“BUT WHAT IF YOU JUST LISTENED TO THE EXPERIENCE OF AN IMMIGRANT TEACHER?”: LEARNING FROM IMMIGRANT/TRANSNATIONAL TEACHERS OF COLOR IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

“BUT WHAT IF YOU JUST LISTENED TO THE EXPERIENCE OF AN IMMIGRANT TEACHER?”: LEARNING FROM IMMIGRANT/TRANSNATIONAL TEACHERS OF COLOR IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

Ayesha Rabadi-Raol

Despite pervasive arguments for diversifying the teaching profession, as teachers of color have shown improved outcomes for children of color, immigrant and transnational teachers of color have largely been left out of possible solutions for diversifying the teaching workforce. In this context, I inquired into the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers, seeking to (re)position them as part of the much-needed diversity in the teacher workforce in solidarity with U.S. teachers of color.

Combining Critical Race Theory and Nepantla, I sought to learn from the experiences of six immigrant and transnational teachers of color as they negotiated, navigated, and reconciled differences across their home countries and the U.S. I conducted my study in New York City due to its high percentage of immigrants in schools, asking: How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate
the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City?

I employed a qualitative research design, focusing on nuanced and complex individual experiences without generalizing or essentializing a whole population. I used Seidman’s (2013) three interview series of in-depth interviews to gain information about my participants and their experiences and situate my study within and between the realms of counter-stories and testimonios.

Analytically, I engaged axial coding, built trans/ scripts (compressed renderings of original transcript) that captured emotional qualities, and presented trans/ scripts to participants. I asked them to identify important themes and name their own truths and stories. This methodology enhanced the meanings of the interviews by interpreting them through poetic counter-stories, and poetic testimonio with my participants.

I synthesized and re-presented findings as co-constructed poetic counter-stories, offering insights into participants’ experiences regarding early childhood classrooms and teacher education programs as spaces of (be)longing, learning about race and racism, access to teacher certification requirements, expectations of being an early childhood educator, and seeing children’s strengths. Implications point toward the need to listen and learn from immigrant and transnational teachers of color in justly transforming early childhood teacher education practices, programs, and policy.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to my parents, Zarine and Rusi Rabadi, and my grandmother, Amy Jamshed Kapadia who nurtured the educator in me. They taught me the importance of education and instilled in me a love of learning, and the values of hard work, persistence, and faith. You are gone but your legacy lives on in the accomplishments of your children.

I also dedicate my work to my Zoroastrian community, which has given me strong roots and a strong identity, to stand for justice and equity. Our religion, based on good thoughts, good words, and good deeds give me inner peace and strength to be thankful for everything life has to offer.
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A. R-R
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I am a storyteller. Let me begin with my own lived experience. I taught at a child development center in Mumbai, India for fourteen years before I came to the United States to pursue a master’s degree in early childhood general and special education. That is, I had accrued professional experience teaching prior to entering a pre-service teacher education degree in the U.S. While taking classes toward my degree, I had heard and read about the importance of educating immigrant children. Yet, in juxtaposition to the purported need to understand families and young children moving across geographic borders, as an early childhood teacher who had recently moved across such geographic borders, my experiences teaching young children and working with families in India were not acknowledged or valued. I often felt that my experiences were silenced and/or invisibilized. Despite rhetoric pertaining the need to diversify the teaching force for a growing population of children from intersectionally minoritized\(^1\) backgrounds, including immigrant children, I saw little effort to diversify the preparation of teachers and to support the development of teachers of color—especially teachers like me, teachers of color from immigrant/transnational backgrounds.

For example, in one of my Master’s degree classes, after I had described how, in my experience as a teacher in India, children responded to a certain kind of

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\(^1\) When using the term intersectionally-minoritized, I ascribe to Souto-Manning (2019c) who amalgamates McCarty’s (2002) term minoritized with intersectionality, thereby conveying the inequities of power where particular groups of people are “socially, economically, and politically marginalized within the larger society” (McCarty 2002, p. xv), accounting for racism, xenophobia, and entangled forms of bigotry.
instruction and materials, one of my peers (a white woman who spoke dominant American English) said, “Well, we are not in India, so it is not relevant. Maybe the experiences in a third-world country do not apply.” These words really hurt me, as I questioned whether my years of experience learning with and from young children had been worthless. I felt diminished. Perhaps these feelings signaled how my experiences and identity as an early childhood teacher in India were being deemed worthless.

Although the course instructor heard this comment, she said nothing as the class continued. This moment marked my awareness of how I, an Indian early childhood teacher, was being othered; how my experiences were going unacknowledged and were (whether intentionally or not) being devalued within the context of a U.S. early childhood teacher education program. Within a context where there was much talk about valuing what immigrant and/or minoritized children brought from home and about the assets of minoritized communities, I did not feel that my teacher education program always practiced what it taught (Picower, 2012).

This incident occurred nearly five years ago, although it is still on my mind. Every time I revisit this interaction, I wish I had responded. Yet, I was uncharacteristically silent. I have replayed this moment in my head many times, trying to make sense of this experience and understand what its potential implications are for the education of immigrant/transnational teachers of color. I also wish my experience as an immigrant/transnational teacher of color had been rendered visible in my teacher education program. I believe this would not only have impacted my experiences as a teacher education student, but also enriched the preparation of other students in the program.
As I continue my learning journey as an emerging teacher educator, I am better equipped with theoretical frameworks that contribute towards a deepened understanding of what happened that day. These gained perspectives help me better understand my life in the U.S., and the lives of immigrant/transnational teachers of color like me. I wondered if their experiences were punctuated by being invisiblized and silenced or if my experience was an isolated incident and not a situated representation of a larger phenomenon. I believe that such invisiblization, if present across the experiences of immigrant/transnational teachers of color in teacher education programs, may be detrimental to the education of teachers who will be teaching immigrant children—as it may inadvertently serve to normalize xenophobia.

In the age of the Trump regime, which is “based on a racist and xenophobic platform that frequently invokes long-held narratives about migrant criminality and economic burden” (Gleeson & Sampat, 2018, p. 87), my identity as an Indian, transnational, teacher of color in the U.S. context is subversive to the (whitified, monocultural) norm (Goodwin, Cheruvu, & Genishi, 2008); and so, my identity and experience may create challenges for the mainstream educational practices to include teachers like me, let alone embrace them. In an attempt to assuage my feelings pertaining to the lack of acknowledgment of my early childhood teaching experiences within the context of an early childhood teacher education program in the U.S., I authored the following poem.
A Teacher Like Me

What does it mean to be a teacher like me?
My race, ethnicity, and gender change meaning,
As I traverse national borders,
So does my ever-changing identity.

A woman, a student, a learner,
A person of color, an anomaly.
A mismatch, an outsider,
A transnational, foreign-born,
Possibly an immigrant? I am torn
Between my many worlds.

What does ‘being a teacher’ mean to me?
 Somehow my experience does not make complete sense,
In this alien country.

I employed poetry as a way of valuing and heightening emotion; as Cahnmann (2003) underscored, “poetry…offers a means to say what might not otherwise be said” (p. 29), to say what otherwise might be silenced.

My teaching experience and identities as an Indian, Asian, woman, person of color, doctoral student, transnational teacher of color, early career teacher educator,
and early childhood teacher, demonstrate how my intersecting identities
(representative of overlapping systems of oppression) impact my interactions in the
U.S. in culturally-specific ways. Because of my Indian educational background, which
was traditionally colonial and colonized, as India was ruled by the British for over 200
years, my experiences within educational settings in the U.S. sometimes appear alien
and disconnected. I have felt like an outsider and labeled as the other, because of my
ways of knowing and being. I am constantly questioning: What and who dictates what
is valued in university-based teacher education programs?

Ever since I came to the U.S., I have been racialized as a teacher of color,
because of my race and the color of my skin. I was a small part of the “diversity”
which was seemingly required in the teacher workforce, but teacher education
programs managed to keep out (at least in terms of perspectives, points of view, and
experiences). My experiences as a Master’s degree student in a university-based
teacher education program where most of the instructors were white (mirroring larger
demographic trends in teacher education—Milner, Pearman, and McGee, 2003) were
fraught with feelings of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) and cultural dissonance
(Genishi & Goodwin, 2008). Through deep introspection, I sought to interrogate what
Sleeter (2001) has called the “overwhelming presence of whiteness” (p. 93) in teacher
education and to interrupt the prevalence of white, monocultural norms in early
childhood teacher education.

By reflecting on my journey as a transnational teacher of color, traversing the
borders of identity, experience, and the color line, keeping a poetry journal
(Cahnmann, 2003), I sought to make sense of the ever-changing and ever-changed
environment of early childhood education around me. Within the context of a university-based early childhood teacher education program in the U.S., I adapted, assimilated, and kept a low-profile. Those reflections on my own experience as an early childhood educator in a new cultural and educational context have led me to think and rethink the potential value that teachers like me bring to teacher education; to affirm that immigrant and transnational teachers of color bring knowledge, pedagogies, and understandings to the U.S. contexts of schooling and higher education.

My dissertation study stands on the foundational belief that immigrant and transnational teachers of color bring with them identity resources (Beck & Nganga, 2016) that could possibly enhance the field of early childhood education, teacher education and beyond. Thus, in this dissertation study, I listened to and learned from the experiences of six immigrant/transnational teachers of color, offering implications for transforming early childhood teacher education.
Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

To understand the process whereby experience becomes meaningful requires that we situate ourselves in history and recognize as critical the relationships and intersections – both given and possible – of biography and social structure.

(Britzman, 2003, pp. 232-233)

Background of the Problem

Currently, within the research literature on pre-service teacher education in the U.S., little is known about the experiences and identities of immigrant and transnational pre-service teachers of color with prior teaching experience in their home countries. These teachers bring an array of experiences and identities to bear on the processes of teaching and learning to teach in the context of traditional, university-based teacher education programs in the U.S., Australia, and Canada (cf. Bense, 2016; Dunn, 2012). Particularly in the U.S., while there is increasing concern with how the field of early childhood teacher education has a growing white teacher workforce, disproportional to the increase of young children of color and/or from immigrant backgrounds (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016), little attention has been paid to how teachers of color are educated—to their experiences and identities (Sleeter, 2001; 2016; 2017). That is, while research in the field is constantly propagating the need for more teachers of color to teach the increasing population of students of color in the
U.S. (Banks, 1993; Brown, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Young 2002; Dumas et al., 2015; Haddix, 2010, 2017; Kiryio et al., 2009; Sleeter, 2001, 2017), these needs, experiences, and identities of teachers of color are often not attended to. This is acutely the case for immigrant and transnational teachers of color.

Although “international teachers have been present in U.S. schools for decades, their recruitment for urban schools as a response to the supposed teacher shortage is a relatively new phenomenon with little research to support it” (Dunn, 2012, p. 1379). Without attending to the experiences and preparation of immigrant and transnational teachers of color, calls for increasing the demographics of teachers of color may be insufficient, as these teachers are likely to continue being prepared by white teacher educators, who are likely to privilege white, dominant, (mono)cultural curriculum and teaching (Au et al., 2016; Dunn, 2011; Goodwin et al., 2008; Shafer, 2018; Sleeter, 2017). As Dunn (2012) unveiled as she focused on the confluence of urban schools, teacher education, and globalization as they pertain to the education and development of international teachers for U.S. schools, there is currently a lack of preparation of U.S. programs to prepare immigrant teachers for urban settings, which typically serve immigrant children and families of color. There is “a need for teacher education and professional development” for international, immigrant, and transnational teachers which centrally account for how “good teaching in one context is not always good teaching in another” and helps teachers navigate within and across potentially conflicting pedagogical practices (p. 1400).

Guiding this study is an understanding of the whiteness which characterizes teacher education—demographically and conceptually (Sleeter, 2001, 2017; Souto-
Manning & Martell, 2019)—and how such whiteness might impact the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color who are (re)learning to become teachers within the context of teacher education programs in the U.S. (Dunn, 2012). Thus, seeking to offer insights onto how to better acknowledge and value the experiences and identities of immigrant/transnational teachers of color with prior teaching experience, the aim of this dissertation study was to learn from and about how immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color with teaching experience (in their home contexts) experience and negotiate (re)learning what it means to teach within the context of U.S. teacher education programs. Specifically, it attended to what knowledges they bring, what knowledges are (from their perspectives) valuable, and how they reconciled their experiences and identities within, across, and in between geographic borders. This is not only a topic of importance in the U.S., but in countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand as well.

While studies on the education of immigrant/transnational teachers are few and far between in the U.S., they are more common in Australia and Canada. Drawing on studies from Australia and Canada, two contexts which dominate the research on immigrant and transnational teachers, and on international teacher migrations, Bense’s review of research (2016) called for “more detailed and reliable data about the global migrant teacher stock, including its numbers, flows, characteristics, and circumstances” and suggested that research in the field should “be directed towards providing more differentiated and detailed descriptions of migrant teachers’ situation” (p. 47). Advising future teacher education researchers to bring to the foreground the individual and
collective experiences of international teachers, Bense (2016) urged the field to develop teacher education policies and practices towards reimagining programs for migrant teachers, as this is “an issue of international significance, which eventually will require the transnational collaboration of educational researchers and policymakers” (p. 47). Heeding Bense’s (2016) call, this study is predicated on the understanding that it is vital to acknowledge and value the experiences that immigrant and transnational teachers bring to the U.S. context and thereby include them within the much-needed diversity in the teacher workforce in solidarity with U.S. teachers of color.

**On the Need to Diversify the Early Childhood Teaching Force**

Although scholars have argued that teachers of color are more likely to seek employment in schools serving students of color (Ingersoll and May, 2011) and have the potential to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students of color (Haddix, 2008; Quichos & Ríos, 2000; Villegas et al., 2012), their “limited presence is well documented” (Haddix, 2016, p. 32). Immigrant and transnational teachers of color are a group which stands to diversify the teaching force, filling this identified need, especially given their rising enrollments in U.S. institutions of higher education. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the need to demographically diversify the teaching force, this dissertation study is grounded on the need to move beyond simply diversifying the teaching force demographically to include conceptual and programmatic considerations for transforming teacher education in ways that account for the experiences and identities of transnational and international teachers of color.

To further solidify the need to study the experiences of and focus on immigrant and transnational teachers of color in early childhood education, I briefly review the
preparation of teachers of color, the importance of the early years, and the possibility of (re)positioning a rising number of immigrant and transnational students in teacher education programs. In doing so, I seek to further substantiate the importance and necessity of studying the experiences of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color. After all, they are a group from whom teacher education writ large (Dunn, 2012) and early childhood teacher education in particular (Adair et al., 2012) can learn if it is to expand beyond its current overwhelming whiteness (Sleeter, 2001).

On teacher education. Almost two decades ago, Sleeter (2001) reviewed eighty “data-based research studies on preservice teacher preparation for multicultural schools, particularly schools that serve historically underserved communities” and found that teacher education overwhelmingly “focuses on addressing the attitudes and lack of knowledge of white preservice students” (p. 94), thereby centering their experiences. Even when preparing teachers to support the learning and development of diverse students, teacher education programs center the needs, experiences, and preparation of white teachers. Departing from the centering of whiteness in the preparation of teachers of color, more recently, in her review of literature, Brown (2014) denounced “how the dominant, (dis)embodied and normalized culture of whiteness, white privilege and white hegemony pervades contemporary teacher education” (p. 326) and continues to compromise the preparation of teachers of color. Reviewing and analyzing a number of key studies (e.g., Achinstein et al., 2010; Guyton et al., 1996; King 1993; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Sleeter & Milner, 2011), Brown (2014) pinpointed how recruiting and retaining teachers of color must entail the consideration and removal of pressing challenges and emotional hardships they might
encounter in teacher preparation programs instead of simply adding pre-service teachers of color to existing teacher education programs as they are. To be sure, the extant teacher education literature has documented many challenges programs face in aptly preparing pre-service teachers of color—as well as in preparing all teachers to effectively teach students of color (Brown, 2014; Milner, 2010; Sleeter, 2001; Souto-Manning, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

**On early childhood teacher education.** In early childhood teacher education, two empirical studies affirm the continuing marginalization of the experiences and identities of teacher of color (Cheruvu et al., 2015; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Cheruvu and colleagues (2015) as well as Souto-Manning and Cheruvu (2016) unveiled how pre-service teachers of color were presumed incompetent and positioned as the object of white pre-service students’ learning in their classes and student teaching placements. Further, they describe how the lack of understanding of preservice teachers of color’s experiences may lead teacher education program to ascribe deficit identities to them, further affirming the need for teacher education programs to learn from their experiences. This is captured for example, by Cheruvu and colleagues’ (2015) description of Marcelle, an African American early childhood pre-service teacher, who

notes her awareness of the negative stigma associated with AAL [African American Language] and the purposeful choice not to use it in class; her language identity silenced her. Though she herself does not subscribe to this deficit view of AAL, she is explicit in not wanting to further reinforce this negative stereotype by using AAL in her university classes, spaces that are typically dominated by white, English-monolingual, middle class perspectives, practices, and values. (p. 252)
Although Marcelle is not an immigrant teacher, her experience sheds light onto the need to learn from the experiences and identities of teachers of color, so as not to silence them in teacher education and/or ascribe them deficit positionings.

Adair, Tobin, and Arzubiaga (2012) explain how the current positioning of immigrant teachers in the U.S. locates their experiences outside of what is deemed legitimate and central in early childhood teacher education programs. They explain:

teachers who are themselves immigrants often experience a dilemma that prevents them from applying their full expertise to the education and care of children of recent immigrants. Rather than feeling empowered by their bicultural, bilingual knowledge and their connection to multiple communities, many immigrant teachers instead report that they often feel stuck between their pedagogical training and their cultural knowledge. (p. 1)

This is problematic as it means that the marginalization of their experiences in U.S. teacher education programs may lead them not to employ their cultural practices and linguistic repertoires in the education of immigrant children.

I focus on early childhood teacher education because of the vital importance of early childhood education. That is, it is important to focus on the experiences of early childhood teachers because of the impact and importance they have in the education of immigrant children of color. This is supported by studies from fields such as psychology, neurology, linguistics, and education (Souto-Manning et al., 2019).

Notably alluding to the architecture of the brain, Shonkoff and Phillip (2000) explained how human development from birth to five years old happens at a pace greater than any other stages of life; young children rapidly develop foundational capabilities, essentially the basis for development, including: cognitive and linguistic abilities; and emotional, social, and moral capacities. Therefore, with the acknowledgment of the importance and potential impact of early childhood education,
this study explored how and what the field of early childhood teacher education might learn from the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color, offering implications for transforming early childhood teacher education.

**On the rise of international students in U.S. universities.** Considering how U.S. institutions of higher education are now enrolling a significant number of international students and how these students are often racialized by institutions of higher education as being “of color” (Institute of International Education, 2016), it is increasingly important to acknowledge and account for the experiences transnational/immigrant teachers of color have in teacher education programs in the U.S. This is especially important in light of the fact that many of them stay in the U.S., pursuing teaching careers after undergoing initial teacher education programs, whether temporarily or permanently. Many of them undergo visa adjustments and are sponsored by schools, which seek to better support an ever-growing population of immigrant children (Adair et al., 2012; Arun, 2008; Beck & Nganga, 2016; Dunn, 2012).

Yet, immigrant and transnational teachers are not a homogeneous group. While some of them have no prior experience teaching, others enter pre-service programs having already developed identities and accrued experiences as teachers in their home countries. Nevertheless, these experiences are not always acknowledged and leveraged within the context of teacher education programs in the U.S. Thus, I ask: how can early childhood teacher education benefit from considering, learning from, and including the experiences and perspectives of immigrant/transnational teachers of color with prior teaching experience? How might these lessons lead to creating spaces
of trust and cultivating the learning of immigrant individuals and communities of color? I build on a body of research (e.g., Arun, 2008; Iredale et al., 2015), which suggests that including their unique perspectives is of vital importance if we are to move beyond teacher education’s “fragile acceptance/rejection tightrope of normalised practices and expectations” (Biesta, 2010 cited in Arndt, 2016, p. 48).

**Statement of the Problem**

In teacher education research and policy, there is a professed critical need to diversify the teacher workforce. This need is grounded on the demographic disproportionality of teachers and students in U.S. schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), which is associated with academic achievement and schooling outcomes (Gershenson et al., 2017) as well as with the overidentification of students of color in special education (Artiles et al., 2006) and the racial disproportionality in disciplinary actions (Skiba et al., 2002). Additionally, there have been a number of academic benefits associated with students of color having teachers of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This has, for example, been supported by a study of 100,000 Black students; those who had at least one Black teacher in their schooling stayed in high school and graduated at higher rates than their peers who did not have Black teacher(s) (Gershenson et al., 2017).

The ongoing struggle to diversify the teaching force and bridge what has been called the demographic gap (Banks, 1993; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Thao, 2007) between who teaches and who is taught in U.S. classrooms, is compounded within early childhood education, where the percentage of teachers of color is diminishing as the number of young children in today’s early childhood education classrooms rises; this
is contrary to trends in elementary and secondary education, where the overwhelmingly white teacher workforce is diminishing (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). This makes early childhood teacher education a critical site for learning about the experiences of immigrant/transnational teachers of color; a critical area to learn from in order to understand—and hopefully interrupt—this ever-widening demographic gap.

Notwithstanding widely accepted arguments for the diversification of the teaching profession, immigrant and transnational teachers of color have largely been left out of possible solutions for addressing this crisis. This is problematic as it does not acknowledge how people of color have intersectionally minoritized (Souto-Manning, 2019c) identities and does not leverage the knowledge and cultural competence that these teachers may have in connecting with immigrant and transnational families and supporting their children. It also ignores the pedagogical expertise, cultural practices, and linguistic repertoires they bring to their teacher education programs and—hopefully—to their teaching practices, with the potential to benefit immigrant children and families.

Despite the potential of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color who have prior experience teaching in their home contexts, Adair and colleagues (2012) have found that when immigrant and transnational teachers’ experiences are not acknowledged and valued in their teacher education programs, they are likely to see their home cultures and professional practices as being at odds with each other. As such, as unveiled by Adair and colleagues (2012), the ability of immigrant teachers to support immigrant children’s learning may be compromised by
their pre-service programs. And—as underscored by Sleeter (2017)—what is valued, taught, and whose practices are centered in teacher education programs are highly influenced by the demographics of such programs.

**Demographics of Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs**

University-based early childhood teacher education programs are comprised of approximately 80% white pre-service teachers; this is disproportional to the PreK-12 student population, which is less than 50% white (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The demographics of teachers in the U.S. show that most of the teaching workforce is white, monolingual and female (Kena et al., 2014; McFarland et al., 2017), while the children they teach are increasingly diverse in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural repertoires, and languaging practices (Darling-Hammond & Young 2002; Goodwin, 2017; Radford & Budiman, 2018). Various studies discuss how teaching in this time of demographic disproportionality is one of the most challenging tasks for teachers, especially in early childhood settings (Adair, 2009, 2011; Adair & Barraza, 2014; Adair et al., 2013; Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Heng, 2014; Perreira et al., 2006; Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Demographically, in the United States, one in four children under six years old are from immigrant households or are immigrant children (Woods et al., 2016). By 2040, this percentage is likely to increase; predictions are that one in three children in the U.S. will be growing up in an immigrant household (Todorova et al., 2009). At the same time, around 80% of early childhood teachers and teacher educators are white. Given this disproportionality, I posit that the field stands to learn from the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color and how they are positioned in
teacher education programs. Further, I posit that the field could benefit from paying
closer attention to the contributions of immigrant and transnational teachers of color
and from understanding their experiences (re)learning to be(come) teachers within the
context of the U.S. Thus, the need for this dissertation study.

**Immigrant and Transnational Teachers in Teacher Education**

Within the literature and research on immigration and education, immigrant
and transnational teacher viewpoints have been absent and/or marginalized. This is
problematic as 8% of full-time teachers in the U.S. (i.e. 256,000 teachers) are
immigrant and transnational teachers (Kena et al., 2014; McFarland et al., 2017;
Startz, 2017). Prior to coming to the U.S., many of these teachers taught in their home
countries, having undergone teacher education programs and accrued teaching
experience; they were professionals with credentials and qualifications. However,
within the U.S. context, their professional qualifications may not be recognized. In
order to teach, many of them need to navigate a new system, undergo an initial teacher
preparation program, and take initial teacher certification assessments (Adair, 2016;
Adair et al., 2013; Cruickshank, 2004).

Even though immigrant and transnational teachers do bring background
knowledges that may aid in their teaching practices in the U.S. (Tobin, et al., 2013),
they also face challenges in a new context of teaching and teacher education. Within
these new contexts, their prior experiences may be dismissed (Adair et al., 2012).
Acknowledging the complexity of their experiences (at once being experienced and
new teachers), it is important for the field of teacher education to consider immigrant
and transnational teachers’ backgrounds in learning to teach and teaching in their home
contexts in order to help them (re)learn and develop as teachers within the context of the U.S. This has the potential to enhance the understanding of university-based programs to cater to the needs of a more heterogeneous population of teachers—better supporting the preparation and development of immigrant, transnational, and teachers of color.

While teachers of color are the minority in the workforce, with teacher education programs being approximately 80% white (Sleeter, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016), I argue that the experiences of transnational immigrant teachers of color can expand the scope of teacher education and serve as counter-stories to the dominance of whiteness in teacher education (Sleeter, 2001). It is important to learn from the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color in solidarity with U.S. teachers of color, considering the implications of their experiences for transforming teacher education.

Including “transnational perspectives can serve as a mechanism allowing Western educators to listen to the “Other” as they interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions about American schooling” (Matthews et al., 2013, p. 185). This can help the field better understand why the teacher workforce remains predominantly white, and even when the workforce is racially diversified, how dominant teaching practices that enact dominant racial ideologies (Picower, 2009) are (or may be) espoused by teachers of color and immigrant teachers (Adair et al., 2012). Building on research by Kohli (2009) and others, I argue that the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color must be explored in teacher education—alongside those of U.S. teachers of color.
In this study, I explored how immigrant and transnational teachers of color experienced and negotiated their identities and understanding of race and racialization in early childhood teacher education programs in the U.S., addressing issues identified by researchers such as Adair and colleagues (2012) and Arun (2008)—how immigrant teachers’ experiences are not integrated in teacher education programs, resulting in the development of a fractured understanding of teaching in their home countries and teaching in the U.S.—counterproductively positioning them at odds with each other. This led some of them to keep their cultural knowledges and linguistic resources outside of their classroom to the detriment of the immigrant children they sought to educate. The experiences of transnational and immigrant teachers (presented in Chapters IV, V, and VI) serve to counter teacher education programs’ centering of dominant, monocultural, white values as norms (e.g., Cheruvu et al., 2015; Long et al., 2008; Sleeter, 2001; 2017; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016).

Since the great majority (about 78%) of teacher education faculty is white (Milner et al., 2013); and as Sleeter (2017) noted:

This fact has huge ramifications for what happens in teacher education programs, including how curriculum is designed and what is taught; how students are recruited and selected; how new faculty members—and who those new faculty members are—are recruited, hired, and supported; how urgently a program works to address race and ethnicity; and the extent to which faculty members who work with race are supported. (p. 158)

By learning from and about the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color, teacher educators have the potential to intentionally interrupt the overwhelming whiteness that currently characterizes teacher education (Sleeter, 2001) while simultaneously avoiding overly simplistic and essentialist understandings of what it means to address racial disproportionality in early childhood teacher education. To be
sure, the simple recruitment of teachers of color—whether they are U.S. born or immigrants—will not single-handedly result in the transformation of teacher education in ways that better prepare teachers to cultivate and sustain the educational success of a racially diverse population of children.

**Terminology**

It is important to explain the terminology employed in this dissertation study. Thus, in this section, I define key terms I employ. Particularly, I explain what I mean by early childhood teaching experience as well as by immigrant, transnational or foreign-born teachers, trying to elucidate my intentions in using these terms and explicating what is indexed by them.

By early childhood teaching experience, I mean experience working with children from birth through eight years old in a variety of teaching and learning contexts which include but are not limited to preschool, early care, kindergarten, and primary grades, in public and private settings. This definition is in alignment with how the major national professional organization in the U.S., the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), defines early childhood education.

Immigrant teachers are those who may have moved to the U.S., having relocated to the U.S. permanently, whereas teachers who are transnational or foreign-born may be living in the U.S. temporarily or for work. The classification of immigrant and nonimmigrant is not static (Foner, 2009). Therefore, immigrant, transnational or foreign-born can be seen as changeful categories based on the policies and politics that dictate their meaning in particular contexts and conditions. I intentionally chose to highlight the experiences of not just teachers who identify as
immigrant or transnational, but also teachers who also identify as teachers of color. In doing so, I account for the ways in which these individuals are racialized and intersectionally-marginalized (Souto-Manning, 2019a). I ascribe to Cervantes-Soon (2012) who explains how “Brown bodies thus constitute the very sites of collision between the First and Third Worlds and of identity negotiation, where the personal becomes political, and knowledge and theory are generated and materialized through experience” (p. 374).

By immigrant teachers of color, I mean individuals who come from minoritized ethnic, linguistic and racial backgrounds—what Croft, Roberts and Stenhouse (2015) labeled “the global majority” (p. 87). Even though immigrant and transnational teachers of color belong to the global majority, they are intentionally and intersectionally minoritized in the U.S. For this reason, I purposely focus not only on immigrant and transnational teachers, but also account for their racialization by including the term “of color.” I intentionally focus on teachers of color within immigrant and transnational teacher groups because even though they represent the diversity that is seemingly desired, per the literature review (Chapter II), their experiences and knowledges are seldom valued or acknowledged within the field of early childhood teaching and teacher education.

I use these classifications in my research to distinguish these teachers, the focus of my study, from the larger group of U.S. teachers of color. This is not in any way meant to state that U.S. teachers of color must not be considered in attempts to diversify the teaching profession, quite the opposite. My study hopes to join forces
with scholarship which undertakes the need to diversify the teacher workforce racially, culturally, and linguistically in the U.S.

**Rationale**

Early childhood education has received a lot of attention recently, including, but not limited to calls for the funding of universal pre-kindergartens. Yet, as early education expands, so does racial disproportionality in and through schooling. For example, there has been a sharp rise in the suspension rates for African American boys in preschool and pervasive deficit notions of a language gap, which disproportionately disadvantages multilingual children (Gilliam et al., 2016; Souto-Manning & Yoon, 2018; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). To be sure, early childhood is a critical and unique period in human development.

As access to early childhood education programs is expanded, efforts to create more “quality” programs for young children are on the rise (National Research Council (NRC), 2015; Recchia, 2016; Takanishi & Menestrel, 2017). While these programs increasingly serve immigrant families and children of color, the voices of immigrants are missing—and so are notions of teaching familiar to immigrant families (Adair, 2009, 2011, 2016). To meet an increasing demand for early childhood teachers for an ever-growing population of children of color, early childhood teacher education programs often work (or at least purport) to recruit a more diverse population of teachers. In addition to recruiting more teachers of color, whether they are U.S.-born, immigrant, or transnational, teacher education programs can transform themselves in ways that center the experiences of teachers of color in their coursework and program experiences (for example, student teaching—e.g. Souto-Manning, 2019c). Thus, by
centering the voices, experiences, and perspectives of immigrant and transnational teachers of color, this study has the potential to expand notions of quality in ways that fully account for the knowledges and experiences of transnational and immigrant communities of color and the teaching they are familiar with. That is, immigrant and transnational teachers of color, such as the ones in this study, can serve as informants, with whom teacher educators may develop intellectual interdependence (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019), collaborating to co-configure teacher education transformatively.

As this study’s findings indicate, such transformations whereby normalizations of Eurocentric knowledge are named and problematized and Afrocentric ways of knowing and global south onto-epistemologies are centered (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017) are likely to better leverage the cultural resources of immigrant and transnational teachers of color to benefit the education and development of the young children they teach—mostly children of color. To engage in such transformations, teacher education programs may benefit from learning about the teaching experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color—especially those who were teachers prior to relocating to the U.S., whether permanently or temporarily.

Findings from this research study support and expand research on how international teachers bring knowledges from their own sociocultural locations to improve and impact the quality of education for children in the U.S. (Ross, 2003), providing positive role models (Baker, 2002; Beck & Nganga, 2016; English, 2001; Green-Evans, 2005). Beck and Nganga (2016) further explicate how some concerns about the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers may be that they can
easily transition from one country to another (Peeler & Jane, 2005) and they can transfer skill sets to their new context to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds (McAllister, 2002). Also, there is limited literature on the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers (Adair et al., 2012; Arun, 2008; Subedi, 2008), therefore their successes in U.S. schools, their perspectives on teaching, or how they teach diverse students in the U.S. is not largely explored.

Through my study, I explored whether and how immigrant and transnational teachers understand and describe their own racialization within the U.S. context. This racialization manifests in various ways—through color evasiveness, colorism, linguicism, and other intersectional identity markers attributed to immigrant and transnational teachers as they navigate racial, linguistic, and cultural borderlands in the U.S. For immigrant and transnational teachers, their languaging practices inform their racialization in the U.S. and vice versa. Seeking to account for their reflections on the deeply intricate connections between language and race they experienced as they immigrated to the U.S., I sought to understand the “co-naturalization of language and race” by exploring the “colonial co-naturalizations of race and language;…perceptions of racial and linguistic difference;…regimentations of racial and linguistic categories;…racial and linguistic intersections…and…racial and linguistic power formations” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 621).

This study can contribute to the transformation of early childhood teacher education, by learning about and from the first-hand experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior experience teaching in their home contexts, the knowledges and assumptions they bring, and how they perceive such knowledges
being positioned in their initial teacher education programs in the U.S. In doing so, it has the potential to offer powerful implications to the transformation of early childhood teacher education in ways that account for notions and knowledges of early childhood teaching in contexts other than the U.S. and in ways that better account for the experiences of and identities of transnational and immigrant teachers of color. Collectively, their experiences can serve as a powerful counter-story to the dominant narrative defining what counts as quality and professionalism in and through teacher education.

To be sure, commonly espoused notions of professionalism and quality standards for early childhood teachers have historically been based on white dominant norms, and therefore may perpetuate inequities (Barnett & Riley-Ayers, 2016; Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). Ingrained and pervasive notions of quality and professionalism in early childhood teacher education programs tend to overvalue normative and dominant experiences, grounded in Eurocentric ways of knowing and notions of teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). That is, dominant notions of professionalism and quality have been problematized as they do not centrally consider the wealth of knowledge of minoritized communities nor do they account for the identities and knowledges of intersectionally minoritized early childhood teachers of color—regardless of whether they are U.S.-born or immigrant. Despite discourses that propagate notions of inclusion and social justice as cornerstones of early childhood teacher education programs in the U.S. (as often listed on program websites, descriptions and missions), implicit in discourses that frame early childhood teacher education in the U.S. are biases that uphold Eurocentric ways
of knowing and being (Adair et al., 2012; Florence, 2010; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2019b; 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019).

As a very racially and culturally diverse population of young children enter early educational settings, early childhood teacher education programs are characterized by demographic and conceptual whiteness (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019). That is, a mostly white teacher education workforce continues to prepare mostly white teachers employing concepts of quality and professionalism rooted in Eurocentrism (Souto-Manning, 2019c). While there is a need to demographically diversify the profession, there is also an urgent need in expanding whose experiences of teaching and what teaching contexts are included in early childhood teacher education programs.

Achinstein and Ogawa (2011) posit that we are currently suffering from not just a demographic shortage of teachers of color, but also a democratic one. This demographic disproportionality between teachers and students needs deeper investigation, not only because of a racial mismatch, but because it has implications for what is deemed legitimate and what is valued in and through teaching, for whose knowledges are centered and whose knowledges are marginalized. That is, it is not merely a matter of demographically matching the percentage of early childhood education students and early childhood teachers in terms of race, but of enhancing access to multiple bodies of knowledge and systems of knowing located throughout the globe in and through their inclusion in early childhood teacher education programs.

I posit that there is minimal attention to immigrant and transnational teachers of color, to what knowledge(s) they bring to teacher education programs, and how they
are positioned. Further, I posit that in developing their identities, immigrant and transnational teachers of color, who are navigating different contexts and conceptualizations for teaching, are not necessarily supported in reconciling different conceptualizations of what it means to teach—within their home context(s) and in the U.S. Thus, the need to learn from transnational and immigrant teachers of color as they undergo teacher education programs in the U.S., (re)learning to be(come) teachers in a new context. This has the potential to inform teacher education in much-needed ways.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

My research study sought to learn from and about the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color, paying close attention to the voices of this particular group of teachers by exploring how they have managed to negotiate, navigate, and perhaps reconcile differences within the context of teacher education programs in New York City. In doing so, I offer implications for (re)designing teacher education programs in ways that better account for the education and development of immigrant and transnational teachers of color.

I conducted my study in New York City. Compared to national demographics, New York City already has a much larger percentage of immigrant children. In New York City schools, nearly fifty percent of the students come from immigrant households. Thus, as it contains a higher percentage of immigrant children than national demographic predictions for 2040 and it is located in one of four states with the largest number of immigrants in the U.S. (others are California, Texas, and New Jersey—Goodwin, 2017; Grieco et al., 2012), New York City was an ideal setting for my study.
My study was guided by the following research question, supported by three sub-questions: *How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City?*

Specifically seeking to learn about the knowledges they bring, I ask my sub-questions: *How do these teachers describe their experiences with learning to teach and teaching in their home context(s)?* Then, I inquired into what knowledges they perceived being valued in their U.S. teacher education programs by asking: *How do these teachers describe their experiences with (re)learning to teach and teaching in the U.S. context(s)?* Finally, I invited them to make sense of their knowledges and experiences in their home countries and within the context of the U.S.: *In what ways do these teachers make sense of and interpret the similarities and differences in their experiences of teaching in their two contexts?*

In doing so, I hoped to help participants name their teaching knowledges and experiences, and then consider how these experiences, although located in geographically distinct locales, inform their experiences as teachers, and shape their identities.

As Britzman (2003) contends, the journey of “becoming teacher” involves cultural reproduction, which is aligned with socializing teacher candidates into the profession. Within the context of U.S. teacher education programs, the majority of candidates (who are white, middle-class, and female) come prepared with cultural capital, dominant English-language skills, and knowledge to successfully navigate the
education system. This is upheld by the positioning of “European languages as superior to non-European languages” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 639). Such ideologies and linguistic positioning espoused by school systems devalue immigrant and transnational teachers of color’s cultural capital.

Through my dissertation study I situated my exploration in this unexamined space as I questioned what knowledges are valued, and whose knowledges count within U.S. teacher education programs. Further, I sought to understand the positioning of immigrant and transnational teachers’ experiences (as perceived and experienced by them) in and through early childhood teacher education programs. Therefore, this study illuminates how early childhood teacher education programs might interrupt the predominance of whiteness in the teacher workforce, with a distinct focus on fostering the preparation and development of immigrant and transnational teachers of color. In doing so, I offer important implications for transforming early childhood teacher education.

My research question and sub-questions were constructed utilizing a critical race theory (CRT) framework along with Nepantla (which will be elaborated in the next section). The main purpose of the research question and sub-questions was to focus on the counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) of immigrant and transnational teachers of color as they testify and speak back to the dominance and hegemony of white, Eurocentric norms in university-based early childhood teacher education programs (Brown, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2019b, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019). In particular, I drew on one of the tenets of CRT that encourages the “naming [of] one’s own reality” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462) combining it with
Nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cervantes-Soon, 2012), in order to speak up and speak out against the ways in which immigrant and transnational communities are positioned in early childhood teaching, in teacher education, and in society writ large. This invariably includes the voices, perspectives, and experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color. To further explain what I mean, I explicate my theoretical framework in the following section.

**Theoretical Framework**

I employed two theoretical lenses in tandem, namely critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987). I decided to use these two lenses because together they gave me the framework to understand how immigrant and transnational teachers of color with early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts navigate, negotiate, and experience the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in teacher education programs in New York City. CRT afforded me the framework of foregrounding the stories of my participants as they traverse the boundaries of race and racialization in and through early childhood teacher education programs; whereas Nepantla complemented and scaffolded CRT by adding another layer, an intersection, to feature the boundaries of nationality, geography and positioning, that my questions were grounded in. Nepantla also directly connected to poetic inquiry and poetic analysis, which afford the “ability to give language to the unsayable” and the possibility to “reimagine ways of understanding the familiar” (Cahmann, 2003, p. 32).
Critical Race Theory

First, I used a critical race theory (CRT) lens. Developed in the 1970s, CRT helps to focus on the effects of racism and to centralize the experiences of people of color. Pertaining to education, CRT challenges us to analyze racism, not as an individual problem, but as a structural issue, perpetuated by institutions within our society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). CRT informed my study as it helped me situate my participants’ description of race and racialization within the U.S. context within its epistemology and gave meaning to their ways of knowing and being in a foreign land.

During the last two decades, CRT is increasingly being used to critically examine the aspects of race and racism in education systems. CRT can be used as an epistemological and methodological tool to challenge systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 2012; Tate, 1997). Building on Critical Legal Studies as a foundation, more contemporary scholars have used it to inform the understandings of various fields of education about how race and racism operates in educational spaces (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The prominent work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solórzano (1998), informs my study as I look deeper into early childhood teacher education in a more complex and critical way.

Predicated on the fact that racism is endemic, institutional, and systematic; racism is not an aberration but rather a fundamental way of organizing society (Bell, 1987; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), CRT is a valuable framework to interrogate inequities pertaining to race and racism. This means that the system is organized to perpetuate a culture where teachers are not equipped to teach racially, ethnically, and
linguistically diverse students well (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Rather, these racist systems are designed to meet white interests (Rogers-Ard et al., 2013). Therefore, three tenets of CRT are particularly helpful for this study: interest convergence, challenges to claims of neutrality and color blindness, and experiential knowledge.

Ladson-Billings (1998) briefly describes some of the major features of critical race theory that began as an outgrowth of an early legal movement called Critical Legal Studies. CRT begins with the notion that racism is ingrained in American society, a “permanent fixture in American life” (p. 11). CRT also employs storytelling to analyze myths, and calls on experiential knowledge, which draws from “a shared history as ‘other’ with…ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony” (Barnes, 1990, pp. 1864-1865).

The first two components of CRT, the ever-present impact of racism and experiential knowledge as it relates to storytelling and counter-stories/counternarratives, provide the framework for this study. As previously mentioned, one component of CRT is “an assumption that racism is not a series of isolated acts, but is endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52). Ladson-Billings (2012) also notes: “One of the hallmarks of critical race theory work is the chronicle. Here, the scholar tells a tale—a moral story or parable—to illustrate a deeper truth” (p. 118). The use of a CRT framework allowed me to delve into the counter-stories of my participants which are often unheard.

Sleeter (2017) affirms that “CRT offers conceptual tools for interrogating how race and racism have been institutionalized and are maintained” (p. 157). Thinking
about the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color within the context of predominantly white early childhood teacher education programs, I have found that CRT is limited as it is U.S.-centric. It is based on the experiences of race and racism in the U.S. and may not include immigrant and transnational perspectives on race and racism. To this effect, Yao and colleagues (2018) conducted a literature review, using CRT as a framework to depict international students’ experiences in higher education. The authors assert: “Although CRT is grounded in U.S.-based legal theory, we argue that CRT must move beyond the rigid confinement within U.S. borders and expand to consider how transnationalism and global exchange contributes to the fluidity and applicability of this theory” (Yao et al., 2018, p. 39). In agreement with this view, Mishra Tarc’s (2013) words resonate with me, “race moves under the intensification of transnational flows and connections” (p. 365). This intersection and overlap of race and ethnicity was crucial to my study as it accounted for “the framing of colonized subjects as less evolved humans than Europeans” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 624).

For this study, I expanded the understanding of racism as it affects other racially-minoritized communities in the U.S., in terms of stereotypes, linguicism, color-evasiveness, and other signifiers of racialization. After all, combined “with the production of race, nation-state/colonial governmentality imposed ideologies of separate and bounded languages on colonized populations” (Flores & Rosa, 2017, p. 623). This understanding allowed me to more fully account for the intersectionally-minoritized identities of my participants, immigrant/transnational teachers of color. It also allowed me to consider
implications of the co-naturalization of language and race across differing nation-state and colonial contexts, linking the analysis of race and language in the US to a transnational frame in which the modern world is profoundly shaped by the globalization of European colonialism. Central...is an analysis of the continued rearticulation of colonial distinctions between Europeanness and non-Europeanness—and, by extension, whiteness and nonwhiteness. (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 622)

Although CRT gave my study the grounding to explore race and racism, it did not sufficiently support my participants’ raciolinguistic practices, experiences, and identities as they converged and intersected (Rosa & Flores, 2017). To strengthen the CRT framework, I applied the fluidity of Nepantla. I saw Nepantla as the river that flows beneath the bridge that is CRT; both would lose some meaning without the other.

Nepantla

Anzaldúa presented the possibility of a new in-between space of hybridity known as Nepantla. According to her, this space is inclusive of the identities of individuals who inhabit the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999). Nepantla is a word derived from Nahuatl, an Aztec language, that describes a feeling of in-betweenness, a feeling of having an identity that is neither here nor there (Delgado Bernal & Alemán, 2017). Maffie (2014) explains:

The Aztecs saw the crossroads as the middle of two conjoining and intersecting paths. The joining together of the two paths creates a new space: an ambiguous space betwixt and between the two. The crossroads is ontologically ambiguous since it is neither one path nor the other yet simultaneously both paths together. Formed mutually by two roads coming together, the crossroads is abundantly middled. (p. 361)

This ontological ambiguity that Nepantla provides seems very apt for my study with immigrant and transnational teachers, who are constantly in a state of in-betweenness, whether it be their immigration status, their racialization, or their teaching practices. It
is at these crossroads, that I looked for their descriptions and interpretations of their experiences. This lens helped make sense of the interconnectedness of social, racial, ethnic, national, cultural, linguistic, economic, religious, and gendered identities in which immigrant and transnational teachers constantly survive as border crossers (Mancilla et al., 2014).

Further, Nepantla affords me an understanding of the “ideological twinning of particular linguistic forms and racial categories” which need to “be understood as the crucial condition of possibility” rejecting what is often “perceived as comparatively stable or malleable racial and linguistic categories and practices” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 631). As such, Nepantla affords me the rejection of analyzing race and language separately. In this permanent change, this hybrid space, I examined the multifaceted experiences of my participants (Mohanty, 2000).

Anzaldúa (1987) described in her poem what it means to live and survive in the borderlands,

To survive the Borderlands
You must live sin fronteras (without borders)
be a crossroads (p. 195).

In using Nepantla, rejecting the rigidity of borders, I sought to expose the academic hegemony that exists in teacher education programs (Brown, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019), and account for how the ways of knowing and being of my participants were always in flux. Nepantla has been used as a theoretical construct to help express identities of individuals and groups in colonized
and marginalized positions, to directly interrupt discourses of power (Prieto & Villenas, 2012).

Nepantla “encourages the wielding of education in the service of respectful worldview amalgamation or consciously fruitful creativity” (Antuna, 2018, p. 160). Anzaldúa (2002) claims Nepantla as a positive rebirth of a previously maligned liminality, coining “nepantlera” for those in-between worlds. Engaging Nepantla, I unveil ways in which immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers negotiate and adhere to dominant, white norms. To Anzaldúa (2002) “nepantla is the site of transformation, that place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures” (pp. 548–549). Whereas Nepantla calls for transformation of thought, theory, and action, CRT situates my participants within the U.S. context. Calling for their stories and truths to speak back to the hegemony of early childhood teacher education.

Significance of Study

Goodwin (2017) states that “immigration and immigrants are indelibly woven into the fabric of American history” (p. 433), thus any discussion of teaching and teacher education must necessarily account for the experiences and perspectives of immigrants. Taking heed in Goodwin’s words, I argue that the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color with teaching experience in their home countries are not only pertinent but stand to enrich and develop early childhood teacher education programs as well as larger dialogues on immigration and education in the United States. After all, immigration is central to American history.
However, it is also important to understand that “the immigrant experience is far from uniform and immigrants, especially those of color and/or poverty, have experienced barriers and oppressions that have been documented and challenged even as they persist and continue to challenge” (Goodwin, 2017, p. 436). U.S. racial categories might obfuscate how immigrant and transnational people self-identify racially. In the U.S.,

racialization projects often frame [immigrant] groups from similar backgrounds into a single “other,” ignoring important within-group differences…according more value to some groups than to others, and in the process producing and reproducing the meanings and structures that undergird racialization processes…. Importantly, racialization is a fluid, geographically and historically-specific relational process, and therefore its mechanisms and expressions vary across contexts. (Agadjanian et al., 2017, p. 559)

By acknowledging and valuing the knowledges that immigrant and transnational teachers of color bring to teach in early childhood settings and understanding their teaching experiences in their home countries and their process of (re)learning to teach, be(coming) teachers within the context of U.S. teacher education programs, I foreground the voices and perspectives of this population of teachers that has been left out of the literature on diversity in the teaching workforce and whose experiences have been silenced and/or marginalized in early childhood teacher education programs.

This particular study contributes to transforming early childhood teacher education in ways that account for the voices, perspectives, experiences, and identities of immigrant and transnational teachers of color. It has the potential to make early childhood education more inclusive, more fully accounting for experiences and perspectives which have been marginalized or silenced to date. This is significant not only because early childhood teacher education programs need to better support the
preparation and development of immigrant and transnational teachers of color (e.g., Adair, 2009, 2011, 2016; Adair et al., 2012; Cheruvu et al., 2015; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016), but also because resulting transformations offer the potential to more fully account for experiences, knowledges and pedagogies that honor immigrant families and their children, who are the fastest growing group of young children in the U.S. today.

In the following chapter I review the importance of including the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color in early childhood teacher education to further affirm the importance of my study. Then, I provide a closer analysis of the relevant literature on immigrant and transnational teachers of color, which serve as the grounding for studying the experiences of my participants within the context of early childhood teacher education programs in New York City.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter I, the aim of this dissertation study was to understand the experiences and identities of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color with prior experience teaching in their home countries, specifically attending to what knowledges and experiences they bring from their home context, what knowledges and experiences they develop as they (re)learn to teach and be(come) teachers within the context of U.S. teacher education programs, and how they reconcile these experiences and knowledges as they develop as teachers. To do so, I was guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

*How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City?*

- How do these teachers describe their experiences with learning to teach and teaching in their home context(s)?
- How do these teachers describe their experiences with (re)learning to teach and teaching in the U.S. context(s)?
- In what ways do these teachers make sense of and interpret the similarities and differences in their experiences of teaching in their two contexts?
Through an interview study combined with poetic inquiry framed by combining critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987)—as explicated in Chapter I—I sought to access what is said as well as what often remains unsaid (Cahnmann, 2003). In doing so, I learned from the experiences and processes of learning to teach within, across, and in between geographies. Thus, I drew implications for the potential transformation of early childhood teacher education in ways that account for the experiences and knowledges of immigrant and transnational teachers of color and hopefully in ways that are answerable to immigrant and transnational children, families, and communities.

In the previous chapter, I explored how dominant ideologies permeate conceptions of quality and professionalism in early childhood teacher education, thereby centering Eurocentrism and upholding what Sleeter (2001) found to be an “overwhelming presence of whiteness” in teacher education. I reviewed the demographics of early childhood teaching and teacher education, drawing connections to content choices and programmatic features (Souto-Manning, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019). I made the case for how immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color stand to make important contributions to teacher education, bringing with them an array of experiences and contributing to the design of more expansive and inclusive programs. In this chapter, I review existing educational research that reveals the need for teachers of color in the U.S. alongside research on the experiences of international, immigrant, and transnational teachers in countries such as Australia and Canada (where such a research area is more
developed). In doing so, I aim to critically synthesize work most germane to my proposed research study.

To be sure, the debate, discussion, and focus on teachers of color, their recruitment and retention in the teacher workforce have been ongoing for the last thirty years in the U.S. (e.g., Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Bell, 1986; Dillard, 1994; Kohli, 2009; Villegas et al., 2012). Simultaneously, discussions pertaining to immigrant teachers have manifested in ebbs and flows for approximately thirty years as the demographics of immigrants in the U.S. have changed (Subedi, 2008; Tobin et al., 2013; Suárez-Orozco, 1987). That is, while these discussions have been ongoing for the past three decades, parallels between them have not been widely established. I organize this review to establish the overlap between teachers of color (alongside the need for and benefits of teachers of color) and the education and experiences of immigrant and international teachers (focusing on their preparation). After all, these two groups are not mutually exclusive. Even though the terms immigrant and transnational apply to people with multiple identities and experiences from various contexts, my aim is to focus on teachers who inhabit both worlds, those of being immigrant or transnational and being termed as a person of color as soon as they are in the U.S., being racialized. To be sure, I understand racialization as the processes and practices that classify groups, including immigrants…on the basis of physical characteristics into an ethnoracial hierarchy. This classification further depends on a variety of social attributes…and results in unequal life chances among hierarchically-ordered racialized groups….

Practices of racial ascription exert symbolic violence on those who are categorized…as a racial identity is imposed on them…and forcing them to accept and internalize their oppression…. These processes have real-life consequences. (Agadjanian et al., 2017, p. 560)
Because of the centrality of race and racism in the U.S. context, where my study is based, in exploring the experiences of my participants, I sought to understand how my participants negotiate their identities, straddling the intersections of geopolitical borders and racialization (Agadjanian et al., 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017). In so doing, I hope to contextualize and validate the importance of my research study.

**Review of Literature**

There is an longstanding need to diversify the teacher workforce in the U.S. especially in early childhood education (ECE), where most of the teaching workforce is white, monolingual and female (NCES, 2016) while the children they teach are increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural repertoires, and language practices (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002; Goodwin, 2002; Goodwin, 2017). Although I do not purport that we should ignore the urgent need for increasing the number of U.S. teachers of color in early childhood classrooms, I believe we can further diversify the teaching workforce by intentionally preparing and including immigrant and transnational teachers of color, especially in light of the need to teach and connect with the ever-growing immigrant and transnational populations of children in early childhood settings.

In an attempt to address my research question, *How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City?*, it is prudent for me to structurally explain the two distinct fields in the literature, which inform my study: 1) Teachers of color in early childhood teacher education, within the wider
context of teacher education, 2) Immigrant and transnational teachers in the U.S within the wider context of international, foreign-born, immigrant teachers. These distinctions are informed by the theoretical lenses I employ to look at the literature – CRT and Nepantla.

For this literature review I employed ProQuest and JSTOR, using several keyword descriptors in my search of the online databases. These keyword descriptors included: “Teachers of Color AND Early Childhood,” “Immigrant Teachers AND Early Childhood,” and “Transnational Teachers AND Early Childhood.” In conducting this search with the most relevant results, given my research questions and theoretical lenses, and then looking only at the U.S. context, where my study will be located, a limited number of eminent scholars were visible in the literature for “Teachers of Color AND Early Childhood” (e.g., Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016; Cheruvu et al., 2015), “Immigrant Teachers AND Early Childhood” (e.g., Adair et al., 2012; Adair, 2011, 2016; Recchia & McDevitt, 2018; Rodríguez-Valls, 2016), and finally, “Transnational Teachers AND Early Childhood” (e.g., Saavedra et al., 2009).

This review of literature unveiled how immigrant and transnational teachers are not usually viewed as the much-needed diversity in the teacher workforce, even if they are termed “of color.” That is, literature on immigrant teachers rarely mentioned issues of race and literature on teachers of color seldom included immigrant teachers. Therefore, the literature reviewed on early childhood and teacher education, focusing on teachers of color, is distinct from the literature on immigrant and transnational teachers. The latter tends to be focused on the immigrant experience of assimilation, acculturation, and cultural dissonance instead of the racialization of immigrant and
transnational teachers and/or immigrant and transnational teachers’ racial identities (Adair, 2011, 2016). In this chapter, I look at these two bodies of literature separately at first, then at parallels, and finally bring them together to focus on what they mean for early childhood teacher education. In reviewing these bodies of literature, I seek to offer a deeper understanding of the problem identified in Chapter I, considering what is known and unknown about the problem being addressed by my dissertation study. This review will inform my methodology (Chapter III).

**Early Childhood Teacher Education**

Centering race and racism as well as identity in my study, with a CRT lens, in this section, I review the early childhood teacher education literature with a focus on teachers of color. To inform my study, it is pertinent to examine the whiteness in early childhood teacher education (Cheruvu, 2014; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016) and of teacher education (Sleeter, 2001; 2017). Scholars have repeatedly argued for the benefits of having teachers of color, who work with children of color and have a potential to positively impact the academic experiences of students of color (Haddix, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016; Villegas et al., 2012). Teachers of color are known to positively impact all students and not just students of color (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gershenson et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2005), yet their recruitment and retention remains an issue for the field of teaching and teacher education (Brown, 2014; Haddix, 2017). Many researchers have studied the positive impact that teachers of color can have on students who share the same cultural, linguistic, racial or ethnic background (Achinstein et al., 2010; Brown, 2014; Dumas et al., 2015; Gershenson et al., 2017; Kiryio et al., 2009; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu,
2016). This literature can be divided into two categories: 1) the overwhelming whiteness of the teacher workforce against the increasingly diverse demographics of the children in schools and 2) recruiting and retaining teachers of color.

**Overwhelming Whiteness**

As Milner and colleagues (2013) stated, “race is grossly under-theorized in teacher education” (p. 339). Scholars of critical whiteness studies have written about the overwhelming whiteness in teacher education. One of these voices is Sleeter’s (2001, 2016, 2017). Sleeter (2017) used the tenets of CRT to better understand the ways in which white interests have been and continue to be centered in teacher education. She asserted:

> The tenet of interest convergence asks how white interests are served through incremental steps. The tenet of color blindness prompts asking how structures that seem neutral, such as teacher testing, reinforce whiteness and white interests. The tenet of experiential knowledge prompts asking whose voices are being heard. (p. 155)

She contends that university-based teacher education programs perpetuate the hegemony of Eurocentric norms, serving the interests and needs of whiteness. To better address the education needs of children of color and support their learning and development, the argument for a diverse workforce has come to the foreground as a demographic imperative (Lowenstein, 2009).

Educational researchers have documented the need for teachers of color in the workforce (e.g., Haddix, 2017; Sleeter & Thao, 2007; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), not only to work as cultural mediators for children of color, but also to positively impact the educational experiences of all children. Teachers of color are even more important in early childhood settings, which are not only the time when development happens at
a fast pace across a variety of domains (see Chapter I), but also are usually the contexts for the reception of many children into the educational system. As such, they are more likely to support and aid the transition of children from home to school settings in culturally competent ways (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018).

Research has shown how teachers of color tend to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of children and families from minoritized backgrounds, and are more likely to engage in culturally relevant practices (e.g., Cheruvu et al., 2015; Irvine, 1998; Quichos & Ríos, 2000; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Further, as detailed in Chapter I, teachers of color have been shown to positively impact the achievement and educational outcomes of students of color (Gershenson et al., 2017). Even the U.S. Department of Education has subscribed to the benefits of teachers of color to student achievement and educational outcomes in its 2016 report, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*. This signals the widespread call to expand the number of teachers of color in today’s schools.

While this body of research—and government actions and reports—reaffirms the need for more teachers of color, especially in light of the shifting demographics of young children in today’s schools, when I conducted a review of the preservice early childhood teacher education literature, I encountered the same overwhelming whiteness documented by Sleeter (2001; 2017) in teacher education writ large in research on early childhood teacher education (e.g., Souto-Manning, 2019b, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019). This points toward the silence/silencing around the experiences of teachers of color in research on early childhood teacher education.
While research does not purport that all teachers of color can and will be the solution to teaching increasingly diverse populations of students (Dillard, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), the invisibility and silencing of teachers of color in the teacher education writ large and in the early childhood teacher education literature in particular problematically put the onus on the individuals and not the system. That is, it frames teachers of color as both the problem and the solution (Jackson & Boutte, 2018). Departing from framing teachers of color as both the problem and the solution (which approaches recruitment as a numbers solution of sorts), a growing number of researchers have documented and built upon the experiences and perspectives of teachers of color in early childhood (Cheruvu, 2014; Guyton et al., 1996; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019), documenting the overwhelming whiteness in early childhood teacher education, which perpetuates deficit lenses framing young children of color (Goodwin et al., 2008).

Navigating a field historically and contemporarily framed by discourses of whiteness and Eurocentrism, early childhood teachers of color often experience dilemmas as they become teachers. They often have to (re)negotiate their identities and perspectives as they enter navigate a field whose norms orients to whiteness and Eurocentrism as moral compasses (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2019b, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019; Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). This disconnect, which Souto-Manning and Martell (2019) explored via journey maps in their own processes of becoming early childhood teachers and teacher educators, often leads to the development of a double-
consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). That is, the experiences that teachers of color bring are
delegitimized, undervalued, or erased to conform to the white, Eurocentric norm
(Cheruvu et al., 2015). In thinking about this disconnect, and how teachers of color are
intersectionally minoritized, positioned at the margins of early childhood teacher
education (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019), my study builds on this literature by
foregrounding the voices of early childhood teachers of color from immigrant and
transnational backgrounds.

**Demographic Imperative**

The shortage of teachers of color is not only a demographic imperative, but
also a democratic one (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2010). These imperatives require
diversifying the teacher workforce to reflect the students it serves (Lowenstein, 2009);
it has permeated education policy and broader discourses. In fact, former U.S.
Secretary of Education John B. King affirmed this imperative in a speech at Howard
University on March 8, 2016:

> Without question, when the majority of students in public schools are
> students of color and only 18 percent of our teachers are teachers of color, we
> have an urgent need to act. We’ve got to understand that all students benefit
> from teacher diversity.

That is, due to the changing demographics of the student population in the U.S., there
is an urgency to foster a more ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse teacher
workforce (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Cochran-Smith, 2011; Darling-Hammond,
2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Lowenstein, 2009; Zeichner, 2009). Because of this
urgency, teacher education needs to focus recruiting and retaining more teachers of
color (Brown, 2014; Haddix, 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to understand that
such an argument may be overly simplistic as it ignores (as explored in Chapter I) how
simply recruiting teachers of color to undergo teacher education programs as they exist may not result in teachers who leverage their cultural and linguistic resources in ways that support, cultivate, and sustain their students’ educational success. This is visible, for example, in Adair and colleagues’ (2012) research, which shows that immigrant early childhood teachers often saw their professional preparation at odds with their cultural practices and linguistic repertoires, thus choosing not to engage their cultural and linguistic assets in favor of professionalism. It is also visible in Cheruvu and colleagues’ (2015) research, which documents the trauma experienced by early childhood teachers of color navigating an early childhood teacher education program which (over)valued white ways of knowing. Research (e.g., Adair et al., 2012; Cheruvu et al., 2015; Souto-Manning, 2019b, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019) unveils how it is important to rethink early childhood teacher education programs, more carefully and foundationally attending to the preparation—experiences, developing identities—of U.S. born and immigrant teachers of color.

Yet, regardless of the faults with the argument to simply recruit teachers of color (e.g., Adair et al., 2012; Cheruvu et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2019a; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019), there has been increased interest in the field of teacher education in how a teacher’s racial and linguistic identity might impact a student’s learning outcomes (Attick & Boyles, 2016; Brown, 2014). Research shows that demographic differences in teacher and student populations negatively affect learning for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Villegas et al., 2012); positive academic outcomes have been documented when teachers share racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds with their students (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Dee,
Racial matching and its effects on outcomes, such as test scores, attendance, and suspensions have been documented in a quantitative study by Gershenson and colleagues (2017). Studying 100,000 students and the impact of having Black teachers on Black students’ academic outcomes, they affirmed that a teacher’s race “is a useful predictor of teachers’ abilities to reduce demographic gaps in educational achievement” (p. 2). Together, the studies reviewed (re)affirm that having a teacher workforce that is not representative of its diverse students, especially in early childhood education, where children are at their most vulnerable stages, is problematic. Yet, as a field, we must move beyond a demographic imperative toward also fostering democratic practices.

**Toward Democratic Practices**

Historically, public education in the U.S. has been seen as a foundational aspect upon which a democratic society must stand (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Goodlad, 1998; Zeichner, 2010). At the same time, education both fosters democracy and keeps oppressive structures in place (Apple, 2009). With this in mind, in this section, I build on the demographic imbalance between students and teachers of color affirming how the field of early childhood education needs more teachers of color, and reviewing literature which helps me explain how immigrant and transnational teachers of color can add to this much-needed diversity.

With the understanding that race is not a universal concept, I employ race as it pertains to immigrant/transnational teachers to explain a particular kind of social differentiation that marks some groups of people as fundamentally and irredeemably dangerous, suspect, polluted, and
Other…typical of contexts of conquest, post- and neo-colonialism, slavery, and immigration. Racialized forms of social difference are traceable, even when constructed covertly, in the semiotic characteristics that instantiate race as inherent and natural. These include, but are not limited to, the deployment of phenotypic, linguistic, sartorial, spatial, legal, and an ever-expanding list of other “cultural” markers; the historical particularities underlying these markers and the indexical regimes that they constitute; and the ways in which such indexical regimes “lay claim on” people…. [T]he semiotic characteristics of race uniquely mark people as dangerous and Other, though the long-term historical and local processes through which race becomes a naturalized social category may be similar to other totalizing frameworks of social difference. (Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. E4)

As such, while the literature on teachers of color is relevant to my study, it has limitations as it is very U.S.-centric and often does not account for immigrant and transnational teachers who undergo a process of racialization associated with their immigration and are positioned as different, not fitting in existing regimented racial and linguistic categories (Agadjanian et al., 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

In this study, I centered the voices, perspectives, and experiences of transnational and immigrant teachers who self-identified as persons of color to understand their lived experiences in and reflections pertaining to early childhood teacher education programs. Seeking to make visible often taken-for-granted onto-epistemological orientations (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017), I sought to learn from immigrant and transnational teachers of color, who are more likely to engage in “seeing the strange in the familiar” and in “unpacking racialized practices in early childhood [teacher education] settings” (Brown et al., 2010, p. 513), given their prior socialization in teaching within a distinct onto-epistemological realm.

The experiences and ways of knowing of immigrant and transnational people of color needs to be carefully considered in the design of teacher education programs as a possible pathway for challenging the whiteness and Eurocentrism, which continue
to characterize them. This is a possible pathway for the negotiation of democratic practices in early childhood teacher education, where multiple points of view and varying perspectives are considered. Matthews, Spearman, and Che (2013) suggest that the voices of international teachers must be centrally positioned “to problematize American notions of U.S. democracy and schooling, providing a refraction of one's culture and practice” (p. 187). This is what my study sought to do within the context of early childhood teacher education.

**Summary: On the Importance of Teachers of Color**

The literature shows how having teachers of color benefits all students, especially students of color (cf. Gershenson et al., 2017). Yet, the growing percentage of students of color is disproportional to the percentage of teachers of color. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service (2016), only 18% of P-12 teachers are of color. Predicated on these projections, teachers of color are urgently needed. As explained earlier, this is especially so in early childhood settings, where there is a declining trajectory in the number of teachers of color.

The major arguments in the literature affirming the need for teachers of color are: 1) having a positive and relatable role model (Achinstein et al., 2010; Sleeter & Milner, 2011; Zeichner, 2009); 2) having a positive impact on educational outcomes and experiences of students who have had teachers of color (Gershenson et al., 2017; Haddix, 2016; Howard, 2010; Nieto, 1999; Quichos & Ríos, 2000; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016); and 3) having a shared identity and experience between teachers and students of color provides a space for common cultural, racial, and linguistic
understanding (Villegas et al., 2012). This does not mean that racial, cultural, or linguistic congruence is the only identifier for of definer of a good teacher. Nor does it mean that teachers of color are automatically good educators for children of color (Brown, 2014).

In her literature review, Brown (2014) analyzed a number of studies on teachers of color serving as good role models for children of color (e.g., Au & Blake, 2003; Guyton et al., 1996; Téllez, 1999). Guyton, Saxton, and Wesche (1996) studied a diverse set of preservice early childhood teachers of color, who wanted to be role models to children of color. This idea of being a role model was visible in all the African American preservice teachers who participated in the study, as well as the Asian Indian female participant. In a similar study, Téllez, (1999) found that Mexican American preservice teachers were committed to “giving something back to their community” (p. 564). The notion of teachers of color serving as role models to students of color was also reflected in Au and Blake’s (2003) study with two preservice teachers of Hawaiian ancestry, who strived to be good role models for students like them (who shared aspects of their identities). Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into how teacher education programs can benefit from successfully recruiting and must work to retain teachers of color, by cultivating the development of role models for students of color (Brown, 2014).

Additionally, seeing teachers of color in positions of authority provides positive role models for students. Kohli (2009, 2016) has documented how seeing adults who racially represent them as positive role models (namely, as teachers) can serve to counteract the negative images students of color might be used to seeing in
popular media. Villegas et al. (2012) concluded that “when students fail to see minority adults in professional positions and instead see them overrepresented in the ranks of non-professional workers, they implicitly learn that white people are better suited than people of color to hold positions of authority in society” (p. 285). Together, Kohli (2009, 2016) and Villegas and colleagues (2012) remind us that when teachers do not reflect children’s identities, cultural legacies, and communicative practices, there might be an abyss between the world of school and the world of home and/or community. This can be detrimental in the education of students from minoritized backgrounds.

Translating findings from education writ large—on teachers of color—to early childhood education in particular and centering the experiences these teachers bring to educating young children, Jackson and Boutte (2018) explain that for over thirty years, research has explored teaching practices and developed theoretical frameworks that focus on the cultural knowledges of historically marginalized children and youth (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). They unveil the importance of combining teaching practices which center the experiences of intersectionally minoritized communities, families, and students with the identities and experiences of teachers of color themselves. They posit that teachers of color often have a head start in enacting assets-based pedagogies, which take a strengths-based perspective towards children from marginalized backgrounds.

The experiences of teachers of color in and through PreK-12 schooling often lead them to question traditional practices in education which are grounded in assimilation (Williamson et al., 2007; Souto-Manning, 2019b, 2019c). Coming to
recognize their own experiences as assets instead of as belonging outside the scope of teaching and teacher education (as demonstrated by Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019, for example), intersectionally minoritized teachers of color can develop assets-based pedagogies, which value the experiences and practices of their students, question societal injustices, and make way for social action. This offers direct implications for what teacher education programs can learn from the experiences of teachers of color—including those from immigrant and transnational backgrounds.

As teacher education programs grapple with educating teachers to employ assets-based pedagogies with children of color, thereby meeting the needs of a growing racially, culturally, and linguistically minoritized student population (Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Zeichner, 2003), Jackson and Boutte (2018) contend that “teacher education programs would benefit from a substantive examination of cumulative hegemonic reinforcements that are inherent in their policies and practices” (p. 87). In looking at many teacher education programs, a superficial approach to addressing issues of equity and justice has been documented (Boutte, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Jackson and Boutte (2018) underscore that if teacher education programs want to propagate assets-based pedagogies for children of color, they need to make systemic changes to employ these pedagogies to support teacher candidates of color as well. This supports my study, which has a keen focus on immigrant/transnational teachers of color in the U.S. As Dick and Wirtz (2011) explained, “racial constructs tend to be of particular salience in postslavery and postcolonial societies, many of which are also sites of transnational migration, such as the United States” (p. E3).
Given the potential to positively impact the education of students of color (Bond et al., 2015; Carver-Thomas, 2018), it is critical for early childhood teacher education as a profession work to foundationally include the experiences and perspectives of teachers of color to inform teacher education programs, structures, and experiences (Souto-Manning, 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019). Through my study, I learned from and about the perspectives and experiences of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers who identified as persons of color.

Their experiences can illuminate a pathway for transforming early childhood teacher education, simultaneously attending to the demographic diversification of early childhood teaching as well as the conceptual diversification of early childhood teacher education. In my study, I show the power, potential, and necessity of exploring and interrogating how immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers experience race, racism, and in-betweenness through early childhood teacher education programs.

In the following section, I turn to immigrant and transnational teachers, undertaking a global perspective (Yao et al., 2018) as I review research on their experiences in teacher education programs, noting how race and racialization are often missing from this literature.

**Immigrant and Transnational Teachers**

In her review of literature, Goodwin (2017) contended: “In 2016, the situation seems stagnant; there continues not to be a “literature on immigrants and education,” at least not in key teacher education journals” (p. 439). Connecting the overwhelming whiteness and Eurocentrism of early childhood teacher education in the U.S. to
immigration, Adair (2014) expressed how “[t]he field of early childhood education and the area of immigration and education are increasingly concerned about cultural, racial and linguistic disconnects” (p. 643). This is visible in my review of literature; I found little on the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers with prior teaching experience in the context of their home countries in teacher education programs in the U.S. Much of the literature addressed two related topics: (a) how immigrant and transnational teachers are adjusting to the field of early childhood and teaching in a new context (Cho, 2011; Lam, 1996; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014; Schmidt, 2010; Tobin et al., 2013) and (b) how teachers with non-immigrant backgrounds are teaching an increasingly diverse and immigrant population of students (Keat et al., 2009); I focus on the earlier, as the latter category is not germane to the scope of my study.

My review of literature is bookended by two major events which impacted the positioning and construction of immigrants in U.S. society: the 9/11 attacks and the Trump regime. The September 11th, 2001 attacks impacted immigration regulation and policy, leading to heightened xenophobia, resulting in violent acts against immigrants, especially immigrants of color (Goodwin, 2017). This xenophobic environment was exacerbated during the recent Trump regime (Gleeson & Sampat, 2018), where multiple travel bans have been enacted and immigrants have been positioned disfavorably. Gleeson and Sampat (2018) underscored: “Perhaps a further consequence of the Trump presidency, and its crude and unflinching brand of racist nationalism and xenophobia, has been the clarification of the collective interests of various communities in the face of blatant white supremacy” (p. 90). I frame my literature
contextualizing my review of research within a larger geopolitical climate, I reviewed studies that speak of and about immigrant and transnational teachers in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

**Immigrant and Transnational Teachers in New Contexts**

My review of literature unearthed studies that point toward the power and possibility of immigrant and transnational teachers who share similar cultural, linguistic, and racial backgrounds with their students, families and communities (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014; Tobin et al., 2012, 2013). Multiple studies found that such teachers may have unique insights into the needs, cultural beliefs and practices of immigrant communities, families and young children; this is (at least partly) due to the perceived similarity in lived experiences, according to the literature (e.g., Mancilla-Martinez et al., 2014; Tobin et al., 2012, 2013). Further, for immigrant and transnational teachers with prior teaching experience, research supports the need for the pedagogical knowledge and teaching experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers to be acknowledged and valued in and through early childhood teacher education programs (Abramova, 2013; Arndt, 2015, 2016; Collins & Reid, 2012; Cruickshank, 2004). Paradoxically, a number of studies show that their practices and experiences are often disregarded because they are not located in the U.S. (Adair 2011, 2014, 2016; Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012; Gupta, 2006; Subedi, 2008). Given how the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers tend to be disregarded in early childhood teacher education programs against the need for them
to be acknowledged and valued in such programs, this dissertation study sought to learn from their experiences and practices, offering implications for the transformation of early childhood teacher education.

Through my review, I have found that the literature on the experiences of immigrant teachers in the U.S. is limited; there are even fewer studies on transnational teachers, especially in the U.S. context (Adair, 2011, 2014, 2016; Adair et al., 2012; Cho, 2011; Gupta, 2006; Lam, 1996). However, countries like Australia (Collins, & Reid, 2012; Peeler & Jane, 2005), Canada (Cho, 2011; Massing, 2015; Niyubahwe et al., 2013), and New Zealand (Arndt, 2015, 2016) have a number of studies on the experiences of immigrant teachers, which substantiate the importance of including immigrant teachers’ perspectives in teacher education programs. These studies, although located in a distinctive contextual milieu, offer important lessons for the U.S. context. I review them next.

**International Research on Immigrant Teachers**

The international studies I identified in my review of literature sought to understand immigrant teachers’ perspectives. They were largely from Canada (Cho, 2011; Kailasanathan, 2014; Marom, 2017; Massing, 2015; Niyubahwe et al., 2013; Oloo 2012; Schmidt, 2010; Walsh et al., 2011) and Australia (Collins & Reid, 2012; Cruickshank, 2004; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Soong, 2018). These studies mostly used qualitative, analytical, and interpretative approaches to highlight the experiences of immigrant teachers in the aforementioned countries. Many of these studies, especially from Canada (Kailasanathan, 2014; Oloo, 2012; Walsh et al., 2011), highlighted the language practices and linguistic resources of immigrant teachers to connect with the
heterogeneous populations of immigrant students. The Canadian studies (Cho, 2011; Kailasanathan, 2014; Marom, 2017; Massing, 2015; Oloo, 2012; Schmidt, 2010; Walsh et al., 2011) also addressed issues of access by questioning the (re)credentialing and certification practices for immigrant teachers. Research from Australia (Collins & Reid, 2012; Cruickshank, 2004; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Soong, 2018) focused on specific strategies for providing supports for the transitional experiences of immigrant teachers. Even though intersections of gender, social class, and race have been addressed, issues of race and racialization of immigrant and transnational teachers were largely absent from the literature that I have reviewed. In the subsections below, I offer a brief description of some of these studies on or about immigrant and transnational teachers, situating my dissertation study within a larger international context and making the case for the need to learn from and about the experiences and knowledges of immigrant and transnational teachers in the U.S. As the term transnational appeared in very few studies, throughout this section, I employ the terms immigrant teachers or international teachers per the preference of the original authors.

**Canadian context.** Within a growing body of research in the Canadian context, I found a number of dissertation studies that featured the perspectives of immigrant teachers in Canada (e.g., Arun, 2008; Chassels, 2011; Kailasanathan, 2013; Wang, 2002; Zhang, 2005). This signals the burgeoning interest in learning about and from the experiences of immigrant teachers since the turn of the century. They all make the case for understanding how immigrant teachers experience (re)learning to be(come) teachers within a new context—in Canada. In doing so, they support the
need for such studies in the context of the U.S. Methodologically, they all sought to foreground the voices, perspectives and experiences of immigrant teachers.

Using a life history approach, Arun’s (2008) phenomenological study detailed the experiences of four first-generation South-Asian immigrant teachers by accounting for their pedagogies and worldviews, relationships and identities responding to their geographic, cultural, and professional locations. This was also evident in Chassels’ (2011) dissertation study as she conducted interviews to investigate “responses to difference experienced by racial and linguistic minority immigrant teacher candidates in an initial teacher education program” (p. ii). More recently, Kailasanathan (2013) analyzed how social capital affects the integration experiences of immigrant educators in Manitoba, using a narrative inquiry approach. Wang (2002) featured the experiences of Chinese immigrant teachers’ cultural dissonance and adaptation through multiple case studies in Toronto schools. Using a case-study methodology, Zhang’s (2005) dissertation study’s aim was to understand the foreign-trained Alternative Teacher Accreditation Program for Teachers with International Experience teacher candidates’ experiences in their teaching practice in Ontario elementary schools. Together, these dissertation studies contribute to the importance of studying immigrant teachers’ experiences, knowledges, and perspectives. They call for teacher education to learn from and about immigrant/transnational teachers.

In addition to dissertations, since 2001 (after 9/11), I identified peer-reviewed published research studies on the experiences of immigrant teachers in Canada. To delineate a progression of research on the experiences of immigrant teachers in Canada over time, I selected articles which represent trends identified via my literature review,
namely: institutional and structural challenges experienced by immigrant teachers (Beynon et al., 2004), immigrant teachers’ acquisition of professional language (Deters, 2006), the process of (re)credentialing and legitimization of immigrant teachers in Canada (Cho 2010; Marom, 2017; Oloo, 2012; Walsh et al., 2011), the integration of immigrant teachers in Canadian schools (Niyubahwe et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2010), immigrant teachers’ experiences of professional transformation and acculturation (Janusch, 2014), and the experiences of immigrant and refugee women in an early childhood teacher education program (Massing, 2015). To make visible how these trends and arguments evolved over time, I review these articles in the timeframe specified earlier.

The (re)credentialing of immigrant teachers was a prevalent topic of the studies I reviewed within the context of Canada (e.g., Beynon et al., 2004; Cho 2010; Marom, 2017; Oloo, 2012; Walsh, Brigham, and Wang, 2011). Speaking to institutional and structural challenges faced by immigrant teachers in Canada, Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa (2004) used interviews and questionnaires to document and describe the experiences of immigrant teacher (re)credentialing in Canada. Their findings and implications underscored the importance of learning from the experiences of immigrant teachers. Cho (2011) centered the counter-stories of immigrant teachers as they worked through institutional and systemic barriers to qualify as legitimate teachers. Her study explored the linguistic capital related to immigrant teacher candidates and the challenges they faced. For example, Walsh, Brigham, and Wang (2011) considered how internationally educated female teachers were positioned in the labor force as they sought certification. Bringing to light the personal narratives of two
immigrant teachers in Saskatchewan schools, Oloo (2012) analyzed data on the experiences of immigrant teacher (re)credentialing, drawing important implications for immigrant teacher induction. Focusing on issues of recertification, Marom (2017) demonstrated the impact of governing policies and regulations on the experiences of immigrant teachers, resulting in unequal employment opportunities that keep the teaching workforce white, middle-class and female and disregarding the experiences and expertise immigrant teachers brought from their home countries. Taken together, these studies reify the importance of learning the experiences of immigrant teachers in programs required for their (re)credentialing, as done by my dissertation study.

There were also studies pertaining to integration of immigrant teachers in Canada and other western countries, naming obstacles. Schmidt (2010) documented the views of various stakeholders related to the integration of immigrant teachers in Manitoba, thereby foregrounding the systemic issues and discrimination faced by immigrant teachers. Deters (2006) examined language barriers experienced in the “professional acculturation of immigrant teachers” (p. 1). A literature review by Niyubahwe, Mukamurera, and Jutras (2013) further deepened my understanding by reviewing publications (including scientific articles, professional articles, media articles, chapters in an edited volume, and theses) in English and French on or about the integration of immigrant teachers. Findings were categorized into professional integration problems and professional integration successes and addressed employment opportunities, integrating with the school culture and teaching team, being (un)recognized for competencies from home contexts, and cross-contextual differences in teaching practice(s).
Using data from unstructured interviews with four immigrant teachers in Calgary, Janusch (2014) listened to immigrant teachers’ experiences of professional transformation and acculturation, making visible the often-silenced stories of internationally educated professionals. Also honoring the voices and stories of immigrant teachers, in a one-year ethnographic study, Massing (2015) describes the process of developing a professional identity experienced by immigrant and refugee women in an early childhood teacher education program in Alberta. Massing (2015) explained how by rejecting expectations to assimilate to normative early childhood teaching practices, immigrant and refugee early childhood teachers dialogically authored a hybrid professional identity at once informed by their own understandings and by authoritative discourses in the field of early childhood education.

This brief review of the Canadian literature on immigrant teachers supports the importance of my dissertation study. To be sure, collectively, these studies show the importance of learning about and from the experiences, knowledges, and perspectives of immigrant teachers within the context of the U.S. The studies reviewed herein illustrate the growing body of literature on immigrant and transnational teachers and help situate my dissertation study as part of a larger body of work, reifying its importance within the U.S. context. In the following subsection, I undertake a similar process, reviewing studies situated in Australia. I limit my review from 2001 to present, because, even though it is a period which marks sharp demographic growth trends of immigrants, the impact of 9/11 created a xenophobic environment globally.

**Australian Context.** A number of studies on the experiences of immigrant teachers are situated in the context of Australia (Brown et al., 2012; Collins & Reid,
Addressing Australia as “a major immigration nation with an increasing emphasis on selecting skilled and professional applicants” (p. 38), Collins and Reid (2012) mixed-methods research study underscored that, like in other contexts, research on or about the experiences of immigrant teachers is scarce, yet much needed if we are to interrupt teacher education as a process of assimilation into existing hegemonies.

Cruickshank (2004) contends that there is a lag in how teacher education programs are responding to the increasing diversity in the Australian education system. With a focus on immigrant teachers, the author interviewed 110 teachers in programs at University of Sydney, Australia, and found the necessity for increased access for minoritized individuals’ experiences, knowledges, and perspectives to incorporate apt delivery modes and structures, foster more inclusive curriculum and support programs, and develop equity provisions within institutional structures. Adding to the need to transform teacher education to support the development of immigrant teachers in teacher education programs, Peeler and Jane (2005) found mentoring to be foundational in bridging immigrant teachers’ professional practices within and across cultural and physical contexts; mentoring “helps them acquire appropriate knowledge and enables them to negotiate the meaning of workplace routines” (p. 333).

Studying transnational teachers, Soong (2018) called for transcending globalized neoliberal discourses to understand and address the (multiple) border crossings of transnational teachers in Australia. This study informed my dissertation study in multiple ways. It features the experiences of transnational teachers, almost absent in the research literature, speaks to the conceptualization of borders and how
immigrant and transnational teachers are constantly crossing over and across these borders, and addresses demographic and democratic imperatives.

Brown and colleagues (2012) documented strategies to support the development of immigrant teachers, ascribing to the idea of crossing borders “in terms of having to align their past experience of pedagogical practice, beliefs and teaching contexts with new institutional expectations and strategic directions” (p. 321). Building on the strengths and experiences of immigrant teachers, they offer a model applied at a regional Queensland university where transnational teachers are supported, offering an example of how teacher education programs can be (re)designed to better support the development of immigrant and transnational teachers.

Research from the Australian context was more focused on how to support immigrant teachers’ acculturation and transition to a new context. The combined body of research was limited and was second only to the Canadian context, where a majority of the studies on immigrant teachers were found. A notable contribution to the research on early childhood immigrant teachers in New Zealand is the scholarship of American researcher Sonja Arndt.

**New Zealand Context.** Even though I did not find much research on immigrant or transnational teachers in New Zealand, Arndt’s work about early childhood immigrant teachers in New Zealand is an important addition to the literature. Drawing on Kristeva (1991), Arndt (2015) challenges commonplace conceptualizations of foreigners, applying such challenges to (re)position immigrant teachers in early childhood classrooms. She calls for the field of early childhood
education “[t]o imagine a place where being with others becomes more than merely accepting them, but rather of walking with them as others ourselves, means further reconceptualising and re-confronting foreignness, again and again” (p. 890).

Arndt (2016) takes a Hegelian view to explain how “[t]his dialectic helps us to see the foreigner teacher as simultaneously privileged and subjugated – the ‘exotic’ bringer of ‘richness’ to the curriculum, she nevertheless remains in the margins, relegated to abiding by entrenched dominant practices and norms” (p. 49). Drawing on their experiences and employing a Marxist perspective, Arndt (2016) explains how immigrant teachers feel alienated by the dominant ideology, which simultaneously drives and oppresses, thereby marginalizing them. Arndt (2016) calls for “early childhood settings to become spaces of resistance” (p. 49), transforming itself to support the development and foster the liberation of immigrant teachers.

In connection to these major contributors to the literature on immigrant and transnational teachers, namely, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, I now delve deeper into the U.S. context, which was the context for my dissertation study.

**U.S. Context.** Applying the same timeframe, from 2001 to the present, I have identified multiple dissertation studies focusing on the experiences and knowledges of immigrant teachers within the context of the U.S. (Carrison, 2007; Edebor, 2018; Kang, 2017; Lee, 2010). Collectively, these dissertation studies signal a growing area of interest in researching the experiences of immigrant teachers in the U.S. Below, I review studies most germane to my dissertation study. I selected studies that represented trends I identified in reviewing the literature: the absence of race (Blythe-Hibbert, 2013), the need to formally acknowledge immigrant teachers’ beliefs and
experiences in formal teacher education coursework (Gupta, 2006; Subedi, 2007), and globalization’s influence in the education of teachers (Goodwin, 2010). Even as the field of teacher education research continues to be dominated by the U.S., research about the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers in the U.S. is limited.

Investigating the challenges that English-speaking Caribbean immigrant teachers faced during their first year of teaching in the U.S., Blythe-Hibbert (2013) used a phenomenological qualitative approach with twelve participants who were experienced teachers in their home contexts. Findings underscored the participants’ experiencing substantial challenges teaching in inner-city public schools in the U.S. Even though this study was with participants from the Caribbean, the word “race” was only mentioned twice and only to describe other studies in the literature review section. Although race and racialization are not necessarily embedded into the framework of self-efficacy, which Blythe-Hibbert (2013) used, the glaring absence of the term is very evident throughout the literature on immigrant and transnational teachers.

Two studies (Gupta, 2006; Subedi, 2007) speak to the importance of acknowledging immigrant teachers’ beliefs and experiences and of including them in formal teacher education coursework. Gupta (2006) used a survey and classroom reflections to explore early childhood immigrant teacher candidates’ prior beliefs and experiences in relation to theories of child development and learning. Reflecting on their own childhood experiences she concluded:

Since teachers’ cultures, race, class, and personal histories shape their cognitive frameworks or worldviews, and thus influence their relationships with their students..., their effectiveness as teachers can only be enhanced if
their personal funds of knowledge and their beliefs are formally acknowledged in a concrete manner within the teacher-education classrooms. (p. 17)

Subedi (2007) addressed issues of positionality and subjectivity as he drew on his research with Asian immigrant and Asian-American teachers, suggesting that “by fully recognizing respondents’ ways of being, researchers can engage in ethical research practices” (p. 51). These studies informed my study as they addressed the dilemma of being an insider/outsider. That is, sharing some similar identity markers of race or ethnicity does not mean that the researcher and the participants share the same experience. They have helped me challenge my own assumptions about why and how I conducted my dissertation study. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter III.

Subedi is one of the few scholars whose research addresses the racialization of immigrant teachers, thereby informing my dissertation study. Using a postcolonial lens to analyze the experiences of two South-Asian immigrant teachers, Subedi (2008) challenged the Black/white dichotomy of racial discourses and made clear connections between the immigrant experience and racialization. He also challenged the dichotomous discourses of foreigner/citizen and explained such discourses further privilege and center “the experiences of those who are white, Christian, native born and those who speak standard English” (p. 61).

In a study with thirty-one Latinx immigrant and guest bilingual teachers, Fee (2010) unveiled some of the complexities of (re)learning to teach in a new context, explaining how the study’s participants “were acculturating on three fronts: as teachers in a foreign school system, as students in a foreign university, and as settlers in a foreign land” (p. 392). This study importantly acknowledges the complexities inherent to the experiences of (many) immigrant teachers, considering personal, professional
and academic challenges experienced. In doing so, it makes visible the continued gap in the literature on immigrant and transnational teachers.

Adair is one of the main U.S. scholars whose research focuses on early childhood teachers from immigrant backgrounds. Foregrounding the practices of immigrant preschool teachers, Adair (2011) documented the unique perspectives of immigrant teachers to the education of young immigrant children and children of immigrants, specifically focusing on how they responded to the use of their home languages in the classroom. Across studies and publications, Adair (2009, 2011, 2016) affirms the importance of immigrant teachers’ perspectives, denouncing their absence in U.S. debates on early childhood pedagogy. In doing so, she urges the field to pay attention to the experiences of immigrant teachers. She states: “we can broaden the field’s ability to equitably educate the growing number of children of immigrants in early childhood settings” (Adair, 2011, p. 58).

Relatedly, Adair, Tobin, and Arzubiaga (2012) asserted the need for more research on early childhood immigrant teachers’ cultural and professional knowledges and the obstacles they faced for political access to curricular/pedagogical decision-making; their participants felt “stuck between their pedagogical training and their cultural knowledge” (Adair et al., 2012). Adair (2014) explains how whiteness creates an obstacle in positively approaching immigrant families, making a strong case for the urgent need to include the perspectives of teachers of color from immigrant backgrounds in diverse contexts in order to better serve the needs of a growing population of immigrant children. Adair (2016) asserts the value of immigrant teachers in early childhood classrooms through her continued study that explored the role of
affection in multiple preschool sites in five U.S. cities. Findings from these studies reveal how immigrant teachers’ positive perceptions of and understandings of the experiences of immigrants can create welcoming environments in early childhood settings, with the potential to foster success for young immigrant children. Taken together, these studies show a disconnect between what is being said about a more diverse early childhood teacher workforce in the U.S. and the obstacles that often hinder access for immigrant and transnational teachers of color, supporting the importance of my study.

Of the studies I reviewed, a few explored the identity and experience of early childhood immigrant teachers in the U.S. (Adair, 2009; Adair, 2011; Adair & Barraza, 2014; Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Heng, 2014; Perreira et al., 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Tobin, et al., 2013; Todorova et al., 2009). In each of these studies the researchers featured a firsthand account of the experiences of immigrant teachers and investigated the challenges immigrant teachers encountered in a new country’s educational system and culture. These informed my study as identity and experience are not divorced from each other; they are inextricably connected (Anzaldúa 1987; Britzman, 2003).

My review of literature on immigrant teachers in the U.S. context shows the gap in the literature concerning the experiences of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers; particularly their experiences with race and racialization, as well as with in-betweenness. I did not find any studies that speak directly to these overlapping issues, especially in early childhood contexts. To build on existing literature and address the gap instantiated in this chapter, throughout my study, I
purposefully and intentionally use the terms immigrant and transnational teachers as a way to encompass, but not essentialize, teachers who are at various stages within the spectrum of immigration. Seeing immigration as a fluid and dynamic process, as afforded by Nepantla, straddling the intersections of identity and experience, I choose to use the in-betweenness to look at the way the literature has positioned teachers of color with an immigrant and transnational background in early childhood education. Thus, my review of literature confirms the need for my study; the need to account for and acknowledge immigrant and transnational teachers’ experiences, knowledges, and viewpoints—within, across, and in betwixt (Adair, 2011; 2016; Adair & Barraza, 2014; Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Heng, 2014; Perreira et al., 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Tobin, et al., 2013; Todorova et al., 2009).

Globalization and (Re)Learning to Teach

As I approached my research study, I kept in mind the very important questions about globalization and/in teacher education raised by Goodwin (2010):

What might quality teaching mean in a global context? What should globally competent teachers know and be able to do? What are some of the issues, dilemmas, barriers, or structures that seem to interfere with teacher education reform and hinder movement towards internationalization in teacher preparation? (p. 20)

Inspired by Goodwin (2010) and heeding her call, my dissertation study sought to deeply examine and analyze these problems by considering how global mobility has complexities and can be “multidirectional,” “transiently permanent,” “culturally inclusive,” and “life-embedded” (p. 20). As she affirmed, transnational employment and recruitment have changed the characteristics of mobility. Addressing the global
disproportionality of resources and technological advancements, Goodwin (2010) explained how all these factors impact a globalized world of teacher education.

Goodwin (2010) also provided a strong framework for the field of teacher education in the form of five knowledge domains for teaching:

(1) personal knowledge/autobiography and philosophy of teaching; (2) contextual knowledge/understanding children, schools, and society; (3) pedagogical knowledge/content, theories, methods of teaching, and curriculum development; (4) sociological knowledge/diversity, cultural relevance, and social justice; and (5) social knowledge/cooperative, democratic group process, and conflict resolution. (p. 22)

In my study, I engaged these knowledge domains. The personal knowledges of immigrant and transnational teachers were valued within the U.S. context. They were positioned as valuable members of the profession. These domains guided me as I sought to (re)frame immigrant and transnational teachers of color as persons and professionals with valuable knowledge or knowledge of children and society, negotiating new realities they faced in their new contexts. These domains also supported the need to consider the pedagogical knowledges that immigrant and transnational teachers of color bring with them. Being a part of the diversity and diversified society, immigrant and transnational teachers may bring with them unique perspectives on education, which might better align with justice and equity orientations. Finally, these domains led me to position the perspectives and experiences of immigrant/transnational teachers of color as vital to teacher education.

**Conclusion**

The theoretical lenses of CRT and Nepantla have afforded me entry points into my review of literature, supporting my research questions and the need for my
research study. Namely, CRT has helped me to look at the literature on teachers of color and encouraged me to think about the complexity of teachers’ identities in relation to race and racism, an imperative because of the deeply ingrained effects of racism on the everyday lives of immigrant and transnational teachers of color (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). As I look ahead to Chapter III and explore the methodology for my dissertation study, it is important to understand that CRT informed my study as I sought to access immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color’s counternarratives and counter-stories to majoritarian knowledges and experiences in early childhood teacher education. To do so, I engaged in listening to the voices and learned about the experiences of my participants—immigrant and transnational teachers of color.

To account for and understand the intersections of race and ethnicity in early childhood teacher education, Nepantla furthered my understanding of the literature about immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color and helped me to locate studies, experiences and knowledges within, across, and in-between geopolitical borders. As CRT and Nepantla came together, I was able to bring these separate yet parallel bodies of literature together, delineating a complex and compound problem pertaining to early childhood teacher education, offering implications for how and what early childhood teacher education programs might learn from the experiences of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color.

In this chapter, I explored the need for more focused research in this converged and convergent field of early childhood teacher education with immigrant and transnational teachers of color. Building on what I have gleaned from the review of
literature, and using my theoretical lenses of CRT and Nepantla, in the following chapter, I explain my methodology.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I delineate the methodology which I used to bring to the foreground the voices and experiences of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color with experience teaching in their home countries who underwent the process of (re)learning to be(come) teachers in U.S. teacher education programs. As explained in the literature review presented in Chapter II, it is important to understand what knowledges and experiences early childhood immigrant and transnational teachers of color bring with them as they enter and pursue initial teacher certification programs in the U.S., what knowledges and experiences they perceive being valued in such settings, and how they make sense of these knowledges and experiences across geographical borders. This was the focus of this dissertation study, whereby I learned from six early childhood immigrant and transnational teachers of color. In doing so, I hoped to help participants recognize their existing knowledges and experiences and (re)consider how these experiences might collectively inform their teacher identities and practices. My study was informed by the following research question: How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City?
In the sections that follow, I explain my interpretation of methodology, detail my use of qualitative research methods, discussing the affordances of these methods to my study. That is, I offer a blueprint for my research study. Then, I make visible the selection criteria for participants and rationale for selection, setting, and context. After which, I further detail particular methods of data collection, interviews and co-construction of poetic counter-stories and poetic testimonios. In doing so, I explain how they align with my theoretical framework of CRT and Nepantla combined. I elucidate how I engaged in data reduction, converted the information collected into data addressing my research questions and show how I analyzed the data collected in order to address my research questions. Finally, I showcase the way findings are presented. In doing so, I address soundness and limitations of my study.

**Methodology to Me**

Methodology is often understood as the collection of methods used in a study or in a discipline. We see methodology as the principles and ground rules, or the “argumentative grammar” (Kelly, 2004) that connects theory and specific methods of data analysis to one another. Methodology guides the researcher to select, construct, and use methods that correspond to the basic ontological and epistemological ideas of his or her theoretical framework. (Gutiérrez, Engestrom, & Sannino, 2016, p. 280)

In alignment with Gutiérrez, Engestrom, and Sannino (2016), I understood methodology as a way to connect the theoretical aspects of a study to the methods of data collection and analysis. This understanding helped me to conceptualize and carry out my study in ways foundationally informed by my theoretical framework. It allowed me to develop a complex, albeit entangled structure, adequate to collect data, allowing me to address my research questions.
To make sense of these entanglements, I adopted crystallization, which rejects traditional views of validity and (post)positivist notions of triangulation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Aligning with CRT and Nepantla, qualitative crystallization is seen as a counter response to traditional methodology and triangulation, which operate under the assumption that multiple sources of data can answer a research question, by pointing to a fixed point (Kuby, 2014). Making space for a multi-genre analysis of data (i.e. narrative, storytelling, and poetry), crystallization helps blur boundaries between art and science. Combining artistic and rigorous methods towards analyzing data, it is commensurate with critical and feminist paradigms (Kuby, 2014).

Employing this methodological framework allowed me to acknowledge and value multiple ways of seeing the world related by my participants, honoring the understanding that knowledge and reality are dynamic and ever-changing (Kuby, 2014). Following a crystallization methodology, which makes space for multiple truths and realities, I employed interviews as the main method of collecting data as I sought to “conduct and present research grounded in the experiences of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23), honoring and foregrounding their perspectives. Then, to further entangle and (re)arrange this data in collaboration with my participants, centering their experiences and perspectives and honoring what is critical for them, I used poetic analysis (explained later in this chapter) to foreground the essential parts and voices of my participants as we co-constructed poetic counter-stories together.
Qualitative Research

In this study, I employed a qualitative research design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), apt to addressing my research questions as I sought to learn from and with my participants. Qualitative research deems research to be a generative process; as such, it cannot be objective. It is subject to many things, including, but not limited to, context, researcher background, theoretical assumptions, and ideology. Qualitative research afforded me access to understanding how six immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color experienced (re)learning to teach in U.S. university-based teacher education programs.

The paradigm of qualitative research figured prominently in my review of the literature, where studies employed ethnography, case-study, interviews, focus groups, life histories, and other related qualitative approaches to data collection. It also aligns well with my theoretical framework; CRT embraces multiple modes of qualitative inquiry to assert the centrality of stories and experiences of people of color, while Nepantla encourages the use of these methods to come together and speak back to oppressive systems and regimes, calling for action.

Accounting for multiple perspectives and knowing that the truth is ever changing, depending on the context and point in time, crystallization as methodology afforded me a space to locate the commitments of equity and justice evident in my theoretical frameworks. Taking strength from CRT and Nepantla, qualitative research allowed me to focus on nuanced and complex individual experiences without making generalizations or essentializing a whole population. Using narrative inquiry as a
broader base, I situate my study within and between the realms of counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and testimonios (Prieto & Villenas, 2012).

**Exploratory Study**

My exploratory study was conducted during a qualitative methods course, with teachers of color as participants. Because I found that the voices of early childhood teachers of color are underrepresented in practice and research (Fontana & Frey, 2005), especially when it comes to certification tests. With the introduction of standardized teacher assessments like the educational Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), the process of becoming a licensed and certified teacher became even more daunting for teachers of color; the edTPA is a performance assessment created by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity and administered by Pearson, Inc., to assess the professional readiness of student teachers (AACTE, 2016). I reviewed literature on the edTPA as a barrier of power and knowledge, keeping teachers of color on the outside. It was with the understanding that “cloaked in the guise of objectivity and swathed in the myth of meritocracy, high-stakes assessments are forms of racist ordering” (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016, p. 201) that I embarked in my exploratory study, seeking to learn from teachers of color.

Through a qualitative exploratory study, I investigated the following question: *How do three early childhood teachers of Color navigate the process of the edTPA to become certified teachers within the predominantly white teacher workforce?* With an intentional focus on race, and therefore a CRT lens, my exploratory study employed Spradley’s (1979) semi-structured interview protocol guidelines. I interviewed three teachers of color (see Appendix D for an excerpt of an interview piloted in my
exploratory study with initial researcher thoughts). Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes and took place at a location convenient to the participants.

**Selection Criteria**

Purposeful sampling was used to choose the participants based on the following criteria: 1) teacher of color, 2) passed the edTPA, 3) early childhood educator, 4) currently teaching in an early childhood classroom. As a student at Teachers College (TC), this was also a convenience sample—all three participants had completed their Master’s degree from TC and were known to me. In terms of racial and/or ethnic identity, the first participant, Jayla, self-identified as Black, the second, Yael self-identified as Black (from Israel), and the third, Alena self-identified as Mexican American. Unknowingly, at that time, I had not considered the intersectional identity of two participants, who also identified as immigrant and transnational teachers. Although I did not specify gender, all three participants were women; so, this was also a gendered interview (Fontana & Frey, 2005). This is not surprising given the gendered nature of the early childhood teaching profession.

**Establishing Rapport**

“Researchers employing reflexive, culturally responsive research methodologies work to build relationships within and across cultures and varied ways of knowing to challenge and facilitate changes in inequitable structures, policies, and practices” (Knight et al., 2004, p. 391). All three participants were known to me, so I did not have to work hard to establish rapport. We had a common context and shared some understandings. For example, when they said that they benefitted from being at TC because of an instructor, Kate, who helped them translate the edTPA, I knew
exactly what they were referring to. When Alena used the term, “white English” it stood out to me and connected with my revised research question, which centered the experiences of early childhood teachers of color with the edTPA in a program where most of the faculty were white, including lecturers and professors. Revisiting my exploratory study led me to attend to establishing rapport in my dissertation study, as relationships with my dissertation study participants were inexistent prior to the study.

**Interviews**

I conducted one interview with each participant. The interview protocol elicited responses that captured the experiences of the participants being and becoming early childhood teachers, their experiences in the classroom in early childhood settings, as well as in the early childhood teacher education programs, the challenges they faced as teachers of color, and their issues with the edTPA. The duration of each one of the interviews was between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The interview with the first participant was via telephone. This is because the first participant was unavailable to meet in person. Interviews with the other two participants were in-person. As this phone interview was also the first of the three interviews, I learned how the medium of communication yielded different conversations. I forgot to ask some more nuanced questions and made it more like a questionnaire than a dialogic space. I was also unable to account for affect as I could not read body language, gestures, or facial expressions. For the following two interviews, as they were in-person, I felt more comfortable and so (seemingly) did my participants. This shaped my decision to have in-person interviews in my dissertation study. I also felt that one interview did not allow me to delve in-depth, so in my
dissertation study, I expanded the number of interviews to three. This also helped me establish rapport with my participants.

**Data Analysis**

I analyzed my data by creating a thematic coding system, keeping in mind my research question (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I also consulted with critical friends who “suggest[ed] different ways of making sense of the data that are being collected” (Horvat, 2013, p. 108). Then I used axial coding. First, I read all my transcripts throughout and identified themes inductively; I then looked to see if these themes matched my question and found more nuanced snippets of the data which addressed my research question more directly. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, to decrease vulnerability.

With an intentional spotlight on the edTPA, the themes that were identified captured key obstacles associated with the edTPA as a gatekeeping assessment, necessary for certification. Namely, they identified the technical language used by the edTPA, the cost of the assessment, and how edTPA did not impact their teaching practice. Combined, these findings made visible how the participants regarded edTPA as not only unnecessary but comprising an obstacle to diversifying the teaching profession. The most evident theme identified across the three interviews, which addressed my research question, was the inaccessibility of the academic/technical language expected to be used in the edTPA.

**Findings**

Overall, this exploratory study helped me learn more about the process of interviewing and having difficult conversations about race, racism, and entangled
forms of bigotry. My findings suggested how teachers of color felt 1) undervalued, 2) delegitimized, 3) isolated, and 4) under-supported. These themes were found in all three participants’ interview transcripts with varying degrees of importance to each theme. Findings from individual participants are briefly offered below; I specifically focus on what seemed most important and relevant in my interpretation.

Alena is a 27-year-old, second generation immigrant from Mexico. She identified as a Mexican-American female and a person of color. After completing her master’s program in early childhood education, Alena taught at a public school in Harlem. She said she felt part of the community, explaining that her Mexican family background helped her connect to the children she was teaching, who were all children of color. She felt comfortable at her school. She said:

That people, that white people will never know, you know. It's not all like, huh, happy. You know, like, sunshine and flowers. It's not, and I think coming from that sort of background makes me want to, um, connects me with the children. Um, and also because I, I want ... Because I try to really, because I know there's difficulties, I want them to be the best that they can be.

She recognized that “it was a privilege” to even be able to go to a master’s degree program but described her edTPA experience as “something she had to do and forgot about it as soon as it was done.” Specifically, she said: “it's hard for you to kind of navigate the language they want us to use in it.” Alena mentioned: “It's interesting 'cause I don't know what’s the purpose of edTPA, I mean, I had to do it. I know it comes from Stanford, but, but besides that I'm just like, you're doing it because they want money.” In talking about what she thought of curriculum, she said, “if you think about curriculum, it is a white perspective.” Taking a cue from Alena’s views on curriculum and language of the school, I asked her about her view of the edTPA, this is when she said, “so I guess in the most broad way, I would imagine proper and
academic language as being that of white English.” In reflecting about her own positionality as a teacher of color teaching students of color, Alena showed how she felt connected to the children, but when she spoke about her experiences in the teacher education program, particularly with the edTPA, which she mentioned was “the most difficult part of becoming a teacher,” she affirmed that they both offered a “white perspective.” The themes of undervaluation of her lived experience and feeling delegitimized by the use of “white English” helped me think about how important conversations on race and racialization, language and identity, in early childhood teacher education are seldom addressed.

Jayla is a 24-year-old, Haitian-American, early childhood teacher of color. At first, she did not think that race played a role in her profession as an early childhood teacher in a private school in Long Island. Later, in her interview, she mentioned that she was the only Black teacher on the staff of head-teachers, while all the assistant-teachers were Black. She described her school culture and how she felt supported in her new environment as a new teacher. She stated, “school culture to me is that, like, you have a team. And we're all, like, we're all practicing the same thing.” She mentioned that she found the edTPA a difficult and unnecessary process, which was extremely expensive. In talking about the edTPA, she also mentioned: “edTPA was like that thing hanging over you that last semester.” Later Jayla said,

I was going to say doing edTPA, I did it during ... I couldn't do it during the semester. Like, I prepped everything. I recorded the videos during the semester because it was, like, going to be impossible to do it during the summer, but I spent, like, at least two months working on it during the summer.

Later in her interview, she explained why it took her so long: “I think they try and make it that way, so not everyone can read it, you know, like, it’s not regular English.”
Jayla was able to express to me how she did not feel racialized but on deeper questioning, she mentioned her feeling of isolation in her school setting where she was the only head teacher who was Black. She also mentioned how she was under-supported in her first school which was a Charter school and therefore decided to move to her current setting which was a more progressive setting. Jayla’s experiences aligned with Alena’s in that the two participants foregrounded the use of academic or “white English” as a barrier for them to successfully pass the edTPA.

Yael, a 34-year-old, is a second-generation immigrant from Israel. Just like Jayla, she mentioned that she was the only Black teacher in a private Jewish school. When I asked her, what was the difference in being a teacher of color and a white teacher, Yael said:

My race is there, and the questions are there and I have like, children sometimes ... I've had children say like, "You look like my nanny." I've had children ask me, "Can I touch your hair?" Um, "Does the ... Does like, the brown color of your skin come off when you take a shower?" or like different things, but when it's coming from the voice of a four-year-old or a five-year-old, it's like ... it's not ... there's no malice. It's like general curiosity- ... and it, now I use it as an opportunity to open a larger conversation and talk about differences and talk about like, uh, just individuality and culture and race in a different way, but it's taken me a long time to feel comfortable to do that.

Yael mentioned how race did play a role in the way she taught and that she was learning to become more comfortable with talking about issues of race and equity. Her identity as a Jewish Black woman from Israel connected to the way she saw the intersections of her identity. She said that it was important to her that the children she taught “saw people of color come from a place of strength” and she wanted them to see positive and diverse images of people in her classroom.

When discussing the edTPA, she also mentioned the financial burden and then explained, “first of all, it took me a long time to understand what was actually being
asked of me, and I think even when I was in it and preparing for it and taping my lessons for it, I didn't fully understand. There's something so complicated about the instructions and descriptions, that, for me, it was, it was hard to, to really understand.”

She further elaborated how an instructor in the teacher education program at the institution of higher education she attended had helped her make sense of the language. Yael explained:

Because she basically broke it down to like, "This is what they're asking from you here. This is what they're asking. This is what you need to do," and I think that if I didn't have that, I probably would have prepared all of my materials and then sat down so it's right and put it together and realize that I'd done it wrong and have to go back and do it again.

My exploratory study supported my focus on listening to the voices of early childhood teachers of color and learning from their experiences and perspectives. Learning from my participants through my exploratory study, I am now more mindful of the spaces of discomfort and give more time to the process of meaning-making. I have also reflected on my own process of conducting just one interview and felt that it was inadequate for the purposes of my study. If I wanted to delve deeper into the experiences and identities of my participants to more fully understand them, I needed more time, so I moved from Spradley’s (1979) semi-structured interview process to Seidman’s (2013) three-stage semi-structured interview process. This gave me and my participants more time between interviews to think about areas I may have missed and/or to ask clarifying questions. The three-interview process also afforded me the space to focus two interviews on topics informed by my research question. The final interview was when we engaged collectively, co-interpreting and making meaning through poetic inquiry. This much needed space for collective data-coding allowed me to surface what was critical according to my participants.
Through reflecting on my exploratory study, I determined the processes and methodology that best supported my dissertation study. First, I learned that CRT, although very compelling, was not enough to explore the immigrant and transnational perspective, and I needed to supplement it with Nepantla so that my theoretical framework helped me better explore my research question. Second, I realized that I needed more time to dialogue with my participants if I wanted to deeply understand identities and experiences, therefore I shifted from Spradley’s (1979) semi-structured interviews to Seidman’s (2013) three-stage in-depth interview process. Finally, I learned that poetic inquiry and analysis aligns with my theoretical frameworks and afforded me the space to co-create something powerful with the voices and words of my participants in the form of poetic counter-stories and poetic testimonio.

**Dissertation Study**

As detailed above, my exploratory study was focused on teachers of color and their experiences with the edTPA in a predominantly white profession, early childhood education. Unbeknownst to me, two of the three participants were also immigrant and transnational, unveiling a population and focus which I did not consider at the time. Grounded by CRT, I chose to take a “problem-centered approach” through which the problem guides the method (Tate & Rousseau, 2002). As shown in my review of literature, research including the perspectives of immigrant and transnational teachers of color is limited, especially in the U.S. context and in early childhood teacher education.

My dissertation study uses qualitative methodology to unpack the “context, personal interpretation, and experience[s]” (Mishna as cited in Marshall & Rossman,
2006, p. 54) of early childhood, immigrant and transnational teachers of color. In my dissertation study, informed by Leavy (2014), I used poetry to elicit truthful moments, moments of emotion through poetry which extended my “understanding of “giving voice” to our research collaborators, a key dimension in interpretive and feminist research, again showing how theoretical shifts precipitated methods of poetic inquiry” (p. 80) to explore my research question (and sub-questions): How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City?

I refined the methods I previously used in my exploratory study as a result of piloting the interview. Therefore, I used Seidman’s (2013) three interview series of in-depth interviews to gain information about my participants and their experiences (see Appendix A for protocol). I conducted a total of three in-person sessions, which were audio recorded. The first to establish a connection and rapport and address the first sub-question, How do these teachers describe their experiences with learning to teach and teaching in their home context(s)? The second to inform the second research sub-question, How do these teachers describe their experiences with (re)learning to teach and teaching in the U.S. context(s)? Then, I conducted a third interview session (which was also audio recorded and transcribed) where I invited participants to bring the first and second interviews in conversation with each other, identifying critical points and reconciling them through the interpretation of the transcripts, creation of trans/scripts (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2011; Souto-Manning, 2018) by co-creating participant-voiced poetry. This addressed my third question, In what ways do these teachers make
sense of and interpret the similarities and differences in their experiences of teaching in their two contexts? Thus, I followed a crystallization approach, with the aim of making space for multiple truths (Kuby, 2014). I audio recorded all interviews and then transcribed the recordings. Seidman’s (2013) three stage in-depth interview process gave me the necessary time to ask clarifying questions and therefore delve deeper into exploring the experiences and perspectives of my participants.

My primary source of data to answer my research questions were the three interviews with each participant, where participants were asked to share their experiences and perspectives pertaining to their experiences and negotiations in the process of: a) (re)learning to teach in the U.S., b) reflecting on the knowledges and experiences they bring from their home country (as they had accrued at least three years of teaching experience) and c) undergoing teacher education programs in New York City. During this process, I hope to have helped participants name their teaching knowledges and experiences, and then consider how these experiences, although located in geographically distinct locales, inform(ed) their experiences as teachers and shape(d) their identities. While each sub-question is correspondent to one distinct interview, the interviews (by design) built on each other, and thus the data to answer each of the research sub-questions was interwoven across interviews.

**Selection Criteria and Rationale**

For this study I interviewed participants based on a purposive sample. To align with my research question, I recruited six participants based on the following criteria: 1) self-identified as an immigrant or transnational teacher, 2) self-identified as a person of color, 3) had teaching experience in early childhood education outside the U.S.,
prior to entering a U.S. teacher education program, and 4) taught in an early childhood setting in New York City when the interviews took place. Based on research findings, which state that since the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, the regions of origin of immigrant populations in the U.S. are now predominantly comprised of individuals from South and East Asian countries and Latin American countries including Central America, South America and the Caribbean, and Mexico (Pew Research Center, 2016), I selected participants who reflect the demographics of immigrant populations currently in the U.S.

I recruited participants through personal communication (using a snowball technique) and via social media (namely, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). While I already had connections with two potential participants who fit all the selection criteria, I also sent emails to graduates of early childhood teacher education programs in New York and asked faculty in early childhood teacher education programs in New York to send messages to their graduates.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

Interviews

Drawing on CRT which centers the experiential knowledges of people of color as “legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26), I used interviews to learn about my participants lived experiences. Focusing on immigrant and transnational teachers’ experiences as sources of strength, I interviewed six participants, audio recording and subsequently transcribing their responses. Then I asked my participants to identify three sections they found important from those
transcripts to construct a situated counter-story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Inspired by
Cahnmann-Taylor, Souto-Manning, Wooten, and Dice (2009), and Souto-Manning
(2018), I used trans/scripting, combine qualitative analysis tools and arts-based
research methods to construct compressed renderings of the interviews informed by
my participants’ identifications of critical passages.

I employed interviews as my main method of data collection. The interviews
were dialogic and, as such, authentic to my study (Kohli, 2018; Souto-Manning &
Cheruvu, 2016; Subedi, 2007, 2008). Further, they allowed me to answer my research
question and sub-questions pertaining to the experiences, knowledges, and
perspectives of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color. In using
poetry, I sought to use the language of my participants through poetic inquiry to bring
forward the complexities of sensed and lived experiences. Located in between the
worlds of arts and sciences, “social issues such as race, class, and sexual
difference…[were] intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text,
elements in which theory is embedded” (Anzaldúa ,1990, pp. xxv-xxvi).

In conducting the three interviews with each of my six participants and asking
my participants to interpret the transcripts through poetic inquiry, my study rejected
the binary of “scientific” versus “arts-based” research. I concur with Cahnmann-Taylor
et al. (2009), who use “a space between what has traditionally been defined as art and
science and consequently carry out research practices in education that are informed
by tools and techniques from these seemingly opposite fields” (p. 2539). These in-
between spaces helped me use the affordances of my theoretical lenses of CRT for
poetic counter-storytelling and Nepantla to feature creative expression through poetic testimonio, highlighting the truths of my participants.

As my participants self-identified as immigrant/transnational teachers of color, they mentioned how at first, and even at the time this study took place, they struggled with their racial identification in the U.S. context. “Still, we live in a period in which the fast growth of…migration is rapidly transforming the established racial classifications. Race and racialization, however, remain central to the immigrant experience” (Itzigsohn et al., 2005, p. 52). The bifurcated notion of race as either white or Black (Itzigsohn et al., 2005), constrains the ways that people from immigrant or transnational backgrounds situate themselves. As Itzigsohn and colleagues (2005) explained, many immigrants came “from an open-ended racial classification system…through the common American situation of a dichotomous black/white classification (with the possibility of answering other), to the way in which…they are seen by American society—the reflective appraisal of the racial gaze of the U.S. mainstream” (p. 57). As such, they are further othered, invisiblized, and marginalized. These individuals are attributed and feel forced to adopt racialized U.S. identities, which were assigned to them as they transversed geographic and political borders. Being Nepantleras or border-crossers, they adapted and accepted these new identities, continuing to feel the tension between who they are and who the U.S. context wants them to be.

Their transitions and understanding of racialization and identity are also impacted by the timing of their immigration. Four of the older participants (Eduviges, Kudrat, Zara, and Patricia) spoke of racialized experiences in questions. This mirrors
findings of Itzigsohn and colleagues (2005). For example, Eduvigis asked: “That’s racialized, right?,” looking to me for answers to validate how she felt. The younger two participants (Alex and Mei) had recently immigrated and recently graduated from teacher education programs, which seemed to make the discussion of their racialization processes easier. This affirms Pew Research Center findings; older generations tend to be more racist and younger generations are more willing to talk about racism (Horowitz et al., 2019). Therefore, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the timing of my participants’ immigration and their age plays a vital role in their conceptualization of and willingness to talk about race and racism.

Further complexities were not taken up at this time and will be undertaken in future research. For example, the imperialistic notion of negating the work done elsewhere, the complexities of language and linguicism, and multiple other points of entry into the data which was rich yet convoluted. For this particular study, I chose to focus on what we can learn when the experiences of immigration and race come together for immigrant and transnational teachers in early childhood education. As such, within the context of this study, the absence of such considerations comprise a limitation.

**Researcher Journal**

Inspired by Quiñones (2016) I employed my researcher journal to document my theoretical framework and commitments before data collection and analysis. My researcher journal served as a space for additional data and reflection that shaped the way I interacted with the data. This reflexive exercise was done throughout the research process to help contextualize my line of inquiry. Specifically, I kept a written
log in my researcher journal where I documented observations and thoughts during the data collection process.

As a supplemental data collection method, the researcher journal a) guided the organization and timeline of data collection, b) was a space to write down ideas, reflection, and notes about emergent themes, and c) was a space to check my own positionality, be reflexive, and subjective. In this way, the researcher journal helped make sure I was thinking through the process and served as a tool whereby I became aware of my own biases throughout the process. This allowed me to avoid superimposing my experiences on those of the participants.

While recognizing that my findings are deeply informed by my positionality, identity, and experiences, seeking to decenter self from the participant experiences, I have added a section of my personal connections with the participants experiences in a section titled *Reflective Researcher Journal* after each participant’s poetic counter-story which is separate from my interpretation of the data in the *Discussion* section for each participant. Although subjectivity and positionality play a major role in qualitative research, I have tried my best to ensure trustworthiness of the study by following these steps.

**Data Coding**

I used axial coding, meaning I used a deductive (theory-driven) as well as inductive (data-driven) approach towards data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I read through the data noting the words, phrases, metaphors, and other linguistic features that might suggest certain categories with deductive “theory-generated codes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 216). I then took notes about the data as well as reflect
on my memos in my researcher journal throughout the data collection process, especially after the first two interviews.

To capture the emotional qualities in the interview transcripts and to better understand my data, I used the method of constructing trans/scripts, inspired by what Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2009) refer to as trans/ scripts, which are “compressed renderings of original transcripts that utilize techniques from poetry and the dramatic arts to highlight emotional “hot points” and heightened language from the original discourse in the data” (p. 2548). These included non-verbal gestures and displays of emotion that convey what the participant finds important, not usually visible in a text transcription. Thus, observing and listening to these emotional hot points (Cahnmann-Taylor et. al., 2009; Souto-Manning 2018) in the interviews recordings and transcripts helped me more fully understand the data by: a) emphasizing what was important to the participants, thus foregrounding their words and their voice in their poetic counter-stories, and b) putting participants’ voices and experiences in conversation with each other to produce a counter-narrative in the form of a poetic testimonio, which epistemologically rejects Eurocentrism (Anzaldúa 1990).

I used these trans/ scripts to identify words and phrases where the participants showed heightened emotionality which were moments when they (nervously) laughed, cried, paused, banged their fists on the table, their voice was differently modulated or when they made more emphatic statements when I read their transcripts with the audio-recordings and my journal notes. After highlighting these sections, I reviewed the notes from my researcher journal once again, to find thematic connections with immigration, race, teaching, and identity. I used this approach because I wanted to
explore tessellations of the research story which when pieced together by the participants, like a mosaic, might form a more complete yet complex picture of the participants’ experiences.

The focus of my study was to learn about the participants’ experiences with racialization and immigration as they traversed the borderlands of being and becoming early childhood educators in the U.S. My interview questions were therefore intentionally constructed so that the participants could highlight these particular experiences to shed light on my research question and sub-questions (Appendix A and Appendix B).

The next stage of analysis was undertaken with and by the participants. During my third interview, I presented the trans/scripts to each participant and asked them to identify three important themes from our previous conversations. I did this to help them recollect and recount the first two interviews and to understand what they found important. I asked for three things or themes as I wanted for participants to focus and prioritize what parts of our interactions within the first two interviews stood out to them and whether I had made sure these were subsequently highlighted in their individual trans/scripts. Including these three instances, I then showed them particular sections of the trans/scripts which were organized during my initial process which coincided with their three themes. This helped engage the participants in the process of co-constructing their own poetic counter-stories with themes that spoke directly to my research question and sub-questions.

After the third interview and after each participant had co-created their poetic counter-story, I reread the data with these emergent themes in mind, I looked for data
that might better address my research question and sub-questions, and also looked for parts of the data that might not necessarily connect to my research questions. As I further analyzed the data, I utilized Cahnmann-Taylor et al.’s, (2009) concept of “hot points,” which feature my participants’ particularly significant or meaningful experiences. In so doing, using a CRT and Nepantla lens, I hoped to account for how convergences and divergences added complexity to my participants’ experiences, which I sought to explore.

**Engaging participants in data analysis.** Using CRT and Nepantla as my theoretical lens, I engaged the participants in naming their own truths and telling their own stories. To be careful not to impose my researcher positionality upon the interpretation of the experiences of my participants, I made a methodological decision to center the voices of my participants who were intersectionally-marginalized, in alignment with my theoretical framework. In so doing, my study aimed to amplify the voices of my participants and their ways of knowing and being.

With the awareness that the process of working with the participants to co-construct their own poetic counter-stories and the collective poetic-testimonio may be difficult or complex, I sought to facilitate the construction of poetic counter-stories by organizing and streamlining the first two interview trans/scripts by emergent themes informed by emotional hot points. I recognize that my interpretations and coding were filtered through my positionality, being a transnational teacher of color myself. My positionality informed the construction of the research questions and the interview questions as the participants’ experiences connected with my own but also differed in many ways. I made sure to meaningfully engage with these similarities and differences
in my reflective researcher journal. I also embraced the feelings of discomfort when the participants’ discussions on race and racialization in particular were challenging for me. For example, as an early career teacher educator and researcher, I wanted to further discuss how race and immigration were interwoven within the fabric of society, especially in the U.S., but I ensured that I was listening and not teaching the participants. This process was fundamental to my study whereby I employed CRT and Nepantla, and co-constructed poetic counter-stories and a poetic-testimonio. My theory and methodology in unison call for the centering the lived experiences and voices of members of historically marginalized communities.

In the following section I explain how I used the process of trans/scription to help my participants create a poetic counter-story and finally a poetic testimonio. Staying true to CRT, I chose to use individual poetic counter-stories to generate knowledge by including those who continue to be epistemologically marginalized, unheard, and disempowered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Building on these individual pieces, I then put them together in conversation with each other in the form of a multi-voiced poetic testimonio, with the support of Nepantla. In the following section, I explain the process I undertook.

**Poetic Counter-Stories and Poetic Testimonio**

CRT foregrounds the racialization of society and the way it informs educational experiences (Hanley & View, 2014). Deeply connected to CRT is the use of counter-stories to interrupt and challenge the dominance of whiteness in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn et al., 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). My participants, immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color, narrated
their experiences in ways that countered the majoritarian story in/or early childhood
teacher education. Rejecting essentialist and overly simplistic stories, their lived
experiences provided a multiplicity of perspectives. Arts-based methods
complemented my CRT framework as they prize subjectivity, inherent in the arts, to
elicit counter-stories. These can represent experiences in deeply emotional ways that
provide a context for alternate realities, thus rejecting one dominant reality, which is
the goal of critical race theorists as well as arts-based researchers (Hanley & View,
2014). As Cahnmann (2003) explained:

> Once we realize that all claims to “scientific truth” are suspect, influenced by
the culturally bound nature of the researcher’s text, we can free ourselves to
write in ways that name and claim feeling, story, and relationship. In so doing
we will be better equipped to communicate findings in multidimensional,
penetrating, and more accessible ways. (p. 33)

Poetic inquiry in particular can assuage qualitative inquiry to attend to a “crisis of
representation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). This crisis of representation is not new
to the fields of early childhood education and early childhood teacher education, where
children and teachers who are intersectionally-minoritized are still underrepresented
and thereby silenced. In pursuing poetic inquiry, I aspired to honor my participants’
voices, languages, speaking styles, rhythm, repetition, pauses and symbols, to portray
the complexity in seeing in and through particular realities of immigrant and
transnational early childhood teachers of color (Galvin & Prendergast, 2009; Hanley &
View, 2014; Wiebe, 2015). This strengthened the construction of poetic counter-stories
and offered a method to account for merging the voice of my participants with my own
insights (Leavy, 2014).

While CRT offers counter-stories as a powerful tool, Nepantla offers
testimonios. Situated within Chicana and Latina feminisms, testimonios (Anzaldúa,
1990) have been used in education research, centering the experiences and perspectives of people of color, transnational and immigrant alike to subvert understandings of “scientific research.” Testimonio is a powerful tool that challenges objectivity and situates the individual in a shared and collective experience of marginalization, oppression, or resistance (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Using the power of testimonio and combining it with poetry, I constructed a multi-voiced poetic testimonio to understand and depict how my participants’ stories and experiences are even more powerful as a collective (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2012; Huber, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2018).

As explained above, seeking to address my research question and sub-questions, I chose the methodology that enhanced the meanings of the interviews by interpreting them through poetic counter-stories, and poetic testimonio with my participants. Using counter-stories and testimonios to disrupt and dismantle hegemonic power structures, I hope to continue to interrupt the pervasive hegemony of methodology and what is considered academically rigorous, and disrupt majoritarian discourses about people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Bringing to the foreground the rich history of poetry from communities of color, I wish to amplify my participants’ voices through poetry, making the findings more accessible to broader audiences. Knowing how academic writing can limit the audience, poetry opens up new realms of understanding and evokes an emotional response from the readers, in the hope of connecting them in some way to the experience (Leavy, 2014). Additionally, historically, poetry has been used to speak against oppression. Ciardiello (2010) documents how Chinese immigrants who were
detained on Angel Island in the U.S. had used the walls of their detention center to write poems about their experiences. These walls later were known as “talking walls” (Zonkel, 2006 cited in Ciardiello, 2010), and are just one example of how poetry has been used to speak against oppression. Contemporarily, scholars and practicing teachers have taken up poetic expression in various ways to continue the tradition of using poetry to subvert oppression (Lai et al., 1999). Poetic inquiry or poetry as a research method (Leavy, 2014) can thus be used to challenge traditional ways of knowing, in alignment with my theoretical frameworks – CRT and Nepantla.

Within the phenomenological understandings of experience, viewpoint, and language, poetic inquiry can portray lived and sensed experience, as a feeling of emotions through words that is not bound by dominant ways of being and communicating in U.S. institutions of higher education. As Anzaldúa (1987) states, “[t]he ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic” (p. 66).

Positionality

As a researcher of color, I recognize my own biases towards the topic and participants. Subedi (2007) clearly explains how we must understand the complexities of researching within historically and intersectionally-marginalized communities in the United States and in the world. It is important to consider what Dillard (2000) called “distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint” (p. 662), that is, how a researcher’s way of being and knowing influence how they develop methodologies and methods. To address my research question and sub-questions, I was attentive to my own
subjectivities to consider “where self and subject [may become] joined” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17).

My own positionality as a transnational, Indian, woman, person of color, and an experienced early childhood educator in my home context, makes me come to my research to explore the experiences of my participants. Recognizing how my subjectivities reinforce the need to conduct qualitative research, I agree with Luttrell (2009) who points out, “qualitative research is defined by an effort to highlight the meanings people make and the actions they take, and to offer interpretations for how and why” (p. 1). My participants were border-crossers, crossing borders both physically and metaphorically because of their identities and experiences. Through my study, I unpack some of these experiences of border-crossings and straddling multiple worlds and realities (Anzaldúa, 1987). Yet, as a researcher, I am aware that my beliefs and biases frame my research practices.

As a part of the data collection process, from the beginning, I documented my expectations and initial responses to the data in my researcher journal. I also engaged in dialogue with critical friends, peers, and advisors to see the data through different lenses and be reflexive of my own biases and subjectivities. In so doing, I considered my own experiences in being and becoming an early childhood educator in the U.S. context, keeping in mind how my experiences with race and racialization have changed over time.

**Soundness**

Data validity and soundness are essential components of qualitative research methods (Lather, 1991). Employing crystallization as methodology (Kuby, 2014), to
ensure soundness and validity, first I conducted two interviews with my participants, to learn about their identity and experiences as experienced early childhood transnational or immigrant teachers of color in their home contexts and in the U.S. I focused on learning more about their experiences in and through early childhood teacher education programs. Once I had some knowledge about their experiences, through my audio-taped interviews, I carefully transcribed these interviews and focused on points of emotion (what Cahnmann et al., 2009 called “emotional hot points”), listening for tone of voice, pauses, volume, repetition, and other features of their speech that may stand out. After this, we co-constructed a poetic counter-story as described above.

To create a poetic testimonio where the participant voices can culminate and be even more powerful, I waited until I had the approved individual poetic counter-stories from each participant to create a combined multi-voiced poetic testimonio. Making the shift from learning from an individual to learning from a collective community, Haig-Brown (2003) explains how testimonios are inherently political and their main aim “is to inform people outside a community/country of the circumstances and conditions of people’s lives” (p. 419) and to compel others to act.

Although I had similarities in identity and experience with my participants, I was keenly aware of the need to consider and account for the apparent complexities in working with participants who negotiate/navigate diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Subedi, 2007, 2008). For example, how the participants responded to being interviewed by someone who is (or isn’t) from a similar racial or ethnic background to theirs (Villenas, 1996) as well as how legitimate I was to them as a
researcher are some of the aspects, which were carefully (re)considered (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Smith, 1999).

Attending to the soundness of my research study, after the first two interviews were transcribed, I shared the trans/crips on Google drive with the participants, asking them to highlight what they deemed important. I asked the participants to validate whether the interpretations and final themes and findings in their poetic counter-stories and in the poetic testimonio adequately expressed their voices. All participants agreed and seemed very pleased and were thankful with the process.

**Limitations for Data Collection and Interpretation**

I acknowledge how my positionality affects the interpretation of my data. I identify with my participants and have had similar experiences as I am a transnational, immigrant, early childhood educator with prior experience, person of color, woman, in the U.S. However, this does not mean that their experiences were the same as mine or like mine. As such, I was careful to account for multiple perspectives and not impose my own, by being mindful of the time I gave my participants to talk versus the time I used to ask questions. I also authored questions that are not leading and allowed for wait-time without interjecting. Finally, the identification of emotional hot points (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2011) allowed me to let the participants themselves identify what they deemed critical, instead of superimposing my own interpretations. These adaptations learned from my exploratory study helped me better understand my participants and generated better data. Finally, the poetic counter-stories and the multi-voiced poetic testimonio served as ways to democratize data analysis and interpretations, honoring my participants’ priorities and notions of criticality (Souto-
Manning, 2014).

In thinking about how the researcher is a tool for research, I was careful to conduct the interviews realizing that my participants may answer what they think I might expect as the correct answers to my questions. My choice of using Seidman’s (2013) three-stage interview process was beneficial, as it allowed for some time to get to know the participants in the first interview, and then after a short time in between interviews, it allowed for time to question, revisit, and reflect upon the first and second interviews, informing interpretations. I tried my best to ensure that the participants were comfortable with me and the setting. Further, I involved them in the interpretive process. We worked alongside each other to check the data for errors and revisions after I transcribed the interviews.

With the recognition of the importance of language in interviews due to “its capacity to present descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of an almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 126), I am keenly aware that conducting the interviews in English, which was the second language for most participants, was a limitation. Not all words, expressions, and contexts have translations or can be fully communicated in English. Although I believe I connected on many levels with the participants and the participants seemed comfortable discussing emotional and personal experiences with me, the interviews would have been different had participants been interviewed in their preferred languages. As all their expressions cannot be translated into English. With the awareness of this limitation, I sought to ensure trustworthiness by checking multiple times with each of the participants regarding whether I had fully captured their
intended meaning.

Another limitation to this study was the selection of six participants, each of whom had immigrated from a distinct nation-state. While my selection of participants sought to be representative, I was very aware of the essentializing process, especially when it comes to immigrant and transnational populations. Their stories are not representative of all immigrant teachers of color from the countries from where they emigrated. I understand that every participant is unique in their own experiences, identities, cultures, and perspectives and cannot be generalized. I was purposely looking to include more voices of intersectionally-minoritized early childhood teachers of color, and therefore I tried my best to select as diverse a participant sample as possible. I will discuss my experiences recruiting participants in the following chapter.
Chapter IV

POETIC COUNTER-STORIES

In this chapter, I describe the process of co-constructing the poetic counter-stories with my participants, featuring themes important to them, in alignment with critical race theory and Nepantla. The focus of this study was to understand the experiences of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color in the U.S. context. Through interviews, I learned how they negotiated their racial identities, immigration status, and teacher identities—and how these were rife with tensions, characterized by a constant state of change and challenge. My participants, as immigrant/transnational teachers of color, constantly engaged in contradictory and divergent ways of knowing, teaching, and learning. Their interviews and subsequent poetic counter-stories revealed tensions they experience every day as they straddle the borders of racial, cultural, linguistic and ethnic difference as well as the privilege they have expressed, to be teachers in the U.S.

Informed by critical race theory and Nepantla, my methodology was further developed as I deeply explored how race and immigration played vital roles in my participants stories and subsequently in their teaching. In this chapter, firstly I give a detailed description of my recruitment process and an overview of the demographics of my participants. Next, I draw on interview transcripts and audio-recordings of the interviews to create individual participant profiles; these profiles introduce each
participant briefly before their poetic counter-story is highlighted followed by a brief
discussion with connections to my theoretical framework and methodology. Finally, I
go through my own reflective researcher journal in tandem with my experiences with
each participant to consider my subjectivity and positionality in relation to the
participants. In doing so, I hope to acknowledge the experiences of participants and the
ways they (re)positioned themselves in early childhood teaching and teacher education
in the U.S.

**Poetic Counter-Stories: The Process**

In trans/scribing the interviews with my participants, I listened to the audio-
recordings multiple times to clearly identify these moments of emotionality in the first
two interviews. Cahnmann-Taylor, Souto-Manning, Wooten, and Dice (2011) describe
this emotionality as “hot points.” I accounted for trustworthiness of these “hot points”
by member checking with each participant in each subsequent interview. For the third
interview, I asked each participant to describe three things that we discussed that were
important to them. I did this so as not to impose my interpretation of their experience
and to ensure that I was including what the participants found important. Once I made
sure that the themes they spoke of were aligned with what I had highlighted in the
transcripts based on heightened emotionality (explained in Chapter IV), I worked with
each participant individually to co-construct their poetic counter-story with words and
phrases from their previous interviews. I made sure that my participants had agency
right from the beginning by asking them to choose their own pseudonyms. This sense
of agency was very important for my study; the place where stories begin is deep and
personal and unique. My commitment to positioning my participants agentively
marked my choice of producing trans/scripts and asking them which experiences they deemed critical (i.e., asking them to identify three things important to them).

Step-by-step, I asked and confirmed with my participants if they agreed with what phrases or words were identified as emotionally charged. I asked them to delete anything they did not agree with or add anything that would further clarify their experiences. Knowing that these practicing teachers had limited time, for the third interview, I brought with me excerpts of the transcripts which were the primary sources of data. Then we highlighted themes based on what they found important and what illuminated my research questions. I engaged in making interdisciplinary connections with sources of secondary data as I sought to better understand my participants’ ideas and concepts, thereby reaffirming my commitments to CRT as “it is crucial to focus on the intersections of oppression because storytelling is racialized, gendered, and classed and these stories affect racialized, gendered, and classed communities” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31).

As I went through the data and identified concepts which I sought to illuminate pertaining to my research question and subquestions, I looked for “other sources of secondary data analysis related to these concepts in the social sciences, humanities, and legal literature” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 34). I especially referred to my literature review (Chapter II). I also referred to poems written by other immigrants about their own experiences, which helped me further contextualize the counter-stories of my participants. My participants’ and I pieced the poetic counter-stories together either on the computer or by cutting up strips of printed transcripts and piecing them together (see Appendix F); this was based on the participants’ preferences.
We co-constructed the poetic counter-stories by 1) identifying what was important to the them, according to them; 2) identifying themes in the transcripts based on emotionality; 3) identifying words and phrases that described the participants’ personal and professional experiences with immigration, race, early childhood teaching/ teacher education; and 4) using the interdisciplinary literature to draw connections that finally resulted in the multi-voiced poetic testimonio. For example, in working with Mei (one of my participants), she read the printed excerpts and used a highlighter to identify what she wanted to use. As she did this, I looked at what she was highlighting and did it simultaneously on my laptop. Once I had all her highlighted phrases and words on my screen, we sat side-by-side and she pointed to things and how they “go together.” Once she was satisfied, I asked her to read through the whole poetic counter-story. She read through it and had tears in her eyes, as she said: “Yes, I think this is good!” We adjusted some of the phrasing so that it was contextualized.

For example, in working with Mei, I asked her if I had missed anything in the transcripts or if she wanted to add anything. She said she was satisfied and so we continued the process. She highlighted a section and said, “I think this is important, but I don’t know.” I encouraged her to use anything she thought was important as we put together the different sections of her poetic counter-story. We decided to begin each stage with “In Japan” and “In the U.S.” to clarify to the reader what her experiences were in each context. We continued with the rest of the interview where I asked her what advice she would give teacher education programs. To this she responded, “It’s all there. It’s in my poem!” As we worked together, I spoke about how
her poem connected with my theoretical frameworks and how important and compelling it was.

Once each participant’s poem was complete, we looked at the repetition in phrasing throughout the interviews or what they thought the title should be and confirmed the title for their poem. A similar process was undertaken with each participant, separately. The titles of the poems themselves (Table 4.1) make connections to identity and (be)longing, the feelings of in-betweenness, the process to be(come) an early childhood teacher, comparing personal and professional identities in both contexts and how they are (de)valued, and finally the perseverance and resilience that all the participants showed.

Table 4.1: Poem Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title of Poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Who I am? Who am I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kudrat</td>
<td>I Love the Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei</td>
<td>Do you really want to become a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduviges</td>
<td>Como se Llama? Right Here/ Right There</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Am I enough? Do I belong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>I didn’t give up!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We purposefully co-constructed a “counter-story as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 32). The participants and I unpacked many emotions and feelings they had about being silenced either implicitly or explicitly as
they navigated their spaces, both professional and personal. The counter-story served as “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32) and thus helped me center the stories of my participants. I intentionally chose poetic-counter-stories within my methodology as they “can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (p. 32).

I involved my participants in poetic inquiry and analysis. This was a methodological decision informed by my theoretical framework of CRT where the participants named their own reality and used it as a source of strength (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This decision was based on my commitment as a researcher to do research with my participants and not on them, centering their voices and their own truths. After we edited and pieced together the final version of the individual poetic-counter-stories, I shared these on Google Docs with each individual participant online for member checking. Once they approved these, and made any changes they preferred, I used them in the subsequent sections of this dissertation. I do not claim to give voice, to any of my participants and therefore, I found this co-construction useful (Ellsworth, 1989).

**Participant Recruitment and Demographics**

Informed by Seidman (2013), I conducted a three-stage interview process during the months of October to December 2019 (Table 4.2).
Table 4.2: Timing and Length of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Duration (in minutes) and Dates of Interviews</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>41.12 (11/21/2019)</td>
<td>78.38 (11/25/2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kudrat</td>
<td>70.37 (10/20/2019)</td>
<td>87.07 (10/23/2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei</td>
<td>52.27 (10/21/2019)</td>
<td>62.52 (10/23/2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>55.09 (10/22/2019)</td>
<td>80.36 (10/25/2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>82.36 (10/16/2019)</td>
<td>121.56 (10/24/2019)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I interviewed six participants who self-identified as immigrant/transnational teachers of color (Table 4.3). My participants associated with the following countries as their home-contexts: Colombia, India, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, and Philippines. All participants who were early childhood educators had teaching experience between two and 15 years outside the U.S. and between four and 18 years in formal and/or informal settings in the U.S. Participants were aged between 29 and 60 years old; they were all female.
Table 4.3: Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Self-Identifies as a Person of Color</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Outside US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Mulata</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kudrat</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>South-Asian</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduviges</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mestiza</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>South-Asian</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment Process

I began recruiting participants by asking friends and colleagues, fellow teacher educators and professors at my university if they knew anyone who qualified for my study. Later, I also posted the criteria on social media and emailed teachers and teacher educators from other universities and schools. As mentioned in the selection criteria, I was looking to interview any teacher who: 1) self-identified as an immigrant or transnational teacher, 2) self-identified as a person of color, 3) had teaching experience in early childhood education (various settings) outside the U.S., prior to entering a U.S. teacher education program, and 4) taught in an early childhood classroom (various settings) in New York City at the time.

When I reflect on the process of recruitment, I realize now that the criteria may have been too specific; many teachers who wanted to participate had either immigrated
as children to the U.S. or had not taught in early childhood settings prior to immigrating. Yet, the reason I wanted to interview teachers with prior teaching experience is because I wanted them to make sense of being and becoming teachers in two countries. The criteria, albeit making recruitment labor-intensive, helped me clearly define a group of participants who richly engaged with my study and could make connections with teaching and teacher education in across State borders.

It was very difficult to recruit participants as I found early on that teachers who potentially qualified did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with immigration and race, given the political atmosphere in the U.S. with Donald Trump as President (Gleeson & Sampat, 2018). Another obstacle was that teachers of color who did identify as immigrant or transnational, were not lead teachers in early childhood classrooms. They were either paraprofessionals or assistant teachers. I discuss this further in the findings section.

Accounting for my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), which includes personal experience, professional experience, the existing literature on a topic, and the process of analysis itself, I saw each poetic counter-story through a lens of equity and justice. These nuances helped me inhabit a space in Nepantla, to live between multiple worlds or belief, my own and those of my participants. This made it difficult to confront issues of race, power, control, and ideas about education. I had to constantly stop myself from “being the teacher” and learn to listen to what the participants had to say. This was especially difficult when I learned about the varying degrees of race consciousness in participants, and when they spoke about their home contexts as lacking resources.
Because of my education in a doctoral program, I have developed more critical lenses towards these issues, which I did not superimpose on my participants. My objective was to learn from their experiences and offer implications for developing transformative spaces in early childhood teacher education, where immigrant and transnational teachers can be fully seen and have critical discussions and reflective dialogue about larger systemic issues. In an attempt to bracket my thoughts and interpretations, I account for my personal and professional experiences in relation to each participant in the sections titled: Reflective Researcher Journal.

In the following part of this chapter, I introduce each participant’s profile with a brief background; each participant member-checked and approved these, indicating that they are representative of how they identified. Then I share their poetic counter-story followed by a brief discussion of connections to my theoretical framework and methodology. Finally, I make connections via my reflective researcher journal. I am intentionally not further interpreting the poetic counter-stories as I want to consciously value the voices and choices of my participants. I am truly privileged to bear witness to these amazing educators’ life experiences through my dissertation study.

Alex

Profile

Alex is a 29-year-old woman from Colombia. In Colombia, after attending a normal school, where she was trained to be a teacher, she earned a bachelor’s degree in social work with an emphasis on education and worked with a state’s department of education to design curriculum. She was expected to implement the curriculum she
was designing in schools. As a result, Alex taught young children at various schools for two years in Colombia before she immigrated to the U.S. as an Au Pair in 2014.

Born into a family of educators, Alex mentioned how “everybody in my family is a teacher;” that her sister and father are teachers too. Initially, Alex did not want to become a teacher, so she chose social work, but because she had been educated in a normal school, when looking for a job in the U.S., her experiences and credentials brought her to work with children. Following her Au Pair position, she worked at a language institute teaching Spanish to children, then at a Charter School for two years as it did not require teaching certification. Alex is currently completing a bilingual teacher education program in New York. She has been teaching first-grade in a New York City public school on the Upper West Side for almost two years and is working towards completing all her certification requirements.

My first meeting with Alex was in a crowded coffee shop at the end of her working day, as requested by her. She introduced herself as being from Medellin in Columbia and proceeded to answer my interview questions. Over the course of the first interview I learned that she was a relatively new immigrant to New York; she had come to the city in 2014. She discussed her family background and her interest and experience teaching young children in Colombia. She also explained how she had taught herself the English language by watching television, reading books, and “forcing herself” to have conversations with English-speaking people. After she came to the U.S., she realized that if she wanted to “sound polite and intelligent” as she does in Spanish, as well as get a better job, she needed to learn the English language.

like when I'm talking in Spanish
I'm Alex
and when I'm talking in English
I don't know, something like... (laughs)
Somebody else.

When asked to highlight three things that were important to her, Alex mentioned how, after our previous conversations about the recruitment of participants for my study, she was thinking about “how hard it was to find immigrant teachers of color, as most of them were paras or assistants, but they weren’t head teachers.” She had looked around her school and she did not find any teachers who were in her position. Secondly, she mentioned that teaching in Colombia and teaching in the U.S. were very different; she hadn’t stopped to think about these differences before. She mentioned how “the culture is so different, that is maybe why, sometimes it’s hard for me to be in the classroom, because I’m used to teaching one way, and have the students respond in one way. Things are totally different.” Finally, she mentioned that she liked the conversation we had about her bilingual teacher education program, and that she hopes to “change what people believe what it means to be bilingual.”

Alex spoke of how she adapted to her new context personally and professionally. She discussed deeply what it means for her to be a “mulata” or a mixed-race person – Black and white.

When I came to the States, the big question was
What are you? who are you?
Yeah, I don't know.
I say I am Latina
but most of the people think Latina is not a race.
They say, “So, what are you?”
I'm half Black half white.
I don't identify as a white or as a Black
because I feel like I have a little bit of both.
Alex explained how she always felt like she did not belong to a particular category and that she was labelled as being “not Black enough” or “not white enough” by various racial groups. She questioned, “Who I am? Who am I?” as we spoke about these issues, referencing an Australian movie where a character who was of mixed-race was perceived to have had “no soul.” She said that sometimes she felt that way. Because of Alex’s deep conversations about being in-between worlds, I drew connections with Nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987) and CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Based on the emotionality of her experience with race, ethnicity, culture, and language, her poem is titled “Who I am? Who am I?”

**Alex’s Poetic Counter-Story**

Who I am? Who am I?

I'm a mixed person

My mother is Black, and my father is white

In my country, everybody's mixed

America is like a Black, white, Indigenous; it's a mix

When I came to the States, the big question was: ‘What are you? Who are you?’

Yeah, I don't know

I say I am Latina

But some people say Latina is not a race

‘So, what are you? ’

I'm half Black half white

I don't identify as a white or as a Black because I feel like I have a little bit of both

I just say Latina: that is the easier answer
Mulata is a mix between white and black

I am Mulata

When I taught at the Charter School,

99% students and teachers were African-American

Somebody asked me, ‘What are you? You know, who are you?’

They were like, ‘Oh, but you're not real black because you are just half and half.’

When you had your straight hair, you look Latina

But when you have curly hair, you look black

‘We can't tell who you are!’

So, they always told me, I wasn't Black enough

But I never said that I'm Black

I wasn't dark enough for them, so I was always the Latina

‘She, she's not dark enough!’

And I'm just like, what? What is that?

So, I wasn't part of the group

I didn't match

One time I feel like I didn't have a soul

There is a movie that talked about Australia and history that the mixed people were considered, like they don't have a soul

They were not black, neither white, and they didn't have a soul

And that made me feel bad
Then I asked myself, ‘Who am I?’

Too dark to be white, and too light to be Black.

In Colombia, I started teaching when I was in high school

My whole life since kindergarten, in the normal school, they prepare you to be a teacher

Still, I never thought that I would be a teacher

I guess it was meant to be

Everyone in my family is a teacher

Maybe that is the only one thing that I know how to do

To be a teacher

I consider myself a new teacher

I think that there is always something new to learn

In Colombia, the discipline was a big deal, right?

The respect: when the teacher was in the room, everything changed

Wow! It looked like military

It's like teachers, meant a lot for the families

Families at home are telling kids: a good teacher is important

Respect your teacher, listen to your teacher.

Teachers don't make a lot of money, but they have a reputation in society

You are admired

They’re like, ‘Oh! Teacher knows everything.’
But you always learn something from the kids

You need the pedagogy, but you also need to have patience and to love what you're doing

Spanish is my first language

It made me feel like I was a smart person

In the States, I am full of frustration, because in English I feel not capable

I learned English by myself when I came here five years ago

It's like you have to force yourself, you know

I'm here now.

In my new school, there are more white teachers than Black or Latinos

I don't know if nobody has noticed, or nobody cares, or nobody says anything

The regular teachers are all white

The bilingual are all Latinos

I had education, I went to college, I graduated, I did a lot of things

I didn't come here to clean bathrooms

I have to push myself

Talking with people, going out, reading books

Sometimes I feel insecure because, I taught myself

Nobody teach me

So how on Earth, how can I know that I what I taught myself, it's right?
Like when I'm talking in Spanish, I'm Alex
And when I'm talking in English, I don't know, something like...

Somebody else.

Discussion

In conversation with Alex, I had learned how she is constantly feeling like
“somebody else” as she traverses the boundaries of identity and race on a daily basis.

In the first two stanzas, Alex is expressing her identity as a *mulata* or mixed-race
person and how it is challenged by people she interacts with in the U.S. She does not
identify as Black or white, and this dichotomous labeling makes her feel conflicted as
she believes she belongs to both groups and they are parts of her that cannot be
separated. Anzaldúa (1987) reminds us, “…people who inhabit both realities are
forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching
modes” (p. 59). In stanzas three and four, Alex expressed her conflict with race further
when she was told in the U.S. that she was not Black enough.

Stanzas five, six and seven are about her experiences with her beliefs about
teaching in Colombia, discussing her perception of the teaching culture there; she
mentions how discipline is very different, the authoritarian style of teaching persists in
her past settings. She seems to be reconciling these differences in how teachers are
perceived and how she continues to learn from children. Being critical of the field,
Alex questions why “The regular teachers are all white. The bilingual are all Latinos.”

Her observation about this disparity is aligned with what I have found in my
recruitment process, which I have described above. I will also discuss this further in
my findings section.
Reflective Researcher Journal

Alex’s perspectives on race and racial identity represented a process punctuated by many transitions—not only in terms of identities, but in terms of epistemologies as well. It was clear that U.S. binary racial categorizations constrained her choice of racial identity. Belonging to a racial category in the U.S. was framed by a politics of belonging—or being Othered. Alex felt Othered; she felt she did not belong. She knew that “[t]he only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites” (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 3-4).

Alex stated belonging neither here nor there inhabiting what Anzaldúa titled borderlands; she was not white enough nor was she Black enough. The Black/white binary had constrained the ways she made sense of her own racial identity. “This dichotomy is the root of all violence” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37). Alex was a Nepantlera. “Nepantleras are the supreme border crossers. They act as intermediaries between cultures and their various versions of reality. …They… inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater conocimiento, serve as reminders of each other’s search for wholeness of being” (Anzaldúa, 2003/2004, p. 20).

I connected with her experiences on a personal and professional level. I thought about how she described the importance of obedience, and respect for teachers in her home context, and how that resonated with my own upbringing in India. Professionally, as I reflected on the process of interviewing her in my researcher journal, our experiences aligned when being labelled teachers of color as soon as we came to the U.S. Although we emigrated from different countries, the process of being Othered as racialized immigrants in the U.S. was a border we had both crossed. Racial
categorization and where we fit or match as immigrant teachers of color is an aspect of identity that develops as we spend more time in a society where race and racism are intrinsic and more widely discussed.

Because Alex had stated that when she is communicating in Spanish she felt like the real “Alex” and when she communicated in English she was “something like…Somebody else” I wondered about the limitations comprised by using English in the interviews; nevertheless, Alex engaged with me in data analysis (identifying three experiences) and in data presentation (co-construction of poetic counter-story). Doing so hopefully has brought me closer to Alex.

Finally, in cultures like mine, where talking about race and racism is impolite or unnecessary, coming to the U.S. and being asked to talk about these issues was challenging for me. I felt a connection in our stories and those of my other participants as I continued the interview process.

Kudrat

Profile

Kudrat is a 42-year-old woman from India. She identifies as South-Asian. She has three master’s degrees: one from Punjab, India in Family Social Issues, the second from Toronto, Canada in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development, and the third from New York, USA in Early Childhood Education. She began teaching at a private school kindergarten in 2010 in Amritsar, India after completing her second master’s degree in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development. She taught there for two years before she came to the U.S. Once in the U.S., she got a job at a daycare center in New Jersey where she taught for a year. Kudrat then got a substitute teacher license to
teach in public schools and worked for two years in New York City public schools. She later decided to get another master’s degree in early childhood education in order to get certified in New York. She is currently working at a public school, Universal Pre-K classroom in New York City and has been there for two years.

With a total experience of five years working in early childhood settings in the U.S., Kudrat’s interviews were mainly focused on her classroom management skills, lesson planning, and emergent child-led curriculum. She mentioned that the three things she would like highlighted in her counter-story were the children in her classroom, her patience in teaching them, and the value of language and literacy. It was easy to see that she was a dedicated teacher and was most animated when she spoke of her positive experiences in her teacher education program as well as her interactions with the children. She mostly spoke in detail about her lessons, giving examples of particular instances in the classroom, especially related to the development of literacy. She mentioned, “language has power! Words have power” and therefore wanted to ensure that the children in her classroom had that power to express themselves. Therefore, Kudrat’s poetic counter-story is focused on her teaching, and how she sees herself as a classroom teacher facilitating children’s learning. Her poetic counter-story is titled: *I Love the Journey*, as it symbolizes how she has focused on staying positive throughout the process.

**Kudrat’s Poetic Counter-Story**

*I Love the Journey*

In India

When I was a child, I studied in a traditional way
My father valued education and he gave us immense support

Being a girl and coming from a small town…

My family has a school in India

So, when you sit down, you learn from your parents

What do you pass down to your children?

I always read to my children; read new words

Like if you were saying Good Morning

Namaste, Sat Sri Akal, and Hello

Children were learning from each other

I introduced three or four languages

Nepali, Punjabi, Hindi, and English

The ultimate goal of the school was to make them learn English

Authoritarian, yeah.

Very different experience

One of the things with the Asian kids is that they listen to the directions very quickly

They know that obedience is very key to learning, right?

if your teacher has a plan for you, you got to follow it

Yes. Teacher knows best

If your work matched with the teacher, you're good.

But if it doesn't, then you have... Anda (Egg/Zero)

Like you failed
You've got to sit straight…
Like you were some soldier
Army place. Military Approach

I was privileged to be a part of the system where they were making the change
So, change, educational change, was difficult
And everything changes

In the U.S.
I learned about Early Childhood
Child-Centered Philosophy
you need to give some space to children to express their feelings
And the answers would come from them
They had a bigger perspective and better understanding

We are constantly telling what we want them to learn, it doesn't make meaning!
When it makes meaning they, they're involved. They're engaged.
Instill reading, awareness of letters, writing
It's very important for us to live a smooth life

Children learn at their own pace
I understood that they had to have time to get things done
You need peace of mind in the classroom
To teach them empathy and compassion

A teacher should be a good listener
Give the children a chance to speak
When one child speaks, the other child is more confident
An educator is flexible
Are we giving children enough opportunities?
Are we allowing children to gain a sense of independence?
Or are we just bombarding them with our thoughts?
Just filling in the bucket.

I'm a facilitator, not a teacher
To create a culturally appropriate environment
I spend a lot of time for them to bring their voices
They're using more words, learning English. The big issue
I tried to instill reading and writing
That’s the knowledge to open doors for you
The books, the books are powerful!
Children's literature that you see in the library is powerful
Language has power
Words have power
On Immigration

It was just me

They ask what school did you go?

What, who was your teacher? Was, what family do you come from?

You are a human being. You're very different.

It's the way you say things

But I was hesitant

That was the path, the best pathway

It takes a long time for a person to be a citizen

So finally, I got to the, the dreamworld: New York!

I had no difficulty

Everything worked out

You face challenges to wait for papers, to wait for the decision from the offices

Do you need more time?

It’s easier if you’re white

To get to a position that you… The respect

Not the respect, the respect… they have to prove themselves

could be the pronunciation of the word, could be their academic background

Once they see you as a citizen, they give you the respect

You're accountable

I have always been a legal person

But I have experienced teachers who did not have any paperwork
Undocumented

So, it is very hard for them

Their performance, their efficiency is at the same pace as the teachers from here

Right.

But they had to answer, ‘Where are you from? It's not what we do.’

It’s not what we do here

My transition happened gradually

You are coming to a setting where the pronunciation is, needs to be correct

The way they say, their name. If you say their name in a different way, they would say

that's not my name, right.

You also go with the flow

To survive personal and professional life

Makes me think, “Oh my goodness, I achieved!”

I had to put a lot of effort

It wasn't easy

It was challenging

I had to prove myself to be a substitute teacher, be a student, be a wife

I had to put an effort

this is how we can change it from negative to positive, positive to more positive

It's not easy

I love the journey
Discussion

It was very difficult for me to get any particular responses about race or racialization as well as access insights about Kudrat’s feelings about immigration. Throughout our three interviews, I tried to redirect her to address the questions about race and immigration, which is the focus of my study, but she chose not to give a direct answer. Perhaps this was due to the fact that in India, it is impolite to talk about race. Or perhaps this is informed by the fact that 40 years ago, Southeast Asians were classified as white by the U.S. Census. It may be because “racial assignment…has significant implications for how racial categories are popularly understood, even among the populations for whom they purportedly apply” especially as it pertains to South Asians (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2019). Conceivably this could be due to her identity as a U.S. citizen; as a citizen, was approximating whiteness and reaping its privileges. As Leonardo explained (2009):

white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being constructed as whites. Usually, this occurs through the valuation of white skin color, although this is not the only criterion for racial distinction. Hair texture, nose shapes, culture, and language also multiply the privileges of whites or those who approximate them. (p. 75)

Being a citizen, and not undocumented, served as a proxy for whiteness. As Agadjanian and colleagues (2017) explained, while race matters, for immigrants, citizenship or legal status is an important marker of privilege and a possible passport to belonging. She engages a “discursive figuration of U.S. supremacy” in the way that she positions herself as markedly different from undocumented immigrants (Lawston & Murillo, 2009/2010, p. 38).
When I tried to address race directly, Kudrat took a color evasive approach.

The following is a good example:

Me: What if any, is the difference between being a teacher of color and a white teacher?
Kudrat: It's easier. (Pause)
Me: What's easier?
Kudrat: Uh, to get to a position that you, the respect. Not the respect, the respect, but if you are, sometimes I felt, not with me, but I felt that the other candidates that they have to prove themselves could be the pronunciation of the word, could be their academic background. Um, but once they see you as a citizen, they give you, no, you're not going to play around here because something's been done to a citizen. It's questioning, you'll have to go through a law, right. You're accountable. Uh, otherwise when you like I have always been a legal person, but I have experienced teachers who did not have any paperwork. Undocumented. So, it is very hard for them. The performance, their performance, their efficiency that is at the same pace. Um, where the teachers from here. Right. But they had to answer, “Where are you from? It's not what we do.” (laughs).

Me: Yeah. Where are you from? It's not what we do.

Kudrat: It's not what we do here. You know, what, where is the, efficiency is a big word. But I felt, I, you know, sometimes even in education, what the major, uh, experience that I have is differentiation of the work. They, the way you say your name and all names or when you introduce the key vocabulary words to the classroom, then you, your handwriting. If it is cursive, I have experiences I want to share. I was a student teacher to student teacher in Canada for my research in a Catholic School. So, my colleague, she gave me the opportunity to work in her classroom. So, my handwriting was super neat and cursive because that's how we had always learned. So, she gave me a paragraph to write on the board. So, I wrote in a cursive handwriting. The children of her classroom were quiet. They did not speak a word, and I was with them for a week and they were continuously talking, being very comfortable, but what happened? I reflected back because here the cursive writing is not, it's not, is not taught. That's a very difficult thing to, to gain and to do. And it shocked them…

As highlighted in the above excerpt, Kudrat always distanced herself from any discussion about race and positioned herself as someone who belonged in the U.S., aligning with white teachers and distancing herself from undocumented immigrants.

She said that “everything worked out” for her and her journey was easy. She said it
was hard for people who were undocumented, but that was not her experience because, she stated, “I have always been a legal person.” However, when I asked her about culture, she mentioned how her transition to the U.S. was difficult as she adjusted to walking on the left side of the street, learned how her colleagues used the laundromat services, etc.

Leonardo (2004) explains how white racial privilege is approximated by people of color where language and culture play a vital role. Leonardo (2004) provides an acute understanding of how Kudrat talks about issues of oppression even though she identifies as a person of color,

Privilege is granted even without a subject’s cognition that life is made a bit easier for her. Privilege is also granted despite a subject’s attempt to dis-identify with the white race. “Race treason” or the renunciation of whiteness is definitely a choice for many whites (Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996b), but without the accompanying structural changes, it does not choke off the flow of institutional privileges that subjects who are constructed as white enjoy (p.137)

I am also reminded of Tatum’s (1992) stages of racial identity development where she discusses the three sources of resistance to talking about race: 1) Race is considered a taboo topic where it is not something to be discussed and discussions about race are usually silenced, 2) the U.S. is a just society and if you work hard you will succeed, feeding into the myth of meritocracy, and 3) denying personal prejudice and distancing oneself from any personal connection with racism. These three stages seem to be evident in Kudrat’s interviews and have implications for the field of teacher education, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter VII.

**Reflective Researcher Journal**

Kudrat gave multiple examples of how she asked the children open-ended questions to facilitate their learning in her three contexts: India, Canada and the U.S.
She mentioned concept maps multiple times and explained how she is constantly asking the children questions to make them critical thinkers and learners. I wonder how her three master’s programs may not have done the same for her as a student; she was not engaging in a critical exploration of racism and processes of racialization.

In my reflective researcher journal, I noted how Kudrat’s reluctance to talk about race and racism as well as immigration could possibly be a cultural trait. Growing up in India myself, I understand how, in most Indian contexts, it is impolite or confrontational to talk about and issues of inequity; this is especially the case for women. As an Indian woman, I am aware of these racial, gendered, and cultural norms that dictate these dialogues. I did not want to make Kudrat uncomfortable and respected her choice not to talk about these issues. I realize that at this stage, I am a researcher and not her instructor or teacher. I did not want to impose my ideas or educate her about racism during the interview.

In seeking to understand Kudrat’s decision to evade discussions pertaining to race and racism, I have accounted for my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) in the process of constructing poetic counter-stories, rooted in critical race feminism (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987). That is, I had “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface…[having] an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 60). Here, it is clear that our shared backgrounds (in terms of the country where we came from) allowed me to contextualize her comments and derive more nuanced meanings of Kudrat’s interview.
Mei

Profile

Mei is a 36-year-old woman from Japan. She identifies as Asian. Mei has taught in Tokyo, Japan for two years at an international school. She has taught in New York City for five years now. Mei has spent parts of her childhood in the U.S. from age five to eleven, she went to school in California and then back to Japan for the rest of her education. Finally, she came back to New York City for a master’s in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and another master’s degree in Early Childhood Education, subsequently stayed on as a Pre-K teacher at a Reggio-inspired private school. Her experiences of being a border-cropper since childhood were reflected in our interviews together as she talked about how knowing the language and speaking English fluently made it easy for her to live in both worlds.

Mei spoke about her experiences with racialization, being stereotypically seen as the model minority in the U.S. She also voiced her frustration with the constant struggle of a work permit in the U.S., even after earning two master’s degrees and having her teacher certification from New York, when she stated, “That’s discrimination!”

Mei’s poetic counter-story is titled: Do you really want to become a teacher?

Throughout her interviews, she spoke about how she had left behind how she taught in Japan and had learned how to be a progressive educator in the U.S. Her story is about navigating various biases in Japan and in the U.S. and how whiteness is seen in both her contexts as having power.
Mei’s Poetic Counter-Story

Do you really want to become a teacher?

In Japan
I taught at an international preschool in Tokyo
but it was all in English
I was teaching mostly expat kids
It was very challenging to get in, although they usually get in because,
because they're non-Japanese
they wanted the experience, the international experience

Teaching in Japan is definitely not a high-status job
But you have to learn, you have to play the piano
There's always a piano in the classroom, in each class
that's why I don't have teacher certification there because I don't play the piano
It’s been like that for generations...

So there, it was more like western philosophy
No, I was not prepared to be a teacher
I felt like I was not doing the right thing
I carry more of a negative feeling with that experience and what not to do

They hired people with no background in teaching
If they had citizenship in an English dominant country
Citizenship.
Meaning they wanted someone who looked white

Oh yes, I remember that.

That's their screening.

In English language schools they want people who don't look like Japanese.

I was like, something's wrong here

I was struggling at the end

So that's my background.

In the U.S.

I guess it's not how you do it in here

I belonged to a non-dominant group

I took it as my strength point

I can offer something that the dominant group can't

And I just feel it; I think it that way

I can bring some of these cultures into the classroom

I see it as a strengthening point.

I've learned more like progressive. They do...

And they also talk about social justice

I didn't know about all these different types of philosophies.

If we had a conversation on like minority teachers, teachers of color

they would like, all look at me

They'd be like, “What do you think, what do you think, what do you think?”
When I first started in New York city, I see a lot of white colored teachers
I guess it depends on what district as well
A lot of the times I would be asked if I'm an assistant teacher
I'm like no, I'm one of the lead teachers and they go, “Oh!”
I have seen a lot, assistant teachers.
Especially like Latin from the latin... Latinx
I thought before I started, white teacher, so like, dominant
And like, they know what's going on
But I guess not

I felt like the Asian... spokesperson
But I'm actually not!
I could talk about Japan, but even within Asia, there are so many different countries
So, like, what's happening here?
Like, I didn't live in Thailand, I didn't live in India, I don't know

they would ask me, “Do you like sushi? Do you like fish?”
I'm like, Uh, yeah!
Do you not like sushi?

After five years in New York you need to renew your teacher certification
I can't
Because I don't have a green card and I don't have a citizenship
That was it
My teacher certification in New York state… is gone
I can't do anything
I can't teach anymore at a public school
I can't teach at a school that requires certification
So only private schools
The certification is only valid for five years
I was so mad!
I guess this is the reality of being in this United States
It is discrimination
I got the credits; I got the education…
Yeah, I did it!
And how come I cannot renew it?
Just because I'm not a citizen here!

It's so sad because I would want to teach more here
but if I can't get a certificate
I have to go back to my country
Why would this country do that when there are so many immigrants here?
Government shuts it down
Or the DOE shuts it down
It's not going to change
That's my point

I mean it's upsetting. It's really upsetting
It's like, are you joking?
Do you not want people that is not a United citizen in your country?
I feel like that's discrimination
Since the President is Trump right now, it's very limited
It's getting really, it's really hard to get a green card
Unless you pay lots of money

Why do I want to live here?
Why?
Because, it's challenging and I like the challenge
I love my school where I work right now
I get to teach young children in a different way

Do you really want to become a teacher?

Discussion
Throughout our conversations, Mei spoke freely about her experiences and when she seemed uncomfortable about being critical, she would giggle slightly. I noted these points of emotionality and worked with her to co-construct the poem. Mei’s experiences with race were more to do with challenging stereotypes in the U.S. and in Japan where she said she was both, “dominant in some contexts and non-dominant in some contexts.” In Japan, she worked at an international school, and her knowledge of the English language helped her “fit in” with the other white teachers at the school. She spoke about how the administration hired people who had citizenship from English-dominant countries, regardless of their teaching experience whereas, Japanese teachers with teaching credentials were usually not hired. Because Mei had a master’s
degree from New York in TESOL, and spoke English fluently, she was “one of them.” She was seen as approximating whiteness and thus reaping its privileges (Leonardo, 2009).

In the U.S. She faced the Asian stereotypical assumptions as a model minority in her teacher education program. She said she felt like she “was put on the spot” when they had any conversations about diversity as her classmates asked her, “Yeah. Teach me about Asia.” She made it a point to tell her peers that Asia has many different countries and cultures and that she only has experience in Tokyo, Japan. These conversations connect to Nepantla as Anzaldúa (1987) states: “Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes” (p. 59).

Mei also discusses how the Trump Presidency has made the process of immigration difficult. This aligns with my literature review where I have used the timeline from the 2001 terrorist attacks until the present Trump Presidency to identify studies for my review of literature. Dominant discourses and media portrayals of immigration and race in the U.S. today also inform my understandings and help as secondary data sources to contextualize my participants’ stories.

**Reflective Researcher Journal**

In my researcher journal, I noted how Mei was always smiling even when she spoke about her struggles and frustration. She was especially frustrated with the knowledge that her teacher certification for New York State expired after five years and could not be renewed unless she had permanent residency or citizenship. Regardless of her many qualifications, Mei was constructed as the Other. The loss of
her state certification and credentialing comprised an additional border; it excluded her from seeking positions in public schools. Even though she had fulfilled all the necessary requirements and documentation, she was dependent on a work visa at a private school and did not have the option to apply for positions at public schools in New York City without the renewed teacher certification. I empathized with her experience personally as the reality of immigration is always on my mind.

I was very intrigued when Mei said that a certification requirement for early educators in Japan was that they needed to know how to play the piano. She said she did not know why it was a requirement and that every early childhood classroom usually had a piano. When I looked into it further, I discovered that, in the 1800s, a German lady who was also a student of Froebel had brought the kindergarten philosophy to Tokyo when she married a Japanese man. Because she played the piano with the children, the tradition continues to this day (Kawano, 2016). This was very interesting to me, given the comments that Mei made about how “white teachers are always dominant” and “they know what they’re doing.”

The Eurocentrism and favoring whiteness in Japan and the U.S. as indexing knowledge and power were visible in my interactions with Mei. Further, the problematic positioning of Mei as a spokesperson for all Asians has direct implications for teacher education programs; this corroborates the findings detailed in Brown’s literature review (2014). This has repercussions for teacher education programs, which I will discuss further in Chapter V.
Eduviges

Profile

Eduviges is a 48-year-old woman from Mexico. She racially identifies as Mestizo or mixed-race between Indigenous and Spanish. Eduviges has a bachelor’s degree in Sociology with a concentration on education from Mexico and has a Masters in Bilingual Education from an institution of higher education in New York. In Mexico, she taught five and six-year-old Indigenous children literacy skills in Alfajayucan in the province of Hidalgo. This is Eduviges’ sixth year teaching in New York. Currently she is in a bilingual school teaching first grade.

In her first interview, Eduviges spoke about how under-resourced and underserved the Indigenous communities in Hidalgo, Mexico were, having limited access to clean water among other resources. Along with a few friends, she decided to work with the children and teach them basic literacy skills, to read and write in Spanish. This was important to her as she believed that they needed literacy to “function in this world.” She mentioned how this was a very meaningful experience, “it was really powerful how the kids were waiting for us to, so they were waiting to, to hear stories, to hear someone reading to them. And that really impacted my life.”

When I asked her what three things she would like to highlight in her story, she mentioned that I should include her persistence in becoming a teacher and adapting to the U.S. culture, how she has taken risks by leaving Mexico and coming to this new country, and her perseverance to overcome difficulties. Eduviges spoke of how she was frustrated with the government in Mexico and how things needed to change. She also discussed how teachers are not paid enough and are given responsibilities and
expectations beyond what was possible, like large class sizes and low pay. She also spoke about her transition to the U.S. and how she slowly found her way, learning the English language on her own and “forcing” herself to “educate her ears” by watching the news. Throughout her interviews, Eduviges spoke mostly in English, repeating the words “right here” and “right there” as well as using the phrase “come se llama?” which means ‘how do you say/call it?’ when thinking of certain words in English. Because of how frequently she used these words, and showed heightened emotions when she said them, we constructed her poetic analysis and titled it: Como se Llama? Right Here/Right There.

**Eduviges’ Poetic Counter-Story**

Como se Llama?

Right Here/Right There

In Mexico, my sueño (dream) was to get into the university

You are a woman! Just stay at home and learn how to take care of everything!

And I said, ‘No way!’

I had this spirit of really getting out of the box
even though I didn't have all the resources
But my mother used to say, ‘Yes, you are going to the university.’

To be a teacher right there
It has to be a mission
I taught indigenous children in Mexico
That really impacted my life
Children are eager to learn
‘Teach me, teach me! What are you going to teach me today?’
You can really do something so they can be a better people
That's what I was thinking
Right there, there were no teachers in the school
So, teaching them to read some words to me was, very important

The color of your skin is not quite important right there
As long as you demonstrate that you can speak Spanish
Well the Spanish is really, emphasized
Language has power

Right there, they speak Otomi language
They were transitioning with the Spanish
because Otomi language is disappeared
It was disappearing at that time

Everything that was happening in Mexico
how the indigenous people were being treated
All the problems: social problems, economic problems and educational problems
Oh boy! that's why we are like this.
In a country that doesn't have a good educational system, it is going to be in a lot of trouble
If the educational system doesn't improve, this will stay
It is not going to do nothing
Everything is going to be worse
That's something that really, really makes me angry!
What kind of government do we have?
How can they leave this population like this?
Just because they are poor?
Does it mean they are not important?

Of course, they are looking for teachers, but no one wants to go there
No one with the salary they are offering
And it was true
It was hard
They gave you 40 kids, 45 kids in one classroom
So, it's a lot for one teacher, right?
So, they have to choose to find ways to kind of control them
But then what about the necessities?
What about a, each child?
But it is also the fact that teachers are not supported right there
Society is asking them too much and they are just giving whatever they can

The children right there, usually say, ‘When I grow up, I just want to get out of here.’
They are growing up thinking about just immigrating out of that town
It could be to the city, could be to another city in Mexico or to the U.S.
They grew up with that idea in mind

I wasn't sure that I was going to be a teacher
I just knew that I wanted to do something that could change how things are
A teacher is someone who was caring with, with children
the role of the teacher as a facilitator or someone who is building something
As someone who is preparing someone to function in this world
I felt that I was changing something
I felt that I was giving them some tools to survive

It wasn't in my plans to come to United States
to leave everything and just come here
I have learned how the system works here so I can compare and contrast
Right here we really concentrate on speaking
In Mexico they usually ask children to be quiet
They have to be quiet
Obedience is so important
So, if the class is quiet it’s the best class
And it means that it's the best teacher too

I find it weird that Mestizo is not in any race here
So, you always have to identify as Mexican or Latino...
But that is not in the forms
I am mestiza
Spaniard and Mexican native
My grandpa was Aztec
My grandmother was white with blue eyes: all the Spaniard features
I came here to the United States because I got married with a Dominican man. I asked myself, ‘How do I stick to my roots?’

I started all over again when I came right here. I finished my bachelors after seven years via email from Mexico. I didn't know English either. I was learning. I learned English by myself. Forcing myself to learn.

I'm an observer and I just started asking questions. Why is this happening? It's kind of my nature. I'm curious.

I needed to understand how the world was right here. So, I started educating my ear; watching the news. And then I started working in a bakery. And I feel so bad. How can I be here working, selling bread? But I said, ‘This has to be a transition’.

I need to learn English.

I was completely new about everything. I felt the cultural clash; the differences and how vulnerable I was at that time. I came here just alone, without any family. No, nobody. I didn't know anybody. The only person I knew was my husband. I started to feel like, Oh my God! What did I do?
I'm empty!

No, I don't know what to do here!

I was feeling called to teach

But the children saw me

I don’t know… they didn't believe I was a teacher

most of the kids Mexican and Dominicans, some Ecuadorians

And I said, ‘Well, I'm right here!’

People here underestimate people who is not white.

I was noticing the change when a white teacher was coming in the classroom

It was really big!

I can say it was because in my color or my, my race

In my school we are all teachers of color, there is no white teacher right there

I feel part of the community

I can communicate much better with them because we have similar experiences and even the language

The head of the school was Jewish, white lady

She was white, but she was very nice person

Right here, I'm not in the dominant group

I am afraid to get out of the bilingual settings because

I don't know how am I gonna be in another classroom

How am I going to function?

Right here I feel very useful because, because my Spanish is strong
My goal is to become better everyday

Como se llama?

Right here/ Right There

**Discussion**

Eduviges’s poetic counter-story speaks of her journey as she traverses the borderlands of identity, both personal and professional. She expressed how she values education and the vital role that teachers play in the lives of children. Like other participants, she has also mentioned how the “teacher is a facilitator to help build something.” She discusses her life in Mexico and how she had never come to the U.S. before she got married. As Anzaldúa, Eduviges had defined herself as mestiza; “*una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color*” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 77). She knew that “people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes” (p. 37).

Eduviges expresses her belief that race and color do not matter in Mexico. Whereas most of Mexico’s population is comprised of mixed race individuals, its telenovelas still cast lighter skin characters as main actors. In contrast to her affirmation, which mirrors the majoritarian story of race and racism in Mexico, a recent study affirmed that despite a rhetoric that race and color do not matter, racism and racial inequality exists in Mexico (Zizumbo-Colunga & Martínez, 2017). Specifically, this study offered “clear evidence of social inequality and discrimination on the basis of skin tone” (p. 1).

Although Eduviges affirmed that language is what matters and that the color of one’s skin is not a significant factor by stating that “what matters is whether you can
speak.” This skirts the inextricable link between race and language. Thus, Eduviges’s counter-story captures a tension between forwarding the majoritarian narrative in Mexico pertaining to race and a counter-story of immigrant teachers in the U.S. This is understandable as “historical and contemporary co-naturalizations of race and language…[are] part of the colonial formation of modernity” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 623). When Eduviges stated that language has power, she was referring to the language of the colonizer, Spanish. Her action mirrors “a common view in sociolinguistics is that societies should affirm the language practices of racialized populations while providing them with access to dominant ways of using language” (p. 639). This reflects how “the creation of language hierarchies positioned European languages as superior to non-European languages” (p. 623). Simultaneously, Eduviges’s experience as a racialized immigrant/transnational teacher in the U.S. mirrors discourses of immigrant and transnational educators of color as intellectually and linguistically inferior.

Her immigration process was relatively simple, but her struggle was mostly with learning the English language and “learning how to function in this world.” Anzaldúa’s (1987) word ring true to make sense of Eduviges’s experience with language, “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is a twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (p. 81). Eduviges’s shared in detail how she had to force herself to learn English if she wanted to succeed, and that she felt “empty” because she did not know anyone except her husband in the U.S. when she first came.
Eduvigés also spoke about how she felt as a teacher in the classroom and how she persevered and had to take the teacher certification exams seven times before she passed them. The difficulty with teacher certification were present in my interviews with Alex, Kudrat, Mei, and Eduvigés, therefore I will discuss it more deeply in Chapter V.

**Reflective Researcher Journal**

In my reflective researcher journal, I wrote about how the experiences of the two Latina participants conveyed a linguistic borderland, which they had worked hard to cross. This is well documented in extant research. Language serves as a formidable obstacle to immigrants seeking to become certified as teachers in the U.S. (Abramova, 2013).

Grappling with language barriers is a mainstay for immigrant teachers. This is further complicated by language hierarchies and whether educators have academic Spanish (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Academic language serves to index dominant ways of communicating and serve to further marginalize and disadvantage those who mix named languages in their communicative practices. Prevalent language ideologies in the U.S. continue to delegitimize nondominant languages and language mixing. This means that translanguaging is typically associated with deficits instead of being recognized for its sophistication and assets. Further, prevalent language ideologies in the U.S. reify a racialized hierarchy of language(s); for example, Spanish from Spain is seen as the standard and Spanish from the Dominican Republic is seen as inferior to Spanish from Spain.
Both Spanish-speaking immigrant/transnational Latina teachers who participated in my study took on remediating what had been perceived to be their language deficit. Their experiences convey the lack of investment in developing and certifying immigrant teachers by teacher education programs. This is particularly important as “22% of children in the United States — slightly more than 12 million kids total — spoke a language other than English at home…Beyond English, Spanish is the most common language spoken at home” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018, pp. 1-2). As this percentage continues to rise, the onus of becoming (re)certified as immigrant/transnational teachers must shift from the individual to the systems in place (i.e., teacher education, teacher certification).

Both Latina participants taught themselves how to communicate in English and managed to clear the teacher certification requirements as well as earn a master’s degree even though there were many obstacles. My exploratory study about how the edTPA positions teachers of color, informed my current study as these teachers spoke of similar difficulties and challenges with the language of the test, how it is very expensive and difficult to access. Thus, instead of imposing remediation processes on immigrant teachers, I suggest reorganizing teacher education and certification—its tools, artifacts, components, and requirements—to honor their experiences, cultural and linguistic wealth. Perhaps these changes would prevent the trend I noticed in my recruitment; many teachers who immigrate to the U.S. speaking languages other than English end up employed as paraprofessionals or assistant teachers. I will discuss this further in Chapter V.
Zara

Profile

Zara is a 52-year-old woman. She is American, with a family background in Pakistan. She identifies as South Asian. Zara has lived her life all over the world as her father was a diplomat. She has lived and studied in the Philippines, Spain, England, Pakistan, and in the U.S. Her journey is definitely not linear, as her experiences living in various contexts and cultures has made her easily adaptable and resilient. Zara strongly identifies as being a Pakistani, Muslim, woman of color. She taught in various settings and has a total teaching experience of 25 years. She had been an early childhood educator in Pakistan at the British and American schools there, and taught in London at a Montessori school too. Her cumulative teaching experience outside the U.S. is 10 years. Zara has also taught in New Jersey and in New York. She is currently the head of early childhood education at a private school in New York and has been an early childhood educator for 15 years in the U.S. Zara has a license from a university in Virginia to teach in international and private schools. She has two master’s degrees and is currently pursuing a third Master’s degree in Educational Leadership.

I interviewed Zara in a private conference room at a library, per her preference. Throughout her interviews, I learned about her struggle with discrimination both in Pakistan and in the U.S. In both contexts, her identity as being a Pakistani-American, Muslim woman of color has played a vital role in her racial identity development. Zara was very calm and composed and had the affect of the confident administrator that she is. Her resilience shone through as she spoke about how she was discriminated against in Pakistan by the leadership in the international schools where she had worked and
how she continued to face challenges because of race and ethnicity as she worked toward becoming a lower school head.

Recalling multiple experiences as the only woman of color in her various teaching roles, Zara’s interviews were deeply reflective and emotional as she connected the pieces together when we spoke. She believed she was a teacher since she was six years old and used to have a pretend school at home, which her family encouraged. Her poetic counter-story was mostly defined by her reflective questions, and is therefore titled: *Am I enough? Do I belong?*

Throughout her interviews, Zara was open and shared deeply emotional and personal experiences with me. Her experiences with teaching in Pakistan as one of the only teachers of color in an international school and being minoritized in her own country have stayed with her. Her teaching experiences in London and in the U.S. context bring another layer to how she negotiates the in-betweenness she felt (and continued to feel at the time this study was conducted) in all contexts.

**Zara’s Poetic Counter-Story**

Am I enough? Do I belong?

And there I was, in Karachi, the only teacher of color in the British school

Everybody else was British

But of course, the more white people you have, the more stock you have as a school

Then you can charge 10 times more than any of the local schools

because everybody's white

They liked me because I had just come from London
I was *fresh* from London, which put me at an advantage

But I was paid as a local

These kinds of injustices happen all the time

They didn't give me maternity leave

There's no legal or illegal in international schools!

Who was going to tell them anything? British embassy?

International schools are not moderated or monitored by any legal system

They said, ‘Well, we've got somebody in your position for next year’

I said to the head of school, *you couldn't do this to me in your country, but you're doing it to me in mine!*

The great injustice for me at that time in that school was after September 11

My husband had immigrated to the U.S.; I was living alone with my daughter in Pakistan

September 11 happened, and all my American colleagues were asked to go to Bangkok

When I approached my principal and said, I'm American. Are you going to move me?

He looked at me and he said, ‘*You don't look American.*’

I remember looking at him and saying, are you sure you want to say that to me?

There are many people who look like me in New York

He said, ‘Are you calling me a racist?’

I said, I'm not calling you anything. I just think this is unreasonable!

I have an American passport
You're moving all the American teachers

*Why not me?*

Everybody, when it was easy, treated me like I was equal

But when it came down to the crunch

and it involved a little bit more, maybe putting your money where your mouth is

that's where the difference came out

That's pretty awful

I think what's worse is that there was no other recourse

People do bad things all the time, but there was no recourse for me

except to accept it if I wanted to be part of that

I'm telling you these specific stories of injustice and difficulty

but I don't want you to think that it was so terrible

there's so much intersectionality now, it can't just be one thing

I speak the way I speak

that gives me some kind of cultural capital.

I'm really a little more complex

I may be slotted into the local context because of the color of my skin,

ethnic background

But I have also lived overseas as a Pakistani

So, I get that lingo and that code
Am I enough? Do I belong?

When I was at a very progressive school in New York City

At a diversity meeting, they asked all people of color to stay in one room

and all the white folks to go on another room to have discussions

I was floored with this idea that we couldn't all talk together

white privilege demands that we have to talk about things in context of white privilege

The discussion cannot happen with people of color because they have another

experience

But for me that was so, that was just ridiculous!

So, you have privilege and you get to speak in a different room?

If you wanna do something about it, you have to talk about it

I remember one of my white colleagues saying, you really should come with us

They perceive me as white because I wasn't the person of color that they typically

experienced

Check your privilege!

There was a little bit of elitism in that

I don't present as your typical person of color for them

The assumption was that a person of color is not fully, well versed, not well-traveled

Because I remember looking at him and saying, dude, I'm Brown! What is your

problem?
I never thought about myself as a person of color

Maybe in the last three years.

Three, four years ago when it was so hard for me to move up

I kept asking myself, what am I not doing?

What am I not doing that isn't…

How am I not qualified?

How am I not, what is it? What is it?

It just comes down to this, right?

Like I'm perfectly personable, I communicate super well

My demonstration lessons are on point

There's no reason!

Why is it so hard?

Am I enough? Do I belong?

When I came here, I felt like I had all this understanding of other cultures

I never even wanted to think about labeling

That's like how unevolved I was

I never wanted to think that I was a person of color that was at a disadvantage

I thought I was a person of color that was incredibly privileged

and I couldn't understand why I had so many obstacles in my way in the last four years

No, there's something wrong.

I was not in the *in crowd*
So, you ride the wave on positivity, and you try to create good
and you get into those positions where you can start affecting change
What I'd like to do is teacher training in Pakistan
I think that would make my heart sing!
that's the good work that makes you feel like you're living a life of meaning

I don't think that early childhood teachers have the same opportunity
They're not enough of them in New York City
Not enough early childhood teachers of color
I feel great every day that I'm involved with kids cause that's my North Star
a lot of my family wonders why I'm still studying at 51
And I really think that it's my job to keep studying, but people don't understand that

In school leadership, there is not one Muslim leader of color in New York city
that means the system is set up for the Caucasian people in those roles

*Can you really see what I can bring to you?*

*Or are you just going to give this to somebody who looks like all of you?*

It's disappointing
But this is my life
And I'm like, look at the lengths I'm having to go through
It's maddening because I know that these schools are looking for a certain type of
person
because they have to respond to a certain type of parent group

These experiences come to mind because I’m thinking more about how hard people of color have to work in an American context to get where they want to get.

When you apply for a job, they say ‘Your profile doesn’t match!’
‘They rescinded the offer!’

It’s funny that even as an adult, this good girl syndrome really follows you. Unless someone pushes the envelope, we can talk about diversity upside down and it won’t matter. Absolutely. It won’t matter!

Am I enough? Do I belong?

my resume reads like a travel journal
I’m so proud and fortunate, right?

What’s difficult for me is that

People don’t really get my power; the power I bring

What the F, man? I’m so pissed!

So, I thought, Theek hai (okay), I’ll come here, and I’ll get the thappa (stamp)!”

I’ve checked all the white boxes
Now what are you going to do?

When we talk about race and access, I never want to be the person that uses this as a card

but I can tell you now, I'm a little fed up

I'm not willing to give anybody the benefit of the doubt anymore

If you are telling me there is a system in place that disallows me to participate because of the color of my skin

I want to freakin' shout from the mountain tops!

I'm feeling extraordinarily brave in front of you

Now here's the problem, it's a very small community

And if you make a ruckus like that, you better be willing not to get a job

These coveted jobs where nobody leaves until they die

You won't get one, if you make a ruckus

I almost feel like I should do it at the end of my career

in order to make a path for other people who may be suffering

Oh my God, what am I doing here!

They don't need me here

I don't know if they need me here

We need to go back and do some shit over there

I'm torn between…
Am I enough? Do I belong?

**Discussion**

Zara’s poetic counter-story was very personal as she reflected on and recounted the injustices she faced as a teacher of color over the course of her career in different contexts. Zara’s counter-story captured a number of tensions as she approximated whiteness, having been educated in London and having been employed in an international school predominantly employing white teachers. She experienced, to a certain extent, racial privileging, accruing advantages by approximating white language behaviors, which afforded her some privileges. Nevertheless, there was a tension; she sounded white but did not look white. As such, the privileges afforded to her proxemic behavior did not afford her full-fledged privileges attributed to her white colleagues (Leonardo, 2009; Rosa & Flores, 2017). She voiced her dissatisfaction with international schools in Pakistan, as she was one of the only teachers of color on the staff and as she was not given maternity leave and asked to leave.

Zara did not always identify as a person of color; immigration transformed her understanding of her racial identity. In the U.S., “immigration policies and racialization projects often frame groups from similar backgrounds into a single “other,” ignoring important within-group differences” (Agadjanian et al., 2017, p. 558). Racialization was central to her immigrant experience. This became particularly poignant when she was racialized and mistreated after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001; she was not acknowledged as an American citizen because she did not “look American.” Zara’s experience unveils how “a focus on immigrants’ legal
predicaments may lead to an underestimation of the role that other characteristics, such as racial and ethnic background, play in molding their experiences” (Agadjanian et al., 2017, p. 558). These experiences with racism and xenophobia continued for Zara even at the time this study was conducted, as she tried her best to navigate the world of educational leadership in New York City being intersectionally minoritized as a Muslim, Pakistani, woman of color.

Zara’s experiences coincided with the timeline I had chosen for the literature review, where I began to review literature from 2001 when the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City caused increased xenophobia towards immigrants. Zara’s and Mei’s counter-stories reaffirmed the pertinence of focusing my literature review on post-9/11 studies, as the context changed dramatically.

**Reflective Researcher Journal**

In my reflective journal, I made note of how emotional Zara’s story made me feel, especially because of her own vulnerability and openness to discuss issues of access and discrimination in her past and present. I had been deeply entangled with immigration policies and racialization processes in the U.S. My language positioned me in ways that approximated whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). As Zara, I had not experienced language as an obstacle, as my Latinx participants had. Nevertheless, I was all too aware of the influence of immigration policy in my everyday life as I did not qualify to work as an international student.

Zara made it a point to say that she did have good relationships with all her colleagues, “when it came down to the crunch and it involved a little bit more, maybe putting your money where your mouth is that's where the difference came out.” Zara’s
stories connected with mine when she described her Pakistani context as I am from the neighboring country of India. Our two countries have had many political disputes and religious differences after British colonization, when India was partitioned into India and Pakistan in 1947. In my journal I noted, “When Zara spoke of her experiences in Pakistan, I felt like I was back home in India, and I completely understood her context because it was as if she was describing Bombay, and not Karachi.” This shared background served as fertile grounds for my cultural intuition to help me understand her experiences and derive meaning in between the lines of the transcribed interview. This cultural intuition served as an epistemological framework of sorts, affording me “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface… an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 60).

I also resonated with Zara’s constant tension where she questions her sense of belonging and coming to understand how race and racism are central and systemic in education systems in all contexts. With Zara, I was able to “extend one’s personal experience to include collective experience and community memory” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 563) in a “complex process that is experiential, intuitive, personal, collective and dynamic” (p. 568) resulting in her poetic-counter-story. When she spoke to me after reading her poetic counter-story, she said, “I am speechless!” For someone who has so much to say and teach, that expression from Zara has stayed with me.

Zara also mentioned how there is a great need for teachers of color and that they need affinity groups and supports in place to help navigate and negotiate the systems of power. I will discuss this further in Chapter VI.
Patricia

Profile

Patricia is a 60-year-old woman from the Philippines. She began her career as an early childhood educator in 1986 after completing a Montessori course. Patricia had a bachelor’s degree in business administration, but after working in the corporate world for a few years, she felt that it was her “calling to become a teacher.” She stated that many of her family members are educators and they owned a boarding school in the Philippines, where she first began teaching young children along with her aunt and mother.

After teaching in the Philippines for 15 years, she came to the U.S. in 2001 to visit a family member and decided to apply for a teaching job at a Catholic school, which she subsequently got after hiring a lawyer to get the necessary documentation to work in the U.S. Because Patricia had just started working as a teacher in September 2001, she recalls clearly when the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center happened on September 11th, 2001. At that time, she worked in Chinatown and lived in the Bronx.

In her interview, Patricia explained how she had to walk most of the way home and reached home after six hours. She mentioned how this catastrophe made her reconsider her decision to move to the U.S. Throughout her interviews, Patricia mentioned how God helped her along the way. She is a devout Catholic and that was an important part of her identity as she discussed how teachers should behave towards young children and that there is always hope for all children to succeed. These intersections of religious identity, ethnicity, race, and class were evident in Patricia’s
poetic analysis. As we co-constructed the poetry together, Patricia appreciated how I included her religious sentiment, stating that it is usually not so openly spoken about in educational settings.

At the time of this study, Patricia had been teaching in New York City public school for 12 years. She communicated her beliefs in the strengths of children and taught in a kindergarten and first grade bridge classroom for children with special needs. Because of her perseverance throughout the process of being and becoming a teacher in New York city, her poetic counter-story is titled: I didn't give up!

**Patricia’s Poetic Counter-Story**

I didn’t give up!

We’re a family of educators
My grandparents were teachers, they were professors
My grandfather started a school in the Philippines from scratch
He just wanted to help 'cause he came from a poor family
he wanted everyone to have an education
Whatever background you came from, whatever your situation in life
he just wanted to help
and I feel that I was the one who continued his legacy among all of us

So that's where it came from
I'm used to helping kids, because I grew up in that kind of environment
I always think that there's hope!
It's just encouraging them… these are kids…
sometimes they want to give up…
You have to help them to keep on going…

A good teacher has genuine or the heart for the kids

go the extra mile

It's the attitude that's the key

You don't give up on students, on kids just because they can't do it the first time

Everyone can learn if you provide the right tools

if you really take time to teach them

In whatever way they could learn

*I didn't give up!*

They look up to teachers in the Philippines

they're not paid well but...

they've high regard for teachers and they appreciate teachers

It's easier 'cause you feel like you're in place, right?

We have our own language so parents and kids can relate to me I can relate to them

I can explain things more to them

there's no misconception of what I mean or who I am

Like this is where I belong and there's no problem

I feel comfortable
I did a Montessori course in the Philippines
I taught there for 15 years
I'm a teacher, I should love the kids
If I don't like kids why am I a teacher?
I better just do something else

I think kids need the best you can give
Just be there
I think, what if that was my child?
How would I want the teacher to treat my child?
That's how I feel when I see kids in my classroom
They are my children
If you want to be an early childhood teacher anywhere in the world
you really have to be dedicated to what you're doing
you have to have genuine concern
And the kids, they know if you care
You need trusting relationships with the children
If you get their trust, they will want to do things
and they want to learn from you

I didn't even think I would land a job in the U.S.
My brother had a good immigration lawyer
I became a teacher in the United States

In New York city

That's when September 11 happened

my sixth day on the job

We saw the plane hit the tower

I thought, oh God! You brought me here to die in the United States?

And my kids are not even here

And that messed up the immigration processing of my children

Two months became two years

I got sick

the bills were piling up

So it was so tempting to stay here

To earn in U.S. dollars

I remember how much I was earning that time

You know why?

Cause my lawyer said, this is all you're gonna get

Just $23,000 a year

But in the Philippines, that’s a lot of money!

I could pay for my children’s education

And pay off all my debts
In the U.S. You are not appreciated as much

My colleague was always putting me down in front of everyone

About my clothes, what I wore

You know, when you first come you don't have enough money to buy clothes

from signature clothes or brands

I said, well if this is the way, I'm not going to stay here like this

I'm going back to the Philippines!

_I didn't give up!_

I don't know if it's a way of being a racist

putting down people from a different culture

It's really offensive

I really don’t know why someone would do that

I spoke to the priest of another school

I said, can you please sponsor me for a Green Card?

He humiliated me

Oh yeah, and he’s a Catholic priest

He said, ‘Oh no, I'm not going to sponsor you

Then I have to support your whole family

All of you will be totally dependent on the school and that's what you people do!

You come here, you want to work and then you get all our money.’

I was crying. I was really crying.
Yeah, he's a priest!

I passionately liked the Catholic school

But that's how it was

I tell you I have a lot of psychological traumas in this country

It's just a lot

I went through so much!

I said, if I'm going to sacrifice this much

I have to get something in return

I was praying

I said if I'm going to get a Green Card that's the sign

I got my Green Card because another Catholic school in the Bronx sponsored me

But they abused me too

Made me work much more than any other teacher

they knew I was waiting for my papers

and could not do anything about it

Every day I would call my lawyer like, can I leave now?

He said, ‘No, wait for the green card!’

Finally I got the papers, and he said, ‘You can leave now.’

I'll never forget the day

It was like deliverance from slavery!

*I didn’t give up!*
I started taking graduate courses that were offered by the archdiocese

Whatever was offered I would take

I would work all day and the go after school

Wherever it was

Then I took out another loan to get my masters

Then my friend told me to apply to the department of education

She said, ‘Any way you're being abused

So just be abused in the public school

They're going to pay you more.’

My friend said, ‘They're stealing from you

If you're going to stay in the United States, they have to pay you the right way.’

That's where I started sending out resumes

I sent out 110 resumes to different schools

I counted them

I had only two interviews

I was hired in a public school in Harlem on an internship certificate

I got my certification after 2 years

I was in an ICT classroom for many years

Then in a self-contained classroom for special ed

I was so scared because I didn't think I could do it on my own

by myself
They judge me at this school too
I can't stand it sometimes
I said this will be my last year
I can't take it anymore!
And last summer I was so depressed
I thought I was going to go crazy
I hardly spoke a word
I would just lay down
I didn't give up!

By the grace of God
I rose up
Started teaching again
But it got better when I was by myself
I only felt better when I was alone
My husband helped me
The personal stuff, you have to leave it behind
do the job part of it professionally
But there is no difference
People want to separate it
But you can't!
You're one!
It sounds like a movie, right?
It's everybody's life!

At the university
the multicultural education course was good
‘cause they said, when you go to another country, you go through different stages
So you don't assimilate right away
That's how I understood myself
Oh! No wonder I felt this way!
Like sometimes I thought, am I going crazy or why am I depressed?
They said, it's like grieving
the stages of grieving

Immigration is the same thing
You don't just come to a country and you're well-adjusted
So that's how I understood myself
We spoke a lot about our experiences in our own countries

I think if you're a white teacher
born and raised in the United States
you don't have to go through everything that I have to go through

I didn’t give up!
First of all going through immigration and getting all those papers
Once you have everything, we're still not the same in getting hired
‘Cause during interviews they prefer white teachers
If you get in and you're like a minority,
you must be really outstanding for you to be noticed!

It came from not just white professors, even professors of color
They prefer to talk to students who are white
but the professors who are really good make you feel you're all the same
It didn't matter anymore
If you don't really like me, it’s okay
but I'm here to study
I'm just going to finish my master's
And it's not about you liking me
This is me learning
and you better teach it
*Teach my mind!*
It motivated me to do more
knowing that I’m a minority
knowing that they didn't believe in me that much
I think it's about race for sure
*They say they're not racist*
*but they are!*
The challenging part was to be certified
That for me the most nerve wracking experience
to pass all those tests
It's not just the tests
after the tests there are other requirements
workshops that you have to do
then they come back and say you're missing this and missing that

*I feel like I’m missing!*

They don’t want to see me

It's very stressful ‘cause I'm doing immigration
and I'm doing this at the same time

*When I got my certification I felt like I won the lottery!*

I'm happy because I didn't give up those years
that I didn't want to teach anymore
or else I wouldn't have been here today

I’m glad *I didn't give up*

So at least at the end of my career I can say I made the most of what was given to me
and I was able to deliver what was expected
and to help the children, to teach the children

That's the goal, right?
At least I’ll end it on a positive note

*I didn’t give up*

**Discussion**

Patricia’s journey had been a tumultuous one, as described in the interviews. Although there is a clear indication of her socioeconomic privileging, as she had been able to pay a lawyer to adjust her visa, her socioeconomics changed as she became an immigrant in the U.S. She experienced firsthand the obstacles brought about by U.S. immigration changes after the September 11 attacks. These changes, rooted in xenophobia, significantly extended the period she was separated from her children.

She delved deeply in the conversation, elaborating her personal traumas along with the professional injustices she had faced as an intersectionally minoritized teacher. Even though she was hired at the first Catholic school as a head teacher and her paperwork was seemingly easy, she had to face many challenges when it came to salary, living away from her children and being treated like she did not belong by her colleagues and administrators. She had experienced firsthand how the Catholic Church had failed to recognize her humanity, failing to make meaning of her journey as a transnational/immigrant teacher. It had “encourage[s] fear and distrust” of immigrants and encouraged us to erase and/or ignore facets of her identity and her very family (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37). It had required sacrifice.

“In the U.S. context, many citizens, Roman Catholics included, remain ambivalent about, if not resistant to, an ethic that urges hospitality and mercy for those who cross or remain within their borders” (Heyer, 2010, p. 410). This was visible in
Patricia’s interactions with the priest who had stated that he would not sponsor her visa, stating that he would ‘have to support your whole family…All of you will be totally dependent on the school and that's what you people do!’ To be sure, research in theology has documented that “Catholics—harbor serious concerns about immigrants and immigration” and “Catholics…are generally slightly less pro-immigrant than secular counterparts” (p. 411).

This meant that Patricia was negotiating tensions professionally, personally and spiritually—her beliefs stood in odds with her experiences as a racialized immigrant in the U.S. Aligned with Patricia’s experiences, Anzaldúa (1987) stated:

> The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (p.109)

These personal and professional experiences that Patricia faced have deep repercussions for the field of early childhood education and teacher education when it connects to a sense of (be)longing. After all, as illustrated by Patricia’s poetic counter-story, belonging is a political project. I will discuss these further in chapters V, VI, and VII.

**Reflective Researcher Journal**

In my reflective journal entries, there were many instances where I saw multiple convergences between Patricia’s story as my own. Her experiences of transitioning from the Philippines as a new teacher, where she felt overwhelmed and under-confident, resonated with mine. She taught for 15 years in the Philippines and I taught for 14 years in India, yet our experience with young children was erased upon emigrating to the U.S. The interviews with Patricia were longer in duration than the
others’, as we had conversations and made connections between our stories. As such, we engaged in dialogue and I was able to draw on my cultural intuition to make meaning and make sense of her experiences and reflections.

As we co-constructed the poetic counter-story together, she was in tears, much like most of my other participants. She said that she could not believe how far she had come and everything she had endured. She said, “I am going to frame this as a reminder of my journey!” Her urge to go back to her home context was a tension that all my participants expressed to varying degrees. Patricia’s experiences with racism and related forms of discriminations in teaching and teacher education are evident in her poetic counter-story.

**Conclusion**

For my six participants, the journey on (be)longing continued as they constantly traversed the boundaries on personal and professional levels. Centering their expertise in telling their own stories and combining our cultural intuitions (Delgado Bernal, 1998), the poetic counter-stories we co-constructed illuminate issues of discrimination and injustice and challenge the field of teacher education to take on the responsibility for transformation. As witnessed by these poetic counter-stories, my participants have had difficult experiences with race and immigration as well as becoming early childhood educators in the U.S. context.

Anzaldúa (1987) states,

I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They’d like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven’t, we haven’t (p.108)
These words by Anzaldúa resonate with the experiences that my participants shared. Of being silenced, of not knowing what to do or what to say, of dressing appropriately or speaking a certain way, of learning languages that were alien to them, of constantly learning, more and more each day, of teaching young children with care and love, of believing in the strengths that all children bring, of learning how to deal with race and racism, of being strong and determined, and of self-actualization where they can be recognized and valued for their true selves.

Across the data collection process, various connections and themes were identified as they elicited emotionality and addressed my research questions. These coincided with my theoretical framework of CRT and Nepantla; therefore, the next stage of analysis, the poetic testimonio, was easier to construct, putting the voices of all six participants in conversation with each other.

In the following chapter, I will explain the process by which I constructed the poetic testimonio as I bore witness to my participants’ stories of experience. All the words used in this testimonio belong to my participants and have not been changed. The poetic testimonio will focus on parts of the interview transcripts which describe the participants’ experiences with teacher education and teaching. Once I have explained the process of the testimonio in Chapter V, in Chapter VI, I will elucidate my findings. Finally, in Chapter VII, I offer implications, providing some recommendations for teacher education practices, teacher education programs, teacher education policy, and teacher education research based on my research findings.
Chapter V

POETIC TESTIMONIO

The use of testimonio in qualitative research using the theoretical lenses of critical race theory, Chicana Studies including Borderlands and Nepantla, and other critical frameworks is part of a legacy of liberation used by people throughout the world (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Personal stories and reflection make space for experiential, narrative accounts and lived experiences of individuals who have been historically marginalized by the dominant white, Eurocentric discourses prevalent in educational research. This type of research foregrounds and articulates an urgent call to action, to which the researcher bears witness.

In this study I have constructed a testimonio using poetic analysis. This allowed me to elicit emotional response from the participant and the audience (Leavy, 2014). Doing so afforded the construction of a testimonio via a unique amalgamation to voice the discontent felt and experienced by my participants: immigrant and transnational teachers of color. Testimonios are intended to be political and critical (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012) of the dominant ways of knowing and being. The testimonio presented herein speaks back to the majoritarian story of early childhood teaching and teacher education in the U.S.

Informed by Anzaldúa’s (1987) concept of borderlands, and drawing on CRT and Nepantla, the construction of a poetic testimonio led me to examine how my participants’ stories oratorically and disparagingly highlighted the emotional, political,
and ideological borders and the injustices they had experienced. I conducted close readings of the interview transcripts along with the voice recordings, tracing how they expressed their discomfort and discontentedness, as they negotiated the borderlands of identity and emotionality in the confines of being a “professional teacher” (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). This analysis underscored my participants’ personal and professional worlds, inviting the field of teacher education to think more deeply about the power of learning from and including the identities, cultural backgrounds, and experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color to address issues of marginalization, including racism and immigration status.

**Constructing a Poetic-Testimonio**

During the co-construction of individual poetic counter-stories with my participants, as described in Chapter IV, I asked them in the third interview what advice they had for the field of early childhood education and teacher education programs. I audio-recorded these answers and transcribed them. After reading each individual poetic counter-story, I identified some sections and phrases that would be better suited of the testimonio. I separated these from the poetic counter-story with the permission of my participants. In the shared Google drive document, I had sectioned off this data, labeling it as *Teacher Education/Chapter V* on each document. Once I had their confirmation and consent, I put together their separate parts into a whole to create a multi-voiced poetic testimonio to center the collective voices of my participants: immigrant and transnational teachers of color.

Inspired by Delgado Bernal (2008) I was compelled to use the *trenza* or braid as a metaphor to express how and why I wove together this poetic testimonio:
Rather than detach and compartmentalize our identities, we might think of how the trenza bring together strands of hair and weaves them in such a way that the strands come together to create something new, something that cannot exist without each of its parts. The trenza is something that is whole and complete, and yet, it is something that can only exist if the separate parts are woven together. Like the trenza, when we are able to weave together our personal, professional, and communal identities we are often stronger and more complete. At the same time, weaving together these and many other identities is fraught with complexity, tensions, and obstacles. (p. 135)

These words guided me as I worked patiently and intentionally to create the poetic testimonio with the voices of all of my participants. I listened to the audio-recordings over and over again to make sure I was not misrepresenting anything my participants had said. Gradually, it all came together as I used my literature review and research question and sub-questions to inform my decisions on what phrases to put together for the poetic-testimonio. It is my personal act of resistance against the dominant ways of doing research, supported by CRT and Nepantla.

Using my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), I used a critical lens as I framed and reframed the sections of the poetic testimonio. Once the data was examined and analyzed in different ways, as secondary and tertiary data sources, I used my literature review as a resource to interweave the participant’s voices into one strong trenza. I used connective themes and points where the participants had similar experiences and put them together. These experiences were especially identified by me as they pertained to teaching and teacher education, informed by my review of literature.

As explained in Chapter IV, the poetic counter-stories were about individual and more personal journeys of the participants and the poetic testimonio is an amalgamation of their collective journey. In this way, their stories come together in strength, to challenge the ingrained and pervasive majoritarian story of whiteness in
teacher education. I ascribe to Cervantes-Soon (2012) who explains how “Brown bodies thus constitute the very sites of collision between the First and Third Worlds and of identity negotiation, where the personal becomes political, and knowledge and theory are generated and materialized through experience” (p. 374).

Multi-Voiced Poetic Testimonio

On Teacher Education Programs

My teacher education program is designed to introduce what teaching is in the United States

The beginning of how it works

I joined the program because there was a person from Philippines, she was the Dean

One of the professors was Japanese origin

That makes a difference

Representation

First of all, you have to come here

Deal with all the immigration stress

you have to go through the World Education Service

They have to *translate* your credentials

As if we are not educated enough!

That's a pretty crappy process

It's a little unnerving to see that your work is not given the same value here

I don't know who's the benchmark
I was reluctant
I became very flexible
So, it was an achievement
I always wanted to know more
that inspired me
I didn’t give up!
I knew that, I will learn something

Finally, I liked the atmosphere
I liked going to school again
But I had my doubts
I felt I wasn't equipped for to teach reading or I'm not the right teacher to teach reading
I had a professor who really prepared me to teach reading
I want to learn; you know I'm spending money to learn
I felt that I was going to be expelled in my first semester
But college has been relatively easy for me since it's got a bilingual program
Half of my classes are in Spanish and that's me
I can write an essay; I can do whatever they asked me to do in college
I'm like, this is good. Yeah. This is normal
It's not easy, but it's something that I can do

They never, they never asked us about our prior experiences in the teacher education
They never talked about teachers’ race, no!
Only how do you teach English language learners?

How do you teach a child who is afraid, who is new in the country, who doesn't feel part of it?

Nothing about how I feel

That's racialized, right?

We never spoke of our prior experiences in the teacher education program

Teachers must be ever conscious of their students' backgrounds

That was more of the discourse

‘Let's talk about student backgrounds’

I've never been in a faculty meeting where they said, ‘Let's talk about your background’

It was not connected to culture and identity

Particularly knowing what we know now about how important a sense of belonging is!

They were giving us a box of tools, but we never developed them with children

Everything in the theory

I didn't learn it

I felt eager to learn

To me it was a dream

I felt like it was going to be ready to teach

But I was very unprepared
not ready, not ready

There is a lot of need for teachers of color right here
They need to help people to prepare for this journey
Really helping them to find out if they want to do this job
Like, are you sure?
Are you really sure?
Are you really thinking about what it means to teach?
It is a true calling
If you find out that this is not the goal, please don't do it
Because you are going to really hurt children and do damage

Teacher preparation programs for teachers of color need to be this self-advocacy piece
of knowing where you are in the history of...
If you're going to be charged with taking care of children and their attitudes
then you need to be fully aware of your own

It's not what you know, it's who you know
I would encourage teachers of color to network more amongst themselves
A forum, an affinity group so that it brings power to this ridiculously unbalanced
system
understanding that we're not any more in a mainstream world
white world

and people are getting smart everywhere

There is an opportunity for teachers of color to form a group so that they have a voice

And I think those of us who are older really should do it for younger teachers

**On Teacher Certification Requirements**

It is difficult to pass this certification test than to do the teacher's program

I had to take six exams

All of those exams are in English

Even if you teach Mandarin, you'll have to take all those exams in English

I'm going to be a bilingual teacher; they are not asking me anything in Spanish

And they are calling for people from different backgrounds!

They say, “We want to be inclusive. We want this and that.”

But all the exams are in English

So, I'm like, how?

Spanish is my first language

I wanted to be a Spanish teacher

but I couldn't because they said that I needed to take credits in Spanish

Why I'm going to take credits in Spanish if Spanish is my first language?

But they say, no, you have to

It’s all about money
I didn't pass the certification tests until the seventh time

the director told me, ‘You can be a teacher!’

And I said, ‘Yeah, but I don't have the license yet.’

I had to stop working to do my student teaching

I was rejected for a job because of my strong accent

But I said, ‘Wait a minute, we are in the South Bronx! What are they expecting?’

The challenging part was to be certified

That for me the most nerve wracking experience

to pass all those tests

It's not just the tests

after the tests there are other requirements

workshops that you have to do

then they come back and say you're missing this and missing that

*I feel like I’m missing!*

They don’t want to see me

It's very stressful ‘cause I'm doing immigration

and I'm doing this at the same time

*When I got my certification I felt like I won the lottery!*
On Teaching in Early Childhood Classrooms

I was inspired when I entered into the field professionally as an early childhood educator. But when I started, I was all over the place. They feel like teachers are, they don't speak, you don't speak. I think that deteriorates creativity. They want you to rush through the unit. ‘Could you see what is the last thing on submission?’ Finish it! Get it done!’ I feel like if you have to do this unit today, you've got to do it no matter what. What about the children?

Teaching the letters, teaching the numbers, teaching how to read a lot of printouts and worksheets. Too many worksheets. But that’s not education. Every single thing looks the same. It's like, this is not art! This is not craft! This is me telling them to do things without, you know, their input. The books are all about a white kid’s experiences. For example, there is no back yards in New York!
A backyard, so that they can play with a doggy

Have pets, all of that

When I asked my kids, ‘Do you have a pet? Do you have any animals at home?’

They said, ‘Yes. Sometimes mice they come up!’

That’s the reality

It's so different
	right here is a process

there are many things that teachers must know about

there are many resources available to you

But to be a teacher is to have a mission in life

It's not just a job

I didn't really bring back the experiences that I had at home

I kind of just like kept it there, I feel

There's not a lot of connection from my past teaching experiences to now

The language I use is so different

I think underlying any system is that children need predictability

they need a chance to move their bodies and build independence

So, you don't need one framework for teaching

you just need those essential understandings

about what a good early childhood program looks like
which needs to be nurturing
Culturally relevant
Valuing their background knowledge
A practice ground for kids to think about how they want to speak
Can it be the same for teachers?

You have a preconceived notion that you have been doing this for many years
This has worked
But what if you just listened to the experience of an immigrant teacher?
Just try
Maybe it will help you grow
I mean, you have done this for many years
Do you want to do that all the time?
Do you need more time?

It’s time!

This multi-voiced poetic testimonio is a convergence of the participants’ thoughts on teacher education programs, teacher certification requirements, and teaching in early childhood classrooms. Using the participants’ voices, I pieced it together, keeping in mind the emotionality as they spoke about these issues. Intentionally using the power of poetry and testimonio to elicit a strong response and bring the injustices and oppressions that my participants have endured during the
process of being and becoming early childhood educators in the U.S. (Souto-Manning et al., 2019), affords the analysis of “race and racism by placing them both in historical and contemporary contexts” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 26-27).

**Themes and Connections**

**On Teacher Education Programs**

All participants mentioned how their teacher education programs were important and crucial to their learning how to teach in the U.S. They spoke fondly about some professors who encouraged and valued them as learners. Simultaneously, they spoke of professors who seemed to prefer to engage with white students and privileged white ways of being, behaving, and communicating in their classes.

Four participants said that they did not discuss teacher identities, experiences, and backgrounds in their teacher education programs, including race and immigration. Mei said that her program addressed these topics, but she felt it somewhat superficial. Because her experiences aligned with a conservative approach (teaching the other) and liberal approaches (focusing on tolerance) to multicultural education; she would have welcomed deeper conversations about immigration in particular. That is, she yearned for the opportunity to engage in a critical examination of “the systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequity, and injustice” and learn about “strategies for…counter-hegemonic teaching and social activism” (Gorski, 2009, p. 313).

Patricia mentioned that she learned a lot in the multicultural course and that they described the immigration process as grieving; that is, she was able to examine dimensions of “systemic oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, and so on)…focus[ing] on the ways in which one of these dimensions contributes structurally
to an unjust and inequitable educational system” (Gorski, 2009, p. 313). Specifically, she said:

At the university, the multicultural education course was good

‘Cause they said, when you go to another country, you go through different stages

So you don't assimilate right away

That's how I understood myself

Oh! No wonder I felt this way!

Like sometimes I thought, am I going crazy or why am I depressed?

They said, it's like grieving

the stages of grieving

*Immigration is the same thing*

You don't just come to a country and you're well-adjusted

So that's how I understood myself

We spoke a lot about our experiences in our own countries

This poetic testimonio and the individual poetic counter-stories speak back to the Eurocentrism in teacher education programs. My participants were very emotional when they spoke about their teacher education experiences. They expressed joyfulness when they spoke of professors or administrators they connected with. Initially, two participants Mei and Patricia, joined their respective programs because they found an administrator or a professor who was from a similar background as them. This is consistent with the body of research on immigrant teachers of color and representation in educational institutions (Arun, 2008; Iredale, Voigt-Graf, & Khoo, 2015), which suggests that including their unique perspectives is of vital importance if we are to
move beyond “[t]he fragile acceptance/rejection tightrope of normalised practices and expectations” (Biesta, 2010 cited in Arndt, 2016, p. 48). The issues highlighted in this section have implications for teacher education practice, teacher education programs, and teacher education policy. I will detail these in chapter VII.

As it sought to understand how six immigrant/transnational teachers of color negotiated tensions associated with being racialized in the U.S., my study offers implications for the transformation of early childhood teacher education programs. That is, it details pathways that can support the racial identity development of immigrant/transnational. It also points toward the need for teacher educators to learn from immigrant and transnational teachers’ experiences, who bring positive pedagogical, cultural and linguistic knowledges to the field. By building inclusive communities that promote dialogue, authentic relationships, and reciprocal learning, early childhood teacher education programs can be more culturally relevant (Beck & Nganga, 2016).

**On Teacher Certification Requirements**

Another theme I identified in the interwoven counter-stories was that of teacher certification requirements. The teacher certification process was especially challenging for five of six participants. They spoke candidly about how they had to give the certification exams multiple times to pass and become a licensed teacher in New York. The research literature clearly shows how teacher certification tests have served as tools to sort teachers and have historically kept teachers of color from getting certified (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016; Souto-Manning et al., 2019). This resonated with the experiences of five of my participants.
The two Latinx participants expressed their discomfort because the exams were in English even though they wanted to be Spanish teachers. As such, they experienced obstacles due to the misalignment between their named language (Spanish) and the named language of the test (White mainstream English). Other teachers also found the tests were very difficult to decipher, given the academic language used. Academic language cloaks racism and enables racist practices. As Baker-Bell (2020) explained: “Labels like “academic language” go unquestioned” (p. 9); that is, “academic language” indexes White mainstream English; “it reveals a covert racist practice that maintains a racial and linguistic hierarchy in schools” (p. 10). Yet, as seen in the poetic counter-stories of the six women who participated in this study, the use of academic language as synonymous with White mainstream English had real and harmful consequences. As such, the teacher certification requirements were in fact racialized to advantage speakers of White mainstream English. This was also consistent with what I had learned in my exploratory study about teachers of color and the edTPA, therefore I was not surprised by this finding. This issue of teacher certification requirements and their inaccessibility to teachers of color is also evident in the literature (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). I will discuss this further in the implications and recommendations (Chapter VII).

**On Teaching in Early Childhood Classrooms**

The participants spoke fondly about the children they taught and believed strongly in their strengths. Adopting a culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining approach was important to all the participants as they sought to value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children even though they felt the pressures of time
constraints and following prescriptive curricula. Collectively, the teachers called for more culturally relevant practices and books where the children could see themselves. Participants mentioned how teachers must “have a heart” for the children and make sure that they value each learner’s needs and learning styles. This is also evident in their individual poetic counter-stories where they each voiced how they felt about children and teaching.

As access to early childhood education is expanded, efforts to ensure “quality” programs for young children are on the rise (National Research Council (NRC), 2015; Recchia, 2016; Takanishi & Menestrel, 2017). Whereas these programs increasingly serve children of color from immigrant families and children of color, the voices of immigrants are missing (Souto-Manning, 2018); so are notions of teaching familiar to immigrant families (Adair, 2009; 2011; 2016).

Immigrant and transnational teachers can diversify the teaching force with experienced qualified educators, such as the ones who participated in this study. Research has shown that international teachers bring knowledges from their own sociocultural locations that can improve and impact the quality of education for children in the U.S. (Ross, 2003), being better able to understand the experiences of immigrant children and children from immigrant families.

Finally, recognizing the process of isolation they experienced as immigrant and transnational teachers of color, they affirmed the need for professional community that are affinity-based. That is, they underscored the importance of putting in place a community where they can collectively counter the isolation and exclusion they had experienced and called for a coming together of teachers of color to support each other
through the journey of being and becoming early childhood educators. This reaffirms prior research findings (e.g., Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Brown, 2014; Cheruvu et al., 2015).

**Conclusion**

The objective of this dissertation study was to understand the experiences of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color with prior teaching experience in their home countries, individually and collectively. Constructing a poetic testimonio then, becomes an act of resistance to challenge what is normed and normalized in early childhood teacher education and teacher education writ large. Here I build on the extensive work of bilingual and bicultural scholars who have used the power of testimonio as an expression of experiences of oppression (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Figueroa, 2015; Huber, 2009; Prieto & Villenas, 2012). Using testimonio as a methodology helped me better understand how immigrant and transnational teachers of color expressed their experiences of and in response to systemic forms of racism (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). Drawing on CRT and Nepantla, this poetic testimonio was meant to create a dialogue whereby the unheard and often silenced voices in early childhood teaching and teacher education are centered.

In the following chapter, I will enlist my findings based on the data analyzed in the form of poetic counter-stories and poetic testimonio. These findings allude to a larger picture and invite the field to rethink and transform early childhood teacher education. I will discuss the implications of these findings in Chapter VII.
Chapter VI

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This dissertation study sought to understand the experiences and identities of immigrant and transnational early childhood teachers of color with prior experience teaching in their home countries, specifically attending to what knowledges and experiences they bring from their home context, what knowledges and experiences they develop as they (re)learn to teach and be(come) teachers of color within the context of U.S. teacher education programs, and how they reconcile these experiences and knowledges as they develop as teachers. I explored the following research question and sub-questions: How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with prior early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City? My sub-questions were: How do these teachers describe their experiences with learning to teach and teaching in their home context(s)? How do these teachers describe their experiences with (re)learning to teach and teaching in the U.S. context(s)? In what ways do these teachers make sense of and interpret the similarities and differences in their experiences of teaching in their two contexts?

Through an interview study combined with poetic inquiry framed by Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) and Nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987)—as
explicated in Chapter I—I sought to access what is said as well as what often remains unsaid (Cahnmann, 2003). In doing so, I sought to learn from the experiences and processes of learning to teach within, across, and in between political, social, cultural, linguistic, affective, and physical geographies.

My research question and sub-questions were constructed utilizing a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework along with Nepantla which helped me analyze the data in a critical manner by keeping the issues of race and immigration in the foreground. The main purpose of the research question was to learn from the counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) of my participants as they testified and spoke back to the dominance and hegemony of white, Eurocentric norms in university-based early childhood teacher education programs and in early childhood classrooms (Brown, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2018; 2019a; 2019c; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019). In particular, I drew on one the tenet of CRT that encourages the “naming [of] one’s own reality” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462), combining it with Nepantla (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cervantes-Soon, 2012) in order to speak up and out against the ways in which immigrant and transnational individuals and communities of color have been positioned in early childhood teaching, in teacher education, and in society writ large. This invariably centered the voices, perspectives, and experiences of my participants: immigrant and transnational teachers of color. To further explain what I mean, I explicate my findings in the following sections.

Overview of Findings

I began this study with my own experiences as a transnational teacher of color in the U.S. context and the literature I had studied about immigrant teachers and
teachers of color. Trying to make sense of my own experiences, I had some assumptions about how I would conduct the study and what I might find. To keep my assumptions in check and not impose them on my participants’ experiences, I kept a researcher journal to jot down my thoughts and connections. Throughout the data collection process, I learned how my participants’ stories connected not only with my story but with the other participants in various ways. The stories not only converged but also connected, like a matrix, at various conjectures.

Some of my assumptions and references to literature were confirmed while others were challenged. As mentioned in Chapter IV, I was interested in learning more about how my participants understood race and racism in the U.S. context and how they positioned themselves within this context. Having the privilege of listening to their stories about their experiences teaching in both contexts, I learned how they were at different stages of understanding about race and racism, and therefore had varying degrees of race consciousness (Leonardo, 2004; Tatum, 1992).

Their experiences highlighted their understandings of their racial and ethnic identities and how they had negotiated changing identities based on their geographical and political context. What struck me most about all participants was their resilience and perseverance to be and become early childhood educators in the U.S. As Patricia rightly said:

I'm happy because I didn't give up those years that I didn't want to teach anymore or else I wouldn't have been here today I’m glad I didn't give up

I can say I made the most of what was given to me and I was able to deliver what was expected
and to help the children, to teach the children
That's the goal, right?

At least I'll end it on a positive note
I didn't give up!

Findings

As I enlisted my findings and looked across participants’ poetic counter-stories, I inductively identified the following correlations, which signaled shared experiences, processes, expectations, approaches, and obstacles:

1) early childhood classrooms and teacher education programs as spaces of (be)longing;
2) learning about race and racism;
3) access to teacher certification requirements;
4) expectations of being an early childhood educator; and
5) seeing children’s strengths (language and literacy, learning ability, care and belonging).

Below, I elaborate and discuss these connective points as emergent themes from the data. Following this, I explain the implications for early childhood education and early childhood teacher education.

Spaces of (Be)longing

In interviewing my participants, I learned about how they have experienced teaching in diverse contexts globally. Bringing together their experiences, their voices echoed similar themes. Whereas they had prior teaching experiences, within the
context of their teacher education programs, such experienced was dismissed. This was further compounded by their belief that they and their experiences did not matter.

As they immigrated to the U.S., they experienced processes of racialization; the most relevant point of resonance was how they felt they, as people, were positioned and constructed as not mattering or as not being fully human; as not belonging simply for being. It is important to understand the historical roots of communities and individuals of color. As Rosa and Flores (2017) explained, the dehumanization of Black, indigenous, and communities of color is deeply entangled with European colonization. They explained:

from the onset of European colonization, indigenous populations were stripped of their humanity at least in part through representations of their languages in animalistic terms that suggested they were incapable of expressing ideas that European colonizers thought were integral to becoming a full human being. (p. 624)

This is seen, for example, in how Alex stated how she felt she ‘did not have a soul’ because she felt that she was not represented racially being mixed-race (Black and white) or ‘mulata.’ Eduvigés had the same experience being mixed-race (Aztec and white) or ‘mestiza.’ Patricia voiced her thoughts when she said that she ‘felt she was missing’ and ‘they don’t see me.’ Kudrat said that ‘they feel that teachers don’t speak; you don’t speak!’ Zara mentioned how she has ‘checked all the white boxes’ but still feels the injustices every day. Finally, Mei expressed her indignation by questioning, ‘Why would this country do that when there are so many immigrants here? It’s upsetting!’

These examples help us glean how my participants were constantly negotiating spaces of being and belonging in their complex worlds, coming to terms with not
being seen in the curriculum either in the early childhood classrooms or in early childhood teacher education programs. Given that the participants felt this way, they stressed the importance of helping children see themselves in the classroom environment. All participants spoke about the power of language and literacy and the importance of diverse books to represent the diverse world we live in. Perhaps, because of their own experiences of being invisibilized, they wanted to make sure that they do not cause the same harm to the children in their classrooms.

**Learning About Race and Racism**

As my participants reflected on their own experiences learning about and experiencing race and racism as they underwent processes of racialization associated with their immigration, they recounted instances when they felt discriminated against. As highlighted in their individual poetic counter-stories, some participants were more race conscious than others. On asking them about it further, I learned that this was because, in their home contexts, they did not discuss race and racism, or their perspectives on race were different. For example, Eduviges mentioned how she was not just Hispanic, but identified as mestiza (mixed race with Aztec and Caucasian ancestry), which is not a category well-recognized in the U.S. Similarly, Alex identified as Mulata (mixed race with African and Caucasian ancestry). These two participants felt racialized when their English language abilities were questioned, and they particularly identified these experiences with heightened emotionality. For example, Eduviges said:

People here underestimate people who is not white
I was noticing the change when a white teacher was coming in the classroom
It was really big!
I can say it was because in my color or my, my race

In my school we are all teachers of color, there is no white teacher right there
I feel part of the community
I can communicate much better with them because we have similar experiences
and even the language

The two participants who identified as Asian, Patricia and Mei, both spoke about how
they experienced being minoritized as well as felt racialized in various contexts. For
example, Patricia said she took it upon herself to challenge the teacher educators at her
university:

It motivated me to do more
knowing that I’m a minority
knowing that they didn't believe in me that much
I think it's about race for sure
They say they're not racist
but they are

It didn't matter anymore
If you don't really like me, it’s okay
but I'm here to study
I'm just going to finish my master's
And it's not about you liking me
This is me learning
and you better teach it
Teach my mind!

Mei mentioned that she felt like she had to be the spokesperson for anything that was
discussed in the teacher education program about teachers of color or diversity. She
emphasized how she did not know much about other parts of Japan besides her city,
Tokyo, and that people would ask her stereotypical questions like: ‘Do you like sushi?’

The two participants who identified as South-Asian: Kudrat and Zara were
resistant to race-consciousness initially. Kudrat was race evasive and seemed
uncomfortable when I asked her about race and racism. She would usually start
discussing classroom management or pedagogy when I asked about race. Kudrat
resisted questions about race by remaining silent or redirecting (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Tatum, 1992). Kudrat did however mention that:

It’s easier if you’re white
 to get to a position that you, the respect
 Not the respect, the respect… they have to prove themselves
 could be the pronunciation of the word, could be their academic background

Once they see you as a citizen, they give you the respect
 You're accountable
 I have always been a legal person
 But I have experienced teachers who did not have any paperwork
 Undocumented.
 So, it is very hard for them
 Their performance, their efficiency is at the same pace as the teachers from here

But they had to answer, ‘Where are you from? It's not what we do.’
 It’s not what we do here

I have documented this discomfort that Kudrat expressed in Chapter IV. She chose to distance herself from the dialogue on race making sure she focused on the positive experiences.

Zara, who had lived and worked internationally, had only recently come to terms with being identified and self-identifying as a teacher of color in the U.S. She mentioned that only in the last four years she has realized that because of her race, the color of her skin and the fact that she is a Muslim woman of color, she was facing injustices in educational positions. She stated emphatically:

I remember one of my white colleagues saying, you really should come with us
 They perceive me as white because I wasn't the person of color that they typically experienced
 Check your privilege!
 There was a little bit of elitism in that
 I don't present as your typical person of color for them
 The assumption was that a person of color is not fully, well versed, not well-traveled
Because I remember looking at him and saying, *dude, I'm Brown! What is your problem?*

I never thought about myself as a person of color
Maybe in the last three years.
Three, four years ago when it was so hard for me to move up
I kept asking myself, what am I not doing?
What am I not doing that isn't…
How am I not qualified?
How am I not, what is it? What is it?
It just comes down to this, right?
Like I'm perfectly personable, I communicate super well
My demonstration lessons are on point
There's no reason!
Why is it so hard?

Am I enough? Do I belong?

Zara’s assumptions of what it meant to be a teacher of color in the U.S. and how it had impacted her trajectory for employment is indeed complex and complicated. As I framed her story with a CRT lens, it was essential to question the centricity of race and racism within U.S. educational systems and how teachers of color position themselves within these systems of oppression.

Given the varying degrees of how race and immigration were perceived by my participants, it is incumbent upon teacher education programs to include these discussions in every course, not just one course on multicultural education. If teachers are being educated to teach in diverse classrooms, it is a disservice to children if the teachers are not self-aware and informed not only about race and racism but also how knowledgeable on how to facilitate critical discussions about these issues in classrooms. As Zara clearly stated:

Teacher preparation programs for teachers of color need to be this self-advocacy piece of knowing where you are in the history of...
If you're going to be charged with taking care of children and their attitudes
then you need to be fully aware of your own

We never spoke of our prior experiences in the teacher education program
school leaders who were ever conscious of their students' backgrounds
That was more of the discourse
“Let's talk about student backgrounds”
but I don't think I've ever been in a faculty meeting where they said
“Let's talk about your background”
It was not connected to culture and identity
Particularly knowing what we know now about
how important a sense of belonging is…

Access to Teacher Certification Requirements

Firstly, through the recruitment process, I found that it was very difficult to
find immigrant and transnational teachers of color who were lead teachers in New
York City public or private schools. On deeper investigation, I learned that a majority
of teachers who identified as immigrant or transnational teachers of color were
paraprofessionals or assistant teachers in early childhood classrooms. This may be
because of the inaccessibility towards the requirements to become a lead early
childhood teacher in New York State, which includes a master’s degree in early
childhood education as well as the edTPA and other certification tests. The lack of lead
teachers of color was also an emergent theme, as my participants spoke of potential
participants for my study and discussed how these teachers were either assistant
teachers or paraprofessionals. For example, Mei stated:

When I first started in New York City, I see a lot of white colored teachers
I guess it depends on what district as well
A lot of the times I would be asked if I'm an assistant teacher
I'm like no, I'm one of the lead teachers and they go, “Oh!”
I have seen a lot, assistant teachers.
Especially like Latin from the latin... Latinx
I thought before I started, white teacher, so like, dominant
And like, they know what's going on
But I guess not
This preliminary finding led to a discussion with the two Latinx participants, Alex and Eduviges who mentioned that language was a barrier in accessing the certification process. Alex even stated her disappointment that she had to take the tests in English even though she wanted to be a Spanish teacher. She said:

I had to take six exams  
All of those exams are in English  
Even if you teach Mandarin, you'll have to take all those exams in English  
I'm going to be a bilingual teacher; they are not asking me anything in Spanish  
And they are calling for people from different background  
We want to be inclusive. We want this and that  
But all the exams are in English  
So, I'm like, how?

Similarly, Eduviges stated:

I didn't pass the certification tests until the seventh time  
the director told me, “You can be a teacher!”  
And I said, “Yeah, but I don't have the license yet.”  
I had to stop working to do my student teaching  
I was rejected for a job because of my strong accent  
But I said, “Wait a minute, we are in the South Bronx! What are they expecting?”

Being the two participants who taught themselves how to communicate in English, navigating a teacher education program with academic writing as well as negotiating the stress of certification requirements had been challenging and overwhelming for Alex and Eduviges. Another participant, Patricia, mentioned how she had also been overwhelmed with certification, as she was simultaneously applying for immigration documentation. Mei expressed her frustration with the edTPA and teacher certification too when she stated that even though she has the certification, it expires after five years and that she could not renew it unless she has a Green Card (permanent
residency status) or citizenship. The other two participants, who were South-Asian, Zara and Kudrat, seemed to have a relatively easier experience with the process of certification as they were educated in English in their home contexts.

These experiences with teacher certification and licensure have been documented by teacher education researchers even before the advent of the edTPA as a gatekeeper (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016). More recently, Souto-Manning, Buffalo, and Rabadi-Raol (2019) have documented the traumatic experiences of three Latina early childhood teachers with the edTPA. The field of teacher education writ large needs to heed this call to action and make drastic changes in the policies and practices that lead to teacher certification. We must remember: “Although cloaked in the guise of objectivity and swathed in the myth of meritocracy, high-stakes assessments are forms of racist ordering” (Tuck & Gorlewska, 2016, p. 201). I will discuss this further in the implications and recommendations.

**Being an Early Childhood Educator**

As my participants described their home contexts and their experiences both in their home countries and in the U.S., a few salient themes emerged, which connected their counter-stories, where the “I” became “we”. These included:

1) being from a family of educators,
2) being life-long learners and having multiple master’s or advanced degrees,
3) comparing some practices in the home contexts as being militaristic,
4) perseverance to become an early educator in both contexts.

I discuss them below.
**Being from a family of educators.** Three participants—Alex, Patricia, and Zara—mentioned that they came from a family of educators and that intergenerationally their family members, especially the women, were teachers or professors. Dingus (2008) examined teachers’ “professional socialization experiences of African-American teachers within teaching families, examining how culturally situated socialization practices inform and shape professional entry and conceptualizations” (p. 605). Alex, Patricia, and Zara were not initially interested in teaching because they had seen other members of their family being teachers and had chosen other professions. For example, even though Alex had gone to a normal school in Colombia, where they trained her to become a teacher since kindergarten, she decided to go into policy and social work instead, but ended up implementing those policies in classrooms and began to love teaching young children. Patricia worked in the corporate world for five years before she decided to do a Montessori course with her aunt and mother, who were both teachers in the Philippines. Once they completed the course, she decided to help them set-up a Montessori classroom in their family school. Patricia continues to be a teacher to this day, with almost twenty-five years of experience. Zara was working in hotel management in Pakistan and doing very well at her job, until she decided she needed more meaning in her life. She consulted with her cousins and aunts, who were teachers and worked towards getting teacher training in the U.K. She has also been in the profession for almost 25 years and is now in an educational leadership role. Half of my participants shared experiences related to being from a family of educators. As such, it is important for the field of teacher education to
realize that, in order to recruit and retain teachers of color, professional socialization experiences in communities and families may play an important role.

**Being life-long learners and having multiple advanced degrees.** Another connective juncture was that three participants had more than one master’s degree each. For example, Zara was currently completing her third master’s degree in educational leadership. She had a master’s in early childhood education and another as a literacy specialist. Mei has two master’s degrees, one in TESOL and the other in early childhood education. Kudrat had three master’s degrees, one in child development, the second in curriculum development, and another in early childhood education. Although this finding raises the question of educational access and opportunity, it may also signal a racialized expectation for immigrant and transnational teachers of color to go beyond basic requirements for teaching in the U.S. This may signal the presumption of incompetence attributed to many women of color.

Paradoxically, another way to interpret this is by focusing on the value that the participants give to the process of constantly learning. This love of learning was evident in the other three participants too where they mentioned how there is always more to learn, and that they have dedicated their lives to learning from the children. These attitudes and mindsets toward learning and education are interesting to consider as the field of teacher certification may not consider these as valuable assets if they are only focused on a summative, standardized assessment like the edTPA, and not a holistic view of the teacher as a life-long learner.

**Comparing practices as being militaristic.** All participants made reference to obedience and discipline as being different in their home contexts and the U.S.
context. Patricia, Kudrat, Alex, and Eduviges directly compared classrooms to the military or army. For example, Kudrat said:

Authoritarian, yeah.
Very different experience
One of the things with the Asian kids is that they listen to the directions very quickly
They know that obedience is very key to learning, right?
You've got to sit straight…
Like you were some soldier
Army place. Military Approach.

These references to obedience and respect for teachers were also reflected in all the participants’ interviews as they described their own schooling experiences and mentioned how they did not want to repeat the same with their students. They mentioned that classroom management and behavior management in the U.S. context comprised a difficult transition for them, as they were used to the children paying attention and listening carefully when a teacher was in the classroom. All participants explained that this was the cultural expectation in their home countries and that parents and families reinforced such expectations at home.

In questioning them further, I learned that all participants had more students per classroom in their home countries than they did in the U.S. context. Eduviges particularly mentioned the larger societal issues by saying:

Of course, they are looking for teachers, but no one wants to go there
No one with the salary they are offering
And it was true
It was hard
They gave you 40 kids, 45 kids in one classroom
So, it's a lot for one teacher, right?
So, they have to choose to find ways to kind of control them
But then what about the necessities?
What about each child?
But it is also the fact that teachers are not supported right there
Society is asking them too much
and they are just giving whatever they can
These authoritarian discourses on teaching and learning were visible across all participants’ interviews. They mentioned that it was not possible for a teacher to provide quality education with culturally relevant, responsive, or sustaining practices if they were responsible for so many children. The participants were univocal in stating that they would have liked to have had a child-centered, interest-led approach, but obedience and discipline was all they had at the time, and they felt ill-equipped to do anything else. Thus, discipline and class size are important aspects to consider for educational research when comparing developing cross-cultural comparisons of various international contexts and pedagogies.

**Perseverance to become an early childhood educator.** As I witnessed in their counter-stories, my participants showed great determination and perseverance to be(come) early childhood educators. In their home contexts, although they worked with children in privileged as well as underserved communities, they still faced biases and injustices. These racial, cultural, and linguistic injustices persisted in the context of the U.S., where my participants worked toward multiple requirements and advanced degrees, sometimes with limited resources, experiencing biases and injustice as they sought early childhood teacher licensure and certification. Nevertheless, they persisted.

Together, the counter-stories denounce the invisibilization of immigrant and transnational teachers of color and their racialized experiences in the context of U.S. early childhood and early childhood teacher education. All participants stressed the importance of being early childhood educators, especially because they thought it was
“a mission” or “a calling” or “adds meaning to their life, to be an agent of change.”

These sentiments resonated when the participants spoke about the children they taught.

In the next section I discuss how the participants’ viewed children, from an assets-based approach, and support their learning, given their own experiences in educational spaces.

**Seeing Children’s Strengths**

In sharing their personal stories, all participants spoke of seeing children’s strengths and giving them the time and tools to help them learn and support their growth; these themes were present in all of their interviews. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Kudrat mostly spoke about the children she taught and how she valued having the space to teach in a place where children’s thoughts were valued. She gave multiple examples of how she was “a facilitator” to their learning. This particular phrasing, of “being a facilitator” was a sub-theme that all participants spoke of either directly or indirectly. Mei discussed how she did not bring what she learned teaching in Japan as she learned to become a “progressive educator” in the U.S. context. Eduviges mentioned how everything here was a process and that she learned to support children’s learning with a more culturally relevant approach. Patricia mentioned how she liked to help children learn and explained that she was always hopeful, never giving up on any child just because they have an identified disability and/or are in a self-contained classroom. Finally, Zara mentioned how children need time, patience, and a teacher who can give them their very best.

These discussions about the children they taught and what they could learn became very passionate as the interviews became conversational. This happened at a
point in which we spoke as fellow teachers. It was interesting to see how each teacher
personified their experiences with the children they taught, clearly seeing their
promise and brilliance. Most importantly, the participants focused on three things that
were crucial to them. These included teaching children how to read and write in
English and/or Spanish so that they had the “power to express themselves;” believing
that all children could learn if they were given the correct tools and enough time; and
the strong belief that if children felt cared for and felt that they belonged in the
classroom community, they would learn better. I will briefly explicate these three
aspects below.

**Language and Literacy.** Every participant spoke about the importance of
developing the children’s language and literacy skills. Patricia used her whole body to
show how she demonstrated to the children how to move from left to right, top to
bottom; something she had learned in her Montessori teacher education program in the
Philippines. Eduviges mentioned how children “were eager to learn” and described her
experiences teaching Indigenous children in Mexico how to read and write in Spanish
so that they could make sense of the larger world around them. Eduviges also
commented on how it was important for children to see themselves reflected in the
books they read. Alex was also very passionate about teaching children Spanish
literacy skills, helping children connect them to the English curriculum; she spoke
deeply about translanguaging as an asset. Kudrat spoke for a long time about how
important literacy was and that “books have power” and “language has power.”
Finally, Zara, who is a literacy specialist, spoke in-depth about how we need more
multicultural literature and shared some videos and photos with me about her
experiences with young children and how she had engaged in building their literacy skills. Whereas they all attributed great importance to language and literacy, they each subscribed to the belief that children needed to learn how to read and write in academic language (Baker-Bell, 2020), whether in English or Spanish. In doing so, they did not recognize the racialization inherent to the very concept of academic language.

Learning Ability. It was evident from the participants’ poetic counter-stories that they saw children as competent and capable human beings. As the participants spoke about how they had negotiated the transition to a new context, they explained how they felt about the children they taught and described how they supported their learning in various ways. The connection between understanding how immigrating to the U.S. had impacted their lives and the impact it had on their practice was made visible across their interviews. They each spoke of resources emanating from their journeys and experiences. As such, it is important to acknowledge that immigrant and transnational teachers bring resources, personal and professional knowledges, which need to be acknowledged and valued in early childhood teacher education. As they connected their personal life experiences to their professional teaching practice, immigrant and transnational teachers explained how they brought with them a passion for learning and teaching, as well as compassion and understanding for all the children in their care.

Care and Belonging. Finally, all participants spoke about how it was very important to them to build positive relationships with the children they taught. Patricia’s words represent what the participants said:
I think kids need the best you can give
Just be there
I think, what if that was my child?
How would I want the teacher to treat my child?
That's how I feel when I see kids in my classroom
They are my children

If you want to be an early childhood teacher anywhere in the world
you really have to be dedicated to what you're doing
you have to have genuine concern
And the kids, they know if you care
You need trusting relationships with the children
If you get their trust, they will want to do things
and they want to learn from you

The feeling of belonging with the children and having the children feel like they
belonged was very important to all participants. It was interesting to note that even
though the participants spoke of belonging in classrooms, they did not use the same
words when they spoke about their teacher education programs. Even though most of
their experiences in their teacher education programs were positive and they
mentioned that they learned a lot, none of the participants associated the term
belonging or even expressed it implicitly when talking about their teacher education
programs. This has implications for the field of teacher education. In the following
chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings for the field of early childhood
teaching and teacher education.
Chapter VII

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I draw implications for the potential transformation of early childhood teacher education practices, programs, policy, and research in ways that account for the experiences and knowledges of immigrant and transnational teachers of color and hopefully in ways that are answerable to immigrant and transnational children, families, and communities. With the recognition that findings from this study are situated within the life-experiences of each individual teacher, and like teaching and learning, are not generalizable, I focus on how they provide critical points of discussion and possibilities for transformation of the fields of early childhood teaching and teacher education. Yet, in light of my literature review (Chapter II), where I detailed how research has been conducted on or about teachers of color and immigrant teachers separately, especially in the U.S. context, my research combines the two issues and addresses immigration and race together; I found that there is much to learn if we only listen to the voices and learn from the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color who are intersectionally marginalized in educational settings. I offer implications as recommendations and categorize them as recommendations for teacher education practices, programs, policy, and research.
Recommendations for Teacher Education Practices

This dissertation study raises several implications for teacher education practice. Firstly, teacher educators need to engage in dialogue and create a discourse that includes intersectionally minoritized teachers in the curricula and syllabi for teacher education programs. It is not enough to have just one course on multicultural education, but to reconceptualize and transform the practices which continue to be Eurocentric and hegemonic even though the programs proport to be social justice oriented. For example, Patricia shared her positive experience:

At the university
the multicultural education course was good
‘cause they said, when you go to another country, you go through different stages
So you don't assimilate right away
That's how I understood myself
Oh! No wonder I felt this way!
Like sometimes I thought, am I going crazy or why am I depressed?
They said, it's like grieving
the stages of grieving
Immigration is the same thing
You don't just come to a country and you're well-adjusted
So that's how I understood myself
We spoke a lot about our experiences in our own countries

It is essential for teacher educators to commit to equity and justice in education by being reflective practitioners themselves if they want to facilitate these important and urgent conversations about immigration and race among others (Goodwin, 2004; Goodwin & Kosnik, 2014). Otherwise, they might be (un)knowingly privileging whiteness, and deficit perspectives towards all teachers of color. At the tertiary level, teacher educator identity and implicit/explicit bias needs to be critically examined which is damaging to teachers of color, especially those who are intersectionally minoritized. Eduviges’s experience illustrates this disparity:
People here underestimate people who is not white.
I was noticing the change when a white teacher was coming in the classroom
It was really big!
I can say it was because in my color or my, my race

Teacher educators need to be able to facilitate critical conversations about race and immigration, as well as other forms of oppression. This is especially important for immigrant and transnational teachers who might not have any experience talking about these issues in their home contexts and might feel uncomfortable or might not have had the need to identify racially in their home country. These discussions are vital for all teachers to learn so that they, in turn, can facilitate these critical conversations in classrooms with children. Especially learning how to engage in critical conversations about race and racism in the U.S. context is imperative.

Instead of only focusing on the Black-white binary and anti-Blackness when it comes to discussions about race and racism in the U.S., teacher educators need to be aware and also consider how racism manifests and affects other racially-minitized individuals and communities (Alcoff, 2003; Chen et al., 1994), including other racial groups like Asians, South-Asians, Latinx, Indigenous and multiracial individuals among others. These intersectionally minoritized people need to be represented in the curricula and syllabi. This was evident in Alex’s and Eduvigés’s poetic counter-stories, as they both identified as mixed-race.

**Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs**

It is not only incumbent on teacher educators to individually take charge of the necessary transformation in the field, but also it is the responsibility of the institutions
of higher education where teacher education programs are located to critically reconceptualize and break the systemic barriers that create obstacles for all teachers of color. Especially pertaining to immigrant and transnational teachers of color, teacher education programs need to provide supports for emotional and psychological counselling services, as well as academic support, including access to language supports and guidance navigating academic spaces. Providing spaces where teachers of color can engage in reflection and dialogue about how they understand racial and ethnic identity is imperative. These supports must be institutional and not the responsibility of faculty, especially faculty of color who are already overburdened with the demands of academia (Moule, 2005).

Witnessing my participants’ counter-stories and the collective poetic testimonio, I recommend that teacher education programs commit to justice and equity work by creating more welcoming spaces, especially if they want to recruit and retain intersectionally minoritized teachers of color, an imperative for the profession of early childhood education. Departing from the centering of whiteness in the preparation of teachers of color in her review of literature, Brown (2014) denounced “how the dominant, (dis)embodied and normalized culture of whiteness, white privilege and white hegemony pervades contemporary teacher education” (p. 326) and continues to compromise the preparation of teachers of color. Recruiting and retaining teachers of color must entail the consideration and removal of pressing challenges and emotional hardships they might encounter in teacher preparation programs instead of simply adding pre-service teachers of color to existing teacher education programs as they are.
To be sure, the extant teacher education literature has documented many challenges programs face in aptly preparing pre-service teachers of color—as well as in preparing all teachers to effectively teach students of color (Brown, 2014; Milner 2010; Sleeter 2008; Souto-Manning, 2019a, 2019c; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). These obstacles need to be critically examined and removed by consulting with and learning from teachers of color.

**Recommendations for Teacher Education Policy**

Given the findings of my study, and honoring the testimonio of my participants, it is imperative to make changes to policy that discriminates against teachers from immigrant/transnational backgrounds. As the findings suggest, teacher certification and requirements were overwhelming and extremely challenging for most of my participants. Researchers have made a case for overhauling the edTPA and reconceptualizing teacher certification and assessment (Souto-Manning, 2019b). This needs to be urgently addressed by policy makers if we are to address the demographic imperative and recruit, prepare, and retain a more diverse workforce in early childhood teaching.

Learning from the literature, firstly we need to acknowledge that privatization and standardization in education dehumanizes teaching and position teachers of color from a deficit paradigmatic perspective. Secondly, race and ethnicity have recently become focal in research pertaining to early childhood teachers of color and the edTPA, comprising significant obstacles to the certification of teachers of color and leading some not to even attempt the edTPA as have been overwhelmed, intimidated or felt judged by the standardization and assessment of the edTPA (e.g., Souto-Manning,
2019b; Souto-Manning et al., 2019). Finally, there is also an urgent need to address the assumptions about *quality* in early childhood education (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018) to center the experiences of communities of color which have been historically marginalized.

Teacher certification requirements and the need for teachers to have a master’s degree to be eligible to teach in New York State create obstacles for all individuals who are interested in teaching; especially for people who are dominant in languages other than English, as was the case for Eduviges and Alex. Requirements for teacher certification and licensure should mitigate these obstacles and provide supports for, and simplify the policies and processes, provide financial aid, and ensure mentoring opportunities for immigrant and transnational teachers of color.

U.S. immigration laws in general are a point of great contention at this moment as the Trump presidency continues. Another implication for policy is that current immigration laws that make it challenging for immigrant/transnational teachers from participating in public and private education. This is mainly because of high costs to hire immigration lawyers, getting an employer to sponsor a work permit, and (de)valuing the teacher certification and licensing from other nation-states. For instance, in the case of Mei, because she is not a permanent resident or a citizen of the U.S., she is not allowed to renew her certification after five years, nor is she eligible to be employed by the public school system without the certification. Considering the dire need to diversify the teacher workforce, immigration laws must account for teachers from diverse backgrounds to have access to teach in U.S. settings. This will in turn allow immigrant children and children of immigrants to access teachers like them.
Immigrant and transnational teachers need to have access to their rights and equality of pay. Teacher education policy can work toward being more just to provide access for hiring and supporting immigrant/transnational teachers in public and private school systems. For example, Patricia spoke about the challenges she faced with immigration as well as getting a work permit, even though she was at a Catholic (private) school. Patricia’s experiences with discrimination also connect with the experiences of Zara, a U.S. citizen by birth, who faced challenges in being hired as an educational leader even at the time this research took place. My participants’ counter-stories collectively call for a transformative stance toward teacher education policy, practice, and research.

**Recommendations for Teacher Education Research**

Evident in my literature review (Chapter II) and the findings from this study is the issue of under-representation of intersectionally minoritized teachers. Particularly in the U.S. context, teacher education research needs to further explore teacher identity, attending to the convergence of immigration and racialization. Another implication is that teacher education research needs to learn how to acknowledge how immigrant and transnational teachers are making sense of their racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities in the U.S. context. If these remain unexamined, they can be potentially damaging to the children in early childhood classrooms.

As all my participants shared, they were not used to having conversations about race and racism in their home context and therefore either learned more about it or are still reluctant to participate in these conversations. Racial identity development and the examination of implicit and explicit bias needs to be researched further to
understand how teachers conceptualize and manifest these in their practice (Leonardo, 2004). I also suggest that there is a need for further research and scholarship that calls for or examines culturally responsive teacher education. By this I mean teacher education practices that are centered on the identities and experiences of teachers of color, including immigrant and transnational teachers.

The objective of this dissertation study was to expand and deepen the field’s understanding of how immigrant and transnational teachers negotiate what it means to (re)learn to teach in the U.S. context and how they navigate these spaces of transition. The findings are not generalizable but can shed light onto diverse contexts and help the field envision possibilities to address issues of access and representation in early childhood teaching and teacher education.

**Limitations**

I have worked towards strengthening the trustworthiness of this study by intentionally featuring the participants’ voices. However, I am aware as a researcher that there are limitations to any study. My theoretical framework of critical race theory and Nepantla supported my methodological choices of using poetic counter-stories and poetic testimonio to bear witness to the experiences of my participants.

The recruitment process was daunting as I have expressed in Chapters IV and V. Because of the current political atmosphere and the Trump Presidency (Gleeson & Sampat, 2018) around immigration in the U.S., it was difficult to find immigrant and transnational teachers of color who would trust me as a researcher to tell their personal and professional stories. I sought to recruit six participants to represent the diversity of immigrant populations in the U.S. and I found that it was easier to recruit participants...
who identified as Asian or South-Asian compared to recruiting participants who identified as Latinx or African. I was successful in recruiting two Latinx participants but did not find any participants from the African diaspora. This is a limitation, as this demographic is not represented.

Another limitation is that immigrant and transnational teachers belong to diverse backgrounds and therefore cannot be generalized. To be sure that my participants’ experiences were not essentialized, I made sure to use only the words they chose and agreed to in their poetic counter-stories and the cumulative poetic testimonio. However, when their stories were woven together as one in the testimonio, their voices amplified as they spoke back to the dominant narrative of whiteness in early childhood teaching and teacher education.

Language was a limitation. My language repertoire overlapped more considerably with those of some participants (those who spoke English in their home countries) and it only overlapped marginally with Eduviges’s and Alex’s. As such, I may not have been able to access some of the more nuanced understandings and cultural meaning making processes that are encoded into and shared by those who speak the same home language. Had I spoken Spanish, I may have had access to different data and have analytical insights emanating from a shared cultural intuition. Nevertheless, I had to either employ a translator or exclude them from this study—both of which were inadequate at best. I opted to include them (as Latinxs are the fastest growing demographics of children under five). Afraid that a translator would render the closeness we developed over the course of three interviews, I opted to rely on listening closely and adopt in vivo member checks.
Finally, because this study was about the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color, the scope of this study was very broad and did not delve into great detail about particular issues of race and immigration. I could have written an entire dissertation on each participant as they generously and boldly shared their stories and experiences with me. I plan to feature their experiences in my future scholarship.

**Conclusion**

I began this study with questions about my own experiences as a transnational teacher of color in the U.S. My dissertation research is based on the foundational belief that we need to acknowledge and value the experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers of color if we are to adequately prepare teachers for increasingly diverse early childhood classrooms. If we expect teachers to be culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining towards the children, as teacher educators, we need to practice what we teach (Cheruvu, 2014; Picower, 2012).

Throughout my process of becoming an early career teacher educator and a researcher, I realized that my research interests stem from personal beliefs and commitments to equity and justice. As I studied the literature in teacher education and learned more about the “overwhelming presence of whiteness” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 201), I also learned how teachers like me continue to be invisibilized and marginalized. It is my hope that this dissertation study provides an urgent call to action with a transformative stance towards including diverse voices in teacher education practice, programs, policy, and research. As Kudrat so eloquently put it:
You have a preconceived notion that you have been doing this for many years
This has worked

But what if you just listened to the experience of an immigrant teacher?
Just try
Maybe it will help you grow
I mean, you have done this for many years
Do you want to do that all the time?
Do you need more time?

It’s time!
REFERENCES


Appendices

Appendix A

Data Collection Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewing an Immigrant and/or Transnational Teacher of Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3 interviews/meetings with each participant. All interviews will be audio recorded.

**Main Research Question:**

*How do immigrant and transnational teachers of color with early childhood teaching experience in their home contexts experience and negotiate the process of (re)learning what it means to teach in the U.S. through teacher education programs in New York City?*

**Interview #1:** Establishing Rapport and addressing sub-question # 1.

How do these teachers describe their experiences with learning to teach and teaching in their home context(s)?

(For interview protocol questions see Appendix B)

After approximately 6-20 days I will conduct the 2nd interview.
**Interview #2: Exploring sub-question # 2.**

How do these teachers describe their experiences with (re)learning to teach and teaching in the U.S. context(s)?

(For interview protocol questions see Appendix B)

Noting “emotional hot points” during and after (using observation form. See Appendix C) for both interviews

Transcribing interviews (within 5 days of each interview)

After approximately 6-20 days I will conduct the 3rd interview.

**Interview/Meeting #3: Addressing sub-question # 3.** (see Appendix C)

In what ways do these teachers make sense of and interpret the similarities and differences in their experiences of teaching in their two contexts?

Co-constructing poetic counter-stories during third meeting (interview) with transcripts of previous interviews and member checking.

Here I will also record the participants’ response to their poetic counter-story and ask if any changes need to be made. (See Appendix B for prompts and questions)

I will further transcribe and code the third interview with the participant’s reactions to their previous transcripts and the poetries that will be co-constructed out of them.
After all 6 participants have completed all 3 rounds of the semi-structured interviews, I will

Construct a multi-voiced poetic testimonio (once all poetic counter-stories are completed).
Appendix B

Interview Protocol (3-step interview process)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW #1</th>
<th>Tell me a little about who you are, about yourself.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Rapport and Background</td>
<td>Where and when did you begin teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What was it like being an early childhood teacher in [home context]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Sub-Question 1</td>
<td>Can you talk to me about your preparation as a teacher in [home context]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus here is on prior experiences and naming one’s truth (CRT)</td>
<td>Can you briefly describe your role as a teacher there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you tell me more about your teaching experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From your perspective, what were key characteristics of a good early childhood teacher in [home context].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What influenced your decision to get into teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What was key in your preparation as an early childhood teacher in [home context]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How were you seen in the context of [home context]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Were you seen as part of the racially, culturally, and linguistically dominant/nondominant group? What did this mean? How did these positionings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me about coming to the U.S.</td>
<td>Tell me about coming to the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What were your experiences like?</td>
<td>What were your experiences like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What made you decide to come here?</td>
<td>What made you decide to come here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tell me about entering a teacher education program in the U.S.</td>
<td>Tell me about entering a teacher education program in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What were some of the differences about being an early childhood</td>
<td>What were some of the differences about being an early childhood teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher in [home context] and what you learned in your teacher</td>
<td>in [home context] and what you learned in your teacher education program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education program in the U.S.?</td>
<td>in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What were some of the similarities about being an early childhood</td>
<td>What were some of the similarities about being an early childhood teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher in [home context] and what you learned in your teacher</td>
<td>in [home context] and what you learned in your teacher education program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education program in the U.S.?</td>
<td>in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How were your prior experiences positioned in the teacher education</td>
<td>How were your prior experiences positioned in the teacher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program you were part of in the U.S.?</td>
<td>program you were part of in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What (if any) is the difference between being a teacher of Color</td>
<td>What (if any) is the difference between being a teacher of Color and a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and a white teacher?</td>
<td>white teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How were you seen in your teacher education program? (if needed,</td>
<td>How were you seen in your teacher education program? (if needed, follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>follow up:</td>
<td>up: How were you racialized?) can you give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about</td>
<td>Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becoming and being an early childhood teacher in [home context]?</td>
<td>becoming and being an early childhood teacher in [home context]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. inform your experience as a teacher in [home context]?</td>
<td>inform your experience as a teacher in [home context]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about</td>
<td>Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becoming and being an early childhood teacher in [home context]?</td>
<td>becoming and being an early childhood teacher in [home context]?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INTERVIEW #2**

Exploring the Second Research Sub-Question and (Re)Learning to Teach in U.S. Context

Focus is on Nepantla and In-betweenness, Along with CRT
me an example of one thing that was particularly challenging/overwhelming throughout the process of becoming a teacher in New York?

When we talk about your teacher education program, how would you describe it?

Could you tell me about some of your experiences with the program? How did you feel in your new role as a student of teaching?

Are there any particular classes or assignments that come to mind? Why or why not?

What do you think is the purpose of the program?

Given you already have experience with teaching young children, how did you experience the program? (if needed: what did you learn? How did you feel? How were you positioned by course syllabi/assignments/faculty/peers/mentor teachers)?

Tell me about how you navigated this transition (if needed: tell me about your journey navigating from being an early childhood teacher in [home country] to becoming an early childhood teacher in the US).
| Can you tell me about your experiences teaching in [home country] and in the U.S.? |
| How were these two teaching experiences similar or different? |
| How were you seen in the context of the U.S. and in the teacher education program of which you were part? |
| Were you seen as part of the racially, culturally, and linguistically dominant/nondominant group? What did this mean? How did these positionings inform your experiences becoming a teacher in the U.S.? |
| Is there anything in particular that you want to tell me about? |
| Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience in your teacher education program in the U.S.? |

| INTERVIEW #3 |
| Focus on Sub-Question 3. |
| Co-Constructing Poetic Counter-Stories. Focus on Poetic Inquiry and Participant Interpretations/Coding of Criticality (what stood out through the transcripts and why). |
| Thank you for all of your insights. Here is a copy of the transcripts of our two prior interviews with highlighted phrases/sections for you to review. I highlighted these phrases/sections because they seemed significant/important, but I want to ensure that I captured what is critical for you. Can you take a few minutes to read them? |
As I had mentioned, we will be co-constructing poetry with these transcripts together, so that we can better re-present your experience of becoming an early childhood teacher yet again in the context of a U.S. teacher education program.

Can you highlight three things that we discussed previously that stand out to you?

Here is what I have found so far, based on my observations of you during our previous interviews.

What do you think?

What have I missed?

What would you like to add/delete?

After creating poetry

How did you feel creating a poem to re-present your experience?

Can you read the poem to me?

How did you feel reading the poem representing your experience?

Based on your experience, what advice do you have for early childhood teacher education programs educating teachers who already have experience teaching in their home countries (teachers like you and me)? (if needed: What should be the same? What could be different?)

Is there anything else you’d like to share or say?
| Closing | I really appreciate your time and your willingness to share your valuable experiences with me.  

Once I have written up my final chapters, or if I have other questions, I will be in touch. Please feel free to be in touch if you have any questions or want to share additional information.  

Thank you! |
Appendix C

Observation of “emotional hot points”

This form will be used as I am reviewing to the audio recording of all interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview number and Date:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Stamp</th>
<th>Observation/Emotion</th>
<th>Observation meaning/Interpretations And Questions for next Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix D

Excerpt of Exploratory Study Interview

For coding, I paid attention to pauses, changes in rhythm, tone of voice, repetition, (nervous) laughter, and other emotional cues. I will do the same for my dissertation study, to help create the poetic counter-story, and eventually the poetic testimonio.

Participant Name: Alena
Date: November 3rd, 2017.
Time: 5.30 p.m.

Speaker 1: Okay, so, um, now just let me know, how do you feel about this? What, if any, is the difference between being a teacher of color and being a white teacher?
Alena:

What's the difference? Um, I know-
Alena:

I do, I do. (laughs)
Speaker 1:

(laughs)
Alena:

I think, oh man, this is a hard question. Um, I think there's obviously a lot of differences in being a teacher of color, being a white teacher. Give me one second.
Speaker 1: Yeah.
Alena:

I mean, I think it obviously goes back to the whole, we have to work harder-
Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Alena:

To get appreciated, type of thing.
Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Alena:

Or it's, we have to work more hard because we, we need to show that we got to this sort of position not because of our race but because we deserve to be here. I mean, not that, for a lot of people teaching is lucrative, or what, or whatnot. But it is, um, you know, you still have to show that you know what you're doing. Um, repeat the question again?
(This is where the race question came in. I knew Alena, yet, she seemed a bit hesitant to talk about race. She laughed to make light of the situation and seemed slightly uncomfortable but answered anyway).
Speaker 1: Um, what, if any, is the difference between being a teacher of color and a white teacher?
Alena:

There's a lot of differences. (laughs)
Speaker 1: Tell me about them. Tell me more.
Alena:

I'm trying to think, because like, my background right now, I'm in a predominantly, um, African American, black, um, and Hispanic school.
Speaker 1: Okay.
Alena:

With a lot of the teachers being people of color.
Speaker 1: Uh-huh.
Alena:

Um, we do have some white staff, and I think at the same time, the, we're similar in that we're trying to get these children to, um, get them to read and whatnot, um, but then we also have a charter school where the teachers are predominantly white.
Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Alena:

And for me, this probably goes off, not even answering the question, but I think for white teachers is a bit easier, maybe, for them to get ... I feel like I'm not answering, I'm so sorry.
(Here Alena was saying that she felt it was easier for white teachers, but then apologized and hesitated. Maybe she thought it wasn't appropriate to say this. Think about how to handle this discomfort in future interviews for dissertation).
Speaker 1: No, it's fine. Just uh, tell me how you feel.
(Here I tried to facilitate the dialogue. Alena then shared how she saw the disparity in interviewing for jobs).
Alena:

I don't know, do I, can I, is like, I guess it's easier for white people to get the job compared to, like, me. You know, I interviewed places-
Speaker 1: Uh-huh.
Alena:

And you go into a school that's predominantly white and you're like, oh.
Speaker 1: Okay.
Alena:

Like, what am I gonna get out of this? Or like-
Speaker 1: You had that experience?
Alena:

Yeah, I mean, you interview, yeah, you go into an interview and you're like, oh, like is this a school for me because-
Speaker 1: Uh-huh.
Alena:

It is a white school with a lot of white kids. And I think it is completely different where like, perhaps people have this mindset, like, oh white teachers should be teaching white kids, type of thing.

(Alena was questioning many things. As we spoke, she mentioned how it “was easier for white teachers” and spoke about teaching children of color or teaching at a school that serves children of color).

This interview was a pivotal point in my research journey as it made me question more about the in-betweenness that teachers of color feel when they are in spaces which are predominantly white. Unknowingly at the time, this particular participant was also a Mexican immigrant teacher. Later, as my research question changed to focus on immigrant and transnational teachers of color, I realized that this aspect of Alena’s personality was made invisible by the questions I had asked. For my dissertation, I want to be more mindful of these aspects of identity and in-betweenness and make space for discomfort.
Appendix E

Consent Forms

Title of Research Study: “Acknowledging and Valuing the Experiences of Immigrant/Transnational Teachers of Color in Early Childhood Teacher Education”

Researcher Name: Ayesha Rabadi-Raol

Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral student, working on my dissertation study, “Acknowledging and Valuing the Experiences of Immigrant/Transnational Teachers of Color in Early Childhood Teacher Education” from Teachers College, Columbia University. My study aims to document the valuable experiences of immigrant and transnational teachers within early childhood teacher education programs. My purpose is to share these experiences with other teachers, prospective teachers, administrators, and policymakers in the hopes of influencing policies that will include the voices of immigrant and transnational teachers in early childhood teacher education.

The study will involve me interviewing you three times during the next few months, per your availability and convenience. With your permission, these interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Once transcribed, I will bring copies of the transcriptions for you to check. We will co-construct a poetic analysis of these interview transcripts based on our interpretations of your experiences.

I anticipate no risks for participation in the study, as no identities of will be revealed. The final product of the study will be used only for educational purposes. No profit will be made.

Please understand that participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you will be offered opportunity to review and have input to the representation before it is finalized. Should you decide not to participate, please be assured that your decision will not be held against you in any way. Should you agree to participate but change your mind later, your wishes will be respected.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can contact me, Ayesha Rabadi-Raol at rabadi@tc.edu. Thank you for considering this request. By signing the statement below, you give your permission to be included in this work and to allow it to be used for publication. By signing the statement below, you indicate your understanding that there will be no monetary compensation for this release.

Sincerely,
Ayesha Rabadi-Raol
Name of teacher:

I ________________________________ (teacher), consent to participate in the study of “Acknowledging and Valuing the Experiences of Immigrant/Transnational Teachers of Color in Early Childhood Teacher Education,” which will involve three audio-taped interviews. I also agree to allow this work to be used in other media formats for educational and professional development purposes.

__________________________________________________
Signature of participant                                      Date

__________________________________________________
Email and phone contact information

__________________________________________________
Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent

__________________________________________________
Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent                      Date
Appendix F

Data Strips (Piecing together a Poetic Counter-Story)

Start from where they understand you're improving their understanding power

you need to give some space to children to express their feelings

To teach them empathy and compassion

every day I looked forward to work with children and with um, my coworkers

It's a positive environment for them. Their brains, start questioning.

When one child speaks, the other child is more confident

So when you sit down, you learn from your parents. What do you pass down to your children?

And they felt they were engaged. Less violence.

because I worked with children, I was in the classroom, so I felt like those were my children

I spend a lot of time for them to bring their voices

Are we allowing children to gain a sense of independence?

you need a lot of effort, right. From parents, teachers working as a team of the triangle

It was challenging

You are a human being. You're very different.

It's a beautiful thing.

It wasn't easy

You also go with the flow

I became very flexible...

this is how we can change it from negative to positive, positive to more positive

But I was hesitant

It is difficult to pass this certification test than to do the teacher's program

Yes, you can do it

I love the journey

So, it was an achievement

Then you just start walking, then you run and you love it. Then you have a passion about it.

I had to put an effort