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Teachers of Color's Perception on Identity and Academic Success: A Reflective Narrative

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TEACHERS OF COLOR'S PERCEPTION ON IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS:

A REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

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Research and scholarship in multicultural education has consistently affirmed that as a result of the long standing racial academic achievement gap and the current teaching force not reflecting the changing demographics of students in the United States, students of color continue to be deprived from having teachers who look like them and who may bring similar life, social, and cultural experiences that can increase the value they place on academics. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers of color and how they perceive their identity as significant and meaningful to their profession and its influential impact on the academic success of students of color. It is the role-model premise that students can benefit from seeing teachers with similar racial/ethnic background in a position of authority in school. This research was grounded on the depth that qualitative inquiry brings to the field of education and was critical to the ongoing thematic interpretation of teachers of colors' often preconceived views of identity. Findings were extracted from 14 teachers of color participants who were engaged in a reflective process that revealed emerging themes from their individual and common perceptions and experiences. This study affirms that teachers of color are vital in the education system and as anticipated, their reflective narratives each produced a landscape of stories that brought meaning into their different backgrounds, personal stories, challenges, belief system, and

career that surfaced their initial motivation for entering the teaching profession. This study is also embedded within a framework that draws particularly from two theoretical lenses; identity theory and identity construction theory. Employing identity studies to teachers is an extension of ways in which theoretical views intersects with teachers' lives, experiences and perceptions of their role and educational practices. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (http://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Currently, the student population throughout the United States is increasingly diverse, yet the teacher population does not reflect this diversity. This lack of diversity in the teaching force deprives students of color from having role models of the same race who look like them and who might have experiences which are similar to theirs (Epstein, 2005; Nettles & Perna, 1997). Having role models from their own race in the classroom can have a positive impact on students' attitudes about school (Perine, 2003), and facilitate their learning on various subject matter, and give students an incentive to do well in school (Vegas et al., 2001). This research study explored the lived experiences of teachers of color and how they perceived their identity, as role models, as being significant and meaningful to students of color.

Teachers bring themselves–their life experiences, histories, and cultures into the classroom. They bring their assumptions and beliefs about what a good teacher is and does, their knowledge of education theory, research, and human development, and their love and knowledge of content areas. They bring their personalities and teaching styles that are shaped by social and cultural interactions. Teachers, most of all, bring their racial identities to school. With the teaching force being majority White, and not reflecting the changing demographics of students and the long standing racial academic achievement gap, it was fair to question if a teacher's racial identity can contribute to the success of the students (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). With the disproportionate gap on teacher diversity, it was also fair to assess that there is a vision gap for students of color. These students need more mirrors i.e., they need to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and see teachers who reflect back to them their language, their culture, their ethnicity, religion, and their experiences (Achinstein et al., 2010). This is the gap that can arise in

how students of color view themselves as future professional because it is difficult for students to be what they cannot see.

The questions "Who am I" and "What kind of teacher do I want to be?" have been addressed by teachers for many years, but only in more recent years have researchers recognized the importance of these questions to the teaching profession as a whole (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007). These authors suggested that identity construction means building a personal sense of the world along with developing a clear understanding of how teachers see themselves interacting with others and as role models. Thomas and Beauchamp (2007) argued that professional identity stands at the core of the profession and thereby provides the framework for teachers in the construction of their own ideas of "how to be" and "how to act" as a teacher (p. 230). The critical importance of identity is also suggested by Palmer (2007) who noted that understanding identity is a process of interpreting and re-interpreting and not a fixed attribute. Palmer wrote that our teaching experiences reveal who we are and that "teaching holds a mirror to the soul" (p. 3), adding that we cannot know our students until we know ourselves. In our teaching, continued Palmer, "We teach who we are" (p. 2).

Positionality

My interest in this topic stems from never having a teacher of color or one who shared the same cultural heritage until I entered graduate school. My teachers have represented what is widely known and researched about the current teacher workforce—White, English-speaking, monolingual, middle class, and female (Driessen, 2015; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Grissom et al., 2017; Vilson, 2016). The racial and linguistic diversity of the teacher population is limited and does not come close to matching the increasing diversity of the U.S. student population. It has always stirred within me an interest to examine existing statistics, explore arguments, and

critique analyses on the state of teachers of color. I have had a keen interest in having conversations with teachers of color and students of color on their perceptions on identity and its' effects on learning, motivation, and academic growth.

Statement of the Problem

The general problem is that K-12 teachers of color are underrepresented in the United States (Egalite et al., 2015) and the gaps in academic achievement between non-White students and their fellow Blacks, Hispanics, Southeast Asians, Native Americans and Pacific Islander students is significantly wide (Hansen et al., 2018). Specifically, Black teachers represent only 7% of the teacher workforce (Farinde et al., 2015), Hispanic teachers 8%, Asian teachers 2% and American Indian, Alaska Native and Pacific Islanders half percent (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2016). This shortage and invisibility of role models can be detrimental to students of color not having the experience of being exposed to or taught by teachers of color (Atkins et al., 2014; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Gay, 2018).

This visibility is a great start to addressing teachers as role models, which is significant for all students. When students see someone of their own race as a professional early in their life they may realize that they too can walk in the same path, which can then raise their expectations and motivation levels.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers of color's perceptions on how meaningful their racial identity is to their profession and how influential it is to the academic success of students of color. It is the role-model premise that students can benefit from seeing teachers with a similar racial/ethnic background in a position of authority in school (Ouazad, 2014; Solomon, 1997). This representation could increase the value students place on academic success and

reduce the stigmas related to students of color. This study focused on a sample group of teachers of color who engaged in a reflective process about their role and presence in the classroom as a member of a minority group in the teaching force. This reflective narrative produced a landscape of stories and perspectives that brought meaning into the teachers' reflections on how influential they perceive their identity is on all students, particularly students of color.

Research Question

Understanding that there is complexity in bringing identity into the classroom, reflective narratives from teachers' perspectives that surfaced to examine how teachers embrace the whole classroom in a way that students become aware of their ethnic identity. Stemming from multiple questions, the primary research questions that guided this narrative inquiry are: how do teachers of color perceive their identity as being meaningful to them as teachers, and: in what ways do teachers of color perceive their identity as meaningful to the success of students of color?

Significance of the Study

Though concerning in any profession, the disproportionate number of teachers of color in K-12 is particularly noteworthy because a growing body of research suggests that students could benefit from assignment to teachers of their own race/ethnicity (Ehrenbert et al., 1995; Phillip., 2017; Quiocho & Rios, 2000).

For clarification, this research is not making the argument that only teachers of color can successfully teach students of color. However, many practitioners, policy makers, and others in the education community have claimed that teachers of color are uniquely positioned to improve the performance of students of color directly or indirectly, by serving as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators (Pitts, 2007; Villagomez et al., Vilson, 2016). This has resulted in calls from prominent politicians and education administrators for the large-scale recruitment

of ethnic minority teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In some cases, state policies have been enacted to recruit teachers of color. Whether or not assignment to a teacher of the same race/ethnicity is related to student achievement is an empirical question that has yet to be fully resolved. This study also adds to a growing body of research on the value of diversifying the teaching force for the benefit of all students.

Research indicates, specifically, that African Americans who have role models in school have higher educational aspirations (Pitts, 2007). Evidence suggested that good role modeling, especially with teachers, is related to better grades, higher persistence, and higher satisfaction with campus life both in secondary and higher education (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Egalite et al., 2015). Through this narrative data analysis, this study explored various perspectives of teachers of color's (a) perceived importance of roles models on students of color, (b) presence and absence of role models, (c) value on having a role model of the same race, and (d) position on teacher identity and academic performance.

The findings of the proposed study may have the potential to contribute to the limited existing body of knowledge by informing teacher education programs, schools, and stakeholders regarding the value of teachers of colors' identity and the importance of their presence in K-12 classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Employing identity studies to teachers is an extension of ways in which theoretical views intersects with teachers' lives, experiences, and perceptions of their role, influence, and educational practices. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) pointed out that teacher identity has become the focus of much theoretical and empirical investigation in teacher education. Teacher identity, being recognized as a certain "kind of person" in a given context (Gee, 2000, p. 99), has

been theorized not as predetermined or given, but rather as constructed within an active process of creation and recreation that is reflected in Britzman's (2003) description of "learning to teach" as "the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become" (p. 31).

This study is embedded within a framework that draws particularly from two theoretical lenses; identity theory (Golden, 2017; Stryker & Burke, 2000) and identity construction theory (Dickinson, 2012; Trent, 2010; Turner et al., 1987; Wenger, 1998). Central to the base of identity theory is a person's social position or *roles* (Stryker & Burke, 2000) and because teacher identity highlights the roles of culture, history, and power, identity theory conceptualizes the self. It is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications (Grissom et al., 2015). Wenger's (1998) theory of identity formation in a community emphasizes the role of participation with others in socially valued activities and has been previously used to understand teachers' identity construction. In other words, identity construction theory involves experiences, relationships, and connections. Figuratively, it can involve symbolical representation of thoughts in an expressive way, creating a conceptual visual representation (Pitts, 2007). These two sets of theories, woven together, highlighted the elements that support my analysis on teachers of colors' visible facets through their narratives on how they perceive identity as influential to their students.

Methodological Approach

In choosing a qualitative approach for this research study, I am inspired by the quality and depth that qualitative inquiry brings to the field of education and in particular, its suitability to my study of teachers of color and the significance of their identity in student success.

I recognize the role that the researcher plays in qualitative studies as balancing one's own understanding of how experiences reflect and dictate our perception of others' experiences. Thus, the reflexive journey that is undertaken in qualitative research is crucial to the ongoing interpretation of others' lived experiences (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006; Etherington, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). I focused on the method of critical narrative inquiry, with the intention of capturing the lived experiences of teachers' often preconceived views of self, ethnicity, and race, and its influential effects on students through their stories.

Narrative inquiry is one of five distinct approaches of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2006). It is a means of "collecting, analyzing, and re-presenting people's stories as told by them" (Creswell, 2006, p. 75). They are stories that often challenge traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge, and personhood. Such gathering of stories can be harvested in a variety of creative ways: unstructured interviews, conversations, written stories, journals, diaries, video diaries, metaphors, poems, symbols, photographs, lifelines, identity boxes, and drawings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Etherington, 2004). It is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). This approach is reinforced by feminist postmodern values concerned with collaboration and reflexivity (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Narrative inquiry brings into play philosophical influences that include memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understanding about a person or group, their culture, and how they have effected change. Therefore, it is important that researchers state their philosophical position and show how it influences their research practices (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2004). It is also important to note that the researcher's discovery of complex patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact a person's knowledge are viewed from specific cultural standpoints, which may add to the depth of information gathered for research and affect its analysis. Narrative inquiry is a bridge between research and practice (Etherington, 2007).

I chose the narrative inquiry approach as appropriate for this study with the understanding that writing teachers' narratives is also an interpretation of lived experiences and a combination of the experiences of the researcher and participants. There is an assumption rooted in the narrative process that a researcher's own history and identity plays a significant part in constructing the participant's story (Lyons, 2007). This assumption required for me, as the researcher, to ask in what way have I grown and shaped the research process. I took reflection notes after each interview and when listening to the transcripts, I was able to critique my interview style. Due to the nature of the study and sensitivity of the issues being explored, it was imperative that the methodology be open to an in-depth opportunity for participants to share their stories and reflect on critical aspects to form a first-order narrative (Carr & Klassen, 1997).

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured and unstructured type interviewing technique with participants. Polkinghorne (2005) described the semi-structured interview as the data that comes from a set of or a guiding question, following the lead of the informant, and asking probing questions accordingly. Narrative inquiry listens for the "how" and "why" of stories, listening for images that are used to communicate meaning, looking for gaps, understanding cultural context, and finding unique insights (Riessman, 2012, pp. 11–33).

A purposeful sample of 14 teachers of color were identified and selected from within the city of Seattle and its neighboring school districts. This purposive sample represented a variety

of minority teachers from various racial/ethnic backgrounds who are underrepresented in the teaching force and represent many marginalized students in the Seattle region. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 90 minutes. Additionally, participant interviews were conducted until the study reaches saturation. Saturation indicates that, on the basis of the data that have been collected or analyzed, the researcher has finally come to a point that new information obtained can no longer provide additional insight to the understanding of the category (Saunders et al., 2018).

Natural setting is one of the characteristics of qualitative research. This is where researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (Creswell & Poth, 2017), but it can also mean that a participant is free to choose a comfortable location of their choice. Audio recordings for each interview session were made approximately over a four-week period using Dedoose, a software application for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis used to assist and expedite the transcription and coding for the analysis. When needed, each transcribed manuscript was checked for verbal and non-verbal actions to note transcription fluency marks as defined by Saunders et al. (2018) and against the recording for accuracy.

Once data was transcribed, a copy of the transcription was emailed to each participant for approval of their individual transcript. I analyzed the data by creating codes through Dedoose, e.g., chronology (epiphanies and events) and the three-dimensional space model (interactions, continuity, situation) and themes that arose from the story. These codes are the commonplaces and experiences of the teachers in accordance with Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) concept of "Defining and balancing the commonplaces" (p. 482) and building "commonplace features" of the research into the study (Clandinin et al., 2007). This is one of the goals of narrative research

text analysis and interpretation. A second goal in analyzing the research is to position the interviews within the context of "the social, cultural, and institutional narratives in which the individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 29). A final goal is to define further research opportunities that may surface from this study.

Ethical Consideration

Before conducting this study, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was needed. This is necessary to make sure all guidelines for the study adhere to the ethical principles as outlined in accordance to research methods involving the safety and well-being of human subjects by the IRB. This is critical as researchers work closely with research participants over a period of time and frequently in the face-to-face mode (where researcher-participant relationships play an important role in the research outcomes). Narrative researchers gather a great deal of highly detailed information that may result in long, very personal stories. The use of informed and voluntary consent was given to participants that informed them of their rights to participate and withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were ensured, as stated in the consent form, that all information was confidential and names replaced with pseudonyms so that none of the participants' identities or identifying information be revealed.

Limitations

Beyond the advantages of qualitative research, some limitations can be argued. Using two prominent characteristics of qualitative and narrative methods in this study, for example, the small sample size and open-ended narrative interviews as explained in more detail in Chapter III, Flick (2018) argued that qualitative research is time consuming, while Harry and Lipsky (2014) noted that small sample size raises the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research. Darlington and Scott (2002) pointed out that generalizability seems not to be a

problem, "If one considers the unit of attention as the phenomenon under investigation, rather than the number of individuals, then the sample is often much larger than first appears" (p. 4). Narrative's reasonings, according to Sykes and Gale (2006), defined it as the "science of the imagination" that seeks to understand human experience and purpose (p. 22).

Moreover, Shenton (2004) added that no educational research (either quantitative or qualitative) ought to be regarded as generalizable, because too many contextual variables can shape the findings. For example, if a student of color is unable to demonstrate enough proficiency in reading or math, quantitative measures, like test scores, may indicate that the teacher is to be criticized. On the other hand, the test scores fail to consider the classroom environment, students' home life, student-teacher relationship, and other crucial factors. Downer et al., (2016) argued that the qualitative researcher can inform stakeholders what works as the qualitative research provides the thick description of experience. Additionally, Berg and Lune (2014) commented that, "Qualitative research is a long hard road, with elusive data on one side and stringent requirements for analysis on the other" (p. 4). Along with the data interpretation and analysis issue, the refining questions in qualitative and narrative methods may be continuous throughout a whole study.

A possible limitation of this study may be research bias as the researcher is a teacher of color with its own experiences, insights, biases, and attitudes. Bias can be reduced if the researcher carefully listens to the participants without any negative viewpoints or disagreements. Bias can also be reduced through researcher reflexivity as reflexivity is only a way of thinking, not a method. Reflexivity requires explicit self-consciousness and self-assessment by the researcher about their views and positions and how they may influence design, execution, and interpretation of the research data and findings (Etherington, 2004, 2007). It is imperative that

the researcher maintains a reflexive approach because it ensures critically how the researcher is involved. The small number of participants is also a limitation of the study. However, in qualitative research, a sample size such as this is acceptable. The transferability of the study may be limited due to the responses from only 14 participants in Seattle.

This research study consisted of some delimiting factors. The first factor is the study is delimited to only teachers of color who have had the experience of teaching in mostly urban school districts. While qualitative research does not aim to achieve generalizability, this study's findings applied to teachers of color in rural school districts and in both urban and rural schools outside Washington state who had similar experiences. However, it is important to note that because findings of narrative research studies are unique to a small number of individuals, it is difficult to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions apply in the same way or are transferable to other situations and populations. Second, the participants were both male and female minority teachers. Limiting the study to one gender would have made it difficult to form the sample needed to conduct the study due to the current shortage of teachers of color.

Terminology

A brief explanation of terms are used in order to enhance readers' understanding of this study. I use the plural of "*teacher identity*" [teacher identities] since most of the literature considers teachers to assume multiple identities that are determined by the social context of their interactions.

Teacher Identity: What constitutes a teacher's identity? Who determines what makes a good teacher? For Dewey (1938), experience, education, and life were one and the same. He saw an individual's experience as a central lens for understanding a person and the keys to educational experience as a central lens for the principle of interaction and continuity. To

understand a teacher's identity, one must understand the teacher's life. Drawing on Dewey's theory of experience and education, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) approached the issue of teacher identity from the perspective of teachers' experiences and voices suggesting that "our identities are composed and improvised as we go about living our lives embodying knowledge and engaging our contexts" (p. 4). Our stories and experiences are the narrative expressions of who we are in our worlds.

For many of us, the concept of learning immediately conjures up images of classrooms, training sessions, teachers, textbooks, homework, and exercises. Yet for Wenger (1998), learning is an integral part of our everyday lives. Wenger argued that we all belong to several communities of practice everywhere and at any given time. Many educational researchers have adopted a variety of theoretical positions such as sociocultural, poststructuralist and feminist perspectives to study identity (Gaither, 2018; Skeete, 2006), focusing on various aspects such as racial identity (Cheruvu, 2014), linguistic identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), cultural identity (Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015), national identity (Barrett & Davis, 2008), gender identity (Dee, 2005), and professional identity (Rus et al., 2013), to name just a few. Even the most theoretically sophisticated researchers would have problems navigating their way through the incommensurate constructs used to study identity or developing an integrated perspective out of the diverse movements contributing to this discourse (Norton & Yearly, 2011; Wenger, 1998). In this research study, I use the term "identity" to mean "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton & Yearly, 2011, p. 5).

In the context of K-12 teaching, the term *professional identities* is currently agreed/based upon the fact that teachers' perspective about their role and the nature of teaching and learning

influence their work behavior, sense of well-being and work effectiveness (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010, 2011). This emphasizes a greater importance on the prototype of educator with whom a teacher identifies him/herself. The literature on teachers' professional identity can be traced down into three categories of studies, based on their focus on different aspects of this concept: (1) teachers' professional identity formation and development, (2) identification of characteristics of teachers' professional identity, and (3) professional identity (re)presented by teachers' stories (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011).

Bridging Identity: This is the type of identity that makes the connection between past biographical experiences with one's occupational role. Regarding teacher identity construction, the term bridging identity highlights how past biographical identities contribute to the way that teachers define their professional role in light of their cultural minority background (Galindo, 1996). In addition, the practice affirms the experiences of teachers in relation to their students.

Students of Color: They are the majority student population in America's schools today and have exceeded their minority status (Borrero et al., 2016). Throughout the research, the term students of color will be used to identify them. Students of color include students who identify as Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian, Black (African-American), Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander.

Teachers of Color: The term *minority* today has been generalized and can choose from several identities other than race. Therefore, throughout the research, teachers of color is used to specifically describe the participants as members of a shared group. "People [Teachers] of color is the new entry in the portfolios of nonwhites, who identify primarily as Hispanic; Black; Asians; Pacific Islander; American Indian and Alaska Native" (Perez, 2020, p. 10).

Racism in Education: Racism is the creation or maintenance of a racial hierarchy, supported through institutional power (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Schooling in the U.S. has a history driven by racialization and racism. From Americanization schools and Native American boarding schools that spanned the 19th and much of the 20th century, to a socialization of inferiority in segregated schools serving African Americans and Mexican Americans (Kohli & Pizzaro, 2016), students of color have been subjected to institutionalized conditions that challenge their interests and their humanity.

Urban schools: Urban schools are schools that are located in the city. Urban schools house students that are linguistically and culturally diverse. Sixty-five percent of the student population is mainly Blacks, Latino, Pacific Islanders and Asians (NCES, 2016). The teacher population usually does not match the student population.

Achievement Gap: This term in education refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as White students and minority students of color, for example, or students from higher-income and lower income status or households. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures (Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002; Villegas et al., 2012).

Vision Gap: This term refers to the lack of visibility of teachers of color for students of color. It is with the assumption that it is difficult to enter a profession or motivate students to excel in school, where they cannot see their culture, values, and identity represented. This is the gap that can arise in how students of color view themselves as future professionals because it is difficult for students to be what they cannot see (Achinstein et al., 2010).

Pacific Islanders: Native Hawaiian and/or other Pacific Islanders who have ethnic ancestry among the indigenous peoples of Oceania (Polynesians, Melanesians, and Micronesians). Specifically, the term refers to people having origins in any of the original people of Hawaii, Guam, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, the Marshalls or other Pacific Islands (Teranishi et al., 2009)

Role Models: A role model is a person who inspires and encourages others to strive for greatness, live their fullest potential and see the best in themselves. A role model is someone who is admired and someone who others aspire to be like (Gershenson et al., 2018; Goings & Bianco, 2016).

First-Order Narratives: Narratives have been defined as first and second order (Carr & Klassen, 1997). The first order narrative is where the individual tells the stories of themselves or about themselves, classified as ontological narrative. Second order narrative is the researchers' account of the other stories used to present explanations of social and cultural knowledge, described as representational narrative (Somers & Gibson, 1994).

Overview of Chapters

Chapter I introduced the research study situating my position as the researcher, establishing the purpose of the study, methodology, nature of the study, and the questions it seeks to answer while highlighting the theoretical frameworks of identity and identity construction theories used to study teachers of colors' identity and its influential effects on students of color.

Chapter II is a critical review and examination of the literature. I discussed the path I took in trying to understand what existed in regards to the achievement gap, lack of teachers of color in the teaching force, and the high demands for minority teachers all leading to the unique

positionality that teachers of color offer to the education of students of color. The exploration of the literature demonstrates the necessity to examine the lived experiences of teachers of color in the context of their roles as agents of change. The literature review also reflects a scholarly array of documentation that gave validation and support towards greater racial justice within educational contexts.

Chapter III employed the rationale for the methodology and the origin of narrative inquiry. It also seeks to establish a foundation of biographical narratives and emergent themes based on the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers of color. This section is followed by a description and justification for the study's methods, which includes the selection of participants, collection of data, and the assessment of findings.

Chapter IV introduces the participants who were elected to participate in the study. Findings were presented from the narrative voices and personal journey traveled by the teachers. These narratives began to identify emergent and recurring themes and commonalities of the narratives.

Chapter V cross-examined the narratives to locate the recurring themes in the stories that are shared and link it back to the foundational literature and extant research. It provided insights determined from the stories, a discussion of the implications for further research, and new ideas intended to assist policymakers, stakeholders, and professional development in the education system for how teacher educators might engage teachers in identity work.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

While all teachers require intentional, culturally based preparation to reach an increasingly diverse student population, greater diversity in the teaching profession can also have positive impacts on student educational experiences and outcomes. This is especially true for students of color, who have demonstrated greater achievement and social development in classes with teachers of color.

The review of the literature identifies the significant impact that teachers of color have on the success of students of color. Their presence and identity, directly or indirectly, can have positive implications on the education of students of color. The overwhelming White teaching force that has been examined by many researchers indicate that students of color, who rarely see adults of color in professional roles, implicitly learn the power structure in society is disproportionate (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Glaes-Coutts, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Adding to this disproportionality are the disparities in the achievement gap between White and non-White students that continues to be a persistent problem (Ouazad, 2014). With this underservicing and underrepresentation in the teaching force, how can the education system ensure that students of color succeed in the classroom to help narrow this race and ethnicity gap? As more ethnic diverse students populate America's 21st century classrooms, educators struggle to construct methods to help narrow this gap. The specific problem that justifies the need for this study is that it has become imperative that all teachers not only acquire competencies in culture and linguistic diversity, but also paramount that students have the opportunity to see and have teachers who look like them, particularly students of color.

A growing body of literature has drawn attention to the unique strengths of teachers of color (Foster, 1994; Lynn, 2016; Villagomez, 2016; Vilson, 2016). Some of these studies have

suggested that teachers of color are well matched to teach students of color because of their "cultural synchronicity" (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 180). These teachers' identity and deep understanding of the cultural and life experiences of students of color, it is argued, translates not only into effective teaching dispositions and practices, but also academic success. The scholarship on teachers of color attempts to walk a fine line when explicating these teachers' unique strengths: it stresses that teachers of color are not effective with students of color "merely by virtue of their race/ethnicity" (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 187) but also maintains that these teachers' cultural insights and experiences with racism and ethnocentricity "give them an advantage over their White colleagues in teaching students of color" (p. 187).

Schools across the country must engage in efforts to diversify the racial and ethnic makeup of their teachers. However, these efforts are perhaps the least successful of school campus diversity initiatives as teachers of color remain underrepresented and their achievements almost invisible (Gay, 2010; Pitts, 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Education at all levels should be responsive to the demands and opportunities of our nation's pluralistic makeup by developing a teaching force that reflects or mirrors the culture of the students.

In this chapter, I examined the literature and found a growing body of research indicating the value teachers of color add to the teaching profession and especially to students of color. These students can benefit from a teaching force that reflects the diverse society in which they must learn to live, work, and prosper. Adding to this literature review are continuing evidences that teachers of color bring more than just their race to the classroom. They bring and empower their identities as role models with cultural capital that benefit students' learning experiences (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Scholarship further indicated that the contributions of teachers of color often have knowledge of community and an ethics of care (Furrer et al., 2014) that positively

impact the academic and non-academic outcomes for students of color (Gershenson et al., 2016). Despite the challenges they experience with recruitment and retention, their incredible influence and visibility can have a lasting implication in the lives of all students. It has also stirred within me an interest to examine major existing statistics, explore arguments, and critique analyses on the state of teachers of color currently in the teaching force, and to further how I examine and analyze the literature on teachers of colors' perceptions on how meaningful their identity is on the students they reflect.

I began by making several strategic decisions that would define the limitations of this literature review and rely on the author's own descriptions of their work to determine whether to review a particular study. I also chose to limit the search on the basis of two criteria. First, I chose to look at studies of teachers of color as a general and broad descriptive category rather than focusing on any one specific ethnic group. Second, I chose to look at only those studies reported in scholarly journals. I chose this strategy because most articles published in scholarly journals have rigorous standards of review and are more widely distributed. This should not diminish the importance of the other sources of scholarship, especially given that issues of diversity continue to go against the grain of popular yet traditional academic journals and research.

After all the articles and references were collected and annotated, I began my review and analysis with attention to their (a) research purpose, (b) research questions, (c) methodology, (d) theoretical framework, (e) findings, (f) recommendations, and (g) conclusions. I was able to identify emerging themes from the literature that represented the various experiences and outcomes of teachers of color, their perception on identity, and what they contribute to the global classroom.

Teachers of Color—They Bring More Than Their Race

Teachers of color—that is, those outside the non-Hispanic white category—make up only 18% of public-school teaching force (Center for American Progress, 2016). As a result, almost every state has a large teacher-student diversity gap. For instance, students of color represent 73% of California's student enrollment but only 29% of the state's teachers are of color (Cheruvu et al., 2015). The differences can be even larger at the school-district level. These concerns are more pressing than ever as many students of color are failing to attain high levels of quality education.

Over the past 50 years, the United States has seen a dramatic racial and ethnic demographic shift. More specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau data predict that by 2040, people of color will become the majority of the United States' citizens (Colby & Ortman, 2014). This demographic increase is changing and growing rapidly in many states as well as in some early grade levels. According to the Center for American Progress (2016), at some point over the next 10 to 12 years, the nation's public schools' student bodies will have no one clear racial or ethnic majority. This demographic trend is already manifested in some of the nation's most populous states, including California and Texas, where the majority of students are students of color (Cheruvu et al., 2015). The need for more teachers of color becomes evident when one looks at how student enrollment patterns in public elementary and secondary schools have altered the makeup of the classroom, while the makeup of the nation's teacher workforce has not kept up with these changing demographics. Nationally, the racial and ethnic composition of students enrolled in public schools is approximately 58% White (non-Hispanic), 20% Hispanic, 16% African American, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American/Alaska Native (Colby & Ortman, 2014; NCES, 2015). Additionally, projections to 2021 indicate higher public-school

enrollments for African American, Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native American/Alaska Natives, and students of two or more races, and lower enrollments for whites (NCES, 2015). Therefore, schools must be prepared to serve an overwhelming ethnic diverse student population.

In an extensive review of the literature, Villegas and Irvine (2010) identified three empirically-based arguments describing the benefits that teachers of color bring to K-12 schooling: (1) they serve as role models to all students; (2) since they tend to work in high minority urban schools, they reduce the acute shortage of educators; and (3) many of them are particularly well-suited for teaching students of color because they bring to their work a deep understanding of the cultural experiences of these learners. Additionally, teachers of color tend to have higher expectations of students of color (Oates, 2003; Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002), they are more likely to utilize culturally relevant pedagogies (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Lynn, 2016), serve as cultural brokers with the community (Eddy & Easton-Brooks, 2011; Garcia-Nevarez et al., 2005; Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011), and play a role in remedying racial disparities of achievement (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Understanding the experiences of teachers of color as elements to improving academic opportunities for student of color are significantly understudied (Jackson et al., 2013). This understanding is significant as teachers of color continue to be underrepresented within U.S. public schools while students of color are steadily increasing and are predicted to comprise over 50% of K-12 students by 2020, and while teachers of color make up just 18% of the U.S. teaching force (Center for American Progress: Education K-12, 2016). In addition, more than 40% of schools do not employ even one teacher of color (National Collaboration for Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2014). While many teacher education programs, districts, and schools are focusing efforts on recruiting teachers of color, there are still many barriers to having a diverse

teaching force. For example, teachers of color have lower pass rates on credential entrance tests (Ahmad & Boser, 2014), they are not supported within teacher education programs (Amos, 2010), and they leave the field at a rate of 24% higher than their White counterparts each year (Pham, 2018).

Since White teachers make up the majority of the teaching population, much of the scholarship on improving the academic achievement of students of color has focused on how to prepare and assist White teachers towards this goal, even within the field of multicultural and social justice teacher education (Sleeter, 2010). Limited research on the experience of teacher candidates of color has shown that the voices and experiences of these pre-service teachers are often ignored within teacher education programs (Amos, 2010; Montecinos, 2004), and they are repeatedly silenced in the dialogue about serving students of color once they are in the field (Delpit, 2006). Added into the review of the literature, Achinstein et al. (2010) identified low pay and working in schools with a high turnover rate, as some reasons why teachers of color leave the profession. Moreover, teachers of color are more likely to work at schools with limited resources, less stability, and higher teacher turnover rates. In addition, it has been noted that the racialization of working in a predominantly White profession and the lack of mentorship also are key factors in the push-out of teachers of color from the profession (Dingus, 2008).

Within this crisis of racial underrepresentation and the "overwhelming presence of Whiteness" (Sleeter, 2010, p. 5), more attention to the experiences of pre-service and novice teachers of color is needed in order to better understand how to recruit, prepare, and retain a diverse teaching force. In this research, I also draw attention to critical issues in the preparation, support, and retention of teachers of color. My aim is to demonstrate, through the literature, the need for more critical research on teachers of color as well as to bring the narratives of their

experiences and perception on their identity and how meaningful it is to students of color to the forefront of contemporary discussion on teacher education reform.

A review of this research is also concerned with the "who" of the teaching force, proposing that who a person is and what a person brings matters and, indeed, is at the heart of what it means to be a teacher (Altan & Lane, 2018; Gomez & White, 2010). In this research, I looked at the perceptions and experiences of ethnic minority teachers as they reflect not so much on their teaching practices, but on their ethnic identity that reflects a large population of students whose culture and ethnicity is not reflected in the teaching profession. Through their narratives, I explored their perceptions and experiences when they were trained, looked for employment, and why they chose to become teachers. I was guided by the belief that it is not simply their presence in school that matters. Quiocho and Rios (2000) alleged that the power of their presence is in whether or not (and how) they transform both the structures and the students in their learning and working environments.

The Obama-Effect

The Obama-Effect research by Coleman (2008) was a model of hope and inspiration about the power of presence and visibility that was certainly worth visiting to begin this review (Marx et al., 2009; Vaughan et al., 2015). President Barack Obama's victory in November 2008 heralded a change in the way Americans saw themselves, especially for American citizens of color and specifically students of color. America had its first African American president. His election spurred an outpouring of optimism among African American young people to achieve at a higher level thus making their hopes and dreams realizable. His election also created a breakdown of many of the stereotypes that have been so profound in this country against African

Americans where issues of racial diversity were incorporated into the overall policy agenda of America.

Journalists, social science researchers, and educators proclaimed that the historical significance of President Obama's election had a psychological effect on children everywhere (Kafele, 2012; Vaughan et al., 2015). They claimed that African American children's image of the world and the image of what they think they can accomplish changed. Obama brought inspiration to African American students displaying that they could do anything and the sky is the limit. Poussaint (2008) contended that Obama's identity brought African American children a greater sense of self because they saw visual images of a Black man as President of the United States. Students of color were reenergized and it changed their perceptions of what they could achieve. "It's something you were told you could do, but you never really believed it" (p. 19). Because of documented low self-esteem and self-efficacy of marginalized students of color, Coleman (2008) contended that the Obama-Effect provided opportunity for parents, teachers, and mentors to help students benefit from the inspiration generated by President Obama.

Educational leaders utilized this example to help inspire all students towards success. The National Education Association (NEA, 2016) report identified the need for positive Black role models in both the personal and school lives of many young Black males as one of the keys to turning around the steady decline of economic and educational achievement (Mobley & Holcomb, 2008). As students of color in middle and high schools move through the educational pipeline, their interest in educational attainment decreased (Whiting, 2006), and they rejected school as a place to develop their sense of self (Whiting, 2004). The assessment from Marz et al. (2009) was whether the influence of President Obama could affect African American's academic performance. When they assessed both Black and White students' performance while Obama's

stereotype-defying successes were highly publicized, there was a beneficial effect on the exam

performance of African American participants. Coleman (2008) agreed that awareness of

negative stereotypes about the intellectual inferiority of one's "in-group" undermines

performance on academic tasks for students who have a strong interest in the success of the task

(p. 120). Obama's representation and visibility of minorities of color in a leadership position was

a step closer to the breakdown of the employment industry beginning with education as it

employed relatively few minority teachers. Wagaman's (2009) research concluded that in

essence, African American students performed better simply by having an African American role

model demonstrating the importance of a good education. Replication of similar studies

(Aronson et al., 2009; Scott, 2016; Teranishi et al., 2009) helped to verify the findings, and the

study started a dialogue about strategies to assist not only African American students, but all

students of color to become more successful in school.

The Role Model Rationale

A role model is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

(4th ed.) as "a person who serves as an example of the values, attitudes, and behaviors associated

with a role." Villegas et al. (2012) suggested that teachers of color can provide positive role

models for students sharing the teachers' racial, cultural, linguistic, or class backgrounds. Role

models can promote high expectations, achievement, and college-going; challenge stereotype

threat and racism; offer mentoring relationships that reflect home cultures and familial-like ties;

and provide multicultural navigation and cross-cultural translation in helping youth to transition

between dominant and non-dominant cultural settings (Colby & Ortman, 2014; Delpit, 2014).

Driessen (2015) and Clewell et al. (2001) indicated that teachers of color perceive

themselves as role models who motivate students to higher academic achievement, broaden

students' career aspirations, and challenge society's and students' stereotypes. For example, Ochoa (2007) reported that Latino teachers' identity was the centrality of serving as a role model for Latino youth. Solomon (1997) noted that teachers of color were inspired by role models and are committed to making a difference for the next generation, as evidence in their relationships with students of color and their families as well as in their roles as multicultural/antiracist education experts. The role model rationale was used widely in the literature as part of the reason for diversifying the teaching profession (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Many teachers of color, according to Villegas and Irvine (2010), identified that being a role model for students of color was a critical motivator in wanting to become teachers, and it was one way in which their cultural identifications influenced their teaching and interaction with students of color.

The appeal of the role model rationale was evident in several studies of pre-service and in-service teachers of color (Boser, 2011; Brown, 2014; Kohli, 2009). In separate investigations in the literature, teacher candidates of color reported that serving as a role model for students of color was the primary reason for their wanting to teach (Achinstein et al., 2010; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Moss, 2016; Vilson, 2016). Similarly, Johnson (2008) reported that teachers of color in her study believed they were exemplars of possibility. Researchers who have looked at the effects of teachers of color on a variety of academic outcomes for students of color continued to declare the value of role modeling as a plausible explanation for positive results (Dee, 2004; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Pitts, 2007).

The role model argument for diversifying the teaching force is compelling and it received renewed attention when Richard Riley, the Secretary of Education under President Clinton, published an article entitled "Our teachers should be excellent, and they should look like America" (Riley, 1995). In that piece, Secretary Riley repeated the role model rationale for

increasing the diversity of the teaching force and emphatically insisted that "children need to see themselves in the faces of their teachers" (p. 19). Its appeal and positivity on the academic achievement of students of color is a primary reason the role model rationale was cited with frequency in the teacher diversity literature.

Because many students of color are from economically impoverished backgrounds and tend to have few models in their communities of successful professionals who are racially/ethnically like themselves, they derive special benefits from exposure to teachers of color (Grissom et al., 2017). As role models, teachers of color are believed to boost the self-worth of students of color (Fox, 2015; Golden, 2017; Moss, 2016), motivate this population of students to strive for social success (Boutte, 2012; Dee, 2004; Wright et al., 2017) and decrease the sense of alienation many students of color experience in schools and classrooms (Dumas, 2014; Egalite et al., 2015; Egalite & Kisida, 2017).

While the role modeling rationale has long been thought to play an important role in young peoples' development, research has also identified that teachers of color sometimes question the assumptions that they will be appropriate role models simply because of their shared racial and ethnic characteristics and as a result, can object to being identified as role models (Solomon, 1997).

Reflective Leader: Take a Look in the Mirror

Just as the emphasis on higher standards in the teaching profession requires teachers to be reflective practitioners, i.e., a systematic process of self-observation and self-evaluation (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012), research indicated that increasing the percentage of teachers of color as mirrors or role models may contribute to narrowing the achievement gap and the vision gap (Moss, 2016). This is the gap that can arise in how students of color view themselves as future

professionals. After all, it is difficult for students to be what they cannot see (Goings & Bianco, 2016). What does this mean in practical terms for those who prepare teachers? First, there is a need to recognize that reflection by itself means very little. All teachers are reflective in some sense, but it is important to describe different ways to define the focus and quality of reflection. The literature provided perspectives of true role models in terms of students having someone they can identify with:

- Personal bond formed over a common identity translates to positive outcomes in the classroom (Downer et al., 2016; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014).

- There is value in being the mirror, but also in holding the mirror. Students should see their reflection in what they learn as well as who is teaching. Even when reflection is used as a vehicle for genuine teacher development, it is often seen as an end in itself, unconnected to broader questions about education in democratic societies. It is often stated or implied that if teachers reflect about what they do they will necessarily be better teachers (Gershenson et al., 2018; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Moss, 2016).

Formidable relationships are established when students are able to see themselves in their teachers and leaders and in turn, teachers and leaders are able to relate to, identify with, and value student's culture. These bonds strengthen a student's will to persevere through adversity. These "mirrors" enable students to look out through the windows into the world to formulate dreams and achieve them (Ouazad, 2014; Sleeter et al., 2015). In today's global classrooms, so should teacher identity mirror the students.

Identity

Wenger's (1998) landmark book *Communities of Practice; Learning, Meaning, and Identity* was perhaps the title most frequently mentioned in the literature on identities. Wenger provided this definition on identity:

> An identity, then, is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other. As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reificative projections. Bringing the two together through the negotiation of meaning, we construct who we are. In the same way that meaning exists in its negotiation, identity exists – not as an object in of itself – but in the constant work of negotiating the self. It is in this cascading interplay of participation and reification that our experience of life becomes one of identity, and indeed of human existence and consciousness. (p. 151)

Beijaard et al. (2000) also provided an alternative definition to identity stating that it is "generally defined as who or what someone is, the various meanings people can attach to themselves, or the meanings attributed to them by others" (p. 750). Beijaard et al. (2004) considered identity to be an ongoing process of interpreting one's self as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context. In that context, according to the authors, identity can be seen as an answer to the recurrent question, "Who am I at this moment?" (p. 108). Teachers are constantly engaged in this self-creation process within the context of their work and their various roles.

Teacher Professional Identity

The type of identity, which is encountered most frequently in professional teacher identity, is when the word "teacher" is uttered or when the literature concerning the identity of teachers is reviewed. Professional identity is a social identity in terms of the professional group of which one is a member, and it is a role identity in terms of the responsibilities one takes on (Buchanan, 2015). As Cohen-Scali (2003) pointed out, professional identity goes through long

and complicated processes that is configured, stemming from the institutions where individuals work or from the working groups in which they belong (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

On considering the perspective of teachers, this type of identity means a series of qualities attributed to the teaching profession by people within and outside the occupation. A teacher's professional identity begins to form as they develop a personal framework of meaning about considering themselves as a teacher (Schon, 2017). In this framework of meaning are the values about teaching profession, perception of efficacy, beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and political elements about the order of school and knowledge that one should have (Sleeter et al., 2015; van Manen, 2008).

One of the realities of identities, according to Alcoff (2006), is that some identity categories are "visibly marked on the body itself, guiding if not determining the way we perceive and judge others and are perceived and judged by them" (p. 5). Alcoff argued that one's visible-self impacts individuals' lived experiences. She stated that the color of people's skin, as well as other embodied features, impact the way one is socially positioned and placed within the hierarchy of privilege in the United States. This is true regardless of whether the social distinction is accurate or not. Just as with identity in general, the identity of a teacher also is not singular or unified. Zembylas (2003) suggested that the belief that teachers have a specific identity "highlights the fact that teachers are produced as particular kinds of professionals" (p. 124). Scholars such as Gomez and White (2010), and Boutte and Jackson (2014) added that teacher identity is also fluid and complex. For educators, this means "taking up an identity is a constant social negotiation that can never be permanently settled or fixed" (Britzman, 1992, p. 42). As one's viewpoint is influenced by a series of experiences over time, so is one's professional or teacher identity continuously in a state of becoming as one's life evolves.

Rodgers and Scott (2008) outlined four assumptions that most approaches to investigating teacher identity share. The first is that identity is influenced by and formed within multiple social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. The second is that identity is formed through relationships and involves emotions. The third is that identity is constantly shifting, and therefore unstable, and the fourth is that identity involves the reconstruction of stories told over time. Teacher identity is a holistic outgrowth of ways in which history intersect with current treatments of teachers, teaching, and teacher development (Olsen, 2018). Recent educational research reminded us that teaching is not merely a cognitive or technical procedure but a complex, personal, social, often elusive, set of embedded processes and practices that concern the whole person (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Olsen, 2018). Research and literature on teacher identity are a critical component across social contexts that continually reconstruct teacher's views of themselves in relation to others.

Taking into consideration various discussions from the literature, I explain my understanding of teacher identities. For me, teacher identity [or teacher identities] is who each of us are in the classroom as we interact with students. Each teacher constructs his or her teacher identities as opposed to these identities being something that is imposed on us or happens to us. We decide who we are in the classroom along with considering who we want to become as educators. Teachers determine the beliefs that will influence their teaching practices, all while making intentional decisions about how social interactions within teaching context will (or will not) affect who each of us are as a teacher. In this review of the literature about teaching identities, I relied on Danielewic's (2014) concept that a teaching identity involves in teachers knowing who they are as teachers, and that teachers determine their identities in the process of creating stories about their lives in the classroom. Simply, teachers' stories are their identities. It

is born of past experiences, constantly in motion, developing and shaped by current circumstances. In sharing their reflective stories of perception and experiences, teachers negotiate and construct their identities.

Within the literature on teachers of color that exists, the field is lacking an understanding of the experiences of these educators, and in particular, the ways in which their identities are negotiated in places where the presence of other teachers of color are few and far between. Identity is a multi-dimensional notion; it is particular and socially marked; it is shaped by one's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and dispositions (Lee, 2013; Olsen, 2018). Holland et al. (2001) suggested that "identities, the imaginings of the self in worlds of action, [are] … social products; indeed, we begin with the premise that identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice" (p. 5).

Galindo's (1996) study on ethnic minority teachers found that personal identities are connected to their professional identities. These professional identities can consist of how one comes to think about education and schooling (generally) and teaching as a profession (specifically). These identities are developed in the context of social and cultural experiences with diversity teachers have in their families, communities, and schools; in turn, their identities are instrumental in teachers' conceptions of diversity (Bower & Parsons, 2016). In essence, teacher identity is a discursive space where identity is negotiated among possible roles and experiences. For teachers of color, they can seek to actually engage in transforming their roles by consciously and repeatedly making present and visible facets of their identity as a transformative function in the lives of students they mirror which unfortunately, have been more-or-less absent in school institutions.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Much of the literature and recent reports on the topic of teachers of color have focused on diversifying teacher workforce demographics and recruitment efforts (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Dilworth & Coleman, 2014; Sleeter & Milner, 2011; Sleeter et al., 2015). This is to be expected since research consistently demonstrates the necessity of increasing a racially diverse teaching force (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Achinstein et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Teacher education programs serve an important role in the process of transforming views on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students from something dreadful to something desirable (Sleeter & Owuor, 2011). However, close examination of many teacher education programs revealed that respect for diversity is typically superficial and not supported by practices, instruction, curriculum, policies, and teacher dispositions (Boutte, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sleeter & Owuor, 2011).

Adding to this review are several critical dialogues and empirical research on the experiences of teachers of color in their preparation programs, e.g., the kinds of support they receive from the beginning of their professional trajectory though their induction years. Given that students of color comprise 37% of the students enrolled in teacher preparation program at institutions of higher learning (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014), more attention on how to best support their matriculation into the profession and sustaining their presence is warranted. This is especially salient since there is a noticeable gap between the numbers of students of color enrolled in university-based programs, 37% (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014), and the numbers that actually enter the profession, 14% (Feistritzer, 2011). I also found several studies that captured the voices and experiences of both novice teachers (Amos, 2010, 2016; Souto-Manning &

Cheruvu, 2016) and seasoned teachers of color (Borrero et al., 2016; Woodson & Pabon, 2016) to shed insight on the high attrition rates among them.

Brown (2014) highlighted some of the pressing challenges pre-service teachers of color encountered in their teacher preparation programs. Brown's analysis revealed three critical race theory[1] (CRT) constructs at work in the literature: (1) counter-storytelling; (2) Whiteness as property; and (3) interest convergence. The counter-stories offer an image of teacher education as one that is "alienating and ineffective, particularly with regards [to] giving these teachers what they need to develop into socially just teachers" (Brown, 2014, p. 337). Furthermore, vast literature exposed the overwhelming culture of Whiteness that pervades teacher education programs and despite calls for recruiting more teachers of color into the profession, those calls only exist in and help maintain a system of interest wherein, "teacher education programs can potentially post about efforts to bring in more teacher candidates of color while simultaneously not transforming the kinds of normative culture, knowledge and experiences that are valued, maintained and offered to these individuals" (Brown, 2014, p. 339).

Through a case study on pre-service teachers of color at predominantly White institutions, Jackson (2015) noted a lack of commitment from their programs and program faculty as factors that impacted their development of culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, some of the study participants felt as though faculties were afraid and unwilling to center culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy in their teaching and held dismissive attitudes towards culture while a smaller percentage of others felt their programs adequately addressed issues of culture and diversity despite the fact that most of the programs in which they were

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[1] Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework in the social sciences that uses critical theory to examine society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power. It argues against the slow pace of racial reform in the United States beginning with the notion that racism is normal in American society (Lynn, 2002).

enrolled had no designated multicultural or diversity course. Participants were concerned about

mastering so-called "best practices," which they saw as key for being considered a highly

qualified teacher (p. 29). In the face of their limited understanding of culturally

responsive/relevant pedagogy, issues of diversity and social justice were important to these

pre-service teachers of color and they were acutely aware of the fact that they did not get enough

knowledge and application of these ideas in their programs. Jackson's (2015) study and Brown's

(2014) analysis, along with others (Allen, 2017; Amos, 2010; Dingus, 2008; Kohli, 2009) clearly

present evidence that "pre-service teachers of color encounter teacher preparation programs that

were marginalizing, isolating and not culturally affirming" (Jackson, 2015, p. 339).

Experiences in the Early Years of Teaching

The beginning years of teaching, also known as the induction years (commonly defined

as the first through fifth years of teaching), is a critical time in the career trajectory of teachers. It

is during these years that teaching patterns and practices are shaped as new teachers develop a

professional identity independent of their student teaching experience (Schwille, 2008).

In a nationally representative sample of 641 new teachers, 63% expressed a need for

information on teaching diverse students (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

and Public Agenda, 2008). Not surprisingly, new and veteran teachers alike report that one of the

key challenges they faced is the non-inclusion of addressing the effective education of culturally

and linguistically diverse students (Darling-Hammond, 2000; National Collaborative on

Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and

Public Agenda, 2008). As previously noted, teachers of color leave the field at a rate of 24%

higher than their White counterparts each year (Ingersoll & May, 2013). However, the academic

literature is scant on documenting and investigating the experiences of novice teachers of color at

this critical phase in their career. Although there is little known about what kinds of practices, community support, and nurturing the development of teachers of color as effective teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the induction years, there is some insight into the kinds of teaching practices, environments, and lack of support teachers of color experience at the beginning of their careers.

Achinstein and Aguirre (2008) investigated the induction experiences of 15 new teachers of color as they negotiated sociocultural challenges whereby students of color questioned the teachers' cultural identifications. Instead of characterizing the students' behavior as disruptive or defiant of teacher authority and moving toward a more control-oriented style of teaching, the new teachers of color in this study viewed these instances as opportunities to broaden student conceptions and strengthen their student-teacher relationship.

Achinstein and Ogawa's (2011) longitudinal study of 21 new teachers of color working in urban schools illuminated the challenges and complexities experienced by teachers of color committed to social justice, and how this plays out in bureaucratic school systems. Key findings from their work illustrated how unsupportive work environments can constrain teachers of color by "silencing a dialogue about issues of race in schools ... thus inhibiting their ability to enact the cultural/professional roles that may have drawn them into the profession" (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011, p. 7).

These studies and many others merely scratch the surface of the complexities faced by new teachers of color. Several articles in this research (Amos, 2010; Borrero et al., 2016; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016) turn a critical eye toward the racialized experiences of teachers of color and how they negotiate social justice-oriented teacher identities in their teaching environments.

Voices and Reflections

As revealed in the literature, there is a need for a deeper, critical exploration of the experience's teachers of color face throughout the pipeline of their identity and development into the field of teaching. I also included in this review a series of studies that empirically investigated the complex experiences of teachers of color in their primary years within the profession. These studies reveal patterns of racialization, marginalization, and isolation, bringing to light existing paradigms of inequities in teacher education and in K-12 schools. However, they also simultaneously illuminate strength, resiliency, and resistance as teachers of color work to improve the educational opportunities of students of color.

By demonstrating the troublesome context within which teachers of color are prepared to teach and contribute to the success of students of color, the following studies collectively draw attention to much-needed reform of the preparation and support of policies and practices of teachers of color. The studies also offer important nuances to the existing body of work through the divergence of their specific approaches and content. While some studies focus on teachers' critical reflection on teacher preparation and teaching, others are observations of classroom pedagogy or programmatic innovations. With studies that represent a range of teachers, from early childhood educators through elementary and high school teachers, and from in-depth studies with two participants to larger data sets of over 200 teachers of color, the following studies bring both a breadth and a depth of the complex issues of maintaining and supporting teachers of color in a predominantly White profession.

What follows are my analyses and reflections of a series of studies that I consider pivotal, and of critical importance to the development of my research questions and methodology. Through a self-developed annotated process, I summarized the important findings for each of

these studies and relate the reasons for their inclusion in this literature review, often sharing my personal reflections and experiences as a teacher.

Souto-Manning and Cheruvu (2016) examined the ways in which six early-childhood teachers of color made sense of and negotiated their pre-service teacher education experience within their first three years of teaching. They used Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA), a process of combining narrative inquiry and critical reflection, to understand the influences of the White-dominated teacher education space on the practices, beliefs, and experiences of teachers of color. Noted also was their perceptions of how their professional identities were being constructed by others, and the impact that being a teacher of color had on their own teacher identity construction and on their perceptions of teaching and learning. Findings indicated that instead of being established by institutional discourse and oppressed by others' perceptions of them, to remain in the profession, these teachers linguistically challenged and appropriated such discourses, re/authoring them agentively, i.e., a lack of agency or personal control, worth, or autonomy that positions a teacher of color as an object of others' actions that bring self-doubt and internalized racism. In the face of these racialized educational experiences and marginalization, the authors argued for a critical analysis of institutional discourses within teacher education as a matter of survival.

This research is critical in view that while teacher training for teachers of color can sometimes be a dehumanizing process where their lived experiences are ignored, it surfaces the narratives of their experiences and perhaps shed light into why recruitment is a challenge (Altan & Lane, 2018). An important component of their training is learning to turn against accepting and conforming to dominant ideologies and respond in ways that can be viewed as a form of transformational change becoming their counter narratives (Bates & Glick, 2013).

Through an in-depth study focusing on the perspectives of first-year teachers of color who envisioned Culturally Relevant Pedagogy[2] (CRP) as a part of their practice in urban public schools, Borrero et al. (2016) discovered the racialized disconnect in the identities and educational context of teachers of color. The authors specifically investigated what successes and challenges these teachers faced in trying to enact CRP. The findings not only illuminated a lack of shared vision with other school staff, they also revealed the hardships of attempting to teach through CRP. This study, however, also showcased participants' understanding of self, community, and collaboration as they navigate theory and practice, and highlight the power and passion of these new teachers. According to Boser (2011), it also builds upon important research that shows ethnically diverse teachers of color holding the potential to bring more critical, sociopolitical consciousness to teaching.

An important component of this research is that the field of teacher education must value the unique experiences and backgrounds of teachers of color as valuable authentic resources in preparing them to meet the needs of diverse learners (Bower & Parsons, 2016). There needs to be a shift that brings the perspectives of teachers of color from the margins to the center of teacher education. Teachers who share a culture with students can provide a more culturally relevant pedagogy into their instructions.

Expanding the research of teachers of color beyond its traditional discourse in urban public schools, authors Villagomez et al. (2016), built their research on the growing shift in the U.S. ethnic population, which is similar to changes in the ethnic landscape of U.S. public schools yet argued that the teaching landscape has not adjusted to align with student demographics.

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[2] Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CPR) is the framework for teachers to acknowledge and promote students' cultural identities and strengths as part of both their learning as teachers and their classroom practices (Duncan-Andrade, 2007).

Although initiatives were in place to support and increase teacher diversity efforts in urban communities, rural communities often were not seen as having much need in this area because of the small populations of communities of color. The authors presented literatures and findings through a self-study using a created framework for a "grow your own" teacher education pipeline that took into consideration promising practices for recruiting and supporting preservice teachers of color in rural and urban communities (Villagomez et al., 2016, p. 19). The framework became a cutting-edge model for teacher diversification through their ongoing access to education coursework and experience, consistent mentorship from a range of stakeholders, interactions with scholars, conducting and sharing research, campus visits, and financial support at the college level.

The value of this research revealed the ongoing assumptions that communities of color exist primarily in urban areas, leaving communities of color in rural areas underserved (Boser, 2011; Boutte, 2012). This research demonstrates outstanding leadership efforts at the local level serving and impacting the needs of often under-considered schools and communities of color in rural contexts.

Students Benefit from Having Teachers of the Same Race

Teachers of color are uniquely positioned to teach students of color. Their identity, experiences, and influence bring to teaching an understanding of the students' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Dee, 2004; Gay, 2002; Villegas et al., 2012; Walker, 2013). This argument builds on a pragmatic view of culture. From this perspective, culture is seen as the way life is organized in a community or groups, including the ways in which community or groups members use language, interact with one another, relate to time and space, take turns at talk, and approach different tasks (e.g., learning; Blankenship & Steward, 2017).

There is a continuing body of research from cultural and ethnic match studies that suggest students, especially those from historically disadvantaged groups, are benefiting in many ways when they are randomly assigned to teachers of the same race or ethnicity (Holt & Gershenson, 2015; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Added to this review are sampling studies that explore how a teacher's race or ethnicity may influence students in areas such as academic performance, classroom discipline and self-confidence (Dee, 2004, 2007; Egalite et al., 2015).

Wright et al. (2017) found that given the demographic changes, many policymakers and practitioners expressed the need for increased attention to how teacher diversity might be linked to reducing racial/ethnic differences in teachers' ratings of social-emotional skills for students of color. Using the most recent nationally representative data, they investigated whether kindergarteners had different social-emotions ratings when they had a teacher whose racial/ethnic group was the same as their own. Their findings were that having a teacher of the same race was unrelated to teachers' ratings of children's internalizing problem behaviors, interpersonal skills, approaches to learning, and self-control. However, students whose teacher race/ethnicity matched their own had more favorable ratings of externalizing behaviors. Results were discussed in terms of implications for school disciplinary policies. This study was vital as it provided key evidence on trends and patterns of same-race teachers to build supportive learning systems for students of colors' social-emotional development.

Researchers Downer et al. (2016) used a large, longitudinal data set that represented 701 state-funded pre-k classrooms and over 2,900 children enrolled in 11 states. Their study examined two hypotheses: (1) children would be perceived to be better adjusted at the beginning of pre-k when rated by a same-race teacher than by a different-race teacher, and (2) children would demonstrate greater gains during the pre-k year when in the classroom of a same-race

teacher. In this study, children rarely experienced a teacher with a different race/ethnicity from themselves, except in the case of African American or Latino children attending White teachers' classrooms. When examining the school readiness outcomes of African American or Latino children matched or mismatched with their teacher, racial/ethnic match demonstrated significant associations with the direct assessment of academic skills for Latino children only. However, teachers' initial perceptions of children and teacher reported social and academic gains were significantly associated with race and ethnic match for African American children.

This study is an integral reflection on how important a child's early introduction into education is through seeing themselves mirrored through their teachers. The findings suggested that race or ethnic match between children and their teachers may play an important role in producing or reducing the racial and ethnic differences observed in children's performance early in school and what they expect to see or experience in the future.

Cherng and Halpin's (2016) explored the alarming concern over the demographic divide between teachers and students. Nonetheless, few studies have explicitly addressed the common argument that students, particularly minority students, have more favorable perceptions of minority versus White teachers. Using data from the Measure of Effective Teaching (MET)[3] study, authors found that students perceived teachers of color more favorably than White teachers. There was mixed evidence that race matching is linked with more favorable student perception, but the findings underscored the importance of minority teacher recruitment and retention, conveying bodies of research focusing on race matching, i.e., students perform better

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[3] Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) is a longitudinal database of extensive survey soliciting students' perception of their teachers' instructional practices. An important feature of the study is that students are specifically asked to report on individual classroom teachers rather than the overall workforce of their school. The MET also includes a wealth of additional information about both students and teachers, making it possible to control for many plausible sources of variation in students' perceptions of their teachers. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012)

when they are taught by a teacher of their own race/ethnicity (Dee, 2004). This research is valuable as it provides a unique opportunity to address the demographic divide from the perspectives of students.

Egalite et al. (2015) based their research on previous studies finding the academic benefits of students and teachers sharing the same race due to teachers serving as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators. They obtained estimates of achievement changes as students were assigned to teachers of different race from grades 3 to 10 in reading and math. This was implemented by utilizing a large administrative dataset provided by the Florida Department of Education that follows the universal practice of test-taking students in Florida public schools from 2001–2002 through 2008–2009. They found small but significant positive effects when Black and White students were assigned to race-congruent teachers in reading (.004-.005 standard deviations) and for Black, White and Asian-Pacific Island students in math (.007-.041 standard deviations). They also examined the effects of race matching by students' prior performance level, finding that lower-performing Black and White students appeared to particularly benefit from being assigned to a race-congruent teacher. Although the positive effect sizes in this report might seem small, they may represent the achievement benefit from just one year of assignment to an own-race/ethnicity teacher.

The significant impacts on student achievement presented in this research lent additional support to the idea that the mirroring identity of teachers could theoretically narrow the performance gap between students of different races/ethnicities by serving as academic role models and therefore, they are more inclined to hold high expectations for a students' potential.

Responding to prior empirical studies finding little or no association between exposure to an "own race" teacher and level of student achievement, Dee (2005) presented new evidence in

his research by evaluating the test score data from the Tennessee's Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) class size experiment, which randomly matched students and teachers (p. 14). Models of student achievement indicated that a one-year assignment to an own-race teacher increased the math and reading achievement of both Black and White students. Although studies have recognized that it is difficult to make reliable inferences about this relationship given the pervasive specification problems associated with standard observational data on educational outcomes, this research clearly suggested that the Project STAR class-size experiment presents a unique opportunity to examine the recognized educational benefits of own-race teachers since it generated ostensibly random pairings of the students and teachers under study (Egalite et al., 2015). This study presented such evaluations and found consistent evidence that there were rather large educational benefits for both Black and White students from assignment to an own-race teacher in these early grades.

Cultural Professional Roles

Common throughout the literature on teacher-student race matching are scholars repeatedly identifying three cultural/professional roles through which teachers of color can enhance educational opportunities for students of color: (1) providing positive role models, (2) engaging in culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, and (3) working as agents of change whose critical perspective on schooling may contribute to transforming education (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Roles and cultural-professional roles defined by Gonzales-Figueroa (2015) are the sets of negotiated expectations, behaviors, and norms as conceptualized by actors in a social situation, while cultural-professional roles are sets of norms and expectations negotiated at the nexus of teachers' ethnic/cultural affiliations and occupational/organizational contexts. Thus, the three roles are always situated in professional and cultural conceptions about

being teachers of color working with students of color in particular school contexts. It is also important to note that the cultural-professional roles identified by teachers of color are inextricably linked to their commitments to fostering educational opportunity, academic achievement, and equitable schooling for students of color.

Enhancing the cultural-professional roles, researchers have reported that teachers of color who share racial, cultural, and/or linguistic backgrounds with students may tap cultural resources in themselves and their students to engage in culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, support cultural boundary crossing, and provide a cultural bridge to learning (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). For example, (Galindo, 1996) described how bilingual Chicana educators tap their own cultural resources to support Latina/o students' identities, parents, and communities. Vickery (2015) identified a form of "other mothering" (p. 164) by African American teachers, and Bristol (2015) similarly describes "other fathering" by African American male teachers to foster academic success among African American students (p. 79). Ladson and Billings (2001) proposed a culturally relevant theory of education. Authors highlighted how teachers use student culture as a basis for learning, build on community and prior knowledge, and see themselves as members of the community. They highlighted three dimensions of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching identified in the literature as promoting academic access and success: It (1) engages communities of learners that socially construct knowledge; (2) demonstrates cultural competence and connects pedagogy and curriculum to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and (3) reflects a critical social justice perspective that reveals the "hidden curriculum," inequities and supports students in questioning and challenging the status quo (Ladson and Billings, 2000, p. 50). However, it is not safe to assume that teachers of color all know how to enact culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. While they may possess

valuable cultural and linguistic resources, these resources would need to be acknowledge and developed for teachers to enact such practices (Walker, 2013).

Agents of Change

With the expanding bodies of research on the academic benefit derived from same-race matching, it is not surprising, then, that 31 states currently have policies aimed at increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of the teaching force (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Ahmad & Boser, 2014). While significant work is still implemented about various strategies for recruiting people of color into teaching, little empirical work, still, has been devoted to understanding the experiences and perceptions of teachers of color and how they perceive their identity as meaningful to the success of students of color in the profession. Achinstein and Ogawa (2011) expertly addressed this glaring gap in the literature.

Villegas et al. (2012) proposed that teachers who enhance educational opportunities for students from non-dominant communities can act as "agents of change" and, thus, see themselves not as isolated educators but as participants in a broader struggle to change society and the education system (p. 113). Some teachers of color are particularly likely to view themselves as agents of change if they have experienced injustice in schools (Nunez et al., 2015; Quiocho & Rios, 2000) and marginalization as teachers (Nieto, 2000). Foster (1994) noted that African American teachers are informed by their understanding of the historical conditions of Black, urban communities. Weisman and Hanson (2011) similarly concluded that Latina teachers pursued social change because they have developed a "bicultural identity" to function in two worlds (home culture and dominant culture) and thus hold a critical perspective on the histories of non-dominant groups (p. 143).

Nunez et al. (2015) and Shamir and Eelam-Shamir (2018) have documented that teachers of color can act as agents of change through their teaching. The new teachers of color, who are characterized as "teaching for change" study, engaged students of color in working for a socially just community and confronting racism in texts and in their local environments (Nunez et al., 2015, p. 441). Matias and Zembylas (2014) documented that teachers of color are more supportive of antiracist education than are White teachers engage students in "color talk" (p. 101). Thompson (2004) attempted to alter the education system by incorporating "politically relevant teaching" (p. 290). Yull et al. (2014) highlighted the significance of teachers' political convictions that schools can be vehicles for social change. King (1991) attributed much of the success of African American teachers who worked with students from low-income, predominantly African American communities to their use of "emancipatory pedagogy," which links mastery of basic skills and school knowledge with critical thinking about "liberating, antiracist, and anti-elitist content" (pp. 255–256). Koerner and Hulsebosch (1995) identified teachers of color as "gate openers" for access to success rather than "gate keepers" (p. 15). Teachers of color can also act as agents of change in arenas beyond their classrooms, effecting schoolwide and district change as well as engaging parents as partners in transforming schools (Villegas et al., 2012).

Community Oriented

Kohli and Pizarro's (2016) study echoed that many teachers of color enter the profession with deep ties and connections to their communities. They often articulated that they became teachers with the objective of returning to their own or similar communities to provide opportunities for intellectual engagement that they felt were lacking in their own schooling. According to the authors Irizarry and Donaldson (2012), these teachers want their students to

perform well academically in terms of GPA and test scores, but that is not how they primarily defined racial justice. Instead, community-oriented teachers often came to teaching from an activist standpoint, seeking the creation of strong, critical, intellectual communities (Perry et al. 2003) that honor and grow the ontologies (ways of being), epistemologies (ways of knowing), and axiologies (ethics) of their communities.

Building on Wilson and Tamir's (2008) framework, Kohli and Pizarro (2016) discovered that teacher preparation programs who are highly focused on cultural relevancy operationalize community-oriented teachers of color as those who feel a relationality and relational accountability to their communities. To contrast the community-oriented definition from conventional ideas of educational justice that promote individualized achievement, taking kids "up and out" of their communities, they introduced this term to mean teachers of color who are fighting inequality and seeking justice, but who do this relationally, along with and as part of communities of color (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016, p. 75). Adapting Wilson and Tamir's (2008) framework, Kohli and Pizarro (2016) argued that community-oriented teachers of color bring community-based ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies into teaching. They seek and need relational ways of being in their work that honor their own families and communities through the success of their students. They want to build intellectual community in the classroom, teach in the community, and grow a collective epistemology. Because of the relational accountability they feel to their families, communities, and histories, this community-minded ontological and epistemological approach to teaching informs and is informed by their ethics (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016).

Community-oriented teachers of color often feel a responsibility to challenge inequities and promote justice for communities of color. Unfortunately, this relational way of being is often

neglected and suppressed within the increasingly neoliberal and capitalist nature of K-12 schooling and is not typically shared by most teachers and school leaders (Wilson & Tamir, 2008). Therefore, community-oriented teachers of color often feel isolated in their beliefs and their advocacy, which serves as a barrier in moving towards racial justice. This was a critical piece to the research in gathering the narratives of experiences that teachers of color face when they are undervalued. The community-orientation they bring into the classroom is a strength, and influences pedagogy, community engagement and relationships that bridges school and home (Magaldi et al., 2018).

Relational Leadership

To address any lack of awareness or resources for students of color to be successful, effective school leaders need to promote relationships and build linkages between school, parents, community, and most especially teacher and student. One of Johnson et al. (2010) strategies is to have key leaders in place, such as teachers, who reflect the cultural makeup of the students. As its name implies, relational leadership, or relation-oriented leadership (Yamarino & Bass, 1990) focuses on the orientation of a leader towards interpersonal transactions with other members of the organization.

Relational leadership describes a way of engaging with one's community of practice wherein the leader holds oneself in relation with, and accountable to, others. One of the first to contribute to the understanding of relational leadership was Miller (1976) in his examining the relational experiences of women and marginalized cultural groups where he concluded that healing takes place in the context of mutually empathic, growth-fostering relationships. Subsequent work by Miller and colleagues led to the characterization of Relational Cultural Theory, and its core assumptions of growth through connection, mutuality, empowerment and

authenticity (Golden, 2017). Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) were among those who explored this notion of connectedness within the workplace. They proposed that relational leadership is embedded within the everyday interactions and conversations of one's network in a non-hierarchical, distributed manner grounded in collaboration, trust, empathy and empowerment as cited in their case study findings with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Similar to the data gathering method that will be implemented on teacher participants for this research, Cunliffe and Eriksen's (2011) research highlighted the intimate reflections of interviewees who profess their leadership to be more "a way of being in relation with their communities and within their conversations" (p. 1431). Uhl Bien (2011) would agree with this description of relational practice as she suggested that it "puts the emphasis of study squarely on human processes of how people decide, act, and present themselves to each other" (p. 663).

In an era where the demographic change is shifting dramatically in the classroom, school authorities are experiencing this shift, and so have the concepts of leadership is changed and evolved. The traditional "leader" versus "follower" paradigm does not take into account the relational nature of leadership, a process in which meaning and identity are created when people work together (Heifetz & Heifetz, 1994, p. 9). As the bureaucratic models shift into more collaborative ones, the study of relational influence is emerging in the educational leadership literature as an important topic of research.

Teacher leaders possess high levels of interpersonal skills and utilize relationships with their students. Since their roles are largely informal, teacher leaders rely on their relational influence with students, such as teachers of color utilizing and empowering their identity as a model of success for students of color, yet little research has focused on the nature of their

individual interactions with students nor the influential effects of their identity as meaningful to the students they racially/ethnically mirror, and those that have shown to improve instructional practices (Branson et al., 2016). Relational leadership approach is appropriate for this research as teachers of color can implement its influencing processes wherein school leaders connect "people, purpose, and practices" (Branson et al., 2016, p. 128). It can diminish boundaries between administration and teachers, parents and teachers, community and teachers, and most of all students and teachers which contributes to the "stream of affirmative, trusting relationships" (Branson et al., 2016. p. 147).

Utilizing data from Kohli and Pizarro (2016) indicated that due to the immense ethnic demographic shift and the achievement gap, teachers of color are being recruited into urban schools more than ever. Their increased presence is correlated with the increased academic success of students of color (Egalite & Kisida, 2017; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teachers of color are often sought after because of their strong cultural relationships with students and insider knowledge of the community. They bring cultural knowledge, strength, and influences their pedagogy, curriculum, and community engagement. School leaders must be able to see the value that this cultural paradigm has for the empowerment of communities of color, as relationality and relational accountability can transform the intellectual engagement and growth of students of color.

Following Their Lead

It is no surprise, then, that policymakers have taken great interest in research showing students of color can make great strides academically when taught by or exposed to teachers of color. For all students' sake, our education system must strive more diligently and strategically at attracting and retaining teachers of color. But this is a long-term strategy. Yet, there is no reason

education leaders cannot draw upon the lessons learned from research to ensure their schools are organized to support the kinds of leadership modeled by teachers of color that can help all students succeed. Exposure to diverse role models serves all students well.

Summary

The results presented and synthesized in this literature review indicates that the racial and ethnic dynamics between students and teachers have consistently positive effects on student performance. The visibility of teachers of color is likely to influence educational success and motivation in the classroom environment for students of color. Evidence in this review imply that both classroom interactions and teacher racial identity make important contributions to the observed demographic gaps in student achievement. The most widely recommended policy responses to these sorts of effects are arguably the ones that involve recruiting underrepresented teachers. Those involved in the making of policies and decisions may find this analysis useful in understanding the interrelated factors affecting students and teachers of color.

Trends in the current literature point to recruitment issues, but less attention has been paid to the unique experiences and perceptions of teachers of color and the influential value of their identity on students they reflect. This literature review adds a level of depth to the critical discourse on this community of teachers. What they bring to the global classrooms of today challenges leaders to think more systematically about ways to improve K-12 schools. For students of color, it is difficult to enter a school where they do not see their culture, their values, their language, and their identity represented in the teachers. Therefore, it is paramount that our nation's diverse students have the opportunity to see teachers who look like them.

Given the overall implication of race matching in this study, teachers of color are particularly well perceived by students of color because they may have personal experience

navigating racial stereotypes about academic achievements (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016) and can connect and relate to their communities. Although I compiled and analyzed a comprehensive list of publications for this review, it is likely that I have not captured all existing publications on this subject. Further work is needed to capture insights from other sources. Identified as gaps in the literature, is that most publications located and examined focused on students and teachers of color within urban school settings. Additionally, ethnic groups studied were the majority minority African Americans and Latinos. Further work is needed to capture insights from various emerging ethnic groups of teachers i.e., as Pacific Islanders, Asians, Native Americans, and Muslims. As a result, more work examining teachers of color within rural and affluent schools have important implications and motivations for further research.

Studies have also begun to explore the shortcomings that emerge when cultural match is presumed without adequately contextualizing and nuancing the construct. For instance, Tellez (2004) argued that the affordances and limitations of match between teachers and students of color have not been adequately theorized or operationalized. In a similar study, Brown (2014) cautioned that teacher educators must be vigilant not to "mask the diversity" in teachers of color by presuming a shared set of reasons for entering the profession and a commonality in their perspectives on teaching, learning, and students (p. 211). Nonetheless, findings from this literature review attest to the importance of addressing the demographic divide between teachers and students and speaks to bureaucratic representation on the notion that governmental organizations, like schools, can better serve students academically and socially when the composition of the teaching force mirrors the composition of the student population.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The positive effects of minority teachers of color on the academic achievements of students of color stand as central to this study, given the alarming underrepresentation of teachers of color and the educational outcomes of students of color still lagging behind their White peers in elementary and secondary public schools in the U.S. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of teachers of color and how they perceive their identity to be meaningful to the academic success of students of color. The framework for this research was employed through narrative reflections of minority teachers of color where data was gathered from their individual stories analyzed into themes, patterns, and supported by two identity theories. Drawing from respectful and positive approaches to listening and interviewing that are associated with narrative research, my hope is to further support the groundwork needed to increase and support teacher diversity and establish the relationship that students can benefit from having teachers of the same race or ethnicity.

Rationale for This Study

The position of a teacher's racial-ethnic identity does impact student achievement for minority students of color. The absence and lack of teachers of color has received increased attention as standards-based achievement became federally mandated in 2001 through the No Child Left Behind initiative (Howard, 2010). Through this initiative, the achievement gap between race demographics became more easily identifiable (Jeynes, 2015; Jordan & Cooper, 2003). Countless education and social science studies recognized the underperformance of students of color in their analysis and concluded that the lack of and "exposure to successful role models [can] essentially erode the stereotypic assumption that one's group lacks confidence in that domain" (Schmader & Croft, 2011, p. 799). They even went further to cite examples of

studies on teacher and student gender (McIntyre et al., 2004; Schmader et al., 2014). Cummins (1986, 1996) concluded that students having the opportunity to have teachers of similar race is critically important for their academic and lifelong social development.

There are not enough mirrors in the teaching profession. Students of color need more mirrors and windows (Golden, 2017), i.e., they need to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and see teachers who reflect back to them their language, their culture, their ethnicity, religion, and their experiences. This is the bridge that connects home, family, and community to the education system as a collaborative learning system (Galindo, 1996). The visibility of teachers of color in the classroom is a resource that can be a valuable support tool for success. Their very presence and identity can disrupt existing inequities and status quo (Goings & Bianco, 2016). The authors also claimed that there is a vision gap in the education system. Egalite and Kisida's (2017) research had mounting evidences on the effect of own race/ethnicity teacher assignment on student achievement. It provided insight into the way students think and feel about the teachers who look like them and those who do not. This same study found that when students had teachers of the same race as them, they reported feeling cared for, more interested in their school work, and students put more effort in school and having higher college aspirations. Students who had teachers that did not look like them, Egalite and Kisida (2017) reported to have had lower levels of confidence and attitude, and these trends were most visible in Black students, especially Black girls. Findings such as this support the certainty that students do better in school when they can view their teachers as role models, thus making the rationale for this study appropriate; a narrative inquiry approach can explore the significance of teachers of colors' experiences as an effort to understand and recognize how significant teacher identity can be to students.

Research Problem

The rapid growth of the minority student population in today's urban and rural schools is projected to continue to increase (Delpit, 2014; Villegas et al., 2012). As a result, the teacher-student ethnic-racial divide may widen even amidst efforts towards increasing teacher diversity. When first exploring the topic of how teachers' racial identity influences student success and learning, I felt, intuitively, the need to explore the narratives of minority teachers of color due to the high representation of students of color in the achievement gap.

As a teacher, I have continued to question why students of color, especially Pacific Islanders students who are reflections of me, are still a few grade levels behind their White classmates. Researchers (Gamoran, 2007; Reardon et al., 2012; Reardon et al., 2018) were quick to analyze whether poverty was a major factor in the gap and found that the achievement gap still exists between White and students of color who have similar socioeconomic backgrounds and go to the same schools. However, this is not the only factor, given the insights I gained from my experiences teaching in Title 1 schools. This narrative research has surfaced stories of minority teachers of colors' own experiences and perceptions as an important means for understanding teachers as knowers of themselves and as potential agents of social change.

Research Question

The focus of this research study is on the critical reflections of minority teachers of color's experiences and perceptions of their identity to the success of students of color. The use of narrative inquiry answered the overarching questions: How do teachers of color perceive their identity as being meaningful to them as teachers? In what ways do teachers of color perceive their identity as meaningful to the success of the students they reflect? Data from this research unraveled the interconnected strands of teachers' experiences as represented in their stories.

Qualitative Research

I am inspired by the quality and depth that qualitative inquiry brings to the field of education. Unlike quantitative research that is concerned with measurements, numbers, and values control, qualitative research allows the researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell et al., 2007). Qualitative research methods value openness and flexibility and allow for focus on the phenomena to be studied in its complexity as well as in its natural setting (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) best conveyed the ever-changing nature of qualitative inquiry from social construction, to interpretivist, and on to social justice:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world into a series of representations… it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 35)

The emphasis of qualitative methodology are discovered through interviews, observations, and interpretation (Polit & Beck, 2010). It can also rely on perception and human understanding such as personal experience and understanding words, ideas and feelings, rather than just numbers (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methodology has several characteristics such that it is interpretive, experiential, and situational (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2010). The qualitative approach of narrative inquiry, which analyzes data inductively from patterns or themes on the lives of individuals expressed in lived and told stories was necessary for this research. The data collection process through interviews, is the optimal tool that was utilized to answer the open-ended research questions of this study. Through this process, analyzed data were accrued towards developing a narrative about the stories of the individual lives of the teachers.

These characteristics and emphasis made it suitable to conduct a narrative inquiry research on teachers of colors' experiences and perceptions that can be interpretive from different views and for gaining a clearer understanding concerning the significant role that their own identity has on students of colors' success.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is based firmly in the premise that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through story (van Manen, 2008). Grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that involves the gathering of narratives—written, oral, visual—focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide "insight that befits the complexity of human lives" (Josselson, 2006, p. 4). The epistemological assumption of narrative inquiry is that we as human beings make sense of our daily experience by living in story structures. In other words, humans are storytelling organisms (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). But, narrative inquiry is more than the uncritical gathering of stories. Narrative inquirers strive to attend to the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the cultural discourses that it draws upon (Riessman & Speedy, 2007). The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world.

Narrative inquiry was first used by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as a methodology to describe the personal stories of teachers. Over the past 35 years, narrative analysis and interpretations have been applied in social sciences generally, in history (Cooper & Jordan, 2003), and in literary, cultural and film studies, often in the rubric 'narratology' (Bal, 2009). The word *narrative* derives from the verb *narrate*, whose Latin root *narrare* means to relate or

recount. It is not the actual story itself but the way in which the story is told that becomes the narrative, yet the two terms are used interchangeably (Hunter, 2017).

Applicable to this study, narrative has been applied in educational research as a way of exploring the values, politics and practices of students and teachers as individuals, and as a way of understanding their identities in educational and personal terms. In their landmark text on narrative research in education, Clandinin and Connelly (1998) described an individual teacher's narrative as providing a kind of "personal curriculum" fostering a pedagogically relevant understanding of the self and of the practices of teachers. McVee (2004) explained that, "narratives of personal experiences need to be represented in teacher education courses in ways that demonstrate their dynamic, multiple viewpoints" (p. 897). Narrative research has been used to shed light on the complex nature of teaching and learning (Clandinin, 2006; Kienholz, 2002). It has been used to explore cultural diversity in teacher education (Dome et al., 2005; McVee, 2004) as well as professional development in in-service teacher education (Stenberg, 2010).

Framing Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquirers define teachers' identities as the narrated compositions of their lives (Clandinin et al., 2011) or "stories to live by" (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 141). In other words, narrative identity is a story of the self that has been internalized and is constantly developing and "transformed through the human context they enter" (Dewey, 1981, p. 251). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) framed narrative inquiry within this Deweyan ontology of experiences that is transactional and a continuously moving experiential process. It includes the recreated past and the envisioned future, which are woven into a relatively articulate account to illuminate personal existences with some harmony, determination, and sense (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

When we think of "life as a story," we envisage our past, our present, and our future because we ultimately live stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, pp. 149–150). In view of teachers' identity, knowledge and experiences, the influx of changes in their teaching lives creates stories to tell and retell, stories to live and relive, as a tool necessary to be effective in their profession. This made it necessary to study teacher identity alongside Clandinin and Huber's (2005) three commonplaces that frame narrative inquiry as a way of understanding their temporality, sociality, and place, all of which exists in stories, thereby "distinguishing narrative inquiry from other methodologies" (p. 3). The first is temporality, i.e., experiential, lived, past-present-future continuity and transition. The second is sociality, i.e., interpersonal, relational, interactions comprising researcher and/or participants' lives. The third is locality, i.e., concrete sites and boundaries for sociality's and temporalities. These commonplaces in teachers' stories also highlighted four assumptions that (1) teacher education is a life-long project, (2) views it in historical terms, (3) considers it a relational process, and (4) regards it as a coherent, progressive, whole (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994). Attending to these commonplaces, Clandinin and Huber (2005) suggested that researchers are able to "study the complexity of the relational compositions of peoples' [teachers] lived experiences both inside and outside of an inquiry and, as well, to imagine the future possibilities of these lives" (p. 3).

Narrative Turn

In today's teacher education, there is a strong tradition of storytelling and autobiography in supporting teachers' personal and professional development, well-being and self-understanding often referred to as the "narrative turn" (Nias, 1996). The narrative formation and perception of identity is taken into consideration in many support systems for teachers, such

as teacher student mentoring, in which teachers share their experiences to recognize and support

their role and influence on students (Calderhead, 2006; Carrington, 2002; Solomon, 1997).

"Narrative turn" is also the term used to describe the movement away from quantitative

studies to the use of personal narratives as sociologists and researchers realized the value of

people's stories (Riessman, 2012, p. 696). Numerous references to this are made in the literature

on narratives in research. Berger and Quinney (2005) discussed the turn toward narratives in the

Postmodern era. According to these authors, sociologists noted that quantitative approaches to

research were far removed from people's lived experiences. As a result of the Civil Rights

Movement, the Women's Rights Movement, and other marginalized groups organizing and

speaking out in the 1960s, social scientists recognized the power of individuals stories in these

movements and began to look at narrative as an approach to research (Riessman, 2012). It was

the personal stories that became the rhetorical basis for grassroots movements and served to unite

them. This change in approaches to research is what Berger and Quinney (2005) and others

referred to as the "Narrative Turn" (p. 15). Clandinin (2006, 2016) suggested four themes in this

turn toward narrative inquiry that is applicable to this research.

First, it is the change in the relationship between the researcher and the participant due to

the intersubjective nature (shared understanding) of their relationship. As researcher and

participant engage in dialogue, intersubjectivity is a necessary condition of effective

collaborative communication and must be established as a strong point for transformation

(Gallagher, 2009). Intersubjectivity, as a starting point, can be understanding without agreement,

but a shared understanding about what is being shared and discussed is critical if researcher is

expected to make meaning and interpretation from participants' experiences. From a relational

leadership context, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) bring to attention that leadership is "a way of

being and relating with others, embedded in everyday experience and interwoven with a sense of moral responsibility" (p. 1432).

The second turn is seen in the change from numbers as data to language as data. Clandinin (2006, 2016) noted that the problem with trying to capture human experience through numbers is that researchers were beginning to question the ability of numbers to reveal deep understandings of human interactions. When numbers are used in narrative research, there is no way to expand the meaning of the data collected. The trustworthiness and authenticity of findings are supported as participants share from their perspectives and in their own voices. The third turn to narrative was the move from "the general to the particular" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 22). A focus on the particular signals the researcher's understanding of a value of a particular experience in a particular setting and involving particular people. Making the particular the focus of a study signals an understanding of the value of that experience. Finally, the fourth turn toward narrative in research is the recognition by some researchers that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding the world (Caine et al., 2013).

Stenberg (2010) argued that teacher identity is manifested through narratives of personal and professional experiences. Clandinin (2006, 2016) claimed that teacher identity is the embodiment of unique life stories and experiences that is ever changing and shaped by the landscapes of an individual's past and present life. Both arguments are narrative identity building, where an individual examines him or herself by highlighting specific meaningful experiences from his/her chronological life story. Narrative research on teachers examines their personal stories and experiences and draw from the perception that benefitted both the teachers as well as the researchers. Teachers are not simply passive research objects, they also take active part in the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The Narrative Researcher

Qualitative researchers recognize that the issues under study have many layers and dimensions, which in turn is why they rarely try to simplify what they observe, due to its multifaceted form (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Everyone who experiences this world lives and retells their own stories, whereas a narrative researcher collects, describes, interprets, retells such storied lives and writes narratives of experiences. Additionally, the role of the narrative researcher is to also be the sharer of the teachers' stories, attempting to give a voice to their experiences and perceptions. Teacher experiences and perceptions are narrative in nature and therefore, the use of narrative methods in this study is natural and appropriate. As teachers and researcher engage in the reflective research process, teachers' stories are retold and changed through the analyses and sharing of these stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). In their own words, "narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 426). In the broad field of education, narrative work has focused on teacher education, looking at the ways in which teachers' narratives shape and inform their practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; van Manen, 2008). Cortazzi (2014) identified three factors that influence the development of narrative research in teaching practices. First, there is currently an increased emphasis on teacher reflection. Second, more emphasis is being placed on teachers' knowledge—what they know, how they think, how they develop professionally, and how they make decisions in the classroom. And third, educators seek to bring teachers' voices to the forefront by empowering them to talk about their experiences. As the narrative researcher for this study, I drew from the philosophical thoughts of John Dewey (1938), who saw that an individual's experience is the central lens for

understanding a person and to view experience a continuous, where one experience leads to another.

Dewey and The Three-Dimensional Space of Narrative Structure

At the beginning of this century, Dewey (1938) wrote that "education is a form of social life" (p. 28). Narrative inquiry is one way of translating this Dewey conception into practical methods of educational research and reform (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 53).

Clandinin and Connelly's development of narrative inquiry as research methodology was deeply shaped by Dewey (1938). As a philosopher of experience and an educational theorist, Dewey based his principles on interaction and continuity, theorizing that the terms personal, social, temporal, and situation were important in describing the characteristics of an experience. For Dewey, to study life and education is to study experience; that is, education, life, and experience are one and the same (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

According to Dewey, instead of answering questions to a clearly defined problem, inquiry is the process of subjecting a problematic or confusing situation to the inquiry process, a process that leaves us open to new possibilities for further inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Dewey also saw inquiry as synonymous with "reflective conversations" and described these as a conscious reflection on a situation while at the same time thinking and acting on the situation (Schon, 2017, p. 233). Dewey's words are true for teachers as they are required to constantly explore and reflect on their teaching and relational practices. Reflection is one of the most effective and integral steps for teachers to improve their profession. Teachers accomplish this through their ability to be intentional and critical in their reflections. When reflection is intentional, it is deliberate and authentic, while critical reflection is the reasoning process to make meaning of an experience (Clandinin et al., 2011). It is descriptive, analytical, and critical,

and it is to be examined and questioned, putting facts, ideas, and experiences together to derive new meaning (Caine et al., 2013; Calderhead, 2006). Similarly, inquiry suggests opportunities for continuing the process since each step uncovers new questions to consider and the process is turned back on itself (Clandinin, 2006). Knowledge then, for Dewey, is gained through the ongoing questions that are part of an inquiry and is a result of continual concern as opposed to being a final conclusion.

Clandinin and Connelly (2004) advanced three aspects of narrative approach from Dewey's theory: personal and social (Interaction); past, present, future (Continuity); and place (Situation). In this three-dimensional space narrative structure approach, interaction involves both the personal and the social aspects of the experience. Using this framework, the researcher analyzes the story from both the personal experiences of the teacher and his/her interactions with students. Continuity or temporality is central to narrative research. When analyzing a story, the researcher considers the past and present actions of the teacher, as those actions are likely to occur in the future. Situation or place also needs to be considered when analyzing a story. As the researcher, I looked for specific locations in the teacher's landscape that give meaning to the narrative, such as the physical location and how the activities occurring in that place affected the experiences.

Positionality

Stating one's positionality in qualitative research is critical because it seeks to assess how different characteristics of the researcher and research participant might influence the research process (Merriam et al., 2001). In reflecting on my positionality, I recognized that I position myself and am positioned in various contexts, e.g., middle class, female, Pacific Islander, immigrant, community leader, and teacher of color. By using positionality, I also understand that

I am defined by these attributes in addition to my life experiences, cultural and community knowledge, and professional contexts which also factors into the degree of my assumptions and relationship to the research and participants. These various perceptions and implications associated with my identity confronts the concept and consideration of an insider/outsider status (Bourke, 2014). My insider advantages, as Bourke (2014) calls "a consciously insider position" (p. 216), e.g., access and rapport (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015), can be applicable and significant. However, my outsider lenses can construct different observations and explore the data in more depth that an insider may overlook and therefore, reflexivity "the analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research" both in concept and process will be emphasized as significant throughout the research process and findings (Palaganas et al., 2017, p. 427).

The precise lenses that brought my interest into this study emerged from my professional experiences as a secondary teacher in three suburban school districts in Seattle and how Pacific Islanders and students of color from various racial ethnic groups responded to my presence and visibility on campus. The excitement and enthusiasm were simply because I was a teacher of color and that they had never seen a Pacific Islander teacher before. I had misassumptions that inner-city schools in Seattle, with its vast diverse of racial ethnic groups and languages would have an overabundance of teachers from around the globe who reflected the ethnic culture of the students. Instead, existing was the over-present teacher workforce still homogenous, White, middle-class, female, and certainly did not reflect the overwhelming students of color population (Borrero et al., 2016; Borrero et al., 2018). The notable shortage and lack of minority teachers of color gave me a new perspective on the value of my own ethnic identity as a teacher. This awareness has allowed me to consistently reflect and develop my own pedagogy that reflects the

critical consciousness necessary to acknowledge the identity markers of teachers of color that is critical to students of colors' success.

Throwing myself into the business of teaching, I soon discovered the academic struggles of students of color (e.g., absenteeism, discipline, lack of desire and motivation to learn) and the alarming measures of the racial-ethnic achievement gaps that has had a long and persistent history in the United States (Garces et al., 2017; Villegas et al., 2012). Achievement gaps were one way of monitoring the equality of educational outcomes. Beginning in 1954, when the Supreme court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation of public schools was unconstitutional, some progress has been made in improving racial educational disparities. But that progress has been slow, uneven, and incomplete (Henry, 1995, 2018; Jackson & Kohli, 2016). The relative low numbers of teachers of color, despite a steady increase in representation over the past 25 years (e.g., Teachers of Color in 1987–1988 were 12.4% of the teaching workforce, in 2011–2012, they were 17.3% of the teaching workforce), has persisted for quite some time (Ingersoll et al., 2016). This smaller proportional representation in the teacher populace, of which I am a part of, often positions teachers of color at the margins and contributes to difficulty extending and integrating their shared identity and knowledge, and influential role within the field of education.

The recruitment, hiring and retention of teachers of color continues to be at the forefront of public education to assist in narrowing the achievement gap --- in an educational system that has failed many of its students of color (Borrero, 2016; Egalite et al., 2015; Henry, 2018; Scott, 2016). In my capacity as an educator and state Commissioner representing the Asian and Pacific Islanders communities in the state of Washington, I have been intimately involved in redesigning policies to accommodate students of color at the K-12 level and have remained interested in

researching these accommodations further because very few studies exist about the professional experiences of teachers of color, and how their unique identities can highlight their leadership and pedagogical strengths that may have a significant impact on academic and non-academic measures for students of color.

Method of Study

Research Design and Process

Qualitative methods were employed to explore and unearth new insights into the experiences of people's lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) which makes it a great fit for exploring the lived experiences of teachers of color and how they perceive their identity as meaningful in the lives of students of color. Like numerous scholars on educational research methods, Maxwell (2004) noted that qualitative methods are particularly suited for "understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences" (p. 17). This is the common claim that qualitative inquiry targets providing unique windows into individuals' understandings of their lives.

A narrative design is also well matched for the purpose of this research as narrative inquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2004), is employed as a qualitative methodology that highlights "a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences" (p. 477). In this study, I focused on the storied experiences of teachers of colors' identity and the meaningful impact it has on students of color. The idea was not to influence my understanding and assumptions of the experiences but allow the participants' voices to speak for themselves.

Hence, a narrative inquiry approach formed the basis for the methodology used in this study. In order to provide a holistic understanding and order for this study, this section began with descriptions of the participants and the procedures for selection, followed by the research question and a brief description of the context for data collection through interview analysis. The conclusion is an explanation of the data sources used to examine the research topic, in addition to procedural challenges, concerns identified, and explanations for how these challenges and concerns were addressed.

Participants

Narrative approaches are not appropriate for studies of large numbers of nameless and faceless subjects (Riessman, 2012). While quantitative depends upon a large sample size for prediction, qualitative purpose and a qualitative research question can come from a smaller sample size of approximately three to twenty, due to content of experience and depth (Englander, 2012). Fourteen teachers of color were invited to share their individual narratives. I chose this sample number not only in hopes for a variety of racial-ethnic representation, but it ensured saturation and enough depth for thick and rich data to meet rigor for a thorough analysis. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) reiterated that the power of narrative research is not in the volume of data collected but rather in the power of the holistic analysis that allows the research to interpret the lived experiences of the participants.

Each participant selected the location for the interview, conducted at a time and place of their convenience, and in a comfortable setting that was safe and free from interruptions (Creswell, 2006). Coincidently, locations, time and place of their choice were all in and at their various schools and classrooms, two of which were on Zoom. Participants were from within the Seattle and neighboring school districts whom I have known through my community networks,

and who were alumni-fellows of The Martinez Foundation, a Seattle based non-profit organization that funds programs and scholarships to recruit, retain and support teachers of color in their profession throughout Washington state. The personal invitational aspect of face-to-face and phone call helped to build the trusting environment that was needed in order to share comprehensive stories of experiences.

Criteria for participant inclusion were also based on these additional components: (a) ethnic and demographic variations of teachers who self-identify as either Hispanic, Asian (South and East), Native American, African American and Pacific Islanders, (b) participants with three or more years of teaching experiences ensured they had experienced a variety of professional development and possessed sufficient career experience, and (c) participants taught middle to high school grade level 6-12. A written consent to participate in the study were collected from each participant prior to interviews, and to protect the anonymity of the teachers, the names used in this study were pseudonyms. Gender and age were not relevant in the sampling.

Interviewing

Interviews are the most widely used technique of data collection in qualitative research, which is perhaps unsurprising, considering they are defined simply as "a kind of conversation; a conversation with a purpose" (Robson, 2002, p. 228). Yet interviewing is a complex social process and there are many types of interviews that vary in the degree to which they are structured, the number of participants, and the way that they are administered to produce rich data for analysis (Minichiello et al., 2008; Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002). In-depth interviewing was the data gathering method for this study utilizing Dedoose software for managing and organizing the data. Utilizing a software application for audio recording, the interviews freed me

up to listen intently while journaling my thoughts and responses and catching nuances that collectively gave a richer picture on how I understood the stories.

Successful interviews start with careful planning that always considers the focus of the research question and to develop an appropriate interview guide that helped to achieve a comfortable interaction with the participant. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016) reminded that the valuable skills of a narrative interviewer is their ability to establish rapport and trust early on in the process. The idea here was to get the teachers to open up and let them express themselves on their own terms and at their own pace (Doody & Noonan, 2013). While I am mindful of my professional connection with the participants, I adhered to the following ethical issues by Creswell (2006) to avoid the conundrum of deception, maintain confidentiality, and protect the anonymity of the teachers I interviewed. Weis and Fine (2000) reminded that as a researcher, to consider the roles of an insider/outsider to the participants; issues that may be fearful of disclosing; establish supportive, respective relationships without stereotyping and using labels that participants do not embrace; whose voices are represented in the final study; and how I write myself into the study and reflect on who I am as well as reflect on the participants I am studying. Most importantly, as researchers, "we cannot be divorced from our backgrounds, social identities and or earlier knowledge" (Bleijenberg et al., 2018, p. 209).

In terms of structure, unstructured interviews were conducted with the open-ended question: What made you decide to go into teaching? This type of questioning method was paramount so that participant are free to develop their own ideas and story (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Although at times I guided the participants at certain points in order to raise key topics of interest or to probe the participant to explain something in more depth, my main role was simply to listen. This method of interview allowed the "experiences, authenticity, meanings, values and

priorities of participants to emerge with minimal interference on the part of the researcher"

(Doody & Noonan, 2013, p. 106). Unlike semi-structured interviews, researcher has a clear list

of questions to be answered with some flexibility in phrasing, placement and probing responses.

While unstructured interviews may be characterized as a method with minimum control,

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) suggested a systematic proposal that I utilized as a guide (Table

3.1) for the purpose of social research such as this one, to elicit rich authentic narration from

participants' experiences. It served as a reminder to avoid the pitfalls of the question-answer

schema of interviewing e.g., a question that may prompt a specific response. The techniques

were categorized in phases discussing the procedures and indication for its use. I have added the

third column to specify the process and procedures that I conducted in following the narrative

interview phases.

Table 3.1

Main Phases of the Narrative Interview Guide

Phases of Narrative Interview	Rules of the Interview	Process and procedures followed by the Researcher
Preparation	Exploration and familiarization with the field under study. Formulate exmanent questions (formulated from the language, vocabularies, and background of the study	Examine chapter two literature review and take notes on studies, speculations, reports, informal accounts of teachers and particular events, etc. Exmanent question(s) are formulated.
Initialization	Formulate initial topic of narrative.	Context of study are explained in broad terms. Ask for permission to record the interview. Procedures of the interview is briefly explained: uninterrupted story-telling and questioning phase. Obtain written consent from participant.

Main Narration	No interruptions, only non-verbal or paralinguistic encouragement to continue telling the story.	Researcher is restricted to active listening to teacher-participant and abstain from any comment or to show support and interest, e.g., 'Hmm, 'yes', 'I see' until there is a clear coda (pauses and signals the end of the story). There's only nonverbal attentive listening. Specific probe questions only for anything else, e.g., 'is this all you want to tell me?' or 'is there anything else you want to say?'
Questioning Phase	Elicit new and/or additional material beyond the self-generating schema of the narrative.	Allow teacher narration to come to a 'natural' end. Researcher can open questioning phase if need to. Exmanent questions have been translated to immanent questions (using words of the teachers) to complete any gaps. Researcher avoids climate of cross-examination and contradictions in the narratives e.g., probing for opinions, attitudes or causes – allow it to occur spontaneously and authentically.
Small Talk	Recording/audio is turned off. Researcher may use why-questions.	Take notes. Small-talk in a relax mood may shed more light on the formal accounts given during the narration and may be used in the interpretation of the data and/or contextual interpretation of the teachers' accounts.

Adhering to the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who are seminal authors on the areas of trustworthiness in qualitative research, member checking was conducted by emailing interview transcripts to each respective participant for review and approval in order to establish the tenet of credibility and accuracy.

Data Analysis

      The analysis included transcribing, coding, and constructing of the narratives. As previously noted, Dedoose was the software tool used to assist with storage, organizing and coding to reveal emerging themes from the narratives. Pattern coding involves identifying "explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identity an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Miles & Huberman, 2002, p. 69). Using pattern coding was helpful for reducing large amounts of data and depth in the narratives into related themes. To this end, each individual transcript was coded and emerging themes from the coding were used to construct teachers' narratives. Additionally, reflective notes (journaling) were conducted during interviews that helped me to recall information that was not part of the recorded conversation and perhaps assist to clarify and check with participants for accuracy of paraphrasing, as well as helping to identify the audit trail to substantiate trustworthiness (Birks et al., 2008; Rodgers & Cowles, 1998; Yin, 2017).

The Interpretive Form

      I approached the narratives looking through the lenses of both thematic and interpretive narrative analysis. Thematic analysis is a process of identifying themes that uncovered various patterns in order to describe the narratives (Braun & Clark, 2006). Narrative interpretive analysis is the subjective interpretive application of the data (Tamboukou, 2016). Both sets of methods not only analyzed textual data but also assisted to elucidate themes, and systematically extrapolate information to better understand and interpret particular experiences.

      Because qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach to social reality and in the description of the lived experiences of human beings (Elliott & Timulak, 2005) taking the interpretivist analysis approach to the narratives allowed the researcher to understand and

interpret the subjective experiences of the teachers' lives. Interpretive analysis is holistic and contextual, rather than being reductionist and isolationist (Berg & Lune, 2014; Timulak & Elliott, 2019). An interpretive approach tends to focus on language, signs, and meanings from the perspective of the participants involved and it interprets the reality through a sense-making process, and in this case, the use of common places, rather than a hypothesis testing process. The idea of subjectivity is that teachers have many different subjective selves, which alter depending on the situation, location and time in which they are engaging (Polkinghorne, 2005). Polkinghorne (2005) contended that for the researcher, "it is a matter of being able to handle several ways of seeing…differing views rather than reducing all views to a single correct one" (p. 49). As teachers share their personal stories, the researcher utilized different ways of seeing people and their narratives by sequencing the turning point moments that lead to their wanting to be a teacher and their current experiences as a teacher [of color]. (Berg & Lune, 2014).

Through thematic analysis, Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phase guide was used as a framework for the analysis of teachers' stories. Extracting aspects of teachers' stories from their transcripts began the process of building a coding base. For coding purposes, multiple readings were made on the data to identify the themes that may be attached to words or phrases.

Coding individual transcripts was a necessary part of describing, classifying, and interpreting the teachers' narratives (Yukhymenko et al., 2014). Themes extracted from teachers' stories were, e.g., compassion, inspiration, accountability, advocacy, change agent, etc. It is more than just summarizing the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it.

Adding to the interpretation of the narratives, I followed Lieblich et al. (1998), who laid out five steps for analyzing narratives with a holistic-content perspective. For Step 1, the authors

wrote, "Read or listen carefully, emphatically, and with an open mind. Believe in your ability to

detect the meaning of the text, and it will 'speak' to you" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 62). It was

through the repetitive reading of the narratives that significant pieces within the context of the

whole story were constructed. For Step 2, the authors suggested recording initial and global

impressions about the narratives. This was guided through my journaling throughout the

Table 3.1

Thematic Analysis' Six-Phase Guide

Phase	Procedures for Each Step
Step 1: Become familiar with the data	Use Dedoose function to manage data Reading and re-reading Note down initial codes
Step 2: Generate initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the data-set Collating data relevant to each code
Step 3: Search for themes	Pattern collated codes into potential or emerging themes Organize data relevant to each potential theme
Step 4: Review themes	Check if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data-set; Generate a thematic map
Step 5: Define themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme Generate clear names for each theme
Step 6: Writing-up	Final opportunity for analysis selecting appropriate extracts Discussion of the analysis Relate back to research question Produce report

interviews. In Step 3, the researcher decides on which themes to focus on and follow throughout

the text. Step 4 is accomplished by coding the different themes and the final steps involved

keeping track of results by following each theme and noting conclusions. The authors also

suggested paying attention to the starting and ending point of a theme, to transitions between

different themes, to the context of each theme, and to their relative prominence in the

narratives.

According to Creswell (2006), both thematic and interpretive narrative analysis

approaches lend themselves to constructionist paradigms that view experiences, meanings and

social structures as mutually constitutive, although they can be used with other epistemological

frames, particularly realist/experiential ones. They were also particularly (although not

exclusively) associated with the analysis of textual material. What can be gained from combining

thematic and interpretive narrative analysis, despite the features they share, is the different

features of the approaches in that thematic analysis is better suited to providing broad overview

of a dataset, while interpretive narrative approaches allow an extended focus on particularities.

Criteria for Rigor

Through the lenses of a social constructivist, often combined with interpretivism (Mertens,

1999) who seek understanding of the world in which they live and work in developing subjective

meaning of their experiences, the standards and criteria suggested by Creswell (2006), Creswell

and Poth (2017), and Guba (1981) who were widely-recognized with evaluative guidelines for

qualitative research, appropriate for establishing trustworthiness were utilized.

- Study employed a rigorous approach to data collection procedures (interview techniques)

    and data analysis (thematic and interpretive narrative), spend adequate time in the field

    with teacher participants in a natural setting (e.g., teachers' classroom) to establish

    rapport. This process established the credibility of the research and critical to the accurate

    representation of subjective human experience (Guba, 1981).

- Utilizing thematic and interpretive narrative analysis, data analyzed through multiple

    levels of abstraction, e.g., moving from general to particular (Clandinin, 2006), multiple

themes combined into larger themes or perspectives, codes and presented themes derive

from the data showing expected or surprising ideas or angles (Braun & Clark, 2006;

Creswell, 2006). This process achieved transferability, the degree to which the findings

can be applied to other contexts, settings, or with other groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- Consistency through thick description methods of data gathering, analysis, and

  interpretation in the findings achieved dependability (Guba, 1981). Because many

  qualitative methods are tailored to the research situation, there are no methodological

  shorthand descriptions (i.e., inter-rater reliability) commonly used in quantitative studies.

  Thus, the exact methods of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation in this qualitative

  study are described in the methods of study section. The thick descriptions provided

  information as to how repeatable the study will be or how unique the situation (Creswell

  & Creswell, 2017; Guba, 1981).

- Creswell and Poth (2017) reminded that research begins with a single focus,

  understanding a single concept or idea as the core concept (e.g., What influences does

  having access to teachers of color have on students of color?). The researcher needed to

  recognize that it can begin incorporating the comparison or relating factors (e.g., What

  influences does having access to teachers of color have on White students?). However,

  the authors warned that "All too often qualitative researchers advance to the comparison

  or the relationship analysis without first understanding their core concept or idea."

  (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 46)

Ethical Consideration

Ethics in narrative research is a set of responsibilities in human relationship that is

accountable for the dignity, privacy, and well-being of the participants (Creswell, 2006). It also

recognizes that the rights and interests of participants must be primary. The process of gaining consent and access to participants involved permission sought in accordance from the university's Institution Review Board (IRB), a process in which committee's review research studies for their potential harmful impact on and risk to participants.

Each participant was asked to read and sign the informed consent which stated the procedures of the research, their willingness to take part in the study and are free to withdraw at any time. The use of Dedoose as a tool for managing and storing of data were outlined on the consent form as one of the important procedures to assure teachers that the protection of data collected are confidential. Transparency about research interests and procedures ensured a trustful relationship with the teachers. This is an important ethical consideration to make sure the participants were fully informed about, and not psychologically or physically harmed in any way by their participation. Clandinin and Murphy (2009) reminded that, "…narrative inquirers [are] to move beyond the institutional narrative of 'do no harm' by learning an attitude of empathic listening by not being judgmental, and by suspending their disbelief as they attend to participants' stories" (p. 647).

Additionally, as a licensed certified teacher and a member of Washington State's Commissioner on Asian Pacific American Affairs, I am bound by professional codes of ethics and principles required of certified educators and community leaders. Clandinin (2007) reminds, "the narrative researcher is in a dual role – in an intimate relationship with the participant and in a professionally response role in the scholarly community" (p. 32). These principles were applied as a base to the research and relationship with the participants.

Perceived Challenges and Methodological Consideration

A methodological consideration in choosing qualitative inquiry was to help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings through the lived experiences and perceptions of ethnic minority teachers. It has a strong emphasis on the written and spoken word as the method by which a "reality" can be captured (Patton, 2002; Sutton & Austin, 2015). However, as noted by Crowe (1998), "words do not operate as external signs of internal meaning for the individual but rather as a pre-determined system for the allocation of meaning" (p. 340). An awareness of this challenge was important in using both thematic and interpretive narrative analysis. For example, the same open-ended question for all participants in this research may elicit different responses at different points in time, so the dynamic nature of participants' perceptions of their experiences was central to the interpretation of their responses. Also, Vaismoradi et al. (2013) have noted that there is a stereotype among qualitative research that portrays thematic and interpretive narrative analysis as the easiest approaches with qualitative methodologies, but this does not mean they produce low-quality results. While this might be considered a challenge or limitation, I believe these methods provided me with the opportunity to take an analytic position that is broader and more open to a range of theoretical interpretations.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This narrative study is based on the notion that by understanding the career motivations

of current teachers of color we might gain insight into the value that these teachers place on their

racial identity and how meaningful and impactful it is to them as teachers and to students of

color.

This study employed qualitative thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) of semi-structured

interview data to illuminate self-reported stories or intentions if racial identity was a factor

behind participants decision to become teachers. In-depth interviews allowed for collection of

open-ended rich data, and provided opportunities for probing and follow-up questions to

understand an unclear response or the meaning behind a participant's response. The interviews

also allowed for the participants to share personal experiences that influenced their commitment

to teach. Working within a narrative inquiry framework was overwhelming and a daunting task

as I attempted to construct meaningful stories and collective common themes from the narratives.

I began by looking at the interview transcripts through multiple lenses involving:

- My positionality as a teacher of color;

- Immersing myself in the transcript through a process of active listening;

- Paying attention to the language of the text;

- Acknowledging the context in which the text was produced; and

- Identifying moments in the text where something unexpected is happening.

According to Milner (2010), these various lenses are the dimensions people use to

construct and reconstruct their identity and to give meaning to their lives and experiences as they

highlight both individuality and the complexity of a life. Patterns, insights, and themes emerged

from the stories as the voices of the participants were experienced first-hand, listened to and pondered upon multiple times, and then coded and recorded.

Moving from interview transcript to another with my assumption that the process was "giving voice" to those with whom I interviewed, I was concerned that the method of coding for themes in transcripts and studying those themes separated people's words from their spoken and heard context. I did not want the outcome to be loss of the participant's experience and the context of that experience. However, I reflected on the statement, "How we analyze and interpret interview transcripts, indeed any texts, reveals the personal and social stance we take up in relation to learning and to life, our underlying assumptions, presuppositions and the wider social discourses to which we belong" (Grant, 1996, p. 111). This was clarification to me that stories are always told, retold, and interpreted from somewhere.

I started this research with the following research questions:

• How do teachers of color perceive their identity as being meaningful to them as teachers?

• In what ways do teachers of color perceive their identity as meaningful to the success of students of color?

The use of open-ended interview format with the question, "What made you decide to become a teacher?" was paramount in gathering the data. Participants were unaware of the research questions thus making their stories and references to their identity authentic. This not only freed the participants to develop their own story, but to share reflectively on their decision. I selectively coded the themes that connected to the research questions.

The sample teacher participants included 14 teachers of color from various ethnic groups;

African American, Latino, Hmong, Vietnamese, Pacific Islander, and South American. Each participant volunteered to take part in a one time, one-on-one 60+ minute semi-structured interview, and all were very generous with their time, perceptions, professionalism, and self-reflection which lead to authentic narratives.

Utilizing the open-ended question, "What made you decide to become a teacher?" I sought out to find retrospective accounts on the influence their identity as teachers of color had in their decision to become teachers, and their perspective and experiences while in the teaching force. The informality of an open-ended question instilled a level of comfort and wide ranges of possibilities for participants to freely talk and reflect on a subject that, surprisingly, are rarely asked of them. Hence, all the participants were delighted to participate and reflect on a decision-making process in their life and its consequences. The participants shared their stories with the spirit of gratitude. In this chapter, I begin with an introduction of each participant followed by the themes that emerged from the interviews.

The Findings

Participant Demographics

Table 4.1 provides demographic information of participants who were interviewed. Attention was placed on describing the demographic characteristics of participants when presenting the findings of this research. A thorough description allow readers and researchers to determine to whom research findings generalize and allows for comparisons to be made across replications of studies. It also provides information needed for research syntheses and secondary data analysis (Beins, 2017). What follows is a brief profile for each of the participants. Their names have been changed to protect their identity. I have attempted to convey a nuanced understanding of each participant to humanize them in a concise, meaning, and authentic way.

Table 4.1

Demographic Descriptors of Participants

Participant Name	Gender	Grade Teaching	# Years Teaching	Content Area	Professional Context	Racial Identity
Bryan	M	9-10	20	English Language Arts	Rural/Title1	African American
Sebastian	M	11-12	7	Special Education	Rural/Title1	African American
Donna	F	9-12	23	Special Education	Rural/Title1	African American
Zer	F	6-12	18	Reading Specialist	Urban/Title1	Asian/ Hmong
Malina	F	9-12	11	English Language Arts	Urban/Title1	Pacific Islander
Kwesi	M	11-12	12	US & World History	Urban/Title1	African American
Loni	M	K-8	10	Health & P.E.	Urban	Pacific Islander
Brooke	F	9-12	12	Ethnic Studies	Rural/Title1	Jamaican
Ali	F	9-12	8	Spanish	Urban/Title1	African American
Sharif	M	10-11	8	Science & Career Technology	Rural/Title1	African American
Kyla	F	4-5	10	General Education	Urban/Title1	African American
Karina	F	9-12	14	Administration	Urban/Title1	Latina/ Argentinian
Luis	M	9-12	13	Administration	Urban/Title1	Latino/ Mexican
Tuyen	F	9-10	7	Algebra I & II	Rural/Title1	Asian/ Vietnamese

Bryan identifies as an African American male and has taught high school English for

more than 20 years. Bryan comes from a military family, born overseas in Germany, and familiar

with traveling as a child until the family settled in Washington state before he began high school.

Bryan held many leadership roles and activities in high school. He remembers being the only

student of color that participated. Memories of high school eventually led him to become a

teacher. *"I cannot recall any specific moment where there was a teacher or anyone in the education field who contributed to a negative experience for me."*

Sebastian is mixed Black and German descent, but his Black identity is more dominant, and because of it, he was always identified as Black. Born into a military family while stationed in Germany, education was emphasized strongly by his father's side of the family who produced many teachers. "*I grew up in the military which meant there was always diversity in my life, and I'm so very thankful for it.*" Sebastian takes a lot of pride that his aunt was the first Black teacher and principal in the Virginia Beach School District when it was desegregated in the mid 1960s. Sebastian is a high school Special Education teacher and a football coach.

Donna is a Special Education teacher for over 20 years and coaches her high school softball team. She identifies as African-American. Donna was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska in a community of only African Americans and Native Alaskans of various tribes. While the geographical and ethnic groups she lived with changed when relocating around Alaska as a youth, Donna said "*personal self-identity did not.*" Giving back to the community and church is the highest level of living according to Donna. It is her mantra as an educator.

Zer identifies as Hmong-American and she and her family came to the United States in 1979 as a refugee with her parents right after the Vietnam War. To preserve their culture, Zer's family relocated to Spokane, Washington instead of moving to the bigger conglomerate Hmong groups in Minnesota or California. "*Spokane was predominately White Americans, blonde hair, blue eyes, and English speaking.*" Zer was heavily influenced to become a teacher through the examples of her fifth-grade teacher and attribute her passion and expertise as a teacher to her.

Malina identifies as a Pacific Islander, born and raised in Oakland, California in the very rough part of West Oakland, a predominantly Black urban neighborhood. Her parents are

first-generation immigrants from the island Kingdom of Tonga. Through the heavy influx of migration from the Pacific in the 1980s and 1990s, many of Malina's relatives settled in the Bay Area and were accustomed to living in a full house to accommodate them. "*In Polynesian families, there's no such thing as inconvenience when helping people*." The ultimate goal for Malina was to leave the ghetto and the inequities of education in Oakland.

Kwesi identifies as African American. He is a high school history teacher who was born and raised in Tacoma, Washington. His mother was a school counselor. This gave Kwesi an early exposure to education as they were frequently having conversations about planning college for the future. Kwesi attended Howard University where the desire to teach crept into his mind. Kwesi plans to get his Administration certification where he feels it will give him more leverage to make changes that affect the educational experience of students of color.

Loni is a Pacific Islander born on the East coast and raised in Mesa, Arizona where he is a middle school health teacher. Mesa has an ethnically diverse community but almost all were very religious and conservative. After graduating from high school, Loni became a proselyting missionary for his church in Chicago's inner cities. It was there that he witnessed many of the youth's involvement with gangs and drugs. This experience was a drastic change in culture from Mesa. He organized sports activities at the local church building and became a mentor to help kids off the street and save their lives.

Brooke teaches Ethnic Studies in high school and is of Jamaican descent. She was a recipient of the Costco Diversity Scholarship out of high school and used it to attend the University of Washington in Seattle. It was there that Brooke discovered her love of the Harlem Renaissance by reading Zora Neal Hurston, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Countee Cullen,

and Langston Hughes. In her students' eyes, especially students of color, Brooke is a teacher, mom, aunty, and trusted friend.

Ali identifies as a Black female, born and raised in the Seattle area. Currently, she is a high school Spanish teacher. Ali is very proud to have grown up in a family of various multicultural/multiethnic mixtures. This exposure to cultural diversity from home became a good transition when her mother registered her in international schools from elementary to high school. According to Ali, the beauty and uniqueness of this education process was learning and experiencing culture first-hand from students and their families. "*I learned from the people themselves, not just through textbooks, and I heavily valued other cultures as well as respecting my own.*"

Sharif is African American, born and raised in Los Angeles and attended private school in the San Fernando Valley. Sharif struggled while in high school and took a few journeys to restore his faith in education. After years of working in television productions, he found it to be unfulfilling. He wanted a profession where he would feel more useful to society. Utilizing his media experiences, Sharif teaches Career Technology Education (CTE) courses in high school, and he finds that students are fascinated by his past profession.

Kyla is an elementary teacher who teaches fourth grade. She identifies as African American who grew up in Los Angeles, raised by a poor single mother, and was accustomed to being evicted, at least nine different homes in 17 years. She graduated high school in 2001 during the post crack epidemic in Los Angeles. Kyla's first intention was to study law because of the injustices she witnessed growing up, especially in the ways her two brothers were treated as one was very dark skin and the other very light. Kyla worked in a youth ministry before becoming a licensed teacher.

Karina was born and raised in Argentina and moved to the United States when she was 21 years old. She was raised during the 1960s–70s in a country under a dictatorship where education was controlled by the military government, and where books were burned. "*I grew up with the desire to read. I wanted to have the freedom to read anything. I wanted to be as free as a child.*" Karina is currently working as a high school Assistant Administrator after teaching in the classroom for more than 15 years. Her upbringing in Argentina is why she believes that the purpose of her education is to empower and be an ally to marginalized students.

Luis just completed his administration certification after teaching high school Social Studies for almost ten years. Luis identifies as Chicano who grew up in the San Gabriel Valley in East Los Angeles county where it was predominantly Mexican, Chicano, and LatinX communities. Going into education was a desire and opportunity to enact social change. Luis decided to relocate to Washington State to pursue his education degree where he could feel culturally safe from the injustices and racism that were directed continuously at him growing up in Los Angeles.

Tuyen is an immigrant from Vietnam 15 years ago. She was determined to further her education by attending a four-year college nearby her home in Tacoma, Washington. Tuyen discovered her love for the classroom when she volunteered to work at an elementary school while in college, surrounding herself in an academic atmosphere and being inspired by the multiple ways of learning. Tuyen was a substitute teacher for five years, enjoying and testing out each grade level to discover which one she enjoyed most before settling to teach math in high school.

Thematic Analysis

What follows is a compilation of voices that make up the research. My goal is to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding through a culmination of the 14 interviews while giving each voice a chance to be heard to humanize the participants in a way that shows the richness, depth, and difference in their personalities, perspectives, experiences, and motivations. The themes and subthemes were identified through an emergent analysis from the semi-structured interviews. The process of continually reading, analyzing, and coding created a more in-depth understanding of the material as the layers, meaning, nuances sifted and re-sifted. After coding all 14 participant interviews, I collated all responses for each of the five emergent themes. Table 4.2 outlines the main themes and sub-themes that have been drawn from the interviews and which are now discussed individually, as well as indicating the numbers of participants who addressed each theme. Additionally, sub themes are listed in Table 4.2 under the main themes from the highest to lowest represented by the interviewees. The goal was to be inclusive of all perspectives and experiences and seen as all important and insightful.

Theme 1: Identity Means Everything

[14 participants]. While literature on teaching emphasizes the importance of identity in teacher development, understanding identity and the issues related to it can be a challenging endeavor. However, for the participants, their racial identity means everything. Sub-themes identified in this main theme are Cultural Identity Empowers, We Represent America, A Complete Leader, We're Diamonds in the Rough, and A Need to Prove our Worth. All participants could not envision their ethnic or racialize identity (can also be described as personal identity) as being separate from their professional identity, largely due to the interactive and personal nature of teaching. For Zer, Malina and Karina, the fact that students commonly

Table 4.2

Main Themes and Sub-Themes from Interviews

Themes/Sub-Themes	# of Participants Addressing Themes
1. Identity Means Everything	14
Cultural Identity Empowers	14
We Represent America	12
A Complete Leader	12
We're Diamonds in the Rough	10
A Need to Prove our Worth	8
2. Social and Cultural Connections	14
Connect Through our Challenges	14
Compassion and Empathy	14
It's Like Family	14
Trust and Restoring Trust	13
Bring Context into Teaching	13
Stories	12
3. Duty to Serve Community	14
It is a Calling	12
We're Saving Lives	12
To Be Mirrors and Windows	12
Set High Expectations	10
Erase Stigmas and Misconceptions	9
Support the Whole Student	9
4. Challenges Encountered	10
Devaluing and Dismissed	8
Enforcer Rather than Educator	8
5. Why It Matters	10
A Space to Heal	8
Students Tell Us	8

ask them the *origin question,* "Where are you from?" because of what they look like is evidence

of how inseparable personal and professional identities are specifically in regard to teaching, but

more so how identity means everything to students. They explain their personal interactions with

students:

> *Because teachers of color are a rarity, students want to know our identity. (Brooke)*

> *They say you're not Black and you're not Mexican or Asian, so where are you from or what are you? Girls love my hair and ask to touch it. Do I dismiss it like teachers who feel they have to be neutral? Students need to see that we are proud of our identity and the power that comes with it. It is everything to them and it should be to us. It is of utmost important to student-teacher relationship. (Malina)*

> *I didn't know there was such a thing as a race category until I came to America. I open my mouth to talk and students are curious to know where I am from. To them, Argentina is a far and foreign country. Students enjoy asking me question about Argentina and compare it to America. When I speak openly and willing about Argentina, it creates an inclusive atmosphere. (Karina)*

Cultural Identity Empowers. [14 participants]. Each participant individually referred to

their belief on the power of their presence in the classroom for students of color before and after

they became teachers. They each acknowledge their racial differences and know not to ignore

color as it is the first of all connections made. For Karina, it is a heavy responsibility and first

step to empowering students today and future generation:

> *As I was preparing for graduation it became clear to me that I wanted to do something greater than myself… something that would allow future generations to live a life of choice.*

> *There was no shame in my identity and my story. I saw many students like myself. I was proud and was infused with pride because I know if I became a teacher then minority students will always be watching me… and can see that I am their ally and that I am one of them. I know many kids don't have that. Identity is always what students look for to make their first connection. (Kyla)*

> *I seek to serve as an example that will inspire students and inspire more minority teachers to come and roll up their sleeves and seriously considering leading from the classroom. (Luis)*

Participants truly believe cultural identity empowers both teacher and student. With the numbers of teachers of color so few in the teaching force makes it that much more impactful. Luis shares the hardships of identity from his youth that eventually lead to his embracing it and desire to use it as an important tool as a teacher:

> There was a degree of self-hatred that developed within me and it made me feel less than what I was. I started to believe it, it developed within me to the degree I rejected it. I rejected it for many years from my adolescence into my adulthood. I never saw anything that was good about my being Mexican. I finally had to move away. The perception was self-destructive and isolated but was saved when I decided to go to college and discovered a space to vent until I could heal.

Kwesi pointed out how teachers of color can contribute to suppressing the value of student's identity if they dismiss sharing openly about their own identity:

> In high school it was mostly white students… so my ideas of what a teacher was and look and acted like was very narrow. I had one African American male teacher, he taught history. What was weird… like you see something that seems like an anomaly and you realize, dang, that's different. But in this case, I saw him and it wasn't that big of a deal… he was as far as his cultural identity and his racial background because he didn't speak on it at all. I feel that is why I never thought teacher identity to be important. I almost didn't see him as a teacher of color.

As a woman of color, Ali feels that the missing piece of students of colors' education is teachers of color:

> Absolutely. A teacher's cultural identity meant everything to me because I grew up attending International schools my middle and high school years. I didn't say anything but I use think why the curriculum and students were international but our teachers weren't. I was not represented and I would have excelled earlier rather than later. I never forget that and that's why I wanted to teach. I wanted to be that missing link in students that were similar to me.

Ali was also very clear that teachers must take care not to ignore color. She shared how an African American parent confronted her with the knowledge that her child was Black and knew she was Black. This parent wanted that difference to be recognized as a comfortable and natural one.

Participants understand and take full control of their identity and are committed to the concept of empowerment that comes with it. Taking control of their lives and their profession as educators can be impactful in students of colors' strong sense of identity. Kyla reflects back to her own personal challenges as a single mother falling into the stereotype of African American girls:

> *I believe people are truly capable of taking control of their lives, and when they hire a diverse staff and establish programs and procedures that reflect those beliefs then all it can do is help empower our students. It sure helped me during some very rough times. It took for me to see a teacher of color instructing incarcerated Black kids when I felt my challenges can be overcome. I wasn't afraid anymore.*

We Represent America. [12 participants]. The nation's demographics are changing rapidly and it reflects in the classrooms. Participants recognize this demographic mismatch between the demographics of the teacher workforce and the nation's students. Aware of the disparity, many of the participants believe their presence in the classroom is progress towards a global America:

> *Every state has a teacher diversity gap, and it's really sad considering the many cultures represented in our students and in our communities. (Loni)*

> *We have large immigrant population in our school, legal and illegal. I don't ask, but I have my suspicions. I have to put aside my political views because I feel for these students caught up in something they have no control over. They just want to be a part of their new home. They will always remember how they were treated and how they felt when first arrived. We need to be better citizens. (Donna)*

> *I told my students that they are the faces of America and the American Dream is no longer the traditional own a business, white-picket fence home with a car, a dog and kiddos. The American Dream is whatever their dream is, what they want to become, what will make them happy, what they would like to see themselves doing in about ten years from now. (Karina)*

Immigrant teachers like Tuyen and Zer shared their views of education in America. Tuyen's arrival was at the heart of a presidential campaign:

When we settled in Seattle, it was the year Obama gave his speech that lead to his presidential election four years later. He describes America to be a magical place, a genius America, a generous America, a United States of America. I always remember that. How do I want be represented, and what will my students remember me for as an American?

A Piece of Paper was the symbol of education and success in Zer's family:

My father expected us to work hard, grow our own vegetables and raise chickens for meat. There were nine of us children in the family and although he taught us to do physical labor but his interpretation of success in America is having an education, a piece of paper. He would say, "In America, it's all about the paper." And what he meant by that, was your diploma. You need to have an education to be successful here. Without a diploma, it was almost a guarantee that you wouldn't have a better life. A diploma represented America.

A Complete Leader. [12 participants]. Participants felt their role as teachers of color in their various schools makes them not just role models and leaders, but complete leaders. What then makes a complete leader? Sebastian explained that if teachers of color enter the teaching profession equipped with all the skills and necessary tools to serve and accommodate to the learning of students of color, then that makes them a complete leader:

We fall into the assumption that just because we're colored doesn't mean we can teach colored kids. We need to come in equipped with skills, cultural skills and knowledge in order to teach kids like us. Our leadership is complete when we enter the force this way.

Kyla was very clear about teachers of color needing to stop talking and stepping up:

I came into teaching because I was interested in working with children, especially minority youth who needed role models they can look to for guidance. We all didn't have these role model and leaders in our youth. Rather than complaining and waiting for that person to come along, I needed to make the move and be that leader I never had. True leadership is having the courage to step in and fill a void that others are waiting and relying on.

Karina declared that a person of color in the teaching force is automatically a leader:

You become an automatic leader when they can see themselves in their teachers. Anything that reflects what is similar, they see you in a position of leadership. It is a feeling of completeness for them and for me. It is empowering to their learning, their interactions and to who they are.

Sharif was immediately asked to be an advisor for a Black Student Union club when he

was hired at a Title 1 school:

> *Apparently, many of the Black students wanted to have their own club for some time but none of the teachers ever available to provide, at least just a space for them to do their thing, whatever it was, afterschool. I was hired and one of the first assignments I was ask to fill on top of my own classes was to be an adviser for this group of kids who have waited for someone to fill the role.*

We're Diamonds in the Rough. [10 participants]. Often educators are reminded to find

those diamonds in the rough. It is a statement describing students who are unexpected to achieve.

Sharif describes them as, "…*less than impressive backgrounds, but through the roof potential.*

They are everywhere and their potential must be sought out." It was surprising that one

participant, Luis, made the statement that teachers of color are the diamonds in the rough, not the

students:

> *Minority teachers are diamonds in the rough. There are so very few of us and we have the cultural capacity to help our students evolve their natural talent into stellar performances and opportunity. As a teacher it is always my goal to utilize my cultural capital to communicate, understand, listen, teach and support my students, especially the minority students who tend to feel devalued – it is a beautiful process and it allows me to identify that one-in-a-million creative intelligence and potential.*

It was after Sharif and Luis referred to themselves as the diamonds in the rough that I

began to recognize the countless inferences to this theme that many of the participants shared in

their narratives:

> *I knew immediately I was different and unique as a teacher. Funny, I felt it as a student, and I felt it again as a teacher. (Malina)*

> *We have practices that are informed by indigenous knowledge and values that can benefit our kids… no one else have[sic] it, we're just unique in that way and it can be taught from any professional development. (Zer)*

Similar to Luis' description, Kwesi describes himself unique in his teacher of color

capacity because he is adept at mobilizing and utilizing a broad range of powerful advocates

from the communities of his students as participants in the instruction and learning pedagogies:

> *I have to utilize my networks and contacts with community leaders that buy into who I am as a teacher that represent our communities. They will be visible and directive when I invite them in to help. Students love it. Unfortunately, many teachers of color don't realize and understand how powerful they are. They need to understand their primary role is that of a linking agent of people, programs, communities, and resources. That is what makes us powerful and unique – a rarity.*

A Need to Prove Our Worth. [8 participants]. While the value of having more diverse teaching force, choosing to be teachers, participants expressed that they were often perceived as subpar educators. The assumption that teachers of color are best to teach students of color creates a subtle—and obviously inaccurate—undercurrent that teachers of color do not have the ability to teach all children. Donna noted:

> *I can deal with all kids, so put me in another class, and let me see how that goes. I've been teaching Special Education for over 20 years and a large number of my students have been everything but Black. I have to always resort to home and my faith. I serve the community, not just a group in the community.*

Another perception that four participants revealed is that they are often stereotyped as not as educated or as knowledgeable as their counterparts in the profession.

> *One of the challenges was convincing parents that our decisions are the right decisions…parents would look to the White teachers and whatever they say was golden. There was no questioning them. But when it came to the African American teachers, it was always a question… always some pushback. There was some uncertainty around 'What is it exactly? Why do you know that?' … having to always go an extra step to convince people that what we're doing is the right thing. (Ali)*

> *There are always subtle forms of discriminatory [sic] from all sides of the isle in education especially with our small numbers. I don't focus on it too much and I don't allow it to hinder my work. If our numbers increase and our students progressing that's all that matters. (Sebastian)*

> *Everything we do is a proving ground and so everything we do has to matter. (Donna)*

Kyla admitted that this is just the reality of the profession for them as teachers of color, despite being just as or more qualified than their colleagues:

> *That fixed mindset is there. I think it creates the challenge of seeing me as someone who is informed and educated and can contribute just as well as anyone else sitting at the table.*

Theme 2: Social and Cultural Connections

[14 participants]. The enthusiasm and desire to connect with students of similar social and cultural backgrounds was a foundational approach to teaching and learning for the participants. Sub-themes identified in this main theme are Connect through our Challenges, Compassion and Empathy, It's Like Family, Trust and Restoring Trust, Bring Context into Teaching, and Stories. This notion that all students can succeed may seem trite as it is constantly repeated, but how it is implemented effectively depends solely on a teacher's social and cultural ability to connect. Relating to students was a clear strength that participants said they appreciated and leveraged to engage with their students. Luis, Zer, and Sharif were all very clear in their stories about their lives and experiences that led them in the path to the classroom. Social and cultural connections was the reoccurring theme that surfaced most:

> *There's freedom to be creative in connecting with my students to their primary culture, I've recognized the need to convey value… affirming their cultural identities… it has a swelling effect …it is empowering for them to see teacher and student connect through culture. (Luis)*

> *How often do Hmong students ever see or meet a teacher who is Hmong? Never. Words can't describe the security Hmong students feel knowing that I am within reach. On culture day, I wear my traditional Hmong attire and through that they are being recognized. (Zer)*

> *All it takes is a quick handshake and a nod most of the time with the boys especially and we're good to go. I have their full and undivided attention. (Sharif)*

For Ali, it is storytelling that wins her students over thus, making her job extremely satisfying.

> *It's like, the more I tell stories, stories about me, I know they are listening more to find connections with me.*

Malina advises that her culturally relevant pedagogies and personal experiences negotiating school structures is an invaluable asset to students of color:

> *As a student, I was grateful to have had a Black teacher. I was lucky to grow up in a predominantly Black area. I see many students with color, they don't have that today, not even one. I think it's about students recognizing that this person looks like me, therefore, they can understand some of my issues. I can talk to them and they can relate to what I'm going through and feeling.*

Connect Through Our Challenges. [14 participants]. Participants conveyed the eagerness to be a teacher is partly from their life experiences and challenges, and the degree to which they have accommodated and assimilated into the dominant culture. Malina and Loni who identify as Pacific Islanders claim:

> *The Pacific is vast and large, it is the largest body of water on earth with so many different island nations. When I am in school and all the islander students look at me, I have to code switch to being an indigenous islander. This is what I am expected to be and I play that role. When many of them are in my class, I am constantly having to refer to our culture to keep them engaged, a missing piece in my education. (Malina)*

> *They ask questions why and how I became a teacher. I tell stories constantly and their favorite is when I tell them my struggles. I see them nodding their heads in agreement – that's the sign I follow. But in knowing that connection, I always finish my stories on a good note and that is I assimilate but never lost myself along the way. That is the message I want to leave with them. (Loni)*

Bryan spoke of how he is perceived by the students as rich and a smart teacher:

> *One of my goals was to always dress professionally to work. Every day I wear a shirt and tie and slacks… I dress to send the message to my students that they're important. Color students interpret it that I've always been rich, successful and smart… and that's a good thing. I remind them that I'm from this neighborhood. Then all of a sudden, the interest shifts to them asking "well what did you do to get where you're at then" They're eager to hear the before and after stories.*

> *Students forget that we were young once and made a lot of mistakes. I have to be transparent about my stories… my students love to hear them. It is the end that matters and they're hearing my stories from the end. (Donna)*

This responsibility was more cogent for teachers when they understood students' challenges, whether it was their home lives, their relationships to their parents and communities, or discrimination or trauma that students may have experienced. Luis said:

> *We can share the challenges … with students of color. This is what you're going to have to deal with, but look at us. You can be successful. This is the focus you have to have.*

Participants felt that they empathize with students' out-of-school experiences differently than do caring, White teacher colleagues. Their empathy often combined with other strengths necessary to provide a quality education to children. Ali, for instance, said it gave her patience with students, above and beyond that of her White colleagues:

> *Where I'm at, sometimes there are Caucasian teachers that don't even have the patience with the kids. Or the kids will do one thing wrong, and they're ready to nail them to the cross.*

Many of the participants reported strong connections with students and families that propelled the students' success, made students feel valued, and provided a safe avenue for students and families to communicate with the teacher. Kyla remembered sharing a personal story with her student:

> *I had a kid who was doing really poorly, academically. His dad had gone to jail… and he just declined drastically. I called home and mom explained what happened. I sat this child down and shared my same experience. At that age, my dad was incarcerated. He was like, "Oh, so you understand what I'm going through? I said, "I lived the same life that you live but it's up to you on how many times you seize the opportunities that are presented in front of you"*

Compassion and Empathy. [14 participants]. Understanding and remembering hardships were countlessly repeated from the narratives. Their choice to become teachers largely had to do with remembering personal challenges in their own education thus allowing participants to have compassion for their students while also holding high expectations:

> *I sympathize with you, but I'm still going to challenge you. I always found ways to educate those around me. Now that I'm teaching, relationships with students come*

naturally. I'm bringing things that I didn't have in a teacher. Teaching is reflecting to [sic] my hardships and I would ask myself 'What can I do better?' or 'What would have I done better to understand?' I would have never known that many of my students come from the same circumstances if I had not shared my story. (Kwesi)

Kyla concurs that her success with students, 90% of the time, requires her to reflect back to her own struggles. Her intuition and empathy are what guides her to know how to act and how to instruct. It begins with modeling the social skills they need before rigor and academics can work:

Students cannot be underestimated no matter where they come from. Their hearts are tender and sensitive, especially my students of color. I feel for them. I make sure they know I understand how they feel and that our lives are edged on always feeling second class, not good, smart enough, and even not pretty enough, so long as they are mixed with White students and White teachers. I always felt that way growing up, but I worry if they will be able to overcome it successfully as I did.

Karina illustrates compassion by showing students how to code switch so that they are able to navigate through oppressive systems, yet fit within the culture of their classroom, school, and community. Karina, like Kyla, consistently reflects on her youth in Argentina and how difficult it was to overcome those suppressed feelings in order to feel liberated:

We are never to forget our struggles. This is where my compassion comes from and this is what makes me an effective teacher to students of color. We need to be this way for all students, but mostly so for our struggling students of color who for the most part don't have the right kind of support they need. By remembering, we teach with empathy and students always feel it.

It's Like Family. [14 participants]. Another recurring theme participants focused on is their abilities to build on personal relationships, like family, to enhance their teaching pedagogies. African American teachers, for example, felt the major difference in teaching African American students was the way in which they approached them because they themselves are African American. All but one (Tuyen, who is not married) of the female participants recognized that they are perceived as the "mother" intersecting work with care in an effort to

show positive influence and affect change in their communities. They did many things that

presented them as a classroom caregiver:

> *I always felt comfortable giving them the "eye" when they were off tasks, and using voice tones that were both firm, yet respectful. These are the types of cues that every African American knows…" (Ali)*

> *My islander students enjoy having me scold them in class, especially if I say something in our language as a term of endearment. They like to show their ability to obey in public as a piece of their cultural expectation of respect… students are envious of that closeness and yearn for that same relationship that can only come when you have a teacher with similar cultural background. It feels like home. (Malina)*

Sebastian spoke about being viewed as a family member which allowed their students

and parents to be more open and receptive with them as teachers:

> *We bring familiarity to our students. You know, they like to look up and say, 'Oh, okay, there is my auntie,' or 'There is my grandma,' or 'There is my cousin.'*

> *Girls are comfortable to call me Aunty now rather than my name. They tell me I remind them of their Mom, or that I look like their Mom. It doesn't bother me, but it does bother other teachers that the comfort level is on that level. (Brooke)*

> *I reprimanded a student after school because of her grades. She was the smartest student in class. I was frustrated with her failing because she couldn't put her phone away. I expected her to get all defensive and talk back, but she responded back saying that it was okay… it's her fault and it was okay that I can yell at her because this is how her mom is at home… she knows I am right. (Donna)*

Brooke captures her role as teacher is an automatic expectation to be a parent. Brooke

was fully aware of this responsibility going into teaching. Her perception on the learning

relationship liken to a family culture for students of color speaks to a consistent theme that was

expressed by participants:

> *I really believe that where we are they [students] expect us to be the mom or dad of every student here. I don't mind going beyond my duties to play that role – it is just natural to feel that way when you have a teacher who resembles some similarities to you.*

Sebastian believes that the various hats he wears are reflective of racial and cultural

concerns that is needed for students of color. Due to his involvement in the community and his

own experiences of navigating through oppressive systems, Sebastian understands that urban

students need more than just a teacher. He becomes the bridge that disrupts unfair circumstances

students face, and at time, support students when their parents cannot. Teachers of color must

have a certain level of finesse, experiences, and credibility so that students may look at them as a

role model.

Trust and Restoring Trust. [13 participants]. Participants in this study, much like in

other research, felt their presence in the classroom makes it easier to build connections with their

students because of perceived cultural and experiential similarities. They said this immediate,

surface-level connection with many students of color helped those students trust them and feel

safe in their care:

> *I think we don't have the trust barrier sometimes that other teachers of a different ethnicity may … because they see someone who they consider automatically, by the skin color that looks like them—then they tend to be more trusting. (Sharif)*

> *You can pull a student out of a classroom—and I've not encountered the student—but as soon as they step out and see my face, as opposed to the other teachers, they feel comfortable enough to share some things that they might not have with the teacher of a different ethnicity. (Kyla)*

> *I had about two teachers who were African American from middle school to college, I remember how they made me feel. Seeing them in the classroom really shaped my experiences because they gave me hope. I could actually grow up and be an educator, I could be worthy. It affirmed that people of color do have the skills sets and capability if they want to do something better for themselves, even if society sometimes says it's not possible. (Ali)*

Loni believes that students may not have enough images of role models from their own

community and culture that are associated with educational success. Loni hopes that his role as a

Pacific Islander teacher allows for many Pacific Islander students in his district and nationwide

to see that their own personal assumptions about being an Islander [excelling only in athletics]

are not always facts. He uses his position to counter the stereotypes of society and school to

restore trust, as well as those held of other ethnic groups:

> *I shock many of the Polynesian students because they don't know quite how to take me… they're shocked to have a teacher who is color [sic] because most have never had one. My job is more meaningful because I know I am a part of a system that is trying to instill trust back into our schools – part of this trust is for students to start seeing themselves represented in their teachers.*

Malina focused on changing stereotypes of all people of color. She argues that seeing

educators of color allows students to realize that their intellectual ability is just as important as

the athletic or entertaining abilities the media portrays of African Americans and Pacific

Islanders. For Malina, she values how students see her, and embraces the perception of being

smart:

> *Kids can identity and understand that they are just as smart as any other culture because Black and Polynesian students think the only way they can make it out is through athletics. It's time to dispel those myths that many of our students of color have of themselves. They see more of us is only helping them to feel they are important and they are visible.*

Bring Context into Teaching. [13 participants]. Having students see them as familiar,

and even familial, allowed many of the participants take on a number of responsibilities beyond

teaching content to their students. This appeared in how they approached their practice and the

information they felt was important to share with students:

> *I think we bring history, a lot of history, and some of us have lived that history. We're not just reading it from the books. We have actually lived that history, and we're able to share that with our students, and I think help them to understand a little better that this is what it takes to be successful, in this world. (Loni)*

> *It never fails. Almost always all of my minority students [of color] tell me that I am like their mom so everything I do and everything I say and how I say it is all too familiar to them. They laugh about it and always express how much they look forward coming to my class every day because of it. (Donna)*

> *When I talk about my upbringing in Argentina and the government wars over education and students risking their lives to get an education, to learn to read, I can tell students*

are thinking and reflecting really deep into their souls asking 'Why?' and 'Why America?' 'Why we flee to America to be saved?' It is history coming from first-hand experience. (Karina)

Teachers of color have lived experiences that connects [sic]… even people of privilege and power cannot understand. (Brooke)

It was clearly understood from all participants that they enter the classroom equipped with the tools that are highly effective with teaching students of color. It is their ability to adopt culturally "appropriate" or "congruent" methods to engage their students (e.g., through their use of language and the design of classroom activities):

I feel for the South-East Asians. They can have a Japanese teacher because Japanese language is taught in school… but never a Vietnamese, or Thai, Laotian, or Hmong. Hmong is a growing population in my district so Hmong students come looking for me and are overjoyed to be in my class. I know how they learn. I use anecdotes and cultural stories that is [sic] parallel to American culture. It's so wonderful to see how happy they are to recognize how much they really do have in common with their new home and language. (Zer)

I have all my music posters on the wall, from Motown to Reggae – it is a catcher for many of the students, particularly anyone of color. They love their music and know their history. When I talk of eras I can always use music to trace back what time period it was. They retain information if music is in the picture. (Bryan)

Stories. [12 participants]. Using student culture through stories as a basis for bringing context into teaching and practice in the classroom was repeated throughout the narratives. Storytelling has always been a unique way for students to develop understanding, respect and appreciation for other cultures, and can promote a positive attitude for students toward various cultures, races and religions. More than half of the participants recognized that their very presence comes with a story of success. Karina, went into the teaching force without realizing her immigrant story had value to her teaching practices:

With the current political climate on immigration, my immigration story has shaped my perspective on how valuable stories of struggles are to immigrant students. Every day reaffirms my choice to be a teacher was really for these students.

The simple tool of storytelling was one of the few elements of instruction that astonished

Donna as a teacher:

> *It is a relational tool used to connect teacher and students. Students are always looking for ways to connect personally to their teachers, first its identity and second is through the story's teachers share. That is the glue that bond [sic] us together.*
>
> *… if students don't understand, I tell it in a story, it never grows old, its miraculous. (Loni)*

Kyla, the 5th grade teacher, and Brooke, the high school teacher both agree that their

racial/ethnic identity comes out when having to use storytelling to capture and engage their

students at all grade levels. They tell their stories with cultural gestures, body language, and

movement:

> *This is what makes us unique as teachers and why we're needed for our students. The social and cultural cues are much appreciated when we openly use it in our teaching practices. (Kyla)*

Kwesi shares similar experiences:

> *I teach Ethnic Studies—students joke around with me that my class should be titled Ethnic Stories, and that's because it is the stories that accompanies the trailblazers who spoke out on the injustices of society that draws them to take my class each semester. Storytelling does not end in elementary school.*

Bryan, who has a minor in Theatrical Studies, launched a poetry club at his school. It was

Bryan who claimed that by returning to his alma mater he can provide small encouragements and

reaching to student of color who need it, something he witnessed in high school but didn't know

how to help. Becoming a teacher was having to revisit past experiences of his youth to help fix it.

He explained:

> *I [didn't] overlooked the sadness I witness that students of color were going through around me. I just suppressed it for the most part. I became a teacher so I can return to fix things. I created this space of safety to use poetry as a form of communicating their feelings about the climate of their society, but then they wanted to listen to stories of people from their culture that carved history in our country. Hispanic students enjoyed*

hearing about Caesar Chavez, Black students connected with the Jesse Owens. Stories that inspire.

Theme 3: Duty to Serve Community

[14 participants]. Service is another way of leveling the playing field for students of color as participants feel compelled to fulfill their social responsibility and duty to their communities. Sub-themes identified under this main theme are It is a Calling, We're Saving Lives, To Be Mirrors and Windows, Set High Expectations, Erase Stigmas and Misconceptions, and Support the Whole Student. The following participants responded that their racial identity was key in their desire to assist, support, and provide a model for their own people and in their communities. In many of their reflections they shared:

> *When I think about teaching in general, I was driven to provide opportunity and experiences for individuals in my community. Almost the entire time I thought about becoming an educator, I knew this would be the only place that I would go. (Sebastian)*

> *Coming back to where my experiences were - I was very connected to this idea. I wanted to provide those experiences for those in places where I saw others not have them. (Kwesi)*

> *For most of them it would only take a small encouragement, a small reaching out that they never had. (Tuyen)*

> *What I thought those students were experiencing, and those who had racial ethnic-based rationale, right? [sic] In their head what they were saying, 'This is what's driving me, this is what is preventing me from success, and this is what I'm frustrated by in rebelling against.' Some of that is definitely what drew me back to teach at Bethel. (Bryan)*

For Donna, her religious upbringing manifested her desire to go into a profession that is service oriented:

> *My mother had us involved in civic and social duties of the church to give, to share, to serve, and to always give back to whomever less than or equal to. We're giving to our own people group, families, and community. I had a rare upbringing based out of the Catholic church. We're not part of a demographic even though our identity to African American as in being black was right on… what trumped everything was giving and service through our Christianity.*

It is a Calling. [12 participants]. Most of the participants agreed with Donna on the notion of service, both connected to religion and secular service and spoke in terms of teaching as their calling:

> *I became a teacher because I felt it a special calling, not everyone has this feeling, but I believe it and I follow always follow what my instincts tell me. I don't take it lightly. (Brooke)*

> *My strength is spiritual; I believe that I was brought here for a reason. Each day I step foot into the hallways and the classroom and see and hear the voices of students greeting me with smiles, I sense it to be a spiritual message reminding me how sacred my responsibility is to them. Teaching is a gift, an individual thing. (Loni)*

> *My intuition is pretty strong. You know what they say about a woman's intuition. Thank goodness for that. I truly follow it when I am in the classroom. Sometimes I tell my students about how powerful that instinct is. One time a student asked "Is that why women say they have eyes in the back of their heads?" (Donna)*

> *Someone told me once, "I'm a teacher because there is no higher calling than helping children." But my favorite saying is "The best thing about being a teacher is that is matters. The hardest thing about being a teacher is that it matters every day? Everyday needs to start today. (Malina)*

One might assume that such feelings would arise more readily from the women due to their nurturing nature, but in fact it was evenly distributed between genders that surfaced in the participants:

> *As a missionary, it literally was a calling from God. We opened up our church building as a starting point for kids to come and eat and play some basketball, just a place of safety. I found myself talking to them about everything, about life. They were eager to listen. I suppose anything was better than what they had. This was the inception of my teaching career. (Loni)*

> *My father's family are all educators. My aunt was the first black principal in Virginia Beach school district. I only have brothers, and we're all teachers. I don't know [sic] that all worked out, but it just did. I guess it just runs in the family. (Sebastian)*

Luis viewed it as an ethically responsibility to be a teacher in order to prepare students of color for leadership in the enhancement of the quality of life for them and their families. Some of the reasons were quite moving. Luis reflected:

As a youth, I internalized many hardships that I saw… the purity goodness of White culture and the superiority of it. I had to forgive which is the first step to building my leadership. Those experiences happen for a reason, it prepared me to be a teacher. This has made all the difference in my career as a teacher and administrator. There are many students back home who are still in the thick of these struggles, they are growing into adulthood with these internalized conflictions. I worry for their livelihood.

We're Saving Lives. [12 participants]. Responses from 12 participants referred to their ability to save the lives of marginalized students of color was overwhelming and worth discussing. Connecting through and understanding similar changes, there were overwhelming concerns about the students' livelihoods. Four participants first tried other professions but chose to come into teaching to make a statement for the power of the profession. Sebastian had a well-paying position but, as he explained, he realized something was missing in his life:

I got sick of office work and working in isolation. I volunteered to coach little league football one year. A lot of the students signed up to play for me because I was colored, I guess it was an automatic give that I must know football. It was a feeding team to high school. How do I help preserve the lives of these boys to make it to high school football? When parents saw the enthusiasm and commitment these boys made to come to practice and school, I knew I needed to change career [sic], and that I did and it has made all the difference.

Sebastian commented that men, in particular, tend not to be encouraged or introduced to the possibility of teaching as a profession because of the lack of male role models and authority figures, lack of diversity of perspectives, low status of the field, lack of acknowledgement of men's nurturing selves, and a skewed image of what it is to be a teacher. He referenced two of his buddies who are now teachers in nearby districts:

After five years working as a team-leader at a pharmaceutical company, my friend Travis realized something was missing – kids. He would often say that people usually go into lab work because they don't have people skills. But he wanted more interaction. He always wanted to be a teacher because he would see kids of color in the streets with too much time in their hands, that was a red flag, but didn't think [sic] of K-12 teaching; no one ever introduced him to the idea but those kids on the street.

Another buddy of mine is an administrator. After four years as an engineer, he said he didn't like it. From an engineering viewpoint, he asked himself, 'Why am I creating tools

for people who don't know how to use the tools they already have?' My job now is utilizing the tools I know to save a life. That makes me happy.

To Be Mirrors and Windows. [12 participants]. Racial identity was the very key for more than half of the participants entering the teaching force and the other half recognized the value of their identity after they were hired. Mirrors and windows are the latest and most used analogy towards calling to improve diversity for students and educators. The participants all claim they work hard to develop relationships with their students in order to help them identify their place in the world. They all agreed that the best way to help their students do this is to put themselves as role models in the classroom, introduce stories and materials that act as mirrors and windows.

Brooke explained what she learned about the phrase "Mirrors and Windows" initially introduced to her at a training class some years back:

A mirror is a story that reflects your own culture and helps you build your identity [they see themselves]. A window is a resource that offers you a view into someone else's experience. It is critical to understand that students cannot truly learn about themselves unless they learn about others as well [they see each other].

Brooke continues:

I know its repetitive, we hear and read this all the time, but it's true. If they [students of color] don't see it they don't think about it, but until they experience it then everything will come back to them and they will realize how a lot of things never assigned value to it. If they will understand – they'll just suppress it.

Ali shared an experience from her childhood:

I was always looking for myself in books because back in the seventies and eighties I could never find a book about myself. I could never find a book that had a little black girl in it, even in coloring books. I was always coloring the face with a dark brown. I was like, "Why are all these coloring books automatically bringing the shades to the white shades?" so I would always color the pictures with the brown colors because I wanted to see myself in those things. I would always hope there would be teachers that were successful that also looks like me.

Bryan, added:

As soon as I got to college, and I had that first teacher of color, I realized how impactful it was. It shaped what I decided to study, what I decided to do with my life. Moving forward, I felt much more comfortable in the classroom. I felt heard, I felt seen.

Set High Expectations. [10 participants]. Through their stories, participants make it apparent that there is a need to supplement or modify the curriculum to make it more meaningful and relevant to their students. They felt special connections to them and their families, and held them to high standards of academic and behavioral success. Zer, expressing the powerful and loving belief in her students' limitless capabilities, was inspiring to hear:

I had a lot of respect for all the students in my class, in general I just saw their infinite potential. It drove my teaching and my diligence, hard work, and all the extra hours I put in because I knew they could do it and they deserved it. I think that was a success because I ended up being a strong teacher. It's not because of me but because of how I felt about them.

Sharif, who started his career in television, felt it was critical to bring in various professionals who are of color into his classroom. It is setting high, reachable, and achievable expectations for them. This was due to the interest level his students of color had in his previous profession as an African American television producer.

Representation matters. It matters because it's automatic expectation [sic]. Students become what they can see. During my time in the classroom, it was really important for me to bring in Black professionals or anyone that is of color. Boeing was not too far from our school and so was Amazon, many from a variety of different sectors, even small businesses so my students could have that exposure. It's to show them that there are a lot of different people in this world doing a lot of different things. If you get a good education, this could be you as well. It's possible.

Tuyen claimed that she was not held to high academic expectations as a student because of her inability to speak good English and the stigma put on Southeast Asians. She now recognizes this same pattern in her colleagues setting the same low expectations based on students' socio/ethnic backgrounds. Tuyen believes her colleagues feel they are doing a good deed by being sensitive and accommodating to the students:

It is really sad to see this being done. Students will rise to whatever the occasion is and expectations you put on them. It doesn't matter who they are, where they come from, we have to believe in them and not make them feel afraid to fail.

Donna, however, warns that she has to be careful not to allow her own empathy to lower

her expectations just to see students succeed:

We have to be careful ourselves. When I started in the classroom, I found myself feeling too empathetic and wanted to cater but on a lower scale, it was a disaster. Even tough students are excited to have us, they sometimes expect us to go easy on them. I have to be careful not to fall for it.

I've been accused of favoring students of color. I'm more careful about what I say and my approach so it doesn't come off as true.... at first, I took offense, but as I reflect on what students observe and disagree, perhaps there is some truth behind it - they do recognize the connection and rapport and it makes sense they interpret it as favoritism and for that reason, my academic and behavior expectations are high for students of color and I'm no escape goat. (Ali)

Erase Stigma and Misconceptions. [9 participants]. Being in a place of a role model

also motivates participants to share with students of color the ways in which they experienced

and overcame life challenges and obstacles. It is used as a tool to also erase the stigma associated

with their communities and opportunity to inspire and show them that it is possible to be

successful in spite of the odds:

I think my influence on the children I teach is very important. Your home life may be rough, you know. We already know that, but you can see somebody, me, I'm just like you. And for me, I let them know personal things about myself, when I was a child, what I did ... They don't have the confidence, but they see it in you. (Loni)

Participants in the sample often said they became teachers because they wanted to give

back to their community and make a difference. The professional pressures that cause many

teachers of color to feel obligated to teach and serve their students also reflect their motivations

to encourage educational success:

While these challenges are admirable traits in teachers, the continuous pull on their professional lives can sometimes be strenuous at times, but every job has it. You have to come into teaching with this expectation, otherwise we're in the wrong business. (Tuyen)

Brooke, who once taught ELA and Early Childhood Education, now coaches teachers as part of being department head. Although teachers of color were infrequently hired, she tells of her excitement to coach and help onboard and to transition as a teacher of color. The excitement arises when reflecting to her youth not having many teachers that looked like her:

> *There were times when I didn't always embrace my Black identity. I felt like White was the standard, or that I wasn't good enough. When I got older, I recognized these stigmas were not only untrue but detrimental notions to internalize.*

These negative stigmas, according to Brooke, can only be erased through representation in the classroom where students of color can experience excellence:

> *Being that representation of a Black teacher for my students meant breaking down a lot of stigma for my students, but especially if there more colored teachers in math and science. I remember my math teacher in high school was Black. When he was in front me, actually doing experiments with me or teaching me math, was an example of not just telling me but showing me that I can do it.*

On one hand, participants understand that, in reality, it is natural for teachers of color to relate to students of color. Yet, while this may come naturally for some teachers, for others it can be difficult to understand students who look like them but come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, home lives, and cultures. Moreover, participants voiced that they were often burdened and taxed because they are perceived by others to relate to every child of color:

> *I mean, and most of the time you can, but even when you can't, it's assumed that you are supposed to touch every child that crosses your path. (Luis)*

> *We become the representative for every child of color, I mean, whether we relate to them, whether our culture is the same or not. We become the representative for all of those children. (Brooke)*

> *The emphasis on teachers and their relationships with students does not only come from administrators or other teachers, but also from students. Students, who may trust teachers in a way that complements learning, can also become overly familiar with teachers and attempt to take advantage of their commonalities. Students, for instance, may speak to Black teachers using slang. Some teachers even noted that Black students*

often spoke more respectfully to White teachers because they did not have these relational commonalities. (Sebastian)

Several of the participants in the sample also mentioned the possibility of having negative influences on students. Expected to be relatable, a discouraging or unsupportive teacher can devastate a student looking for someone to trust. Participants stressed the need for teachers who care for their students and who try to connect with them over teachers who simply look like their students:

Being able to superficially relate to particular students often facilitated a connection, but teachers saw building that connection and supporting students as a greater priority. (Zer)

Bryan remarked in his reflection:

I am privileged enough to work with children who look and identify with the same things I identify with. We speak the same language without even at times opening up our mouths. I have this opportunity to give them the things that I may not have gotten when I was in school. In respect to seeing things from the same lens but now with a bigger microscope. In many instances the students were comfortable to take risks and share personal experiences, triumphs, and challenges because I shared those same sentiments.

Valuing the students was not just vocalized, it was displayed in other ways; for example, Bryan always felt comfortable wearing a shirt and tie to school but there was also a reason for it. He wanted the students to view the dignity and pride that he carried and that he carried himself that way for them. How he spoke these words was endearing and heartfelt. Bryan recalled a conversation with a student:

You know why I dress like this? Because of you. I want to look nice for you. You're what's here. What kind of teacher am I without some students? I can't sit up in this classroom and learn these things myself. I already know them, I need somebody to teach them. I dress like this for you.

Support the Whole Student. [9 participants]. Participants expressed a sense of obligation to teach students of color well beyond the academic curriculum. It was often noted that their sensibility, and the stress that goes along with it, was intensified by their limited

representation in the teaching workforce and the field of education at large. Participants felt

particularly aware of their small number when looking at district and state representation and

attending professional development trainings, which often did not cater to the kinds of schools

they worked in or the kinds of issues they faced. This lack of adequate resources and support

often led participants to navigate challenges on their own and rely on whatever they had to serve

their students:

> *There are a lot of challenges, and there will be a lot of challenges because we are a minority of people who teach in the teaching profession. (Karina)*

In the narratives, participants overwhelmingly spoke about the additional responsibilities

they face in serving underserved children which were mostly students of color. They felt a

responsibility to nurture them as whole beings and be a stable support for them. Many of these

responsibilities were personal obligations they felt to take care of them and make sure their

needs, both academic and non-academic, were being met:

> *Well, I don't think I can separate being a parent from my job as a teacher. Because I'm teaching my own children. I look at the children that I serve as an extension of me. I want them to go out and be their very best, because they represent me. I went into teaching for this very reason. (Donna)*

Academically, participants spoke about feeling a burden to serve students of color

because another teacher may not. They shared a fear that if they did not teach, they would not be

held to high expectations or encouraged to reach academic success:

> *I felt it was my obligation to teach my students, I mean my race. I knew that they will put them in a corner somewhere and just leave them there, and I felt it was my — as a teacher, I felt I had to. I had to. (Luis)*

This feeling of obligation to educate students went beyond academics. In some situations,

by acting as a parent, a hairdresser, a chauffeur, an advocate, a counselor, or a cheerleader,

participants felt they went above and beyond the responsibilities of a "typical" teacher.

Supporting the whole student was seen as part of their professional responsibilities, and they felt

OK if they had to use money out of their own pockets to make sure their students had what they

needed. This is an on-going process in Donna's class:

> *They come to Ms. M. I'm a nurse, I'm a therapist. One day I said "I don't think I taught today. I felt like I was a nurse, a therapist, a fan, a mentor, I don't even know how I floated through this day because it was Ms. M this, [or] that.*

This pressure to be everything they can be for their students encouraged teachers to carry

themselves in particular ways to be a proper role model, especially for students who do not have

role models at home:

> *I have an obligation as a woman of color to provide the best type of example of a role model and what my students should do as they're character-building, and just how they carry themselves. And I do think that differs from White teachers. I don't know if they come into the role and think all of that. (Ali)*

Theme 4: Challenges Encountered

[10 participants]. The same qualities that participants perceived as strengths, however,

often come with challenges that hindered their professional growth. Sub-themes identified in this

main theme are Devaluing and Dismissed, and Enforcer rather than Educator. Unique to the

stories of the participants, a pattern emerged that made visible some of the tensions and

complexities that shape their work. Participants believed their race and cultural background

influenced their work in a way that is beneficial for students and the broader school community.

But they also think that those same attributes can impede their professional growth, creating

extra stress and obstacles due mainly to leaders not recognizing their unique contributions, and

not providing them with additional support:

> *We come into teaching and they just assume we understand their community and student's experiences just because were of the same race or culture as that student and neglect to provide us with extra needed support so that we're not overwhelmed, or just feel valued for it. They need to provide trainings for teachers of color in the same way they do for all other teachers. (Zer)*

Sharif explained that in all his years teaching, teachers in his school have never had a professional development training on cultural responsiveness towards understanding and connecting with their substantial ethnic diverse student body:

> *Yea the perks that come with our unique relationship building, family engagement, translating, and discipline should be seen as an integral part of being a strong teacher but unfortunately it goes unrecognized leading to minority teachers leaving the force and we're back to square one. (Sharif)*

Devaluing and Dismissed. [8 participants]. While there are absolutes on the value and impact of teachers' identity on students of color, it is worth to discuss the following themes that speak to the negative assumptions and expectations that still exist. Participants experience both professional and personal challenges that devalue or "other" them. Not only are their expertise and professional contributions dismissed at times, but they often experienced negative treatment and lack of individual or personal recognition from their colleagues.

Kwesi shared a story about a time he experienced great success, but faced disdain rather than congratulations from his colleagues:

> *I only received praise as an Ethnic Studies teacher, being a Black man. I worked with two other White teachers, and only once, I received the praise and the high scores. Rumors spread that I'm not a good teacher, didn't see anything special that I was doing in the classroom, etc. It was almost like bullying.*

Kwesi expressed that he was not supported or encouraged to be successful with his students, but instead he was alienated. Other participants sympathized with this kind of hostility or spoke about how difficult it was for them to be recognized for their efforts. Participants expressed frustration at the amount of work that they put in, saying that they often worked twice as hard and were required to do more work, but rarely received the same reward or praise as White colleagues:

There are a lot of things that I've implemented and shared with other teachers, and then they get the credit. I told one of my co-workers who is White, and he recognized it, too. I told him it was starting to bother me… someone else is looking to be more qualified with less years and less time in the position. (Sebastian)

The need to work harder to be seen as adequate and professional also made some of the participants feel pressured to police their behavior. Assumptions about their demeanor, that they were too loud or too harsh, for instance—often required them to "code switch," or regulate their behavior based to fit into their school. By trying not to fulfill other's stereotypes of them, participants hoped that meeting a particular standard of professionalism would remove any distracting idiosyncrasies and allow them to be recognized for their work:

There's a level of professionalism that I have always kind of internalized, like I need to be on my P's and Q's, because I'm color [sic]. I don't want to be judged as not being professional. I wanted to make sure I was always dressed professionally, you know, punctual, all of those things. And that's because I was also, you know, being looked at by my fellow colleagues. (Brooke)

Zer expressed having additional issues with being seen as a valued member of the school community, such as having their opinions, suggestions for improvement, and complaints go unheard, "I was kind of dismissed at times. It makes me not want to say anything." While the majority of participants, to a varying degree, admitted that it is essential to have teachers like them, many of them also stressed the danger of assuming that they will perform a certain way simply because of their race. Zer shares her thoughts on having a school staff that is reflective of the student population:

There needs to be some teachers of the same demographics because I feel like those voices need to be present on the teacher level and the administration level. But I feel like to assume that it's going to solve all problems, that's naïve. That teacher could be Polynesian, but they strictly identify to be Filipino and they have nothing to do with the Polynesian community or anything like that.

Bryan's perspective illustrates the tension that exists between the importance of having a diverse representative and the naivety of staff and leaders always expecting specific behaviors

from them. His experience highlights how every person is multilayered, unique, and categorized

by skin color:

> *Overall as teachers we often attribute our success to our personality, our ability to teach, and characteristics other than race. But I also know, we are in a unique position that can't be changed – a layer we cannot change. We are in a unique position of authority to many of the students that look like us. We can't disappoint them no matter how challenging that layer is.*

As she dismissed the act of generalizing, Tuyen, who was the only participant not ever to

bring up race as a factor to her becoming a teacher, emphasizes the entirety of a teacher:

> *I don't think any assumption is necessarily a good thing… a teacher is a package. I think that there are a lot of people who make serious efforts to do wonderful things and I don't know that just sticking the color teacher [sic] in front of the colored class is a way to start the conversation. If you're a good teacher and you have certain core set of values that is universal like humility, caring, equity, justice, you can be a role model to a lot of different students.*

Enforcer Rather Than Educator. [8 participants]. Teachers of color come with instant

assumptions as expressed by many of the participants. Yet, they are uniquely able to leverage

cultural similarities to manage their classrooms. But being able to discipline students easily often

led others to see them as enforcers rather than educators—a reductive stereotype that I heard

throughout the interviews:

> *I was assumed to be tough and strict instead of being able to connect to my students and use that connection to establish order and create a classroom environment conducive to learning. (Loni)*

> *I didn't have to get loud or do anything. I had a no-nonsense kind of attitude, where it's a lot of nonverbal cues… it's a different vibe than other teachers, where they kind of make excuses, and 'Oh, I can't handle you. I'm afraid of you. I want you to be my friend.' No. They're going to respect me." (Brooke)*

Participants did assert that their ability to manage students of color who are perceived to

be difficult could also be a distraction to their instruction and pedagogical skills. Some reported

that they become the disciplinarians for the entire building, handling not only the behavioral

issues of their students but those of other teachers as well. This extra responsibility took away

from their planning time, professional development opportunities, and disrupted their time with

their students. Sharif said it best, "I was the only Black teacher there, but I handled basically all

the discipline problems."

Donna indicated that at one time being labeled as the disciplinarian meant that sometimes

colleagues and administrators believed she could only teach the troublesome or lower performing

students. This tension resulted in yet another area of frustration:

> *Because of Black teachers' strengths in classroom management, I was not afforded the opportunity to teach students performing [at higher] levels. At times I rarely got an opportunity to advance to teaching courses that recognized me as subject matter experts [sic], such as honors or Advanced Placement. This was frustrating because I wanted to enhance my professional skills.*

Kyla and Zer share similar experiences:

> *You do it so well, let's just keep you here. If I'm doing the ABCs every day [that is the sentiment]. I never really get to do anything of a higher caliber. I think a lot of times teachers of color representing our low achieving students, we get stuck in a certain group, because we do it well. (Kyla)*

> *I'll teach the low level, but I have to have a high level to balance it out. I need to actually talk to people during the course of the day who care so I can make sure that I'm still up to date with things. (Zer)*

Theme 5: Why It Matters

[10 participants]. Building a diverse teacher workforce is complex. It is about more than

just increasing the numbers of teachers of color. It is also understanding and critically examining

the intricate and nuanced nature of their experiences as paramount. Sub-themes identified in this

main theme are A Need to Heal and Students Tell Us. Throughout the interviews, the

participants' stories revealed the necessity to apply their past schooling experiences and their

personal connection to culture to support current students. Sharif revealed that his identity as a

Black male and teacher of color is what expands dreams and horizons for his students of color

who are in dire need for that social-cultural connection with their teachers:

> *Being a Black school leader in the urban core has showed me the importance of advocacy and representation. Students need to see mentors who share their background but who also can expose them to new experiences. Being a leader who is grounded in my identity ensures that I can show students my authentic self, while seeking experiences to expand their horizon. (Sharif)*

> *I have no regrets, no regrets at all. Teachers today get a bad rap and it wasn't like that when I started 20 years ago. Regardless, I have seen and experience first-hand how valuable I am and that is all that matters to me. (Donna)*

In terms of why it is important, Sharif also added that global representation in the student

population makes it unprecedented for him to be in position of leadership:

> *I can identify several instances in which my perspective at the table was an important one and had that perspective not been there, there could have possibly been a different outcome for our students. As a teacher of color, I can offer a perspective that is often needed, as an advocate or support system for students that they may not have at home or in their community.*

Luis asserted that teacher identity matters on all sides as he reflected on his own

positionality and the tasks that accompany it:

> *A lot of times when people talk, particularly to students of color, [specifically] Black kids, about their future, they talk about things that they don't want them to be. "I don't want you to go to jail. I don't want you to get hurt. I don't want you to be poor." But I would like to serve as a positive example for what kids could be or help them find positive examples of their own.*

A Space to Heal. [8 participants]. Almost all of the participants brought up how

meaningful their positions are as teachers of color because it is a form of healing from trauma

experienced in their adolescent years in the classroom. It is pain that accompanies their

experiences as students. While remembering as a young Vietnamese immigrant student

struggling with her anger at the discrimination she felt and heard from her peers who were

mostly White, Tuyen explained her commitment to teaching:

My Dad told me that if I wanted to be successful in America I should become a teacher. It wasn't until I understood English well that I realized other students were making fun of my [broken] English. There was no Asian teacher to go crying to, I was so alone. This motivated me to master the English language and teach it especially to ESL students. It has been a form of healing and forgiveness I guess.

Luis stated:

In some ways I still carry that politicize [sic] lens where I look at education as sort of a healing process for me. To really shape it to what it can be particularly to our black and brown students and that's where I am right now in terms of identity, it is a possibility for healing me and I hope it heals others.

Emotions emerged as Ali reflected on her youth, hoping that her position can prevent such experiences from students today. Although she knows it still exists, it is healing for her to know she is now a part of a solution for many students who are in need of this comfort:

I didn't have the opportunity to have a teacher of color, so when I was faced with problems or racial slurs, I didn't have people to turn to or talk to. I always felt lonely going to school. I see that lonely look on students' faces today and it breaks my heart to know it still exist. My teachers gave me advice but it didn't help because they didn't experience the same feeling that I had.

Kwesi and Karina agreed that they draw consistently on their experiences as the "other student" to understand the alienation and marginalization that so often characterize students of color.

Teaching is healing from my past in Argentina and I have become a powerful advocate with authority to help make meaningful relationships among my students. (Karina)

Students Tell Us. [8 participants]. All but two of the participants alluded to the valuable process of listening to students. They were in unison that teacher identity matters, simply, because students tell them. When being recognized by the simple comments students say, it is an affirmation that racial identity matters as students of color seldom encounter teachers in their school teachers who look like them and can identify with them:

"I've never had a black girl teacher before." (Ali)

"You're the first teacher of color I've seen." (Kwesi)

"Are you really a teacher?" (Tuyen)

"We didn't know there was a poly teacher in the district." (Loni)

"Wait... you're a teacher?" (Sharif)

"How did you become a teacher?" (Bryan)

"You're my first Black teacher." (Kyla)

"Where are you from?" (Malina)

This process of listening to students and supporting their ideas is just one example of the

larger concept of student voice according to Donna, Sebastian, and Zer:

> *Students tell me all the time that they pay attention and want to learn more...because I am color. [sic] They also tell me it is comfortable for them to discuss certain issues, especially of race because there is an instant connection that they don't necessarily feel with others. (Donna)*

> *If you don't genuinely listen to their voices, then you won't create anything of value. In order for teachers of color to produce and be as effective, they need to heard just as students need to be heard. Students need to know that their voice matters. The minute they feel like their voice does not matter, you've just lost a great student and teacher. (Sebastian)*

> *I am a better teacher because I listen to my students. There's so much behind their voices, more than they can verbally expressed. We need to tune in more to what they say, they can play an active and equal role in our classroom instruction. (Zer)*

Participant Key Insights

This section is an integrated synthesis of the participants' narratives that is critical to

understanding how identity plays a central role in their desire to enter the teaching force and the

continuous affirmation on its added-value to their teaching pedagogy, and to the success of

students of color. Selected are key insights that I identify as significant from each overarching

theme that is enhanced and supported by their sub-themes. The following statements are

selections I carefully chose in which the participants indicated the essence of the overarching themes.

Theme 1: Identity Means Everything

This is one recurring theme from the participants revolving around their belief that identity means everything to them and to their students. Considering the many variables that exist in regards to one's identity, all the participants illustrated the multifaceted ways in which their identity is developed and activated. This particular theme is inferred due to their coming to an understanding of the ways in which their beliefs, experiences, values, and assumptions are linked to identity as an essential feature of culturally responsive practice. Malina recounts when her students ask the *origin question*, "Where are you from?"

> *They say "you're not Black and you're not Mexican or Asian, so where are you from or what are you?" … Students [want and] need to see that we are proud of our identity and the power that comes with it. It is everything to them and it should be to us. (Malina)*

> *Identity is always what students look for to make their first connection. (Kyla)*

Theme 2: Social and Cultural Connections

Across participants' stories, the guiding power and influence of teacher and student relationships form the overarching theme of social and cultural connection. The relationships enhance learning through creating authentic opportunities for students of color who do not easily access these opportunities in the school system. Participants were unyielding in their beliefs that their academic challenges were in most ways a direct result of inequitable learning experiences from not having teachers with cultural similarities. The following excerpt from Luis sums it best.

> *There's freedom to be creative in connecting with my students to their primary culture, I've recognized the need to convey value… affirming their cultural identities… it has a swelling effect …it is empowering for them to see teacher and student connect through culture. (Luis)*

Theme 3: Duty to Serve Community

Stories of participants shed light on their sense of accountability to become teachers to serve as representatives of their communities. An important aspect of their job is their ability to wear many "hats" which signify their willingness to fulfill numerous roles even in the current oppressive schooling context. This ability appears to require particular strategies from being parents and role models, setting high expectations, and erasing stigmas. Participants are compelled to wear the many "hats" that are critical to the nurturing of relationships and academic development of students of color. Sebastian's words are powerful as it encompasses this theme:

> *I was driven to provide opportunity and experiences for individuals in my community. Almost the entire time I thought about becoming an educator, I knew this would be the only place that I would go where I will have multiple roles to carry, roles that is needed to change students' lives.*

Theme 4: Challenges Encountered

Stories around the participants' struggles and challenges in relation to their teaching experiences are brought to the forefront of this theme. They uncovered the automatic assumptions that are placed on them because of their color, and these same assumptions accompanied their teacher responsibilities. Through their stories, many of the participants alleged that negative encounters disempowered them especially in terms of wanting to represent their communities and generate academic improvement for students of color. Some participants relayed different strategies to survive within their professional context:

> *Yea the perks that come with our unique relationship building, family engagement, translating, and discipline should be seen as an integral part of being a strong teacher but unfortunately it goes unrecognized leading to minority teachers leaving the force and were back to square one. (Sharif)*

Theme 5: Why It Matters

The experiences and perspectives of the participants are essential in understanding how they see themselves as change agents who are in a position to advocate and provide unique opportunities relevant to students of color in deep and meaningful ways. Furthermore, it is of importance to understand how the participants' prior schooling experiences have influenced teacher beliefs regarding teaching, learning, and how such beliefs are manifested within their teaching pedagogy. From the findings in this theme, it is evident across participants that understanding identity and knowing how to utilize it can build a robust learning environment for students of color. Sharif sums it best in these words.

> *…my perspective at the table was an important one and had that perspective not been there, there could have possibly been a different outcome for our students… I can offer a perspective that is often needed, as an advocate or support system for students that they may not have at home or in their community. (Sharif)*

Summary of the Analysis

Each of the 14 participants reflected on their initial desire to become teachers through an open-ended question. Participants were unaware that as they shared their story, it invited me to listen intently for experiences related to their identities as teachers of color. I was astounded that with each participant, the topic of their racial identity was captured early into their story. Identity was present throughout their decision process, whether it was recognized before or after they were hired. After which, their narratives turned into testimonials and reaffirmations on (1) why and how their identity is a valuable resource to students of color, (2) their personal experiences as teachers, and (3) their individual contributions to the education system and communities.

As a result of the way the interviews were structured, broad categories emerged and were coded thematically. Many of the statements could be and were coded across more than one category and therefore, responses overlapped. The individual interviews became a continuous

story that captured elements that were consistent among all the participants evident through the frequency of occurrences of the theme and sub-themes.

Overall, the findings indicated the continual quest for reflection and inquiry upon examining how identity emerges and influences the professional practices of teachers of color. It is also a constant quest for understanding how teacher identity plays a significant role in the education of students of color who are known to struggle academically. Therefore, teachers of colors' identity is a presence that students of color can benefit from. For these teachers, who come from diverse backgrounds and with their unique cultural experiences, are able to bridge home and school to enhance student learning.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study has largely been to explore teachers of color's perceptions and experiences on how meaningful their racial identity is to them as teachers as well as how their identity can afftect the academic success of students of color. The starting point for framing and carrying out this dissertation began with my questioning if more students of color are given the opportunity to see themselves reflected by those who teach them in the classroom, then will this structural change help to narrow the achievement gap and lead to academic success? Given the study's premise and conclusions, improving the education outcomes for students of color remains a national education imperative, as long as teachers of color remain a minority in the current teaching force.

Upon entering the teaching force in 2006, I was stunned to discover that the racial gap between teacher and student still existed from when I first entered America's school system 40 years earlier, given the vast global representation in racial and ethic growth of our students today. Peeling back the layers, we are still finding that students of color continue to be highly represented in the achievement gap for numerous reasons, i.e., problems with school discipline, chronic absenteeism, low test scores, high drop-out rates, and disengagement (Cherng & Halpin, 2016).

Findings in this study were extracted from 14 teachers of color participants who were engaged in a reflective process that revealed their individual and common perceptions and experiences. This qualitative study affirms that teachers of color are vital in our education system and as anticipated, their reflective narratives each produced a landscape of stories that brought meaning into their different backgrounds, personal stories, challenges, belief systems, and careers that empowered their motivations for entering the teaching profession.

It is important to be reminded that this research does not make the claim that White teachers cannot successfully teach students of color; but more significantly, it is through the role-model principle that students can benefit overall from seeing and having teachers with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds in a position of authority in school (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Ouazad, 2014;).

Thematic Interpretations of Participants Accounts

The data in this study represent the voices of the 14 participants who have decided to pursue their career as teachers. Their voices were genuine, often representing the essence of their experiences. What emerged from this study are the five themes worth highlighting:

- Identity Means Everything

- Social and Cultural Connections

- Duty to Serve the Community

- Challenges Encountered

- Why it Matters

Although the number of participants was small (14), it nevertheless aligned with the narrative framework selected for this study. Therefore, the reader should keep in mind that the themes and findings may not be readily generalized to a larger population. Rather, the themes and findings describe the experiences of these individuals, which may give researchers and teacher educators an idea of what this particular group of teachers of color experienced; and more cautiously it should not be interpreted to be identical for every teacher of color.

This concluding chapter entails two ways of interpreting and reflecting upon the findings from the interviews. The first way discusses the motivations that the 14 participants had when entering the teaching force; the second way describes where they placed value on their racial

identity in their decision to become teachers. Through the use of a narrative and thematic interpretive analysis, distinguishable patterns, insights and themes emerged, and then were coded and recorded.

Next in this chapter, the data discusses information in which the 14 participants placed priority on their decisions to teach and what they can offer beyond pedagogy. The chapter then turns to my reflections and the leadership aspects of my findings.

In accordance with this study's theoretical framework, I interpreted what the participants described about their experiences and its impact on them, but also the analysis of the effect of their presence as teachers of color improving educational outcomes and aspirations for students of color. In what follows, I elaborate each of the five themes, and 21 sub-themes bringing the participants' voices to surface, and how their pespectives link with literature and previous research.

Initial Motivation to Become a Teacher

Studies have determined that motivation to teach for many teachers has been clustered into three categories: altruistic, extrinsic, and intrinsic (Van den Berghe et al., 2014). Altruistic motivation refers to internal factors such as love for and desire to work with children, and a tendency to serve society. Extrinsic motivation involves the individual's concerns with external influences such as material benefits and job security. Intrinsic motivation is described by the individual's internal desires for personal growth, development and working in educational settings. However, not all three factors necessarily act in concert at any one time.

Table 5.1 illustrates how the themes and subthemes of this study are clustered according to the altruistic, extrinsic, and intrinsic nature of the participants motivation to become a teacher thus indicating that altruistic and intrinsic are generally shown to be dominant.

Table 5.1

Themes and Subthemes Clustered into Motivation Factors

Themes and Sub-themes	Altruistic	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Identity Means Everything		X	
Cultural Identity Empowers	X	X	
We Represent America	X		
A Complete Leader	X	X	
We're Diamonds in the Rough		X	
A Need to Prove our Worth	X	X	
Social and Cultural Connections	X	X	
Connect Through Our Challenges	X	X	
Compassion and Empathy	X	X	
It's Like Family	X		
Trust and Restoring Trust	X		
Bring Context into Teaching	X		X
Stories		X	
Duty to Serve Community	X		
It is a Calling		X	
We're Saving Lives	X		
To be Mirrors and Windows	X	X	
Set High Expectations	X	X	
Erase Stigmas and Misconceptions	X		
Support the Whole Student	X	X	
Challenges Encountered		X	
Devaluing and Dismissed		X	
Enforcer Rather Than Educator	X	X	
Why It Matters	X	X	
A Space to Heal		X	
Students Tell Us	X	X	X

Table 5.1 shows the findings in this study corroborate Flores et al. (2011) examination of minority teachers of color's motivations to pursue teaching, which revealed that their motivations were primarily altruistic and intrinsic in nature. For example, bilingual participants, like Zer and Tuyen, felt a "personal calling" (altruistic and intrinsic) to enter the teaching force in order to have Hmong and South East Asian representation in the system. For them, this ethnic representation bridged school and home, and as a result, more parents were engaged with their

student's learning. Flores et al. (2011) described that teachers of color can be an altruistic link for students of color that may predict academic achievement, social and emotional development, and a variety of other positive school outcomes.

Themes and subthemes from the data, e.g., duty to serve community, social and cultural connections, compassion and empathy, and empowering cultural identity aligned with altruistic and intrinsic motivations and led some participants to renegotiate their definitions of teaching and success. Redefining teaching for these participants meant developing a critical savvy approach to teaching that is responsive to a broad range of social inequalities (Buchanan, 2015), and to act relentlessly for social change to improve the academic struggles of students of color.

Kyla and Ali made references to their youth and the unfairness of the school system's perception of colored students that caused them to feel like racial subordinates to their majority white peers and teachers. Both participants remembered the grueling task of always having to suppress their feelings of anger and discomfort when spoken to with racial pre-assumptions. This feeling of subordination led them to developing emotions that match what Robinson (2008) describe, as "perceptual segregation" (p. 1103). This is when emotional subjectivity will generally cause someone to feel their location in the racial order. With similar challenges in Argentina, Karina says the painful experiences of her youth is where her compassion for students comes from. She believes that those memories should be not forgotten: "By remembering, we teach with empathy and students always feel it." Flores et al, (2011) reiterates that teaching with empathy matters greatly for marginalized students, but more strategies for cultivating it as a disposition in teacher education is needed.

Although teaching in K-12 comes with many of the additional benefits of most careers, in addition to long holidays and paid summer breaks, interestingly, not one participant indicated in

any way that these benefits were seen as a part of their external motivation. Rather, they maintained a strong intrinsic and altruistic value not only from the rewards associated with teaching, but also on their efforts to overcome challenges related to their own upbringing, sustained by their love and empathy for marginalized students of color like themselves.

Luis, with immense sadness, spoke of students like himself back in San Gabriel Valley who are still drowning in the same struggles he had 30 years ago. He claims that as long as majority of the teachers and administrators are White back home "Chicano kids will never be culturally safe." It is for this reason that Luis pursued a teaching and administration career and plans to return to implement and enact social changes that will improve the education experiences of Chicano students. Flores et al. (2011) explained that teachers' motivation and teaching quality are beginning to be found across a range of cultures.

Unique to this study was the capacity to capture participants' motives for teaching that attracted their concerns more towards service and less concerned with working conditions. A strong sense of accountability to give back and make a difference to their community was common in their stories, but the foundation factor stemmed from their identity as teachers of color. For Malina, the ultimate goal for her was to someday leave the education inequities of West Oakland. She shared in her narrative that success was heavily defined by those that make it out of the neighborhood, but for Malina it was a difficult disconnection. The more students inquire of her the *origin question,* "Where are you from? she felt a stronger yearning to return home to teach where students no longer have to ask. This is because her ethnic and racial identity is already familiar and similar to them, only this time her teacher credentials advances her identity with "the power that comes with it." Flores et al. (2011) would describe this as the

personal fulfillment and opportunity to experience a meaningful engagement with students and locations where teachers feel they are needed most.

Identity Means Everything

Perhaps most profound throughout the categorization of themes in this study is the meta-level importance of *identity* established within the participants' responses and throughout all other categorical themes. The data is descriptive as it provides very clear insights into the experiences of participants and why they considered and moved through teaching as a career. In the context of this study, the narratives of the participants bring to light a concern with the "who" (in terms of identity) of the teaching workforce, and reinforces that who a person is and what a person brings does matter and is at the heart of what it means to be a teacher.

The perceptions and experiences of the participants reveal the intrinsic value of their racial identities in the profession of teaching and their teaching pedagogies with students of color. I found it fascinating that half of the participants alluded to racial identity as the main motive for entering the teaching force. The other half of the participants claimed that it was after they were hired as teachers that they came to recognize the value of their racial identity in the profession, generally from the voices and reactions of their students.

This main theme dealing with identity corroborates the research of Danielewics (2014) which found that choosing to teach entails much more than simply taking up a profession, or accepting a job in a school system. It is an identity development process where teachers have recognizable selves among individuals and how they are recognized and regarded by students. "What makes a good teacher is not methodology, or even ideology. It requires engagement with identity, the way individuals conceive of themselves, that teaching is a state of being, not merely ways of acting or behaving" (Danielewics, 2014, p. 20).

Through my years of teaching, I have had countless conversations with fellow colleagues, mostly White, on the need for teachers of color in our buildings, and their realizing how many students of color can benefit from their strong presence. It is a conversation I have had without any reservations, due the growing demographics of ethnic minority student growth. This begs the question, "Why should education leaders care whether the teaching force reflects the demographics of the study body?" A growing body of literature in Chapter II suggests that outcomes such as test scores, attendance, and suspension rates are affected by the demographic match between teachers and students (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). This research brings to surface the insights of teachers' identities as a critical part of understanding who these teacher-participants are, what they do, what they believe, and why they believe it. The sub-themes under this main theme manifest the influential power teachers of color feel they possess, and as a result, are in a position to truly make a difference in the education of students of color. Kyla, Zer, Sebastian, and Sharif indicated that their racial identity was the very key for their hiring in schools heavily populated with students of color.

Similarly, Tuyen, Brooke, Bryan, and Loni declared that they recognized the value of their identity by the reactions they received from students of color in their various grade levels. Loni commented "I had no idea my identity as a person of color made an impact on students." Loni continued to share that when administrators began to recognize it, he became instantly marketable throughout the district. The empowerment their identities gave them came across strong from the participants' stories. This is an indication that there is an internal power dynamic that operates from within students [and leaders] which structures the differential perceptions and treatment of teachers on the basis of their color (Vaughan et al., 2015).

Education researchers (Egalite et al. 2015; Ingersoll & May, 2013; Kohli, 2009) agree that public education is what brings people together as a nation. Yet, diversity in color still remains a gap in the teaching force. The theme and tone for this request cannot be clearer from the data in this research. Participants alluded to their presence in the classroom as representatives of a global America, which concurs with Gurr et al, (2020) notion that this visibility can be described as being "cultural ambassadors."

Donna reminds her students that "they are the faces of America" and what their dreams of becoming at any point of their life is their American Dream. Donna also asserts that due to her religious upbringing that "being a teacher in America is being a better citizen." Zer reflects that her father's admonition of success in American is to have "*a piece of paper,*" a symbol for a college diploma. Her teaching career is a large part of that symbol of American success to the Hmong community, as Malina and Loni are to the Pacific Islanders, Tuyen to the Vietnamese, Brook to Jamaicans, Luis to Latinos, as well as the large number of Black teachers to Black students.

Is it any wonder that two decades ago, then Secretary of Education Richard Riley (1995) under President Clinton said that, "Our teachers should be excellent, and they should look like America!" Corresponding with the data of this research, Secretary Riley's words reflect a long-standing concern about the mismatch between the demographics of the teacher workforce and the nation's students.

Indeed, improving the recruitment and retention of teachers of color is widely researched and has long been a policy goal, particularly in districts with large percentages of students of color (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). The identity concerns over the impact of teacher-student race mismatching sparked new directions of accountability for the participants in this research to

fill that role. For example, Brooke reiterated, "If they don't see it they don't think about it …

until they experience it…they will assign value to it." Chapter II uncovered numerous literatures

on the state of race matching between teachers and students leading to better student outcomes

(Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Altan & Lane, 2018; Bates & Glick, 2013; Cherng & Halpin,

2016; Egalite & Kisida, 2017). This research offers a fresh perspective into this mirroring

paradigm by examining teachers of colors' intentions for becoming teachers.

Another important takeaway from the data of this research is the participants' belief in

their unique position as teachers in an environment that require a specific identity,

connectedness, and innovation in how they aid in the teaching and learning of students of color.

Luis explains this aid by using the "diamond analogy," which is the strength they developed

from living with discrimination, being typecast, and through socio-economic hardships, thus

elevating their worth in the teaching force, and making them unique like "*diamonds in the*

rough", Luis described. This statement is commonly used to describe high at-risk students, who,

underneath their rough exterior, possess inherent brilliance and teachers are tasked with the

responsibility of bringing this to the surface (Patterson, 2010).

A growing number of empirical evidences affirm that these challenges, refined and

strengthened through maturity and education, do enable an advantage for teachers of color to

connect with students of color (Gershenson et al., 2018). It can also be found in theme two where

teachers connect with students through their challenges and their initial motivation to become

teachers. Berg (2019) described these teachers as "diamond cutters" who possess the aptitude,

predisposition, and cultural capital tasked with the job of polishing gemstones that each student

inherently possesses.

There was also a unified agreement by the participants in this study that their racial identity empowered them in their work. For example, Sebastian claims that because he is Black, he is able, literally with ease, to break down negative stereotypes in his class to help students understand and confront racism. Kyla asserted that when leaders hire a diverse staff and establish programs and procedures that reflect those beliefs then, "*all I can do is help empower our students.*"

Braza and McGeehan (2020) found that teachers of color were expected to take on a disproportionate share of work supporting students and teaching about race and racism, and that this is often made difficult by the indifference and sometimes resistance of White teachers, often passing on their own responsibilities to teachers of color. Participants shared that with this upper-hand, they feel a moral imperative to do this extra work by counseling students and sharing similar experiences for understanding and connection, thus also leading to proving their worth in the global classrooms of today.

The power of their presence is in their mirroring of their identity with students of color, thus making identity mean everything to the participants. This was the commonality shared by the participants in all their narratives, i.e., believing that their mirroring of their identity will help to transform students of colors' academic experiences, whether it was through their initial motivation to become teachers, or recognizing it after they were hired.

Social and Cultural Connections

All participants in this study noted that students of color often come to school with differences in language and customs that, unfortunately, some teachers see as deficits or challenges in order to socially and culturally connect with them successfully. Through their own unique narratives, participants Sebastian, Kwesi, Brooke, Malina, and Zer agreed that students of

color are often at a disadvantage when it comes to the curriculum that is selected, the manner in which it is delivered, and often does not take into consideration the ethnic cultural and educational backgrounds of the students today. Zer and Karina experienced firsthand immigrant students from Southeast Asia and South America who were unfamiliar with the American style of student-centered teaching and often found the curriculum less inclusive. This supports Woodson and Pabon's (2016) research contending that this non-inclusiveness in education is largely due to the lack of diverse teachers from all ethnicities who, if present, may have the cultural, social knowledge, sensitivity and empathy to the needs of students to ensure that a more appropriate and equitable curriculum be employed.

In their qualitative research on teachers' cultural competence and deficit-based view, Keratithamkul et al. (2020) discovered that curriculum alone provided very limited perspectives and portrayals of culture, leaving many non-White teachers to feel disconnected to their students and can, at times, develop an elitist viewpoint. This elitist viewpoint caused me to pause and reflect on the research findings in this main theme and sub-theme. For example, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) contended that social and cultural competency, be it curricula or social/cultural connections, can be taught by anyone. Contrary to this viewpoint, the findings in this research deem otherwise. For example, Luis referred to his Latino identity as "cultural capital" that is unique and authentic, and cannot be replaced by any form of training. Kyla recognized immediately that her identity is what her students and parents looked for to make their first connection. Zer summed it up well saying, "*We have practices that are informed by indigenous knowledge ... no one else has it.*" These unique qualities and characteristics were utilized in the participants' teaching to connect with students and their families who need this support.

Kwesi took a different perspective from his own experience by pointing out that teachers of color do not suppress their identity as it dismisses its value to students of color who are in dire need of this mirroring. Teachers of color need to be visible, outspoken, and act as advocates. The only teacher of color Kwesi had was a high school history teacher, *"… it wasn't a big deal… he was as far [away from it] as his cultural identity and racial background, he didn't speak on it at all*" and for that matter, Kwesi continued "*… I never thought teacher identity to be important. I almost didn't see him as a teacher of color."*

Linking to this unique connection between student and teacher, the participants freely shared strategies they found to be effective by organizing their classrooms to incorporate their students' culture. For example, Luis, who is now an administrator in an urban school in Seattle, advocates for school-based experiences of ethnic minority teachers to improve student outcomes by fusing more of the students' culture and family into the lesson plans. Delpit (1995) emphasized that minority teacher candidates of color need to be encouraged to bring their prior knowledge, past experiences, culture, and own stories to the process of becoming a teacher. Interviews from the participants consistently repeated this same belief in both their desire to become teachers and what they want to bring into their teaching pedagogies. Delpit (1995) proposed that ways for these teachers to share [connect]their experiences and insights is for the students' knowledge and background to be included in the teacher education programs in a manner that seeks a balance between biographical and research-based knowledge.

In alignment with Delpit's findings, Sharif shared "*Telling stories of my upbringing in East Los Angeles is always an attention getter in class… they gravitate to stories of survival and getting out of challenging circumstances*." This would make sense as to why participants shared the inquiring voices of their students, e.g., "*How did you become a teacher?" "Wait … you're a*

teacher?" "*I've never had a Black teacher before*" and "*You're the first teacher of color I've seen*" all affirming similar tones of disbelief, yet hope. There is widening agreement among the scholars that support Sharif's and other participants' interpretation that this gravitation from students of color, particularly in urban schools, is an indication of students processing the idea of possibilities for themselves because student and teacher connect through their challenges (Delpit, 1995; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Wright & Gottfried, 2017).

On the other hand, Kyla, like the majority of the female participants, believes her nurturing characteristics and presence as the only Black female teacher is what bonds students of color to her in every direction and as a result, Kyla feels deeply accountable to that trust because, "*They look at me and tell me I'm like their mom or aunty.*" Teaching different grade levels, Kyla and Sharif find themselves consistently improvising and designing their curriculum to be culturally sustaining for their majority White students. In return, it can assist in developing models of how to design such curricula for their colleagues who struggled to culturally connect with their students, which is another asset to having a culturally diverse teaching force highlighted by scholars Wright and Gottfried (2017) and Fant (2017).

All participants in this study perceived themselves as mentors, as all teachers should be. However, what is unique is that as teachers of color, they are mentor members of cultural groups, including families, which often defines how they see themselves as professionals. Data from the interviews indicated that the participants' experiences and the identity they represent and develop, in the context of family and community, had a great influence on how they come to regard issues of race, diversity, and social justice as a teacher.

After realizing the positive impact Loni had on Pacific Islander students, he realized that the absence of teachers from his students' cultural community not only has consequences but it is

also an equity problem for both students and teachers and it needs to be addressed through intentional recruitment strategies by all school districts. Parallel to Fant's (2017) research on teaching practices of Black male teachers, Fant quoted the same sentimental tones of equity e.g., "Our children need us," "We're even more valuable to the profession," and "Feelings of isolation should not exist, but it does" (p. 95). Loni explained that one consequence of this absence, from his own observation, creates a lack of curiosity around race for teachers. He further explained that teachers were never curious to ask about his background until he was asked to assist with issues regarding students of color.

Equally important, this study affirms that identities are not static but exist in continual development and revision as teachers of color are influenced not only by their students, but also by people with whom they come in contact with in schooling contexts. Further, these participants' "self-image" appears to be related to all of their relationships as well as to the responsibilities that develop between them and their students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. Quan et al. (2019) along with Flores (2020) suggested that all teacher candidates must explore their own identity, self-conceptualization, and beliefs. Teachers' stance towards identity combined with cultural experiences will likely define their classroom interactions and connections to their students according to Jackson (2015). Kwesi, for instance, one of the few Black teachers in his district, expressed the fact that his skin color matches that of his students does not give him any superpowers as educator, but it does give him the ability to see students of color in a way that is untarnished by the stereotypes, biases and cultural disconnects that fuel inequality and injustice. He noted, "*I'm connected to them because of our shared racial identity. I'm familiar with the world they inhabit. I can see their appeals and challenges, without the filters of minority, urban or at risk.*"

Duty to Serve the Community

Coding the determinants that factor into their decision to enter the teaching profession, all participants had varying but common responses. One, in particular, that was encouraging and uplifting was their sense of accountability to duty. Ali, Malina, and Karina refer to it as a *calling* to serve their community. The concept of calling which all participants either specifically or inferred to is worth exploring. Rooted in the traditions of the ministry, the notion of a calling has a long and intimate association with the work of teaching (Kung, 2011). To be "*called*" means responding to a summoning, the sources of which are variously experienced as internal or external (Kung, 2011, p. 41).

However, this call to duty is more complex as teachers of color often act in loco parentis, helping students, especially minority students of color, to navigate life inside and beyond the classroom as participants share their experiences as leaders in the classroom, in the school system and in the community. In general, Cochran-Smith (2010) asserted that "teachers can and should be both educators and advocates who are committed to diminishing existing inequities in school and society by helping to redistribute education opportunities" (p. 350). Cochran-Smith's study suggests that supporting others, especially the marginalized, appears to frame the core motivation to teach for this study's participants.

The ethical and moral dimensions of a calling manifest themselves in the participants' political expression of advocacy and social justice for others. Participants expressed their aim of making that difference by setting high expectations and erasing stigmas and misconceptions to bring about positive outcomes for their students, the community, and humanity in general. For example, Zer talked about her strong sense of accountability to serve among her own, to save lives, support, and advocate for Hmong students whose families cannot speak English. Donna

expressed how she felt drawn to special needs students "*who are struggling*" and "*who seem to find me.*" Brooke expressed her desire to "*facilitate their (student) learning so that they can bridge the gap of their struggles between where they are now and when they go to school.*" This notion of advocacy and desire to serve communities of color in schools are echoed by other participants like Sharif. He made the conscious choice to leave the corporate world to take on the role of leadership missing in the education of students of color deemed lost and difficult to access, much like himself at their age. Sharif explained, "*I know from experiences what it was that I wanted and that was to have a teacher I connected with, like a parent who understands me.*"

The concept that teaching is a calling by the participants in this study was a way or a personal mission to initiate change in challenging the ways in which their ethnic identity, pedagogical practices, their voices, and involvement could improve or save the academic lives of students of color.

Similar to Serow's (1994) findings on teachers' "basic orientations to teaching" (p. 70), Serow discovered a distinctive and deep service ethic among teachers feeling their job as a personal calling. This deep service ethic was also the foundation to become teachers for the majority of the participants in my study. Luis said, "*Those experiences [challenges of his youth] happened for a reason.*" Loni added, "*I believe I was brought here for a reason.*" Kwesi sums it up saying, "*I was very connected to this idea.*" The teaching profession is certainly connected to an overwhelming belief and accountability to saving lives, being role models, erasing stigmas, and supporting the whole student (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Carey, 2020). Compared to teachers who say they were not called to teach in Serow's (1994) study:

> Those who view teaching as their calling in life display significantly greater enthusiasm and commitment to the idea of a teacher career, are more mindful of its potential impact

on other people, are less concerned about the sacrifices that such a career might entail, and are more willing to accept the extra duties that often accompany the teacher's role. (p. 70)

How common a sense of duty is among teachers is unclear, but it appears to be more common than generally recognized in the research literature. This common sense of duty is prevalent among teachers of color in this study as seen in Table 5.1 by the small numbers of extrinsic reasons for becoming teachers. Sebastian felt an emptiness in a well-paying office job when he volunteered to coach little league football, "*A lot of students signed up to play because I was colored ... an automatic give that I must follow ... [to] help preserve the lives of these boys in high school football.*" Similar to this finding, numerous studies (Buchanan, 2015; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Canty, 2016; Carey, 2020; Celik & Terzi, 2017; Clayes, 2011; Flores et al., 2011) consistently report that teachers find most satisfaction in matters intrinsic to the work of teaching and caring for the young which lends additional support to the conclusion that a sense of calling is common among teachers.

Challenges Encountered

Through the qualitative narratives, 10 out of the 14 participants in my study had the ability to articulate issues that perhaps a more general or majority population of teachers could not. It was their skin color. Because of their strongly developed critical analysis of racial inequity experienced in school from their youth and as adults, these participants had a heightened awareness and language to articulate what Tefera et al. (2014) claim as "teacher racialization." This is the enduring educational equity problem of the United States demonstrated by the disproportionate representation of racial minority educators, thus leading to expressed feelings and experiences of alienation in a predominantly White visible profession. This educational equity problem surfaced in many of the participants' shared experiences and perspectives. Bryan,

for example, felt that Black culture is only recognized, if at all, in February's Black History month, "*It comes and goes and students wouldn't even know it was here. If I don't say anything, it stays quiet and hidden.*" In addition to teaching CTE classes, Sharif also teaches an Ethnic Studies class. His purpose for establishing this curriculum was to heighten a sense of appreciation of cultural and identity awareness needed in a school student population he describes as, "*a mini United Nations.*" Instead, his objectives felt "*tokenized without positive lingering meaning for the students*" by White administrators.

Unfortunately, this is the ongoing challenge corresponding to the lack of support in negotiating socio-cultural issues with little regard to many teachers' racial identity (Madsen & Mabokela's, 2014). Numerous studies showed how teachers of color feel isolated and face the burden of repeatedly serving as the expert disciplinarian or in stereotypically defined roles, that were added to their job description (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Kohli, 2009; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). This was found to be common among the Blacks and Pacific Islander participants in this study. In the guise of family, Malina described "*We're looked upon like family that can be stern and harsh.*" Although this added support is advantageous, these additional roles revealed in my study (and found in the literature quite frequently) are commonly laid upon the shoulders of teachers of color that lead to feeling devalued.

Numerous scholars have argued that school administrators are prone to overlook the value of prospective teachers of color (Achinstein & Aquirre, 2008; Amos, 2016; Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gist et al., 2018; Ho & Cherng, 2018). They assume that these teachers' strengths, such as their shared cultural experiences with students of color, commitments to equity and justice, and the potential to bridge differences between communities and institutions will fluidly translate into classroom practice. Whilst Gist (2018) revealed that this may be unintentional

assumptions, this study revealed that it can often leave teachers of color ill-prepared to negotiate their multiple identities in their classrooms, beginning with students of color asking them the *origin question*.

Kwesi, Sharif, Malina, and Loni were the only participants who had been raised in the same neighborhood and community as their students. Kwesi entered the profession because he wanted students to have a teacher who reflected their community. "*I can relate more to the families and students because I'm not different from them and I know that I bring those elements of their neighborhood into my class*." Zer believed her positionality and insights were assets to her teaching, like many of her participant colleagues; however, administrators framed her use of cultural connection "*too often*" a deficit for Hmong students' ability to learn English.

Looking at teachers who share common aspects of identity and community with their students as a deficit in teaching is incredibly detrimental to the learning process (Amos, 2016). This study revealed that the very intrinsic desire that drove these participants to become teachers were, at times, at the core of them questioning their role in the teaching profession. Sometimes in the face of these experiences, they were led to wonder if their cultural and community connections with students were actually limitations rather than strengths. Ho and Cherng (2016) made the clear argument that the devaluing of ethnic minority teachers of color is what leads many of them to contemplate ending their tenure as teachers.

Another critical piece from the data, indicated that the participants claimed they had to serve in more disciplinary roles when compared to their colleagues. For example, administrators would often assign Sebastian and Bryan to assist in administrative duties like monitoring or "*policing*" the halls during passing time and after school. They were asked to also fill roles such as coach, mentor, mediator, and counselor. Ali added her own frustrations, "*It's also the*

additional black or brown students in our classes or testing groups, or the extra time spent in

meetings relating to students of color or the frequent 'Can you talk to him or her?' requests by

colleagues and administrators to deal with discipline issues." Sebastian summed it up best by

saying, "*We don't want our students to think that's all we're here for. If we're continually placed*

in a position to be the disciplinarians then our ability to be teachers is inhibited and students

miss out on that relationship building too."

Unfortunately, according to Pizarro and Kohli (2020), these dual responsibilities occur

more often than reported and have become repercussions for hiring teachers of color, and quite

often the patterns that cause them to leave the profession. Fish (2019) revealed that the devaluing

of teachers of color takes a toll on their well-being, growth, and retention. With these findings,

there is a call for more attention to racial climate in schools and its impact on teachers of color,

particularly in discourse on diversifying the teaching force. This often-unappreciated research

indicates that teachers of color have much to contribute to teaching and learning at all levels as

their cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge are often marginalized and undervalued in

schools (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018).

Why It Matters

Unexpectedly, a big take-away in examining the data is the significance of the frequency

participants shared regarding the social and cultural disconnections they experienced with

teachers from their youth. This disconnection created feelings of internal injury that, ironically,

led to many of the participants desire to enter the teaching force. Luis stated that he entered the

profession to help prevent and eliminate the adverse experiences he felt as a Mexican immigrant

student being "*labeled as not having proper health habits and need training in morals, manners*

and cleanliness from White teachers" and making assumptions that education was not important

for poor Latino families. Zembylas and Papamichaels (2017) explained this to be a form of microaggression which is an outgrowth of implicit bias that automatically categorizes people according to cultural stereotypes. Microaggression is termed as "prejudices that leak out in many interpersonal situations and decision points"; they are experienced as "slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages" (Sue, 2019, p. 39) as experienced by Luis.

Brooke and Ali encountered similar adverse feelings in middle school when they were prevented from transferring into higher-level reading and writing classes. Ali said, "*Black students were only in remedial classes*." Ali also pointed out that it was a newly hired Black vice principal who recognized her strong writing skills and demanded that she be transferred to a more challenging class. This form of implicit bias and microaggressions, according to Cherng and Halpin (2016), are both powerful and measurable, and often leads to inequitable punishments for students of color as in the experiences of Brooke and Ali.

When modeled after Ali's vice principal's leadership, teachers of color can negate the consequences of tracking by student ability or perceived intellectual capacity. The consequences of implicit bias and racial stereotypes are so powerful that Black students, in particular, are much more limited in how they see themselves (Solomon, 2017). For example, Sharif believes that his mirroring of his identity to students of color is an asset that can expand their dreams and horizons of becoming more than they expect from themselves. In other words, Sharif found himself in a position to offer a perspective that is often needed and critical to their decision-making processes. Luis capitalized on his new leadership role as an administrator to be an advocate and positive example, thus helping his students find positive examples of their own. The data of this research speaks volumes to how participants firmly believe in their influential roles in the academic success of their students of color. Their very presence in the classroom is

encouraging for these students to imagine the possibilities for themselves. Bryan concluded, "*because sometimes people who are just like us are our mirror, what we're capable of.*"

The data from this research provided a window to the array of complex commitments that teachers of color face when making the decision to teach. One of the most surprising and responsive pieces of their narratives was from eight of the participants who alleged that due to being subjected to racial microaggressions when they were students, they turned to teaching as a process and space to heal. Rather than wallowing as victims, their intrinsic impulse fueled their desire to become change agents for students, who like themselves, had negative experiences during their formative-education years.

Tuyen reflected on her years as an English Language Learner (ELL) student constantly harassed and laughed at because of her broken English, "*There was no Asian teacher to go crying to. I was so alone.*" This became the turning point for Tuyen to pursue teaching so that she can be that teacher for struggling immigrants and ELL students to turn to. Ali was faced constantly with racial slurs and felt lonely going to school, "*I see that same lonely look on students' faces today.*" Becoming a teacher was Ali's way of eliminating experiences that lead students to feeling isolated. Karina reflects on always being labeled as the "other student" with cultural and political conflicts from home. Once again, these experiences reveal another element into why participants feel it essential to enter the teaching profession. It is an effort to dissolve these feelings of isolation and implicit biases that can perpetuate the education experiences of students of color today.

Critical Race Theory (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015) provides tools to help educators take to social justice activism in order to create an environment that demonstrates and ensures equal opportunity of learning for all students. This study's participants' motivation to teach were

grounded in what Simmons (2016) called "liberatory pedagogy" (p. 76) and "themes of transformative resistance" (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Simmons explained that education is a matter of politics as well as pedagogy, and therefore the practice of education for liberation takes place in circumstances of specific power relations. Liberal pedagogy incorporates a struggle for meaning as well as a struggle for freedom and justice.

Eight participants alluded that returning to and transforming the very system that oppressed them acts as a form of healing. Freire (1996) said:

> Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (p. 452)

As with the participants' resilience in overcoming the challenges from their youth, data from this study shows they are illustrating a form of resistance that is transformative (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). This means that participants do not locate their past suffering to relish in a state of victimization (Freire, 1996). Rather, they locate their suffering to demonstrate how they have transformationally resisted by engaging with their pain to carry out the socially just ideals of racial equity (Matias, 2013). Participants Sharif and Sebastian, both pained from the damaging effects of stereotype, eventually left their jobs in the corporate sphere to return to a familiar space; a space where their presence can now transform and raise students of colors' level of self-awareness to a point where the decisions they make in their personal and academic lives are transformative and truly empowering. It is also a space where teachers can be supported to promote the idea that resistance of some type may be necessary to take ownership of their

learning experiences which not only articulates how they were able to overcome their challenges, but also how they endured it.

More than half of the participants also claimed that the voices of their students carried a weight and reinforced their confirmation in their decision to continue teaching. Simple but unified student statements, for example, like Ali's, "*I've never had a black teacher before*" to Kwesi's, "*You're the first teacher of color I've seen*" and questions from Sharif and Brian; "*Wait, you're a teacher*?" and "*How did you become a teacher*?" all indicate the uniqueness of their position and influence. Towery's (2009) research revealed the power and potential of the presence of teachers of color in the classroom and particularly for students of color. Anderson's (2018) study asserted that students have firsthand knowledge of what occurs in schools and classrooms, and have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and schooling, and as a result, "their insights warrant not only the attention, but also the responses of adults" (p. 105).

However, Anderson (2018) also argued that youths' voices, particularly of students of color, are often underutilized and marginalized when it comes to education reform decisions; "The stakes are too high to maintain the status quo which often marginalized these salient voices" (p. 120). Kieran and Anderson (2019) contended that their voices must be at the center, not in the margins. Zer's narrative, for instance. spoke of the need to tune in more to what students say as it plays an active and equal role in her instruction of them. Sebastian warned, "*If you don't listen to their voices, then you won't create anything of value*." The participants' narratives resonate with Anderson's (2018) research to uplift and value the voices of students of color as it will have and always will matter in education policy, practice and research.

Reflections and Take Away From the Analysis

The main themes and sub-themes of this research analysis seek to explain how identity is meaningful in the participants' perceptions and teaching experiences with students of color. What I have found from examining the findings of this research is an indication that the connectedness and similarities of identity and culture between teacher and student is a mechanism that can improve the educational experience of students of color (Gurr et al., 2020). In addition, teaching became a space for these participants to serve one's own, and moreover, as a healing process from their own challenging experiences in school.

The racial identities participants bring to the process of teaching and learning were also challenged and sometimes redefined as well as deepening the understanding of their personal identities and professional roles, essentially of seeing themselves in their own mirrors. The participants' self-reported experiences are evidence of their rising levels of maturity in their profession, growing self- awareness, questioning of efficacy, increasing their self-reflection, and a developing awareness of the multilayered complexities that teachers of color face.

Conceptions of identity are now identified as acutely personal, sometimes even raw. Through the thematic analysis of participants' personal stories, this research also provided another unique window into the world of teaching, student learning, and leadership. It is also through a leadership asset that focuses on how school leaders can effectively serve minoritized students—those who have been historically marginalized in school and society.

It is also through a window of leadership that the participants discovered how to have come authentically to see themselves. By taking upon themselves a certain type of leadership role on many fronts, their rediscovered and confident identities, both representing and honoring indigenous heritages and local cultural practices, empowered them as leaders in their own right.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Understanding that leadership is the focal point of this PhD program, the question *How would I describe the leadership characteristics of the participants?* repeatedly reminded me of the purpose for this study, throughout the analysis process. And at each turning point of discovery and learning about their lived experiences and perspectives, it was clear to me that these participants were cultural leaders in their profession to their students, families, community, and colleagues. Banks' (1995) framework of culturally responsive leadership (CRL) appears to resonate with the participants' narratives. According to Banks (1995):

> Culturally responsive leadership involves those leadership practices that emphasize high expectations for student achievement; incorporate the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home communities in the school curriculum; and work to develop a critical consciousness among both students and teachers to challenge inequities in the larger society. Culturally responsive leadership also creates inclusive organizational structures at the school and district level that empower students and parents from diverse racial and ethnic communities. Similar terms such as culturally proficient leadership, culturally relevant leadership, multicultural leadership, and diversity leadership have been used to describe these leadership practices that support students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and create inclusive schooling environments. (p. 7)

Outlined in the main and sub-themes extracted from the narratives, the participants' desire to become teachers and their current roles as teachers does comprise the skill sets of a culturally responsive leader that Banks (1995) is referring to. The criteria of integrating a student's social and cultural background into their teaching pedagogies emerged constantly through their stories. Norman (2019) would argue that any well trained-seasoned teacher can implement it. However, I believe Zer described it best when she alleged that her unique skills to integrate curriculum was almost second nature to her because her identity mirrored the cultural practices of her students. This was the underlying tone throughout the participants' experiences from their various schools and classrooms.

Cited in the literature review, America's schools today are experiencing a rapid increase in ethnic and cultural diversity, yet teachers who mirror this ethnic diversity is still alarming low, and students of color continue to consistently perform lower than their counterparts from the mainstream (Gay, 2018). Reasons for such tendencies have been traced to variables such as the school environment, teaching methods, curriculum design, student motivation, educational policies and school leadership (Gay, 2018). Interestingly, these variables, or lack of, were the primary motivations that participants decided to become teachers and continue to stay in the profession. The main themes and sub-themes reveal that participants believed, without a doubt, that their racial identity afforded them the advantage to culturally respond and connect with students of color authentically. According to Luis, Kwesi, and Sharif, this was the missing component towards a more positive academic experience for these students. Freire (1996) asserted that one expectation of society is that education institutions should find ways of responding to such inequality. Intuitively, participants responded to this inequality.

Unfortunately, I have discovered that little research has been carried out to establish exclusively how teachers of color are culturally responsive leaders. Comparisons of urban schools with high student performance with those with low performing students show that teacher leadership can make a difference (Andrews & Sonder, 1987; Fears, 2004). Examples from data of this research affirms that these participants exhibit the skills of a culturally responsive leader by:

(1) creating a safe educational environment (Delpit, 1995, 2006). In the context of racial identity, many teachers do not consider race germane to their syllabus. Others strive for colorblindness in the classroom (Milner & Laughter, 2015). However, participants Sebastian and Sharif claim that due to their racial identity, all students and particularly

students of color feel safe to ask questions and hold discussions on racial matters and confronting racism. These are issues that overwhelmingly confront their daily life.

(2) examining the pressing challenges in the context of the students' life as a member of a minority group (Banks. 1996; Lopez, 2015) An overwhelming consensus among participants is that they felt connected to students of color through their life, family, and cultural challenges. Milner and Laughter (2015) views teachers of color in the classroom as a community asset in which they can be deliberate and intentional on how negative circumstances can be viewed in positive ways.

(3) including family members in the educative process (Gay, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). The participants' stories illustrate the process of bridging school and home. They serve as representations of what is familiar to many students of color e.g., their home, family, social and cultural norms thus enabling participants to incorporate these aspects of students' lives into the learning process.

(4) helping students to know the affirmative resources relative to his or her needs; and encouraging students to engage themselves in ongoing and continuing education around minority issues (Khalifa et al., 2016). This skill correlates with the culturally responsive leader who is accountable to the communities they represent (Delpit, 2006). A large aspect of this accountability voiced by the participants is their role modeling to their students of color and their potential and future possibilities. Sharif's students, for example, were captivated with stories of how he made it out of the streets of Los Angeles. They became points of references for Sharif to encourage his students to set goals and stay engaged in school, and perhaps become teachers themselves.

Although schools share common leadership requirements with other enterprises, they require special leadership because schools must respond to their unique realities. In the light of ever-changing demographics in organizations and in schools in particular, there is a need to define how leadership should be acted out in culturally diverse organizations.

Representative Bureaucracy

Educational policy literature adopts a representative bureaucracy-like frame that supports this analysis. Representative bureaucracy (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Vinopal, 2020) concerns itself with how the demographic characteristics of bureaucrats affect the distribution of outputs to clients who share these demographic characteristics. This theory holds that the presence of minority bureaucrats in public agencies can improve outcomes for clients who share their identities. This improvement stems from the bureaucrat taking direct actions to benefit the client or through a more indirect path. There is also well-established literature in the field of representative bureaucracy that demonstrates that teacher representation is related to educational outcomes for minority students of color (Vinopal, 2020).

A significant amount of research has considered the relationship between ethnicity and educational policy, with much of the focus on matching (or mismatching) the ethnicity of a teacher to his or her students. While the findings parallel with the literature in Chapter II and the data gathered from the findings of this research, I felt that this representative bureaucracy-like frame provided a broader look and connection outside of education that is pertinent to this study.

The applicability of this research suggests that research on representation in the organization can be useful for enhancing our understanding of school and classroom dynamics around race, ethnicity, and potential other characteristics of students, teachers, and administrators. By introducing this research in Chapter I and connecting it to related research in

education, this research has examined many studies throughout applying evidence to the outcomes of teacher-student race matching tends to result in greater student achievement (Dee, 2004; Grissom et al., 2017).

On balance, the main themes and sub-themes in this research, with its supporting evidence from the literature, arrived at comparable conclusions with descriptive representation among bureaucrats, including teachers. This can lead to improved outcomes for client populations with whom they work and points toward mechanisms linking descriptive representation to substantive effects. These effects, revealed from the main themes and sub-themes, may be direct as in the voices of students expressing their joy of finally having a teacher that looks like them, or inquiring about their teachers' pathway out of challenging circumstances. It may be through their cultural and social connections as in speaking the same language and similar social challenges. This study implies that scholars working at this intersection have significant opportunities to contribute to our collective understanding of the dynamics of race and other characteristics within schools through further investigation of these mechanisms.

Bridging Identities

Galindo (1996) introduced "bridging identity" as an analytic term in describing teachers of colors' role identity and highlighting how past biographical identities contribute and link to the way they define their professional role in light of their cultural and ethnic minority background (p. 85). Scholars have continued to expand this process of critical reflection to help teachers of color reclaim cultural resources and consider how they might be integrated into their personal teaching philosophies and where they can bridge life history, culture, pedagogy and construct their identity in a manner that supports ethnic minority students of colors' family, and

community (Fortune et al., 2016; Reitzes & Jarett, 2012). This term is especially relevant as seen in the participants' stories as they work with, not against, the cultural values and practices students bring from home.

The participants talked freely about why they chose the teaching profession. They shared critical experiences of their identity at different points of time and location in their lives. While yet having impacted them differently, it was clear that their identity markers eventually became the singular common experiences they shared. The participants attributed their identity as teachers of color to be the key component of their success as teachers and the advantage they have to bridge home, culture, community, and language with school thus leading to the success of students they represent.

This research can be a source of support and encouragement for all teachers of color by illustrating the process of bridging minority biographical experiences with the shaping of both teaching identity and the positive impact these identity roles have on students of color. The themes of students learning through stories, inquiring how teachers got themselves out of rough circumstances, a feeling of family, and connecting through similar challenges from their youth is similar to the pioneering work of Foster (1994, 1995) where he presented case studies of African American teachers that identified the themes of connectedness and solidarity they felt toward their families and communities of origin, which they applied to their teaching contexts. These are the bridging identities Galindo referred to in the research.

Garces et al. (2017) research on teachers of color encouraged this same concept towards racial equity by asserting that a common characteristic across these teachers was that their interactions with students extended beyond the classroom. Foster and Galindo's research is still applicable to the findings of my own research, which supports that the influence of similar racial,

culturally shared experiences, and ethnic identity on teacher's beliefs and practices is central to the types of instructions and learning that can facilitate minority students' educational success critically needed in our global classrooms today.

Contribution of This Study to Scholarship

As discussed throughout this dissertation and extensively in Chapter II, there is substantial literature on the phenomena of role modeling and the positive outcome through race matching between teacher and student. This research encompasses, specifically, narratives of teachers of color on the implication of their identity as teachers and on the educational experiences of students of color. Most analyses are broad in their findings on what equitable education is and how it relates to the imbalance of racial representation in teachers. However, this analysis hones in specifically on the perspectives and experiences of teachers of colors' need to illuminate equity-focused conversations that highlight their intentions of becoming a teacher.

The intersectionality of their identities that contribute to the academic success of students of color as well as revealing some of the limitations that hampers their job is also discussed. Due to the underrepresentation and imbalance of teacher and student demographics in today's global classrooms, this study is premised upon not only how critical it is for change to transpire in the education system, but also to implement practices that will foster support, mentoring, and retentions of teachers of color. For the participants, ethnic and racial identity mean everything, as it is the social and cultural link that bridges school and home, an asset that has been absent too long in the education of students of color. For this reason, I chose to seek out their perspectives on identity through individual dialogues inquiring as to why they decided to become teachers. This served as the entry point to the dialogue thus making their stories authentic and not predisposed to identity alone.

The voices of the 14 participants provided a starting point in achieving a close-up understanding of teacher accountability to students and community on a personal level. In addition, their voices added to the understanding of the challenges to retain talented teachers of color who often have a deeper understanding of what it means to nurture academic potential and build relationships of trust with students of color and their families. Teachers of color, as I heard repeatedly from the participants, surprisingly have never been asked why they chose their profession thus leading to their thoughts on identity. One could argue therefore, that they need an avenue to have their voices heard, given the lack of a critical mass within predominantly white institutions of learning.

This research is also unique in that I viewed the data through my own lenses as a teacher of color, an immigrant, and bilingual. My childhood experiences and desire to be a teacher, and the rewards and challenges of this profession were remarkably parallel to most of the participants' experiences. Emergent bilinguals can also benefit from bilingual and bicultural teachers who understand firsthand the process and challenges of second language acquisition and are prepared to advocate on their behalf. In addition to the main and sub-themes extracted through thematic and interpretative analysis, this research also provides additional windows that instinctively emerged from the analysis; i.e., culturally responsive leadership, representative bureaucracy, and bridging identities, thus offering socio-variables to consider and shedding light on policies and praxis that can chart the paths forward towards change and an equitable education for all students.

Implication and Recommendation for Practice

The fact that over 80% of K-12 teachers in the United States today do not share their students' racial ethnic backgrounds and the wide race gap in education achievement, it is

imperative to understand how teachers of color can assist to narrow this gap in the education of students of color. Hopefully, my research has opened up the reach and influence that teachers of color have in the academic experiences of students of color, the impact they have on their students', family, and community, and that it has touched on the importance of this work for students who have been historically marginalized. I believe that it has delved, to a degree, into the life experiences that helped shape the worldviews of the participants, drawing a link between their experiences as students and their motivation to become teachers and remain in the profession.

In today's educational institutions, administrators are the gatekeepers to hiring and recruiting teachers of color. This research discussed the commitment level to duty that the participants have in serving the educational needs of students of color and the impact they have on their communities and families as it relates to diversity and inclusion. Teachers of color do not work in isolation; they require leadership and administrative support to push these shared values forward. Let me address some of those who, I believe, can learn from my research.

To the Administrators

Several of the participants have a history of enduring racism while others report feeling devalued and forced to serve as racial experts in stereotypically defined roles that are not related to academics. Consistent with the literature (Fortune et al., 2016; Norman, 2019; Pizaro & Kohli, 2020), teachers of color need you to understand that your voice and commitment to racial diversity and inclusion work carries the most weight in the schools and, many times, in the community; therefore, it is essential that you lead these efforts. As administrators, you must lead for equity and access as a key action to recognize teachers of color as culturally responsive leaders by allowing them to act decisively, creatively, and independently, and model a personal

belief system that is student-centered and grounded in equity and access. To do so, especially in matters so charged as racial diversity, teachers of color need the safe space and administering room to act. This is where your leadership and change can and must be enabling.

Having spent time with the 14 participants as they shared extensively their journeys about becoming a competent and professional teacher of color, and moreover authentic stories about their experiences and perspectives on the value of their identity in the education of students of color, the following suggestions are for you:

- Align your vision, mission, and resources with diversity and inclusion practices that are transparent for the communities that you serve. This will have a powerful impact on the learning culture of all students.

- Value the diversity and demographics of your teachers and students and pay greater attention to the intersection between the race/ethnicity matching more broadly, as well as the differences in the magnitude of its impacts across the various outcomes that determine and empower a teaching for diversity policy.

- Demand practicing role modeling in context (Dee, 2004). Given how well the role model effect stacks up against other teacher credentials, having a diverse teaching force is educationally meaningful for students of color, indeed, for *all* students.

- Participate in the recruitment efforts to diversify the teaching profession. Along those lines, one approach is to broaden the recruitment efforts beginning in high school to motivate students of color to join in the teacher education pipeline.

- Create more opportunities for teachers of color to lead and have dialogue centering upon race and its impact on the educational system beyond the underachieving

subgroup discussion. Speak to what empowers teachers and students of color, and reform the focus only on deficiency models.

- Build collaborative relationships with ethnic diverse communities by bridging home and school to promote opportunities for future teachers which can have positive long-term impacts.

- Develop a culturally responsive leadership framework to guide school system leaders in shifting their practices and beliefs to create culturally responsive learning environments for students and teachers. This will imbue culturally responsive actions across all levels of educational leadership.

Overall, I urge the administrators to create a strong inclusive vision for their school. With the racial climate in our society today, the data of this research needs to be acknowledged in creating more representation of "diverse elements of society" (Carr & Klassen, 1997, p. 127). Take notice of the social movement issues that abound through the Black Lives Matter, Asian Hate Violence, LBGTQ Travesty, Denial of Immigrant Dreamers' Citizenship, Cancel Culture and, White Supremacy Violence, etc. and how these real-time events directly impact all of our lives today. Pledge to train, empower, and honor your teachers who talk honestly about these ideas with your students and focus on how they impact their young lives, if you want them to become the change we wish to see.

It is critical that you build a reputation of collaborative partnership with the community that you serve, a partnership that is comprehensive and participatory. Such collaboration would invite and welcome teachers of color as strategic decision makers in every step of the design and implementation for all students to excel.

To Teachers

It is important to identify best practices that work effectively toward closing the achievement gaps that persist by race/ethnicity as well as socio-economics, language, and disability. Fortunately for teacher practitioners, there are considerable agreements on the practices that improve the academic performance of groups of students who have traditionally demonstrated lower levels of achievement than their White, and more affluent peers (Kohli, 2018). Extracted from the 14 participants' personal experiences and perspectives, the following practices are encouraged as best practices for all teachers to implement into their teaching practices: a) demonstration of high expectations, b) implementation of culturally relevant instruction, c) establishment of caring relationships, and d) effective parent and community involvement. These strategies should be not new to you and none are quick and easy fixes. However, each is a complex construct that must be considered within the specific cultural and social context of your students and school community, and the particular issues that exist in the relationship to the achievement disparities in school.

Demonstration of high expectations. Expectations are internal processes that arise from teachers' belief systems and values. Gershenson, Holt and Papageorge's (2016) research on working with diverse students cited low teacher expectations as a major contributor to the achievement gap. You must be willing to explore your beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that may lead to low expectations and accept responsibility for the influence they have on student learning.

- Students should be taught a challenging, rigorous curriculum in ways that capitalize on the strengths of their learning style.
- Provide equitable opportunities for students to respond and participate.

- Provide ample wait time for thinking and responding.

- Students should be asked high-level, open-ended questions that require them to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.

Implementation of culturally relevant instruction. Gay (2010) suggested that culturally responsive instruction is not just a one-day event and cannot be dismissed as "just good teaching" (p. 23). The analysis from this research referenced to culturally relevant instruction as a foundation for connecting students' home culture and school. This is a key strategy for closing the existing achievement gaps by race/ethnicity. Culturally relevant instruction should include:

- Using the language and understandings that your students have acquired in their families and communities to bridge the gap between what they know and are able to do and what they need to learn in school.

- Incorporating the everyday issues and concerns of families and the community into curriculum and instruction.

- Actively engage students in the learning process.

- Use equitable grouping practices.

Establishment of Caring Relationships

No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship. Caring relationships between teachers and students are not a frill, but integral to academic success. In effective classrooms, the strengths of every student should be recognized, respected, and valued. In return you share the roles of both learners.

- Express personal interest in your students' family, culture, and outside activities.

- Be sure students have many opportunities to interact with positive role models.

- Mentoring programs should be in place to build a sense of personal efficacy and community connection.

- Leadership should be shared among students in collaborative learning activities.

Effective parent and community involvement. Parent and community involvement in schools has long been linked as having a positive effect on student achievement. Golden (2017) indicated that effective home-school partnerships increase grades, test scores, attendance, graduation rates, post-secondary enrollments, and homework completion.

- Recognize and acknowledge that parents' may view their role in their children's education differently than the school.

- Be sure parents understand school expectations and are equipped with the tools and resources to support their student's academic achievement.

- Provided parents with frequent feedback about students' progress.

- Create one-on-one connections with parents to develop personalized relationships with students' families.

To White Teachers—See Color

As schools in the U.S. continue to crowd with diverse students of color, there is much at stake for White teachers who represent more than 80% of the profession. One important factor to begin with is changing the rhetoric. For example, the most distinct characteristic to students is my skin color and like clockwork each trimester, they anxiously inquire about my ethnicity, where I am from, and what language I speak. With enthusiasm, I thank them for asking as a way to model pride and confidence in sharing one's identity and culture. I came to realize how unique and extraordinary I feel with each conversation and it became a great relationship tool. Unexpressed at times from students, but their curiosity on identity is important and truly matters.

Students of color are no different. They want to be recognized in that same spirit of uniqueness, appreciation, and connection. Unfortunately, and too often, the old adage, "I don't see color" is also implying "I don't see race" and can be interpreted that a teacher is colorblind. While the intention behind this colorblindness is to declare that you do not discriminate and treat all your students equally, however, race and ethnicity often play large and important roles in student's identities and contribute to their culture, their behavior, and their beliefs (Waite, 2021). Students of color are constantly grappling with their identity, and race is a large part of that (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). When race and ethnicity are recognized, it will allow teachers to be responsive to individual differences. How can a teacher have a relationship with students of color if they do not acknowledge all that makes them who they are? These relationships should be sought out with the intention to honor one's whole self (Waite, 2021).

What many teachers do not understand is that being colorblind is quite problematic to diversity and inclusion efforts. The idea of not seeing skin-color is nice in theory, but in actuality it is denying one's identity and does not acknowledge the whole person. If a teacher claims to not see race, then what else are they not seeing in the students? "To say 'I don't see race' is to say 'I don't see you" (Waite, 2021, p. 13) and can erase the students' individuality implying their racial and cultural identity is not a factor in the educational space. If you are to create an inclusive learning environment with students of color, it is important to understand that the goal is *not* to be colorblind (Lynn, 2016). The goal is actually to see and recognize skin color and to control and regulate your innate impulse to make assumptions based on such characteristics. Being able to first recognize this is critical. We all see color.

White teachers need to be more intentional in taking small daily actions that make their classroom more welcoming and curriculum resonant for students of color. For example, provide

a constant stream of writers, artists, mathematicians, scientists, engineers, and other competent and caring men and women leaders of color visible to them in order to counter the poisonous issues that people of color are defined by oppression. In essence, your curriculum will define and display the worth and value you place on the identities of students of color in your classroom.

- Understand the historical roots of racialized inequalities.

- Understand your own subjectivity as a reflective practitioner.

- Understand the elements of being an ally in situations of power inequality.

- Create shared learning environments that model trust, inclusion, and safety.

To Teachers of Color

As indicated in this research, you make up only 20% of today's teaching workforce (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Despite the low numbers, there is no reason we cannot draw upon the realities and lessons learned from this research. Teacher leaders of any color, working together, can ensure that their schools are organized to support the kinds of conditions modeled by your examples that help all students to succeed. You are acutely positioned to serve as an agent of change for students of color and their learning experiences, and may be the first to recognize injustice (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Therefore, you must be advocates for equity and learn how to have courageous conversations about race, and model such conversations for teachers and students. The low numbers of teachers of color representation make it an urgent matter to implement a "growing your own" goal in your pedagogy. If students of color have successful experiences in schools, with your help, they may be eager to join the teaching profession. Your presence is the first step to connecting with students of color and to build community ties that foster a sense of belonging for them and their families. Capitalize on your unique position to lead as a role model by having a greater understanding of cultural awareness

that lends itself to a more responsive pedagogy and collaborate across levels of leadership with all teachers to embed these practices in your schools.

- Participate in professional development training pertaining to culturally responsive teaching and assist in designing differentiated learning experiences in the classrooms.
- Visibility on campus is critical. Students of color need to see you involved in leadership positions and school wide activities.
- Create a culturally affirming classroom and environment.

Recommendation for Future Research

Many opportunities emerge from this study for future research directions. For example, larger sample sizes and ethnic representations should be collected in future research. This study explored the lived experiences of a select group of individuals at a particular moment; future research should consider a longitudinal study, following participants from their initial interest in teaching to either completion of their program or attrition. As this was a narrative inquiry study, future research could also consider other qualitative theoretical framework such as phenomenological work or case studies. Experimental or mixed-design studies examining the effect that a particular variable has on students of color are also needed. While the focus of this study was limited, it addressed issues which require further exploration from students of color. Since generally parents have a great influence on their children, to examine the role of the parents of students of color on their children's decision to become a teacher is an important question to address.

Limitations

Although the study informs reasons behind why the identity of teachers of color is an asset to the education of students of color, and suggests their experiences to be valuable data, it

has several limiting factors. First, with its small sample size, it has a geographic constraint. All of the participants are from the same region in the neighboring school districts of Seattle, Washington making the findings not generalizable. Therefore, I would be curious to know if the stories and experiences of teachers would have differed if this study had been done in other regions or states, e.g., California, Utah, Arizona and Texas, as I originally intended. This small sample size also prevents certain ethnic or racial groups from being represented. All of the participants grew up in the United States, thus excluding the perspective of teachers of color who grew up in other parts of the world.

Second, this study did not involve participation interviews of students of color voices, their experiences, and perspectives to add to the analysis that may have enriched the data. Conducting focus groups may also enrich the data so that participants can discuss implications for teacher preparation programs to help teachers develop a more profound cultural and personal awareness of their identities, as they become teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. While qualitative studies are limited in the generalizability across an entire population, this study does provide a glimpse of the essence of what it means to be a teacher of color. This study is also limited in its perspective on the situation, as narrative inquiry is the lens by which the topic is examined. At the same time, it allows for a deeper inquiry into the lives of the selected participants. Future research may address areas of this study's limitations.

Conclusion

I have been transformed by this research in more ways that I could have ever foreseen. The complexity of identity markers such as race, ethnicity, and culture became forefront in how this study's participants perceived and interpreted their lived experiences. The ideas of critical consciousness and formation of identity have altered my understanding and approach to

exploring the complexities of identity politics in education. The questions that guided my research were answered in ways that reached beyond any simple, clear-cut model that reflects the experiences of these participants and others like them. The global students of today are an indication of why identity must intersect between teacher and student to create unique teaching and learning opportunities.

Through this research, I felt I was capturing the essence of my own experiences and intentionality of becoming a teacher, and how we as teachers of color are constantly and consistently formulating their racialized location and identity in their experiences and reflexivity. It is a position that can be contradictory, challenging, alienating, and yet powerful. These narratives have evoked many emotions within me as I see a continual theme of resilience and inspiration within these lived experiences. The hope that one day the voices of those who reside on the margin will not only be heard but appreciated is an aspiration that must counter the systemic barriers that are embedded in our education systems.

As the participants refer to their current and past experiences as a means to deconstruct, negotiate, interpret, and communicate their role as teachers, it influenced the lens by which they approach and position themselves as pivotal members that can bring about change and progress in the education of students of color. Furthermore, this research continues the consistent echoing of educational equity for a more ethnic diverse teaching force. I speak for myself, the participants, and many teachers of color, that teaching has become a space where the "self" and "collective" identity are bridged together to form a unique environment of leading, acceptance, learning, and belonging. The participants in this study represent this concept in their thoughts, actions and hope for the future of education. They bring their lived experiences to the forefront in bettering themselves as teachers and role models and have chosen to react and work through

barriers. Ultimately, as a result of this study, they and others like them are perhaps more cognizant of the ways in which their authenticity and identity impact their pedagogy and practice and in becoming tomorrow's leaders for change.

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Appendix A: Approval of IRB Ethics Application

Online IRB Application Approved: Interview Teachers of Color Dissertation August 18, 2019, 8:50 am

Sun, Aug 18, 2019, 5:50 AM

Dear Lynette Finau,

As Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for 'Antioch University , I am letting you know that the committee has reviewed your Ethics Application. Based on the information presented in your Ethics Application, your study has been approved.

Renewal is not required, however, any changes in the protocol(s) for this study must be formally requested by submitting a request for amendment from the IRB committee. Any adverse event, should one occur during this study, must be reported immediately to the IRB committee. Please review the IRB forms available for these exceptional circumstances.

Sincerely,

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for Participants

Consent form for Interview Research: A Qualitative Study

This informed consent form is for individuals invited to participate as an interviewee in a research study entitled "*Teachers of Color: A Reflective Narrative on Perception of Identity and Academic Success*."

Researcher/Principal Investigator: Lynette S. Finau

Chair of Dissertation:

Name of Institution and Program: Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Study: *Teachers of Color: A Reflective Narrative on Perception of Identity and Academic Success*

Participation Information:

I _____ volunteer to participate in a research project by Lynette S. Finau from Antioch University's Graduate School of Leadership & Change. I understand that the project is a Qualitative research designed to gather information about the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers of Color in grade level K-12. I will be one of approximately 14 teachers of Color interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will be not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

2. I agree to my interview being audio-recorded. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview by the researcher with very minimal questioning.

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and secured. I understand that my name will not be identified or identifiable in the data/reports that result from the research. Pseudonym's will be used.

4. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies involving Human Subjects Protection at Antioch University.

5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Name of Participant   Date   Signature
_____

Principal Researcher/Investigator   Date   Signature
_____

Appendix C: Participant Overview and Invitation Letter

Invitation to Participate in Study

[Date]

Dear [participants name]

STUDY: *Teachers of Color: A Reflective Narrative on Perception of Identity and Academic Success*

    Hello, my name is Lynette Finau (Principal Investigator/Researcher), and doctoral candidate at Antioch University Graduate School of Leadership and Change in Yellow Springs, Ohio. I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Leadership and Change with research interest in teachers of Color in secondary education.

    Taking a Qualitative approach, my research study consists of interviewing participants, member checking, and extensive data analysis, using an inductive research technique. The focus of the interview will be related to the experiences and perceptions of teachers of Color on identity in secondary education. The data will be analyzed thoroughly to make meaning of the narratives. It is anticipated that the interviews will help develop a rich and reliable collection of narratives for the study.

    As an eligible participant, you have been selected upon your certification, at least three years of experience in the teaching force, and ethnic minority status. Your voluntary efforts to participate in this study is greatly appreciated. This study will be conducted at a date, location, and time of your choosing.

    Please reply through email if you are interested in participating in my research. Your participation will be greatly appreciated. A memorandum of understanding about the research study is attached below for additional information if applicable to your decision to volunteer.

    Thank you for your time. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Lynette S. Finau

I have read the Invitation and the attached Memorandum of Understanding and **agree to participate as a volunteer** for this research:

Name   Date

_____   _____

Email   Phone#

_____   _____

Appendix D: Memorandum of Understanding About the Research

Memorandum of Understanding about the Research

STUDY: *Teachers of Color: A Reflective Narrative on Perception of Identity and Academic Success*

Investigator/Researcher: Lynette S. Finau

Participants: Participation will consist of distributing a welcome email message to all participant volunteers (up to 15) to interview with the principle investigator. The topic of the interview is teacher identity and its influential factor in the success of students. Participation in this research project is voluntary and are free to withdraw at any time. Interview will be unstructured with an open-ended question *"What made you decide to become a teacher?"* where participants are free to develop their own ideas and story.

Confidentiality: The researcher will take notes and audio recordings for research purposes only. An audio recording and written notes will be kept anonymously. Identification details will be removed before submitting the result results to the dissertation committee. During the research process, the notes and recordings of the interviews will be kept in a locked, and secured location. Participants in the study may request that any comment s made be off the record or stricken from the notes. Interviews may be stopped at any time by the interviewee and all of the interview data notes or reports will be destroyed. The results of the study may be included in the future scholarly presentations and publications.

Risks: Participants of this research study may be made uncomfortable by reflecting or revealing emotional experiences from the interview. Participants do not have to comment or answer any question or expand on experiences that is deemed uncomfortable. This is a voluntary study.

Benefits: There are no gifts or monetary benefits for the participants.

Expenses/Reimbursements: There will be no compensation for participation. The principal investigator will cover expenses if necessary during scheduled meetings.

Questions: If there are any further questions regarding this research, please contact me, Lynette Finau, at _____. The Dissertation Chair, should there be any additional questions is _____. The study, as well as the content of this memorandum of understanding, have been reviewed by the Antioch University Institutional Review Board (IRB) which is a committee whose members are tasked with ensuring that research participants are protected.

All efforts to ensure reliability and validity throughout the study are appreciated.

Lynette S. Finau
Ph.D. Candidate
Principal Investigator and Researcher
Antioch University Graduate School of Leadership and Change

Appendix E: Reply Message to Volunteer Participants

Reply Message to Volunteer Participants

[Date]

Greetings _____ (participant name):

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the *Teachers of Color: A Reflective Narrative on Perception of Identity and Academic Success* study. I look forward to our upcoming interview which should last approximately 45 – 60 minutes. You will be asked to read and sign the Informed Consent Letter prior to our interview.

Interview arrangements:

Date:_____

Time:_____

Location:_____

In preparation for a successful interview, please think about the open-ended question "*What made you decide to become a teacher?"*

Your willingness to share our experience as a teacher for this study is greatly appreciated. Please don't hesitate to call or send an email message to me in advance if you have any questions. I am really looking forward to it.

All the best,

Appendix F: Permission for Use of Table 3.1

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Appendix G: Permission for Use of Table 3.2

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Dear Lynette Finau,

1 Table (Table1) From Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3:2, 77-101, DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

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