intensified the affective and political force of these stories. Visual choices—like Maria walking alone through a rural village or Ilona’s stillness beneath a tree—were not arbitrary. These curated assemblages (Rowell & Pahl, 2015) reflect a growing justice literacy among participants, one aligned with Sensoy and DiAngelo’s (2017) notion of inequality as historically produced and institutionally maintained. In this sense, the velfies allowed PSTs to move beyond performative reflections, enacting instead what Lemley (2014) describes as the “naming” of structural violence—a foundational step toward justice-oriented praxis.

### **Recognition and agency: Pathways of justice-oriented becoming**

Two interconnected meaning-making pathways—*I See You* and *I Am a Future Creator*—illustrate how PSTs cultivated recognition and agency through their velfie-based reflections. These trajectories show how multimodal storytelling can serve as a site for professional identity rehearsal and pedagogical positioning, supporting the development of justice-oriented dispositions (Gandolfi & Mills, 2023; Purdy et al., 2023).

In the *I See You* pathway, recognition emerged as a foundational pedagogical stance—an affirmation of students’ dignity, struggles, and aspirations. Through direct gaze, steady framing, and empathetic address, participants enacted ‘ethical witnessing’ (Picower, 2021). Rather than offering abstract commentary, PSTs engaged in imagined dialogues with students, positioning themselves relationally. These enactments resonate with Fraser’s (1998) conception of participatory parity and Esteban-Guitart and Moll’s (2014) emphasis on affirming funds of identity. The *I Am a Future Creator* pathway extended this recognition into projective agency (Priestley et al., 2015), as PSTs imagined education as a catalyst for transformation. Velfies in this category emphasized outcomes such as literacy, civic engagement, and social mobility. In VEL\_009, for example, a participant’s public call to “invest in education” linked personal experience to societal responsibility, suggesting a vision of teaching as advocacy. These narratives align with Datnow et al.’s (2023) argument that teacher education must connect micro-level care with macro-level critique.

These pathways served as identity rehearsal mechanisms, enabling participants to test and refine emerging professional orientations. From a FOI perspective (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), the movement from recognition to agency marks a shift from deficit-oriented interventions toward capacity-building. This trajectory reflects Markus and Nurius’s (1986) theory of possible selves and aligns with evidence that emotionally engaged, reflective learning fosters professional alignment with equity goals (Almumen, 2023; Cerna et al., 2021). The embodied and aesthetic form of velfies—through gesture, voice, spatial framing—enabled participants to communicate meaning beyond verbal reasoning (Perry, 2023; Springgay & Freedman, 2012).

This process signals a broader reorientation in teacher education: from content delivery to reflexive transformation. As discussed by Donath et al. (2025), practices that emphasize situated,

emotionally resonant learning promote deeper internalization of inclusive values and ethical commitments. Velfies supported this by allowing PSTs to move beyond theoretical engagement with inequality, instead rehearsing justice-oriented teaching identities in contextually grounded, embodied ways (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025).

Finally, the two trajectories reveal that recognition and agency are co-constitutive dimensions of socially just teaching. Recognition grounds pedagogical relationships in respect and attentiveness; agency projects those relationships toward transformation. Together, they underscore that SJTE is iterative, affective, and relational—shaped by how teachers imagine, position, and perform their roles in relation to others (Masud & Marsoobian, 2024; Volman et al., 2023; Z. Walsh et al., 2020).

### Velfies as pedagogies that bring body in

The velfies produced in this study illustrate how teacher education can enact *embodied pedagogy*—approaches that position the body as central to learning, knowing, and teaching (Bondy et al., 2022; Perry, 2023; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; Walsh, 2023). Embodiment is therefore the physical presence of the teacher candidate and the affective intensities of gaze, voice modulation, posture, and gesture, which, as Walsh (2023) argues, carry epistemic weight in justice-oriented pedagogy. Participants' multimodal performances extended meaning beyond the verbal, with gestures, silence, hesitation, and spatial framing often functioning as powerful signifiers in their own right (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2010).

As with earlier participatory visual methodologies such as Photovoice (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997), velfies invite participants to integrate personal histories, material contexts, and critical reflection. However, the digital, performative turn (Choi & Rho, 2021; Lyle et al., 2020) transforms these artifacts from static representations into identity performances that unfold over time, enabling teacher candidates to re-enact their funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2023; Zhang-Yu et al., 2023). Through the layering of verbal narrative, bodily expression, and environmental cues, participants constructed self-authored professional identities grounded in lived experience, community knowledge, and aspirations for justice.

The embodied nature of velfies also foregrounded the *affective labour* of becoming a teacher for equity. As Matias (2016) and Bondy et al. (2022) note, confronting inequity in teacher education demands cognitive engagement and emotional risk-taking, often surfacing discomfort, vulnerability, or anger (Avraamidou, 2020). Our analysis showed that this emotional register was frequently embedded in candidates' bodily presence—leaning forward to signal urgency, lowering the gaze to express empathy, or pausing to let an image resonate.

At the same time, we acknowledge the methodological and ethical limits of this approach, echoing cautions in the literature (Ciolan & Manasia, 2025). Velfies inevitably privilege candidates who are digitally fluent and comfortable with self-presentation, potentially marginalizing others. Aesthetic decisions—such as camera angle, background, or editing—can reproduce dominant cultural norms and inadvertently silence alternative modes of expression (Almumen, 2023; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010). Moreover, the personal exposure inherent in embodied storytelling raises enduring questions of consent, emotional safety, and the circulation of digital artifacts once released into public or semi-public domains. These are not abstract considerations: they constituted real constraints in our study, shaping what participants chose to disclose and how they positioned themselves.

Velfies expose teaching as an embodied practice in which presence, gesture, and affect carry as much weight as words. They surface the tensions, vulnerabilities, and aspirations that

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3 shape how pre-service teachers position themselves against inequality. At the same time, they  
4 reveal the methodological and ethical challenges of working with highly personal, digitally  
5 mediated artifacts. These insights position velfies as both a promise and a provocation for  
6 teacher education: a medium that unsettles established pedagogies while demanding new forms  
7 of reflexivity, care, and accountability.  
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10 The velfies produced in this study illustrate how ITE can enact embodied pedagogy—  
11 approaches that position the body as central to learning, knowing, and teaching (Bondy et al.,  
12 2022; Perry, 2023; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; C. Walsh, 2023). Embodiment encompasses  
13 the teacher candidate's physical presence and the affective intensities of gaze, voice modulation,  
14 posture, and gesture, which, as Walsh (2023) argues, carry epistemic weight in justice-oriented  
15 pedagogy. Velfies represent a digital evolution of participatory visual methodologies—such as  
16 Photovoice (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017; C. Wang & Burris, 1997)—but their performative, time-  
17 based nature transforms them into dynamic identity enactments (Choi & Rho, 2021; Lyle et al.,  
18 2020). Through the layering of verbal narrative, bodily expression, and environmental cues,  
19 participants constructed self-authored professional identities grounded in lived experience,  
20 community knowledge, and aspirations for justice (Esteban-Guitart, 2023; Zhang-Yu et al.,  
21 2023).  
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24 The embodied nature of velfies also highlighted the affective labor of becoming a justice-  
25 oriented educator—labor that requires emotional attunement, ethical reflexivity, and  
26 vulnerability. As Matias (2016) and Bondy et al. (2022) argue, engaging with inequity in teacher  
27 education is cognitively and emotionally demanding, often surfacing discomfort, fragility, or  
28 anger (Avraamidou, 2020). Our analysis found that such emotional registers were often  
29 embedded in bodily presence—leaning forward to convey urgency, averting the gaze to express  
30 empathy, or pausing to allow visual resonance.  
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### 33 Limitations

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35 This study is situated within a single institutional and cultural context, which may limit  
36 the transferability of findings to other ITE programs. Its design, embedded in one course and  
37 involving a single cohort of PSTs, fosters analytical depth over generalizability and does not  
38 allow for comparative or longitudinal claims. As a method, velfies privilege participants who are  
39 digitally fluent and comfortable with self-presentation, potentially marginalizing those less at  
40 ease with performative modes (Almumen, 2023; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010). Aesthetic and  
41 technical decisions—such as framing, editing, or setting—may also reproduce dominant cultural  
42 norms, constraining the range of multimodal expression (Kress, 2010; Rowsell & Pahl, 2015).  
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45 While IVA enables in-depth exploration of embodied meaning-making (Knoblauch,  
46 2014), its interpretive orientation resists standardization and does not pursue inter-coder  
47 agreement, which may affect transparency and comparability (Jewitt & Price, 2012). Finally, the  
48 personal and visual nature of velfies raises enduring ethical challenges around vulnerability,  
49 emotional exposure, and the circulation of digital artifacts—issues widely noted in participatory  
50 visual research (Choi & Rho, 2021; Ciolan & Manasia, 2025; Wang & Burris, 1997). These  
51 considerations shaped what participants chose to disclose and how they positioned themselves  
52 within the task.  
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## Conclusions and implications for future research and practice

This study highlights the pedagogical value of multimodal, embodied practices—specifically velfies—in supporting SJTE. Future research should explore how these practices influence teacher identity and praxis over time, particularly in varied institutional and cultural contexts (Cerna et al., 2021; Gandolfi & Mills, 2023). Longitudinal studies are needed to examine whether such reflexive, arts-based tasks facilitate shifts from awareness to sustained action (Almumen, 2023; Picower, 2021). Moreover, aligning professional learning models with multimodal approaches can foster more holistic engagement by attending to emotion, motivation, and ethical stance as drivers of pedagogical change (Kennedy, 2018; Priestley et al., 2015).

At the policy level, the findings suggest a move toward value-centered frameworks that recognize teaching as emotional, relational, and moral work (Purdy et al., 2023; Reagan & Hambacher, 2021). Explicit knowledge alone is insufficient; countering the dominance of rescue pedagogies requires systemic attention to inclusion and equity (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; C. Mills, 2013). Within practice, embedding arts-based, reflexive modalities in ITE programs can deepen PSTs' sense of agency and moral responsibility, especially when coupled with safeguards that ensure emotional safety and diverse representation (Choi & Rho, 2021; Avraamidou, 2020).

To evaluate SJTE effectively, research must move beyond measuring knowledge acquisition to examine the development of professional dispositions, including willingness to change, self-efficacy, and critical justice orientation (Datnow et al., 2023; Masud & Marsoobian, 2024). As the *I Am a Future Creator* trajectory illustrated, PSTs' transformative intentions must be matched by opportunities and support to enact change. Finally, this study echoes calls for greater methodological rigor in teacher education research. As noted by Nīmante et al. (2025) and Kowalski et al. (2020), there remains a scarcity of large-scale, longitudinal, and comparative studies that include both teacher and student outcomes. Evaluating the transfer of ITE into classroom practices requires more robust designs, particularly those capturing complex, nonlinear processes across multiple dimensions (Donath et al., 2025; King et al., 2023). In an era of accelerating educational reform, understanding how teachers internalize and apply social justice principles is essential for building responsive, equitable systems of learning.

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