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Poetry For Us: Centering the Voices of Teachers of Color Through Action Research Poetry

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POETRY FOR US: CENTERING THE VOICES OF TEACHERS OF COLOR THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH POETRY

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ABSTRACT

POETRY FOR US: CENTERING THE VOICES TEACHERS OF COLOR THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH POETRY

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The teaching profession has historically been defined by an "overwhelming presence of whiteness" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 101), leading to experiences from Black, Indigenous and Teachers of Color (BITOC) often being neglected and undervalued. This action-oriented research project employed poetic inquiry techniques to capture the full experiences of BITOC participants speaking *their stories* in *their* voices through poetry. The centering of BITOC experiences is crucial to shifting the paradigm from mere survival and retention towards what aspects of the BITOC experiences support them to flourish and thrive in private/independent schools. This study examined poetry as a generative practice for building community, healing, self-reflection, and providing affirmations for BITOC in their independent school settings. Critical race theory (CRT) served as the theoretical framework of this study, specifically the centering of the counter-narratives of BITOC. Their stories are centered and amplified as integral sources of knowledge and experience, while exploring an embodied and generative practice to support their thriving. This study seeks to contribute towards an equitable and inclusive teaching profession which embraces and acknowledges BITOC experiences. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https:// etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: BITOC flourishing, poetic inquiry, healing, agency, counter-narratives, poetry, narrative inquiry, private/independent schools, teachers of Color, critical race theory

Dedication

This is dedicated to my colleagues and fellow educators of Color. I see you.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all the women from my ancestral lineage from whom I have descended. I am here only because of their strength and resilience, and I feel their vibrancy course through me. I give special thanks to my family and in particular my parents who supported me throughout this journey, especially my mother Shizuko. It is your fiery passion and conviction that carries on the legacy of the powerful Okinaka women.

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My utmost appreciation to my fellow poet educators. Thank you for entrusting your stories with me. Thank you for creating the circle of sharing, for being vulnerable, for connecting, and listening.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Schools as Places of Welcome - Problem of Practice

The School of My Dreams

The school of my dreams
Sounds like songs ringing
Drums beating
Jump ropes turning
and
Sticks rhyming

The school of my dreams
Smells like warm bread baking
white rice steaming
Stews cooking
And garlic frying

The school of my dreams
Feels like joy warming
Faces smiling
And a rainbow of color,
Skin the color of honey, caramel, mahogany, and umber
The feeling of knowing YOU ARE welcome

The school of my dreams
Does not have a mold of
Should be
But allows each child to become
Who they are

The school of my dreams
Is conscious
Of how we all fit in the circle
No one in front
Nor one behind
Because we all have a place in the circle

In the school of my dreams
There is no not enough
Because you are already enough
Just as you are

In the school of my dreams
We listen

To the quietest voices in the room
Not just the loudest ones

In the school of my dreams
We create community, not based on how you can fit into
But just be
As you are

This poem was written as a wish of what may come to fruition from my research. I have been an educator for 15 years and a student for 21 years and I have yet to encounter a school that has truly embodied such a learning environment. I am an agent of change, committed to creating and influencing school communities where the experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) are centered, and their flourishing, not their mere retention and survival, is cultivated and supported. I aspire to be a part of a movement that propels and fosters the development of Black, Indigenous, Teachers of Color (BITOC) to have a seat at the table so their experiences are heard in positions of leadership in school communities and pre-service teacher education programs. The presence of BITOC in schools is integral for the reimagining of school communities as places where BIPOC not only survive but thrive and flourish.

The problem of practice includes that teacher education programs and schooling institutions have never been structured around the experience of BITOC (Matias & Liou, 2015). The experiences of BITOC in educational settings is often overlooked and undervalued in a teaching profession developed and maintained in an "overwhelming presence of whiteness" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 101). Therefore, the very presence of BITOC in school communities can be a source of inspiration in and of itself due to the myriad challenges one faces when working in a system and environment that was not created for you. The challenges can be so dire that attrition rates suggest that BITOC leave sooner and at higher rates than their white counterparts in a profession with disproportionate percentages of representation (Griffin et al., 2022; Kim-Seda,

2022). The impacts of systemic racism and exclusion within schooling institutions are significant and far-reaching for BITOC, including emotional harm and unwelcome and professional underestimation and exclusion. The feeling of being an outsider, obligated to fit into and assimilate to a school setting, reveals the ways in which educational institutions have ignored and devalued the experiences of BITOC.

The emotional and psychological impacts of systemic racism—both explicit and implicit, and the resulting exclusion within school environments—has long lasting effects for BITOC. Feeling isolated and unsupported, compounded with being one of the few BITOC in a school can lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion, impacting professional growth and development and overall mental health (Love, 2019; Rios & Longoria, 2021). As one of few BITOC in an educational setting, educators may not have colleagues who understand their experiences or have trusting and developed relationships for guidance and support. Experiencing discrimination and microaggressions from colleagues, administrators, or even students can lead to feelings of frustration, anger, or even trauma, and can have negative effects on their mental health and well-being (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

The emotional exhaustion can be amplified if they feel and implicitly are expected to carry the burden of representing their entire racial or ethnic group through their beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Often BITOC are also expected to address issues of diversity and inclusion in the school, resulting in additional emotional labor, on top of their teaching duties. This can lead to burnout, exhaustion, and isolation. The emotional impacts of exclusion and systemic racism within schooling institutions can be wide-ranging and long-lasting for BITOC including increased rates of attrition.

The higher attrition rates of BITOC may be attributed to the fact that common challenges white teachers face is compounded by the racialized experience of being a BITOC (Kohli, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Such challenges may include overt and covert acts of discrimination by colleagues and school leadership resulting in feelings of isolation due to antagonistic school cultures that make them feel invisible, undervalued, and unwelcome (Ahmed, 2012; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The lack of colleagues' racial literacy and awareness of other perspectives, practices, and cultural sensitivity is another racialized experience BITOC may encounter regularly in their school communities (Kholi, 2021).

As a means of "diversifying" the schools, institutions often form a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee of which BITOC are often asked to lead and be a part of, therefore taking on extra duties without pay, sometimes being showcased as a means of "showing" the institutions DEI progress (Kholi, 2021; Love, 2019; Player & Irizarry, 2022). One of the most impactful challenges that BITOC face due to their minoritization is the mental and physical toll taken on their health and the overall feeling of not belonging in their school environment (Kholi, 2021; Love, 2019; Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023).

Much research and scholarship has been focused on the experiences of BITOC in public schools, but this study fills a gap in the scholarship centered on the experiences of BITOC in independent school environments. By amplifying their voices, this study has the potential to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for BITOC in independent schools. The potential for poetry as a tool of self-care and development for BITOC, has the potential to help the retention and thriving of BITOC in their educational setting.

The aim of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of BITOC in independent schools by centering their experiences in their own educational biography, teacher preparation

program, and current professional setting. My research was aimed to develop community and networks by connecting BITOC that often must hide parts of themselves to fit in. As a means of centering the experiences of BITOC, this research project also explored the strategies, practices, and tools that BITOC utilize to not only navigate and cope with systemic racism and exclusion in schooling environments, but also what supports their thriving. This study aims to contribute to the development of effective practices and structures that support the recruitment, retention, and flourishing of BITOC in independent/private school environments. Another contribution is the potential use of poetry as a means of empowerment, community building, self-care, and healing for BITOC.

Research Questions

The research question guiding this study was, What are the lived experiences of BITOC in independent/private schools? The secondary question was, How can poetry be used as a potentially generative tool in healing, reflection, affirmation, self-care, community building, and expression for BITOC flourishing? These questions were posed so that the counter-narratives, the often-untold stories of BITOC could take center stage. I wanted the landscape of their journeys to becoming educators to be told through their voices, their experiences, their narratives. In a profession dominated by whiteness (Sleeter, 2001), this study aimed to create a rich tapestry of other experiences in education. The co-collaborators were given the opportunity to share a broad range of their stories and so the questions were open-ended to allow for an open and expansive sharing. The second research question was generated as means of putting research into practice and action for the co-collaborators. Poetry was examined use as a generative and artistic tool that the educators might be able to put into practice for each of their own lives to support their

professional work in the classroom. Both research questions were critical to this research project in order that the stories of the co-collaborators were the focal point.

Correspondingly, the study was conducted through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), so that the counter-narratives of minoritized teacher experiences were the point of convergence. CRT is a theoretical framework that prioritizes the impact of race and racism on minoritized groups' experience as the nucleus of understanding in various settings, including school institutions (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Kim, 2016). In alignment with CRT, the heart of this study focused on the voices of BITOC that have often been silenced, disregarded, placated, and rebuffed. Working collaboratively with participants, their lived experiences were centered, and their stories were shared in their own words as an intentional means of empowerment and agency.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to prioritize and center the experiences of BITOC in independent/private schools and identify the factors that contribute to their survival and flourishing in these learning environments. Working in concert with the participants as co-collaborators, poetry was explored as a generative tool for healing, reflection, community building, and affirmation. The study sought to not only inspire agency but also create a community of BITOC as a potential source of strength, belonging, and shared striving. The research project was based on a paradigm shift of mere survival and retention of BITOC in independent school settings, to advocating for the flourishing and thriving as integral members of their school communities.

Potential Significance

The potential significance of the study lies in the potential to empower and validate BITOC in their professional settings. By giving Teachers of Color a platform to share their experiences, the study focused on bringing together BITOC who may feel isolated as one of the only minoritized voices in their school by creating community. The study also sought to make recommendations for independent schools and teacher training institutions on how to support the thriving and resulting retention of BITOC in their communities. Further, poetry was examined as a potential tool for thriving in their professional setting.

Previous studies have shown that poetry can serve as a powerful means for reducing stress, anxiety, improving self-reflection and expression, and building connections during times of distress. A study by Park et al. (2022) found that a poetry therapy program for nursing students in South Korea, a competitive and highly stressful environment, showed a significant decrease in their stress and anxiety levels and an increase to their well-being and resilience. Cronin and Hawthorne (2019) found that the use of poetry writing in classrooms increased the students' abilities for self-reflective practice, increasing their self-awareness, improving communication skills, and emotional regulation. The use of poetry was also examined by Acim (2021) in healing and the building of connection during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way of reducing anxiety and healing stress. A study by Miller (2021) investigated the use of poetry as resistance and a means of networking and community building in the fight for racial justice, specifically for the Black Lives Matter movement. Overall, research suggests that the generative practice of writing poetry can be a powerful tool for healing, empowerment, reflection, and community building.

The practice of writing poetry can also be a valuable tool specifically for BITOC to process their experiences, reflect on their identity, and find empowerment in their work. Writing

poetry can be a way for BITOC to process their experiences of racism, microaggressions, discrimination, and exclusion within the educational system. By putting their own thoughts and emotions into words, they may be able to gain a sense of clarity and understanding of their experiences. Poetry writing can also be a way for BITOC to reflect on their identity and cultural heritage. By exploring themes related to race, culture, and their family narratives, they may be able to gain a deeper understanding of their own identity and the experiences that have shaped them, allowing for a creative and meaningful tool of expression.

Lorde (2017) shares that by writing poetry we can "learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes" (p. 8). By sharing their poetry with others, participants may be able to put into words and action their hopes and dreams for their school communities. Poetry writing can also be a way for BITOC to connect and build a sense of community. By participating in poetry workshops or circles of sharing with others, they may be able to find a sense of belonging and support. By incorporating poetry writing into their self-care and professional development practices, BITOC may be able to find new avenues for personal and professional growth.

Researcher Positionality and Relationships to the Research

"Where are you from? Are you the nanny? Are you Chinese? But where are you really from?" These questions have plagued me for most of my life. These two stanzas from my poem, *Puppet on a String* is a glimpse into my inner wrestling with my identity and resulting self-worth.

Puppet on a String

Trying to uncover the hidden
To find who I am
I don't know
The hidden past
So much forgotten
So much
pain
Of not wanting to remember
But I am trying to find who I am
Unfurling the winding helix,
tracks of DNA from the past
the stories that live in my blood
but are silent to my ears.
A knowing
a feeling
with every beat of this heart
they are there
my ancestors live
I long to connect
and know.
But perhaps I already
know…
Torn between worlds
Never a perfect fit

Not Japanese, enough
But also not white, enough
Never quite…*enough*
So, Who am I? And where do I belong?

As a biracial educator, I have been on a journey of self-discovery, identity reclamation, and undoing of years of conditioning and shaming. Growing up in a predominantly white upper-class suburb outside of Toronto, one of the most diverse cities in the country, my identity was formed in a sea of whiteness. As a first-generation college graduate of a proud Japanese immigrant mother and British-Canadian father, we were one of the only families of Color in our public school. Due to the average income of the neighbourhood, the school was finely renovated and resourced with music and art programs. Not only did our socio-economic status differ from

most families, my religious background and cultural practices at home were something I felt ashamed of for most of my life. I kept most of who I was, what I identified with, hidden, and tried to assimilate to fit in as best as I could. The need to hide, become invisible, not speak up, stand out, or cause conflict became a personality trait reinforced day after day. My desire to assimilate was partially driven by the absence of representation and role models in my schooling experience. I also recognize that having a white father afforded me many privileges and ways to hide behind various aspects of whiteness. My father's whiteness protected me at times, although most of my time was spent with and shaped by my mother.

In my own educational experience, I did not have a single teacher, principal, vice principal, or administrator that was BIPOC. This became part of the reason why I chose to become a teacher, because I had never had anyone who looked like me, with whom I could partially identify with. I entered the teaching profession directly out of my master's program and teacher training, both staggeringly white spaces. My pre-service teacher training, the curriculum, and teaching practices I was learning were steeped in Eurocentrism. I did not resist but tried to assimilate and fit into the ideals and prescribed role of the "model" teacher. My teacher preparation program did not include a single mirror for me and my identity. Style (1988) of the National Seeking of Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) project first described the importance of windows and mirrors in school curricula as a metaphor for what each child deserves in their educational experience. Every child should see themselves reflected in the stories and curriculum they learn in school, they should see themself mirrored in some way: in the books being read, the history being told, and the teachers standing before them.

Having oneself represented at school is an important aspect of identity development and a necessity, not a privilege, for every child to feel affirmed, seen, and validated (Style, 1988).

Windows are a means of seeing other people's realities, also a necessary tool to learn. However, most Black, Indigenous, Students of Color (BISOC) are learning primarily through windows, through other people's perspectives and rarely experience any mirrors, any reflections of themself in their schooling career. When students don't have a balance between windows and mirrors in their schooling journey, important aspects of identity validation and affirmation can be underdeveloped, sending false messages of who is important and validated, thus forming a deficit sense of self. Such was often my experience. I never felt enough.

When I began teaching in a private school in Hawaii, a very culturally diverse locality, I straddled between wanting to fit into the ideal teacher and feeling the responsibility to welcome the whole being of each student, most coming from biracial homes. I tried to contort myself to fit into the box of "good Waldorf teacher," hiding the parts of myself that did not fit. As time passed and my experience and confidence increased, I began to question and pushback on traditions, practices, and attitudes that centered whiteness as the standard. It has been an ongoing process of peeling back the layers and finding who I really am, what it means to be biracial in different social environments and communities I inhabit. Imposter syndrome and the doubt in myself is a daily struggle, believing that I deserve to take up space, just as I am. That I am enough.

Study Limitations and Delimitations

As a qualitative action research study, this project focused on BITOC currently teaching in independent schools in Canada and the United States. The study had limitations in the form of the small data sample size and the focusing on one specific geographic location. As such, the findings are limited to one region of the continent and could be critiqued for lacking generalizability. Although all participants are educators in independent school settings, the majority were from one educational pedagogy. Independent schools vary in terms of school environment, culture,

practices, attitudes, and institutional structures. Unintentionally, all the participants were female or non-binary, therefore limiting possible gender differences.

The delimiting factors of the study included teachers that self-identified Teachers of Color in an independent school setting who are enrolled in or have graduated from a teacher education program. Diverse teaching positions and range of teaching experience were incorporated into participant recruitment to ensure the scope of experience was not based on one specific department of a school (such as early childhood, grade school, or high school**)** and covered a range of teaching experience and subjects. This provided the necessary pool of co-collaborators to illuminate their experiences in their own education, teacher training, and current teaching positions. The sample size allowed for an intimate and collaborative focus group.

Key Terms and Definitions

The key terms defined below are in context and applicable to the study. Most terms are central to the study and may be discussed further in forthcoming chapters. Language is a significant and powerful tool, especially when addressing/representing a person's identity and is therefore not taken lightly. Conversely, I acknowledge that language and social descriptors of identity are dynamic, fluid, and ever evolving.

Teachers of Color: Rios and Longoria (2021) define teachers of Colors to include "Latinx, Southeast Asian, Asian American, and East Asian teachers" (p. 9) along with Black and Indigenous educators. Readers can often overgeneralize the experience of one person to essentialize a diverse range of experiences and people and thus I use the term assuming that the experiences of one minoritized group is not the same for all.

BITOC: Defined as Black, Indigenous, Teachers of Color. This term is used most consistently throughout the text to highlight the experiences of Black and Indigenous educators to

confront anti-Black racism and the colonization of Indigenous peoples, as sovereign people, on the land of what is now called Canada and the United States.

Minoritized: Rather than using minority to describe a relationship between members who share a social identity and relationship to power, I want to highlight that non-whites are the global majority and are the projected majority in public schools (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2016; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021). Even so, folks of the global majority still experience practices, structures, attitudes, and policies that result in them being minoritized (Rios & Longoria, 2021).

Counter-story/counter-narrative: A central tool of Critical Race Theory, a counter-story or counter-narrative is told from the perspective of the minoritized person as a means of challenging structures and practices that contribute to inequity (Huang Hoon et al., 2019; Kohli, 2021; Williams et al., 2018).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The amplification of BITOC voices in schooling institutions requires that their experiences be situated in theoretical frameworks committed to the empowerment of minoritized groups. Contextualizing the experiences of BITOC within the social and historical backdrop of systemic issues of inequitable power relationships, specifically in educational institutions, requires that the impact racial identities have on experience are viewed as a theoretical lens rather than minor variable. Critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory (CRT) serve as the theoretical lens from which the research is positioned. The embedded and systemic implications of how race impacts the experience of BITOC is challenged through the counter-narratives of minoritized experiences, a central tenet of CRT.

Review of the current literature focusing on BITOC experiences is in no way exhaustive but seeks to ground the study in the foundational and relevant theoretical and empirical research on BIPOC educators. Although there is an emergent and growing number of scholars and scholar-practitioners focusing their research on the experiences of BITOC, there is a lack of research focused on independent school educators. The literature review is anchored in the reality of white supremacy and white supremacy culture that privileges whiteness. Utilizing race-neutrality and color-blindness, the perpetuation of and maintenance of dominant white narratives in education continue to minimize and ignore the harmful and racialized experiences of BITOC in school environments. Research regarding BITOC attrition rates, the assets BITOC bring to school communities, forms of resistance against their racialization, and the notion of flourishing within schools is discussed as a means of situating the integral role of BITOC in

school communities now and in the future. A brief discussion regarding gaps in the research on BITOC experiences in independent schools concludes the chapter.

Critical Theory

As one of the early critical scholars, social scientist Horkheimer was the first to write about critical theory, examining the injustice surrounding the German economic depression of the 1930s (Kincheloe et al., 2011). Thereafter, many German critical theorists fled Nazi-Germany and came to the United States, introducing critical theory to American scholars (Kincheloe et al., 2011). Since the introduction of critical theory in America, the themes of investigation have expanded and diversified across various disciplines of study. At the root of critical theory is the challenging of injustice and subordination through the examination of privilege and inequity within historically rooted power relationships (Giroux, 2001; Kim, 2016). The investigation of inequitable and discriminatory power imbalances must be critically examined, brought to awareness, and challenged through the development of critical consciousness.

Freire (2000) first defined the notion of critical consciousness as an essential understanding of one's social reality by examining the root causes of oppression through a cycle of reflection and action. The development and utilization of critical consciousness is something that all citizens and students must foster to fully understand and combat inequity. From its historical roots in Germany to its contemporary application, critical theory seeks to confront and interrogate issues of domination and unequal distributions of power through critical awareness and resistance. Central to this study is the investigation of power imbalances within school environments as contributing factors to the experiences of BITOC.

Integral to critical theory lies the notion of individual empowerment through the agency of minoritized individuals as important agents of social change (Giroux, 2001; Kim, 2016). The

empowerment of those who are harmed is not only important to uncover inequity but to mobilize communities to make real change in their environments. Empowerment of individuals is fundamental for social change as a collective method of fighting back against systems, policies, and structures that perpetuate inequities (Kim, 2016; Love, 2019). Empowering individuals requires respecting each person for their inherent humanity; each human should be recognized for being worthy and sacred just as they are, not for what they can produce (Hersey, 2022). As such, critical theory argues that the examination of inherent social inequities *requires* that all lived experiences, not just dominant perspectives, are valued and centered to facilitate action (Freire, 2000).

Centering and elevating minoritized voices is paramount to truly understanding social inequities, empowering individuals, and building momentum for change. Giroux (2001) asserts that action, as an integral component of critical theory, must be grounded in understanding the "sufferings of others" (p. 9). Individuals aspiring to become agents of change must ensure that all perspectives, particularly those belonging to minoritized communities, are not only heard but amplified and prioritized. Critical theory is a congruent framework for this investigation as a means of empowering BIPOC educators as integral agents of change in their schooling environments.

Critical Pedagogy

Education is an integral component of critical theory as a means of creating long lasting change and its application has been named critical pedagogy. Freire (2000) had a strong influence on critical theory in North America and his work, including his theoretical framework for education, became the foundation of critical pedagogy. Freire (2000) argued for the development of critically conscious and socially responsible citizens dedicated to the liberation of all people.

Schools, as central institutions of the social reproduction of culture and values, have the responsibility to encourage students, not as passive learners, but as empowered active citizens who are agents of change (Giroux, 2010). From this perspective, educational pedagogy must focus on fostering agents of social change by encouraging dialogic practices that invite the full identities of the students into the classroom (Giroux, 2001, 2010). Students are viewed as important and powerful agents of change, integral to the future of solving social inequities.

Critical pedagogy also asserts that learning in school environments must foster critical thinkers who are conscious of and feel empowered to work for the liberation of all people. The purpose of education is not the development of individuals who simply memorize and regurgitate information and facts, but rather are aware of inequities and see themselves as change makers, able to impact history (Giroux, 2010). Through education, the pursuit of self-reflection, self-determinism, and critical consciousness become the building blocks for social transformation.

Freire (2000) states that schools must give students "the freedom to create, and to construct, to wonder and to venture. Such freedom requires that the individual be active and responsible, not a slave or a well-fed cog in the machine" (p. 68). This model of conscious development directly opposes the ideology of passive learners accepting and perpetuating the status quo to serve the development of the economy. Rather, consciousness is developed for the liberation of all people who feel they have the power to unite and change the course of history (Giroux, 2010). Issues of inequality such as social class, race, or gender must be examined to empower students to transform these inequalities (Freire, 2000). The purpose of education according to critical pedagogy, is the development of critical thinkers who question and challenge systems of power as active and engaged learners. Thus, the role of the teacher, the learning environment, and curricula are integral in the application of critical pedagogy.

Teachers are integral guides, according to critical pedagogy, emphasizing their role as moral and intellectual models for the students, rather than mere technicians of fixed and guided curricula (Giroux, 2010). Teachers are important role models for their students and must be active citizens within their local and global communities. Who and what the teacher brings into their classroom has a large impact on the students. Teachers can have a significant impact on whether students feel reflected in the curriculum, feel welcome and understood, and are inspired by the teacher's enthusiasm. As such, teachers must combine a practice of constant reflection and practice to guide their students to also be conscious, active citizens (Giroux, 2010). Therefore, teachers themselves must be engaged citizens, aware of the current cultural and historical context "entirely wet by the cultural waters of the moment, of the space" (Freire et al., 2014, p. 18).

Educators applying critical pedagogy must be interested in the world around them, involved in social and political issues, modeling the type of democratically conscious citizens they aim to develop in their students. As moral models, teachers must be authentic in who they are, living by the values they espouse and uphold. The teachers who stand before students must constantly strive, always *becoming*, growing, learning, and engaging in critical consciousness of the social and political issues as lifelong learners and models for their students.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an academic movement which stems from legal scholarship, with academic activists critically examining the relationship of race and law by challenging dominant approaches and narratives in the pursuit of racial justice (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 2009). A group of legal scholars including Bell, Delgado, Lawrence, Williams, and Crenshaw, examined the impact and significance of race in the application of critical legal studies (Kim, 2016). The group collaborated with the goal to transform the lives of BIPOC negatively

impacted by the law due to racial discrimination (Crenshaw, 1988). The lived experiences of BIPOC and the detrimental effect of racial discrimination was centered and highlighted through their work and scholarship. The name CRT was created in 1989 during their first organized workshop, in which they worked together to create a new structure for future scholarship, prioritizing the experiences of minoritized, specifically racialized people (Taylor, 2009). Matsuda (1991) defines CRT as the work of legal scholars of Color focusing on "the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as a part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331). The significance of CRT is the founding by scholars of Color collaborating in community to challenge the impacts of race and prioritizing and centering the needs of BIPOC.

CRT seeks to uncover and address how subtle and invisible conceptualizations, standards, and norms negatively impact BIPOC (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kim, 2016). CRT argues that racism is pervasive, structural, and attitudinal, and seeks to reveal, resist, and change the deeply ingrained systems of racial injustice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Racism takes on many forms and permeates American society not just in personal attitudes but systemically in policies, institutions, and systems, embedded in institutional power of which BIPOC have never possessed. Not only does the employment of CRT reveal imbalances of power but also seeks to empower and center the experiences of BIPOC as a means of revealing the impacts of inequity on individual lives to take action and fight for social change. Drawing on several tenets of critical theory, CRT focuses on the critical consciousness of inequitable power dynamics and systems and the empowerment of minoritized people as agents of change (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In alignment with CRT, the aim of this research project is to prioritize the experiences of BITOC

and challenge the invisibly pervasive ways that racism impacts minoritized teachers in independent school environments.

Due to the embedded and often invisible nature of racism, CRT argues that inequitable systems and structures must be directly named and revealed to dissolve and change them. Kendi (2020) explains that there is no neutrality in racism, every action either resists or supports racism. Therefore, an important aspect in the dissolving of racist ideas, actions, and policies, is to consistently identify and explicitly name them to bring about change (Kendi, 2020). Without first uncovering and naming racism and its resulting impact on BIPOC, change can be futile. Ladson-Billings (1998) suggests that CRT can be a means of deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction. The notion of deconstruction refers to the identification, examination of, and further demolition of oppressive structures, policies, practices, and discourse (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Reconstruction is the development and fostering of human agency and empowerment in the process of reimagining structures and actions for the liberation of all. Construction describes the development of "equitable and socially just relations of power" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9).

Applied to this study, to deconstruct the harmful structures, policies, and practices in schooling environments, it is vital to highlight the experiences of BITOC and their valuable insights and knowledge as those most negatively affected. Reconstruction begins when BITOC voices are heard and centered; this results in agency and empowerment via community building efforts and revisioning processes. Then, construction can begin when BITOC voices are included and centered in the development of equitable policies, curricula, practices, and structures that foster their flourishing in school environments.

Race and Racism

The social concept of race is integral to the identification of inequitable distributions of power. Imani (2021) defines race as "an active hierarchical division of human beings that serves to create and perpetuate racialized and racist social structures" (p. 96). Imani's definition highlights that race is not a biological fact, but a social construct created by humans to categorize people in a hierarchy of unequal value, thus rationalizing the dominance of one group over others. Race as a social construct seeks to associate physical features and characteristics to moral attitudes, cognitive abilities, and personality traits (Imani, 2021). Believing in race as a biological fact created assumptions about groups of people that were not based on evidence or reality but were perpetuated as stereotypes and deeply embedded beliefs about certain groups of people through social reproduction. Such attitudes were perpetuated through social institutions such as schools (Giroux, 2010).

The creation of race was a necessary tool to categorize people based on their physical appearance to "justify the dehumanization necessary for European colonization" (Imani, 2021, p. 97). European colonizers used race to seize land, enslave racialized people, and gain control and economic dominance through rationalized supremacy and power over others (McLean, 2020). The socially constructed idea of race was created as an integral justification for the dominance of one group over another, rationalized as the *natural* and *inherent* hierarchical division of human beings.

The construction of race was created as a means of justifying racist actions. Coates (2015) argues "but race is the child of racism, not the father" (p. 7). The application of racist actions was the driving force and rationale for the creation of race. Lorde (1992) defines racism as a belief system that prioritizes the inherent superiority of one race over others and results in dominance

and inequitable power. Lorde's definition emphasizes the belief in the inherent and *natural* dominance of one race over others. Marable (1992) expands the definition of racism as "a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific American, American Indians, and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color" (p. 5). Marable's definition develops the framing of racism to the oppression of multiple voices, experiences, and cultural backgrounds as a systemic approach for dominance and supremacy broadening the landscape beyond Black and white.

Imani (2021) defines racism as "a Eurocolonial system that dictates how we should exist, behave, interact, regulate, and organize ourselves and each other" (p. 96). This definition emphasizes the pretext for a standardization of behaviour, premised on the ideology of European/white as the superior race and thus standard norm upon which all behaviour and structures must be modeled. Underlying each of these definitions is the belief in the superiority of one racial group over another whereby the superior group inherently possesses power over all others and is the standard upon which others are compared. The social reproduction of the false ideology of the biological qualities of race have been perpetuated and maintained over time and have been embedded in such a way that they have become invisible and pervasive.

White Supremacy

The creation of race and the belief in a naturally dominant race, has been consciously and unconsciously embedded within social institutions and policy, perpetuating and preserving inequality through white dominance or white supremacy (Bridges, 2019; Saad, 2020). White supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to all other races to the detriment and subordination of racialized people (Saad, 2020). White supremacy is a system that fraudulently centers whiteness at the center of human experience supported by the belief in inherent racial

superiority. White supremacy is defined by Imani (2021) as “a system that falsely places whiteness and white people at the center of what it means to be human, to live, and to be deserving of humanity and livelihood” (p. 108). White supremacy is not just a belief system, but is a part of how systems, policies, and institutions are structured to preserve and perpetuate the dominance of white ideology (Saad, 2020).

White supremacy, while inherently positioning whiteness at the center, assumes other ways of being and the experience of racialized people are abnormal or a deviation from the norm. The racialization of other people leaves white as the unnamed and assumed standard or default. European colonizers as white people became the default, the unnamed standard for the human experience. In America, racialized people are not just Americans, but must identify their nationality with a hyphenated identity such as Japanese-American, African-American (Imani, 2021; Takaki, 1994). Those who do not hyphenate their nationality are assumed to be the default, white. Whiteness is therefore positioned in a seat of power based on the assumption that white is the standard norm.

CRT scholarship seeks to reveal, challenge, and disrupt the taken-for granted acceptance of white experiences as the norm (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that whiteness is the standard representing attributes such as middle class, intelligent, high achievers, and the standard of beauty marginalizing Blackness as the assumption of laziness, low achievement, and violence. Such standards and perpetuated assumptions about whiteness and Blackness allow for the continued domination of BIPOC. By standardizing whiteness as the universal standard, it results in the subordination of BIPOC as abnormal, and different or other from the norm. When white experiences are the assumed experience of all, any differing voices and perspectives are often silenced, ignored, and dismissed. The normalized white experience is

centered in the development of structures and policies, further ignoring the experiences of BIPOC, and privileging the white standard. CRT is a means of revealing, challenging, and making changes to the taken for granted norms benefiting the superior group, and thereby negatively affecting and suppressing all other racial groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT directly seeks to challenge the embedded and invisible nature of white supremacy by centering the harmful impacts on BIPOC.

White Privilege

White privilege can be defined by Saad (2020) as a system that grants white people "unearned privileges, protection, and power. It is also a system that has been designed to keep you asleep and unaware of what having that privilege, protection, and power has meant for people who do not look like you" (p. 25). The unearned benefits that being white offers, is at the devaluing and detriment of those who are not white. The subtle and covert nature of white privilege disguises it as normal or the status quo and therefore unquestioned. The notion of white privilege and the metaphor of the invisible backpack was first coined by McIntosh (1989), a women's studies scholar. McIntosh (1989) listed 50 examples of white privilege stating:

> I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and black checks. (p. 1)

McIntosh explicitly names whiteness as the implicit norm in an attempt of waking up those who benefit from white privilege. The implications of white privilege are demonstrated as Tatum (1997) argues through "every social indicator, from salary to life expectancy, reveals the

advantages of being white" (p. 8). The privileges that come with being white are granted whether one is conscious of them or not. White privilege is pervasive in every facet of society. Privilege requires that the beneficiary profit and or gain something that is not available to everyone and is to the detriment of others. In the case of white privilege whiteness becomes the "beneficiary of racism" (Tatum, 1997, p. 9), the subordination of others based on race is ultimately what allows for white dominance. White privilege is not based on merit, skill, or work ethic, but instead rests solely upon belonging to one race and believing it superior over all others. White supremacy pervades all social institutions, including schools, which serve as an essential means of social reproduction.

White Supremacy Culture

The perpetuation of white supremacy and the resulting white privilege, creates an embedded white supremacy culture. Okun (2022) defines white supremacy culture as the ideology that white people and their ideas, beliefs, and actions are superior to those who are not white in explicit and implicit ways. White supremacy culture surrounds all of us thereby shaping our internalized beliefs, values, and norms including our ideas of self and the characteristics of our identities. Although it affects all of us, the impact is not the same. Being aware of the implicit and hidden tenets of white supremacy culture are integral to dissolving and working towards equity for all. Okun (2022) outlines 15 tenets of white supremacy culture including perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, only one right way, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, I'm the only one, progress is bigger, objectivity, and the right to comfort. When assessing school environments and examining the lived experiences of BITOC, the impact of white supremacy culture must be explicitly acknowledged so that BITOC can, as Love (2019) argues, "not just

survive but thrive" (p. 2). To thrive, white supremist culture must be readily identified and examined through the impacts on BITOC in their school environments as a means of deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction.

Color Blindness

Color blindness assumes that the center of experience is viewed and rooted in the experience of being white (Pabon & Basile, 2019; Player & Irizarry, 2022). Thompson (1998) defines colorblindness as a "willed ignorance of color that, although well intended, insists on assimilating the experience of people of color to that of whites" (p. 524). Color blindness ignores the racialized experiences of BIPOC as minor and insignificant variables, assuming that the white experience is common to all people. Intentional or not, colorblindness can be camouflaged as an equitable mindset in which all people are judged the same. Pretending not to notice the color of another's skin may be viewed as a virtuous trait. However, this harmful stance can be a means of reinforcing the privileges of those who benefit from their inclusion into the dominant white culture (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Pabon & Basile, 2019). Color blindness ignores and dismisses the racialized experiences BIPOC may encounter every day by minimizing their impact and silencing their voices. Research that centers the lived experiences of BIPOC must explicitly address the implications and consequences of race as a salient part of living and working in a white supremist culture.

CRT in education actively and consciously interrogates the taken for granted narratives of institutional objectivity (Kim, 2016). Notions of color-blindness and race neutrality are actively challenged and examined in CRT scholarship. Working against white supremacy culture and the idea that there is only one right way, centering minoritized experiences is a means of shifting the perspective by rejecting the unquestioned standard. As a strategy of changing white supremacist

norms and culture, BIPOC experiences are not ignored, but rather amplified. The notion of color blindness is rejected as a claim of inclusivity and equal opportunity, when it is the opposite, the suppression and silencing of differing experiences.

CRT in Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) applied CRT to educational research arguing that analysis of the impacts of gender and class in education are well established fields by feminists and critical theorists, but race has been an under-studied domain until the introduction of CRT. As a theoretical framework, CRT centers the impact of race and racism on minoritized groups' experience of racial oppression within a society that upholds whiteness as the normative standard in education both in and out of the classroom (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner et al., 2021). CRT in education affirms that race is "a central rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences" (Russell, 1992, pp. 762–763). Until the development of CRT, race was viewed as a secondary and non-impactful element rather than a theoretical lens to examine social norms and attitudes. Educational research employing CRT is integral to the deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction of equitable schooling environments as a means of revealing, challenging, and changing the ways white supremacy culture impacts BIPOC in school settings.

The Political Weaponization of CRT in Education

CRT in education has gained significant attention in recent years. George Floyd's murder in 2020 was a spark that ignited a racial reckoning across the country and the globe. The U.S. debate over how and if the country's racial history is taught lit a fire of fury (Edelman, 2023). Since January 2021, 24 legislatures across the U.S. presented 48 different bills to restrict or limit the discussion of issues related to race, racism, gender, and American history in publicly funded

K-12 and higher education institutions (Friedman & Tager, 2022). The legislative attempt to prohibit the discussion of "divisive" concepts for teachers and teacher educators, calls on the government to impose restrictions through book bans, censored curricula content, prohibiting the use of language, affirmation, and acknowledgement of different identities (Friedman & Tager, 2022). Nine of the bills specifically target CRT, "a term that has been invoked … not on the basis of its actual meaning … but as a catchall for any teaching on race or diversity of which they disapprove" (Friedman & Tager, 2022, p. 9). CRT has been usurped by some conservative legislators and conservative activists as a means of creating backlash, borrowing the *name* as a demonizing, fear-instilling boogeyman, and applying it to practices and ideas related to DEI, rather than the actual theoretical framework.

The political weaponization of CRT was intentionally created by journalist Christopher Rufo in which he said, "'cancel culture' is a vacuous term and doesn't translate into a political program; 'woke' is a good epithet, but it's too broad, too terminal, too easily brushed aside. 'Critical race theory' is the perfect villain" (Wallace-Wells, 2021, para. 6). Every term in critical race theory was recognized by Rufo as creating a negative connotation for most middle-class Americans and thus a perfect political weapon. The executive order (EO) of the Trump administration was inspired by Rufo's three-minute monologue on Fox News in which he stated with absolute intention:

> It's absolutely astonishing how critical race theory has pervaded every aspect of the government … Conservatives need to wake up. This is an existential threat to the United States. And the bureaucracy, even under Trump, is being weaponized against core American values. And I'd like to make it explicit: The President and the White House—it's within their authority to immediately issue an executive order to abolish critical-race-

> theory training from the federal government. And I call on the President to immediately issue this executive order—to stamp out this destructive, divisive, pseudoscientific ideology. (Wallace-Wells, 2021, para. 8)

The EO, drafted with the help of Rufo, began the legislative onslaught of anti-CRT bills across the country and ignited the debate and targeted attack of any diversity, equity, and inclusion, multiculturalism, cultural awareness, prejudice, and identity work under the inaccurate guise of CRT (Friedman & Tager, 2022). From the media smearing campaign, CRT has become an emotionally triggering phrase as the next incarnation of backlash against the push for racial awareness and equity.

Pushback against racial literacy, awareness, and equity has existed since the fight and collective movement for civil rights and anti-racism has been in action (Arnett, 2022). The backlash is not new, Poon states "every time, there has been backlash … Because the system of inequality will benefit some, and in this case, racism, and systemic inequality benefits White-identifying individuals. The push for equity undermines that" (Arnett, 2022, p. 30). The current political backlash targets schooling institutions because of the influence schools have. If current generations are informed about how racism impacts structures, this will ultimately influence how they vote in future elections. Such possibilities have elicited pushback by those seeking to maintain their political power by stifling discourse on the impact of race on social systems (Friedman & Tager, 2022).

Schools are especially effective battlegrounds in which fear and political force is used to silence those who advocate for change. By censoring what is taught, the contributions of marginalized communities and the historical processes that have led to systemic racism, will be

erased, and ignored, perpetuating a false narrative that continues to silence the stories and perspectives of minoritized groups.

The attack of CRT not only targets schools, but the personal lives of those who work in schools. Personal threats toward school board members, administrators, and educators are fear invoking tactics to silence those who are creating curricula, teaching youth, and/or doing research on systematic inequality (Edelman, 2023). Poon speaks of the threats they and their colleagues have received stating:

> I have colleagues who have received mail at their homes with just pictures of their child, at a playground. No words, just to say, 'I know where you live, and I know where your children are' … There's a palpable fear I think among a lot of scholars, especially scholars of color, who are trying to fight this blowback at sometimes very personal costs. (Arnett, 2022, p. 30)

Fear tactics are being imposed on scholars, educators, and school board members as a means of silencing their voices and halting their efforts for change. This can have significant consequences not just to their professional but personal lives, including the safety and wellbeing of their families. However, amidst the fear and threats, there are many who are fighting back despite the danger to their reputation and livelihoods, there are many who will not be silenced.

Despite the negative backlash to CRT in education, the exposure to mainstream media has also created increased interest by students and organizations to learn more, learn what CRT really is and apply it to different fields (Arnett, 2022; Edelman, 2023). In higher education some CRT classes are full of waiting lists, and some CRT scholars are now in high demand (Arnett, 2022). Despite the danger, scholars are continuing to teach their classes, write articles, and promote content that may be restricted in certain parts of the country. Institutes, such as the Institute for

Common Power, are opening and focusing on the barriers to teaching history in a truthful manner; books are being written such as Vitale's *The End of Policing*; and banned books are being distributed to states with strict book bans through organizations such as The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA; Edelman, 2023). People are resisting, claiming space, and fighting through the backlash. Now, more than ever before, CRT in educational research is needed to fight for justice and truth.

CRT in education is a means of challenging traditional models of scholarship, research, and education. Applied to curriculum, policy, and practice, CRT as a theoretical lens seeks to name and identify harmful effects that taken-for-granted norms and values assume to include while ignoring and omitting the racialized experiences of minoritized people, specifically BITOC and BISOC (Kholi, 2021; Milner et al., 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Educational settings are important institutions for the preservation and perpetuation of beliefs through social reproduction and have the potential for being significant places of ending minoritized subordination. CRT seeks to illuminate the impact of race, challenging the idea of race neutrality in educational settings through the empowerment and centering of BIPOC voices and narratives (Kholi, 2021).

Research employing CRT over the past 20 years has investigated significant issues pertaining to race in education, such as the role and presence of whiteness in teacher education (Berchini, 2015; Sleeter, 2017), attrition of BITOC (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019), assets of BITOC in the classroom (Easton-Brooks et al., 2022; Egalite et al., 2015; Gershenson et al., 2022; Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2019), discourses on race in teacher training (Milner et al., 2021; Pabon & Basile, 2019), retaining BITOC in predominantly white schools (Kim-Seda, 2022; Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022), and assessing the impacts of race in school environments on BITOC (Gaytan, 2021; Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021; Williams

et al., 2018). CRT scholarship seeks to prioritize the amplification of BIPOC students, teachers, and other stakeholders as a means of expanding the narrative in educational settings. The utilization of CRT as a theoretical framework for this study aligns with the research questions and the goal of centering the lived experiences of BITOC in private and independent schools. The congruence is anchored in the centering of BITOC experiences as a means of finding ways for their thriving and flourishing.

Challenging Dominant Narratives

The dominant, master, or majoritarian narratives are the stories and histories perpetuated and centered as the universal experience of all, embedded with racist assumptions of minoritized people because of white supremacy (Love, 2019; Mhango, 2018; Murray, 2018). Dominant narratives are "accepted as truth and told from the vantage point of the powerful" (Kholi, 2021, p. 15) and or privileged/dominant group. The dominant group in the U.S. and Canada are white, cis, heterosexual, Christian, middle class men, the group with the power and status that creates and controls the value system in society (Jewell, 2020). Grounded in the assumption that the dominant group is the normative standard, master narratives are unquestioned and maintained for the benefit of the dominant group correspondingly silencing, removing, and harming racialized people.

The stories perpetuated and prioritized reflect the values, assumptions, perspectives, and beliefs of the dominant group in which, "systemic racism [is] embedded in the dominant grand narrative" (Mhango, 2018, p. 96). The dominant narrative is the lens in which history is told and normalized as the frame of reference while silencing, ignoring, and perpetuating the devaluation of experiences of racialized people (Kendi, 2016; Love, 2019; Mhango, 2018). The values, beliefs, and history students learn in school is controlled by a narrative steeped in white

supremacy, thus maintaining racist and harmful narratives upon which self-identity and self-worth are instilled for both white and racialized students.

History is shaped by the stories and perspectives centered. What is taught in school has significant power in either perpetuating the status quo or presenting different and more equitable perspectives (Bock, 2017; Kendi, 2016; Love, 2019). Love (2019) states, “schools are mirrors of our society” (p. 40) and reflect the beliefs that are prioritized and maintained. The stories and history that are perpetuated can either narrow or broaden our understanding of others and ultimately of oneself. What and who’s history and truths are being maintained and preserved in our school classrooms? Coates (2015) wrote of his experience in school in which, “schools did not reveal truths, they concealed them” (p. 29). The history and curriculum of schooling often does not include an expansive collection of perspectives in which minoritized students are reflected. What is the impact when dominant narratives, the belief in one story being the only story, is perpetuated and maintained?

Takaki (2008) describes the master narrative of America as the pervasive but mistaken history that America was settled by white Europeans and therefore to be American means to be a white American. The narrative is controlled by the dominant group, those who hold the power to perpetuate the belief that anyone who is not white is not a true American. This ideology is perpetuated through school history curricula and the cultural norms such as the hyphenation of racialized American identities such as Japanese-American, Korean-American, etc. (Imani, 2021; Takaki, 2008). The ideology that white Americans are simply American, leaves them unnamed as in the experience when individuals who are biracial will often be described as half-Jamaican or half-Black, while the other unnamed half is assumed white (Imani, 2021).

The maintenance of white as the unnamed default for what it means to be American is further reinforced and exemplified through the numerous racist government policies and actions isolating and targeting racialized Americans such as the exclusion act, internment of Japanese-Americans, and racial profiling (Takaki, 2008). The dominant narrative in American society centers the dominant, white group as the unassumed, accepted standard. Challenging and rejecting the embedded dominant narrative requires that the voices of minoritized people are centered, amplified, and valued to counter and transform the default narrative.

Counter-Stories as Resistance—Centering BIPOC Voices

Counter-stories are a practice of amplifying and centering the voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of those who are often ignored, minoritized, and silenced (Briggs, 2018; Ellis et al., 2021). Educational research employing CRT prioritizes the use of counter-stories as a means of resisting, refuting, challenging, and exposing the white-dominant narrative. CRT in educational research goes beyond just cultural sensitivity and awareness and includes "an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education that relies mostly upon the perceptions, experiences, and counter-hegemonic practices of educators of color" (Lynn, 2004, p. 154). The focusing of BIPOC experiences in CRT research is integral to the analysis and transformation of education in the US and Canada. The utilization of counter-stories in educational settings is to uncover racism BITOC experience, build community among BITOC, and reject white-dominant narratives (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

A counter-story is told from the perspective of marginalized people as a means of challenging and counteracting white norms embedded within structures, practices, policies, and taken-for granted attitudes and exposing inequitable power that contribute to and perpetuate inequity (Kohli, 2021; Murray, 2018; Williams et al., 2018). The counter-story offers valuable

ways of uncovering, exposing, and rejecting white-dominant narratives, structures, and norms in education. Hearing the lived experiences of racialized individuals is integral to challenging accepted truths and worldviews that often do not take minoritized experiences into account. By uplifting and prioritizing the voices of those who are often pushed aside, new, and important perspectives are considered, and hegemonic white norms are resisted as an essential means of disrupting harmful power structures, practices, and policies.

The centering of minoritized voices, of which there are countless unheard stories, strengthen approaches for social and cultural survival, persistence, resistance, and change (Kholi, 2021; Solomon & Rankin, 2019). Counter-stories are a means of rejecting dominant discourses in education and used as a means of collective community building and resistance. Delgado (1989) argues that "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p. 2436). Communities of Color have used storytelling as a means of survival and action within a society steeped in white supremacy. Critical scholars continue the tradition of storytelling and utilize counter-stories as an integral tool in research for liberation and empowerment. The sharing of and centering of biographical narratives and stories can become significant sources of power and resistance as tools for community building, sense of belonging, solidarity, collaboration, and agency (Kholi, 2021; Love, 2019; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

The collaboration of minoritized groups banding together in solidarity is fundamental to social change. Changing the paradigm from mere survival in social settings and environments to thriving and flourishing requires that the voices of minoritized groups and individuals are uplifted as a means of creating community and validating their experiences. As an agent of change, the centering of counter-stories in my research challenges the normalcy of a predominantly white

teaching force in private and independent schools by centering the experiences of BITOC and building community among independent school BITOC as a means of mobilizing for change.

Historical and Social Contexts of BITOC

Changing Student Demographics

The projections for 2050 show that white Americans will no longer be the majority (Passel & Cohn, 2020), thus the future that is fast approaching in America will be one in which the students in every classroom will be minorities, a diverse mix of races and experiences. Takaki (2008) suggests that diversity, specifically racial diversity, is America's manifest destiny, and that all educators must prepare for the students of the new America, one in which the various experiences must be included in the curricula and represented in the teaching faculty. It is therefore critical to examine the role that race plays in education, especially given the changing demographics of students. School leadership, administration, and faculty must investigate the impacts and need for change in school environments. The opportunity and obligation to redefine who is accepted as an American, by constructing a new expansive narrative is of the essence in education for today and in the future. Research examining the impact of race on students and teachers is essential to creating equitable schooling environments.

Research has shown that in 2020 students of color in U.S. public schools accounted for over 50% of the study body (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022a) while teachers of Color made up only 20% of educators, indicating a disproportionate representation (USDOE NCES, 2021). The statistics indicate that in private schools, students of Color make up 34% of the population (NCES, 2022b), while teachers of Color make up a mere 15% of the teaching force (USDOE, 2021). The statistics present a glaringly high percentage of white educators teaching non-white students in both the public and private sectors. The absence of

racially diverse educators in both public and private school settings indicates that a significant proportion of the racially diverse student body is not proportionally represented in the teaching force. Consequently, nearly 40% of U.S. public schools do not have a single Black, Indigenous, Teacher of Color in their faculty (Ellis et al., 2021). These findings present a stark view of the teaching force and underscore the urgent need for diversifying the teaching force. While policy makers and scholars have focused on recruiting BIPOC as educators (Bianco & Goings, 2022; Gist, 2022), BITOC attrition rates may present a clearer picture of whether BITOC can actually survive in school environments, and the abysmal retention rates of BITOC (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021; Todd-Breland, 2022) warrant further investigation.

BITOC Attrition

Discussion of diversifying the teaching force often focuses on the need to recruit more BITOC (Bianco & Goings, 2022); however, recruitment is not the only barrier to the disproportionate representation in schools; retention is an essential aspect (Griffin et al., 2022). Once BIPOC have decided to enter the teaching force and have survived the barriers inherent in teacher preparation programs, what happens next? Scholarship investigating the retention of BITOC suggest that the challenges are so dire, that attrition rates for BITOC in the profession show they leave sooner and at higher rates than their white counterparts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kim-Seda, 2022). Black educators leave at twice the rate of white teachers (Kim-Seda, 2022). Hancock and Scherff (2010) suggest that simply being a BITOC is a noteworthy predictor for attrition. The reason for such attrition may be attributed to the fact that common challenges white teachers face is compounded by the racialized experience of being a BITOC (Kohli, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

Overall teacher shortages and attrition was in crisis before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Scholarship found that such teaching shortages especially affected low-income students of Color and BITOC (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The attrition rates post the switch to emergency transitions to online learning and other necessary implications due to COVID-19 have only increased an already high-stress profession and increased workloads as teaching practices and expectations have changed (Marshall et al., 2022). Examining the layered barriers all teachers face in 2024 is further intensified for BITOC due to the compounding of their racialized experiences in schools.

Research examining the attrition of BITOC in public schools argue that historical and current racial discrimination in structures, policies, job dissatisfaction, and individual attitudes have significant impacts on retention rates of BITOC (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Griffin et al., 2022; Kholi, 2021). Such challenges may include overt and covert acts of discrimination, feelings of isolation due to antagonistic school cultures that make them feel invisible, undervalued, and unwelcome (Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022), colleagues lacking racial literacy and awareness (Kholi, 2021), taking on extra duties, such as Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committees without pay, culminating in the mental and physical toll taken on their health and an overall feeling of not belonging (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). The feeling of not belonging, of always being a visitor is a constant reminder that no matter what you do, you will never be "one of us." Ahmed (2012) argues that:

> People of color in white organizations are treated as guests, temporary residents in someone else's home. People of color are welcomed *on condition* they return that

> hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by "being" diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity. (p. 83)

Never feeling that you are a part of the group, naturally belonging to and becoming a part of the social fabric of an organization, may be one of the underlying components of BITOC attrition.

Despite the numerous barriers that BIPOC individuals face, including feeling undervalued and excluded from their community and organization, simply retaining them in public and private schools is not enough (Rios & Longoria, 2021). Research and action should focus on the thriving of BIPOC individuals in school environments by recognizing their value and importance within the community. It is crucial to center the experiences of BIPOC individuals to shift the paradigm from survival and retention to identifying the factors that contribute to their flourishing and thriving. The feeling of not belonging is often a result of white supremacy culture, in which structures and programs, such as teacher preparation programs, cater to the needs of the dominant white culture, ignoring the experiences and perspectives of BIPOC individuals (hooks, 1990; Matias & Liou, 2015).

White Centered Teacher Preparation Programs

Employing CRT as a theoretical lens to investigate how race and racism are perpetuated and maintained in teacher preparation programs allows for uncovering and analyzing the role whiteness plays. A core tenet of CRT is that racism is salient, pervasive, and institutional and can have an enormously detrimental effect on education including teacher preparation programs (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Race can often be overlooked or dismissed in teacher education (Matias & Liou, 2015) because "teacher education does not exist in a vacuum; rather it reflects and perpetuates [a] system of White supremacy" (Picower & Kholi, 2017, p. 5). Scholars have extensively investigated the centering of whiteness and over-representation of

white teachers (Pabon & Basile, 2019; Player & Irizarry, 2022; Sleeter, 2017). A significant imbalance of white teachers versus BITOC in schools has serious ramifications for teacher pre-service education programs, “including how curriculum is designed and what is taught” (Sleeter, 2017, p. 158). CRT is a means of uncovering the invisible ways that whiteness dominates pre-service teacher education programs as a means of making meaningful change.

White Centered Course Curricula

Research over the past 20 years indicates that teacher education programs show significant differences in their desire and efficacy to alter curricula for equity and social justice (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023). Although some mainstream programs have begun exploring multicultural content, whiteness continues to be the dominant paradigm (Endo, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2017; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023). Curricular changes often take the form of surface level initiatives, with programs only adding, “‘multicultural content’ rather than changing … [their] philosophy and structure” (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 221). The add on curricula can satisfy the institutional optics of offering equity-based teacher programs; however, research on teacher training programs’ curricula and syllabi has demonstrated that most are still rooted in whiteness, emphasizing tolerance of diversity while prioritizing white values and disregarding or marginalizing BIPOC teacher candidates’ perspectives, values, needs, experiences, and perspectives (Sleeter, 2017; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023). Real transformation of curricula requires centering the values and lived experiences of minoritized people in and out of the classroom for real change to occur, informed by those who are harmed by inequities.

As an extension of white supremacy, the dismissing of the primary role race plays, the valuing of colorblindness often continues to influence teacher preparation programs. Sleeter

(2017) argues that through assertions of race neutrality and color blindness, the "curricular content of teacher education tends to reflect white sensibilities" (p. 158). The color blind mentality harms and denies the experiences of BIPOC teacher candidates and perpetuates the status quo of white supremacy. The centering around whiteness becomes the invisible veil that informs many aspects of teacher education programs thus normalizing whiteness and causing BIPOC teacher candidates to feel devalued, dismissed, and ignored in preparation for classroom instruction.

Centering the Emotional Needs of White Teacher Candidates

Whiteness in teacher education programs not only minimizes the experiences of BIPOC candidates but also privileges the needs, values, and experiences of white teacher candidates, including their social-emotional needs. According to Sleeter (2017), "teacher educators tend to focus on the emotional needs of White students rather than those of students of color" (p. 159). Catering to the needs of white students may result in avoidance of the impacts of race on education. Avoidance may stem from concerns regarding white fragility and defensiveness, including discomfort or guilt incurred when confronting one's privileges and complicity in racial injustice (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014). Issues related to white fragility and defensiveness may arise because of confronting one's privileges and guilt of being white (DiAngelo, 2018). White fragility defined by DiAngelo (2018) is the defensiveness and denial that some white people may have when confronted by issues and or information of racial injustice and inequity. Centering and prioritizing whiteness within teacher education programs continues this practice by favoring white candidate's comfort while further marginalizing and harming BIPOC teacher candidates' experiences.

Exclusion of BIPOC Voices and Epistemologies

Excluding minoritized voices and epistemologies from predominantly white educational spaces such as schools and teacher education programs may have devastating long-term repercussions for recruitment and retention of BIPOC teacher candidates (Picower & Kholi, 2017). When these perspectives and values are absent from curricula and values taught at teacher preparation programs, these candidates often feel invisible, disconnected, and like outsiders, further diminishing their participation numbers within teacher preparation programs (Endo, 2022; Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

Matias and Liou (2015) conceptualized a community of color epistemology that "honors the struggles, pride, and experiences of communities of color fighting racism" (p. 603). They argue that teacher education programs cannot simply develop cultural competencies in teachers, but they must seek to transform the pre-existing paradigm that centers a white worldview and seeks to ignore the impacts of race on education (Matias & Liou, 2015; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023). Deep transformation of the values, curricula, and underlying values that are prioritized in teacher preparation programs must go beyond surface claims of DEI initiatives. Such additional programs and/or curricula often do not benefit BIPOC (Endo, 2022). Real change must include the voices of BIPOC in the transformation of teacher education programs, first by diversifying the faculty.

Absence of BIPOC Teacher Educators

Although there is growing recognition of the significance of diversity within both the teaching force and teacher preparation programs, an absence of BIPOC educators in teacher preparation programs remains a pressing concern (Endo, 2022). At present, 75% of teaching faculty employed by teacher education programs at higher education institutions across the US is

white (Davis & Fry, 2019). This lack of representation only further entrenches white values, practices, and curricula in teacher preparation programs. Data shows that teacher preparation programs "tend to be even less racially diverse among the ranks of academic personnel compared to other fields" (Endo, 2022, p. 183). Even more than other fields, teacher education programs are more likely to reproduce white values and beliefs due to the dire underrepresentation of BIPOC in teacher education.

BIPOC teacher educators bring valuable experiences, knowledge, insights, and teaching skills that are indispensable to pre-service teacher candidates, particularly BIPOC teacher candidates (Endo, 2022; Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022). BIPOC teacher educators serve as role models and mentors who bring an understanding of cultural sensitivity and challenge the white centered perspectives of DEI work in the classroom (Endo, 2022; Gist et al., 2019). Their presence serves as an essential catalyst for real transformation of teacher preparation programs by challenging colorblind and white-centered structures within curricula of teacher preparation programs. Although increasing the number of BIPOC teacher educators is an important first step, diversifying the teaching profession alone will not dissolve white supremacy and white supremacy culture in schooling environments.

Assets of BITOC—Black Indigenous Students of Color Success

Diversifying the teaching force is of critical concern and among the most important reasons is the compelling evidence of the integral impact BITOC have on Black Indigenous Students of Color (BISOC) success (Gershenson et al., 2022; Milner et al., 2021; Todd-Breland, 2022). The benefits of a racially diverse teaching force are far reaching and broad in scope, with long-term benefits. Scholarship focused on the assets of BITOC over the past 20 years has yielded noteworthy trends pertaining to the influence of and expertise they bring to the classroom and

learning environments. A few of the significant findings include improved academic achievement as evaluated through higher test scores (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Egalite et al., 2015), decreased student absenteeism and suspension rates (Dee, 2004; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2020), and the impact of higher teacher expectations on social outcomes (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2016). Review of the literature further suggests that BITOC serve as role models and motivate students to see what is and can be possible for them (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Ellis et al., 2021; Gershenson et al., 2022).

Review of the literature further suggests that BIPOC teachers serve as role models and motivate students to see what is possible for them (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Ellis et al., 2021; Gershenson et al., 2022). The literature reveals compelling correlations between BIPOC teachers and BIPOC achievement, development, and wellbeing in schooling environments due to their perspectives on pedagogy, diverse educational practices, and varying worldviews. The social and emotional impact of BIPOC teachers is significant because of their greater ability to empathize and understand what it means to be a racialized student in a school setting.

Shared Understanding

One of the most important contributions of BITOC in the classroom is their ability to understand and sympathize with their student's cultural experiences and epistemologies by teaching in culturally responsive and sensitive ways (Gershenson et al., 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rios & Longoria, 2021). BITOC often have a greater understanding of the experiences of their students due to their own educational biographies and life experiences. This shared understanding creates the capacity to recognize and deeply empathize with the joys and struggles of their students, both inside and outside of the classroom. As result, BITOC may be more attuned to the cultural differences among their students (Dee, 2005; Rios & Longoria, 2021), drawing on

their own experiences of racism and minoritization (hooks, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Due to their heightened sensitivity, BITOC "serve as both 'windows' and 'mirrors' for students" because they can "reflect the student population in racial and cultural terms while also serving as a window for students to see opportunities that lie outside of their immediate context" (Ellis et al., 2021, p. 1). BITOC serve as guides not only in the classroom as role models, but also as direct manifestations of what is possible for minoritized students. Such awareness and modeling enable the development of deep and meaningful connections between the student and teacher.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Many prominent scholars of Color have focused their research on the academic improvement of BISOC and found that underlying academic success relies upon "the relationship between teacher and student" (Easton-Brooks et al., 2022, p. 631). The integral relationship developed between student and teacher in the classroom is often one founded on a shared cultural connection, understanding, and respect of one another (Gaytan, 2021; Irvine, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994). These seminal scholars made important contributions by investigating the relationships between BITOC and BISOC, specifically Black educators and Black students. Irvine's (1989) research suggests that the Black teachers in the study did not simply act as role models but were cultural interpreters, mentors, counselors, and advocates for their Black students.

Over the course of eight years, Foster (1997) examined the experience of Black teachers teaching Black students, and the strength of her scholarship was in the fact that she had the teachers tell their own stories. Ladson-Billings (1994) explored the experiences of eight Black teachers teaching Black students, and the significant benefits observed from the research became foundational in the development of culturally responsive practices and framework. Higher levels of cultural awareness are an integral ingredient for the development of classroom environments in

which relationship, understanding, and rapport can be developed and thus create learning spaces for BISOC to thrive.

Affirming Identities

As part of their effort to foster trusting relationships with students, BITOC often create classroom environments which accept and celebrate each student's full identity within the classroom environment, creating more inclusive learning spaces (Ladson-Billings 1994; Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2019; Rios & Longoria, 2021). By acknowledging and understanding their experiences as minoritized individuals, BITOC often affirm and value the student's cultural identity through a multicultural awareness—thereby fostering classroom environments more welcoming and supportive of BISOC (Gaytan, 2021; Gershenson et al., 2022). Classroom environments that value the cultural and linguistic diversity BISOC bring to the classroom are recognized and valued, broadening the narratives beyond white norms and experiences. The decentering of whiteness in the classroom allows for the identities of all students in the class to be affirmed and valued. Such affirmation has the potential to have extensive impacts on a student's trajectory in life.

The impact of BITOC on BISOC in the classroom has far-reaching ramifications, not only now but also for future opportunities for BISOC. A large and recent long-term study of over 100,000 Black students found that having just one Black teacher during their elementary school years reduced the chances of Black boys from low-income families dropping out of high school by 39% (Gershenson et al., 2022). The same study found that across gender identifiers, having only one Black teacher in elementary school increased the expectations of going to post-secondary education for Black students in high school (Gershenson et al., 2022). The mere

presence of having just one Black teacher in 10 years of elementary schooling increased the belief in themselves and impacted the drop-out rate significantly.

Similarly, a study by Egalite and Kisida (2018) found that Black students taught by Black teachers in high school, as compared to being taught by white teachers, reported greater motivation and care from their teachers, leading them to have more interest in attending post-secondary education. Studies have illustrated the many positive impacts of BITOC in schools. Reflective teachers play a pivotal role in its implementation; not only as role models but also by showing care and empathy toward their students. Through a greater awareness and sensitivity to cultural identities and experiences, the impact of BITOC in the classroom can have positive effects that extend far beyond the relationship in the classroom, positively shaping life decisions beyond high school graduation.

Justice-Oriented BITOC

Building equitable schooling environments involves changing and rebuilding school systems so they support minoritized students and teachers rather than harm them (Murti & Flores, 2021). The development of learning environments that include the unique perspectives of BITOC will help create schools that attract and retain BIPOC in which their experiences, skills, and insights are valued to the benefit of all students. An equitable system that proportionally represents the students they serve by centering minoritized voices, is a school that will better serve all students. Development of learning spaces that challenge white supremacy values and culture within school environments has long been the goal of justice-oriented educators (Kholi, 2021; Murti & Flores, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

Experiences gained while living within an environment steeped in white supremacy may account for the high proportion of BIPOC who identify as justice-oriented teachers. Such

educators bring critical perspectives regarding the historical, political, and social impacts inequities had on their own education experience (Gaytan, 2021; Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Experiences gained in their own education often serve as motivations to become teachers. Such personal stories may account for why more Black teachers *seek* positions in underfunded inner-city public schools than white teachers (Kholi, 2021). An impassioned desire to make change within school settings often prompts some BITOC to pursue careers in education, regardless of its high stress and barriers they may face (Rio & Longoria, 2021). BITOC often feel a strong responsibility to challenge injustice within their schools as advocates for BISOC, something they may or may not have experienced during their schooling journey. BITOC can serve as a voice from within, someone who understands these struggles and fights on behalf of their students and families of Color.

BITOC are also keenly aware of the omission of such critical perspectives in their pre-service education program and the need for culturally sensitive pedagogies and practices. Easton-Brooks (2019) conducted an in-depth study that found that among the white teachers and BITOC who completed a course on racial literacy and its application such as multicultural education or culturally responsive practice and teaching, 76% of white teachers actualized the practices in their classrooms while 92% of BITOC put the theory into practice. The high percentage of BITOC implementation suggests they are more likely to understand the necessity of an educational pedagogy that respects and upholds the lived experiences of students, and cultural heritages. As graduates of teacher preparation programs that may have overlooked culturally specific pedagogy, BITOC are astutely aware of any gaps in educational pedagogy that do not encompass culturally relevant practices and are eager to implement practices that will help center the lives of BISOC.

Justice-oriented BITOC are willing to challenge and identify harmful practices and policies despite the negative repercussions such as explicit denial of problems and racism (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). BITOC in public schools often pursue teaching positions in highly diverse areas because they view their work and presence as central to student success (Rios & Longoria, 2021). BITOC are often the advocates for their students and families of Color, and they are willing to take risks to speak out against practices and policies that harm BIPOC, as agents of change (Rios & Longoria, 2021). However, such resistance can be isolating and take an emotional and physical toll. Therefore, examining the ways BITOC can thrive and flourish within such conditions is integral to their retention in the field.

BITOC Resistance—Flourishing and Thriving

There is a long history of BITOC who have challenged and resisted "schools' assimilationist goals for students of Color" (Rios & Longoria, 2021, p. xiv). Justice-oriented teachers have challenged Eurocentric curriculum, deficit-informed attitudes, and practices and structures that silence, ignore, and push out BITOC (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Justice-oriented BITOC are working as beacons of light across Canada and the US in public and private schools, often facing numerous obstacles and hindrances. However, resisting cultures of white supremacy is painstaking and relentless work, some working with the support of their colleagues and administration and others working without (Love, 2019).

Research suggests that due to their racialized experiences in their own education and personal lives, BITOC are often passionate and committed to bringing culturally sustaining, racially-literate, teaching practices to all their students along with high academic expectations of their BISOC (Gaytan, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Despite the difficulties and challenges, BITOC have found ways to not just survive but to thrive in their

school environments. One key aspect that supports their flourishing is a sense of community, connection, and solidarity with other justice-oriented educators, families, and communities. By connecting with others who share their values and goals, BITOC can find support, validation, and inspiration. Additionally, cultivating a strong sense of identity and purpose as a justice-oriented teacher, rooted in their cultural background and values, can also contribute to their flourishing. The development of self-care practices and coping strategies to address the emotional and physical toll of resisting harmful practices and policies is a key tool for sustained resistance. Such practices may include engaging in culturally relevant and joyful activities, meditation, therapy, and building meaningful relationships outside of work. Finally, having access to professional development opportunities that prioritize culturally responsive teaching and anti-racism work can provide BITOC with the tools and knowledge to effectively challenge and transform their school environments.

Sustenance Through Self-Care

Rest

I honor myself
just as I am
just as you are
And so I rest…and bask in this moment of rest
I breathe in and take every minute I need to fill my lungs, without rush
Time slows and I can let my shoulders down and relax
The tension and contraction of the day, slowly releases with each breath
I take the space and I rest

Integral to BITOC survival and thriving in public and private school environments is the centrality of continuous self-care and embodiment of rest as resistance (Hersey, 2022; Rios & Longoria, 2021). The term “self-care” has been commercialized and synonymous with indulgent activities such as bubble baths and trips to the salon rather than “a deeper practice of self-care” (Rios & Longoria, 2021, p. 129). Rios and Longoria (2021) advocate for self-care as an essential

practice, suggesting taking time away from deeply demanding equity work to think about ways that BITOC experience joy, rejuvenation, hope, and rest. Self-care is non-prescriptive and an individual journey to finding the ways of centering joy and rest into one's life. Physical integration encourages physical activities like walks, stretching, dancing, or hiking. Restful integration may look like spending every other Saturday in the garden, or on the couch reading science fiction novels. Artistic creativity including writing poetry, creating art, making music may be an avenue to self-care while others need a spiritual practice such as meditation, journaling, or reading (Rios & Longoria, 2021). Recent scholarship on the relationship between art and the potential to transform and heal suggest that various forms of art creation and exposure provide significant therapeutic benefits for healing trauma, stress, and burnout (Magsamen & Ross, 2023). Art, not for the consumption of others but for one's own well-being, has the potential to heal and transform; this is particularly important for BITOC. The isolation, fear, anger, and sheer exhaustion that comes with being the only BITOC in a school, or one of few, can be particularly traumatic; consistent self-care practices are key for healing trauma in BITOCs and maintaining their health and wellbeing over time.

The act of rest is another form of radical self-care that affirms our inherent worth as human beings. Hersey (2022), founder of the Nap Ministry, argues that rest is an act of resistance against grind culture based on values associated with white supremacy in which one's value is determined by one's level of productivity. Hersey proposes that resting is an act that expresses our inherent worth as human beings rather than measured against productivity alone. Rest as resistance is an act of seizing back power from systems which dehumanize BIPOC and affirm our inherent worth (Hersey, 2022). Validating that we are worthy and enough just as we are, without producing, grinding, working, or doing, is a pivotal component of healing, self-care, and

validation. Belief in the inherent sanctity of each life is central to BIPOC self-care while rejuvenation plays an essential role in resistance and thriving among BITOC.

Narratives of Joy

Joy

I am the light
I am power
I am the generations of woman power, the strength of my oba-chan Kiri-sama and mama Shizuko combined - the quiet chrysanthemum
I fall and I rise
I laugh big belly laughs
for this moment, in this moment
The steam rises from my cup as the sunlight sparkles crystals of life
Her baby soft curls shine in the sun
and I am filled
The beauty of the moment in the cannery yellow petals of the tulip and
dew drops on the evergreen blade of grass
From the wellspring of sadness and loneliness I rise
Even if just for a moment
I bask in the fleeting moment of joy
And I breathe

Self-care practices are not the sole factor that contribute to BITOC's success; shifting narratives around joy, celebration and knowledge gained through teaching are also pivotal (Love, 2019; Rios & Longoria, 2021; Solomon & Rankin, 2019). BIPOC who fight for justice can find inspiration in their experiences, insights, wisdom, and resilience when fighting back. Refocusing our narratives to highlight our joy, our dreams for justice, and transformations we bring about are integral to changing the narratives of ourselves by ourselves (Rios & Longoria, 2021; Solomon & Rankin, 2019). Though not every day can bring happiness, cultivating the habit of acknowledging and welcoming joy is vital to fighting injustice in schools. BITOC depend on joy as an essential source of motivation when working toward justice in schools; laughter and community are important tools in maintaining and sustaining our work.

Working in Community

A central aspect to BITOC survival, resistance, and flourishing is the energizing effect of working in community with others. As hooks (1990) asserted, "one of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone" (p. 213). Building communities of resistance and organizing for change are powerful means of finding and connecting with others who share in the struggle of creating equitable change (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021; Solomon & Rankin, 2019). Building a community can take many forms, from intergenerational dialogues and affinity groups, to collaborating with BITOC in schools or community organizations. Intergenerational dialogue involves elders of age or experience coming together with novice educators to exchange experiences, insight, and knowledge (Rios & Longoria, 2021). Sharing in dialogue provides a means of (re)visioning while at the same time welcoming others who have experienced similar struggles; furthermore, it can serve as a sustainable practice leading to collaboration and action.

Circles of Sharing

Souto-Manning and Cheruvu (2016) examined how BITOC educators and pre-service practicum students came together within school communities through the practice of circles of sharing. Through the Freirean practice of culture circles, the group of BITOC met regularly to critically discuss their reading of the world by centering their lived experiences as minoritized educators and teacher candidates in the classroom. Intergenerational learning was an effortless result, in which educators of varying ages and experience collaborated with pre-service teachers, in a symbiotic relationship in which all of the participants learned from one another. These circles provided a space for sharing and envisioning their classroom practices as a source of inspiration, hope, and agency. New classroom approaches and curricula were also discussed, enriching their

teaching practices while creating a greater sense of agency. This circle of sharing among BITOC became an important space where members felt welcome, heard, valued, and appreciated in their school environment and gave hope to teacher candidates as to what is possible in their future schools.

Affinity Groups—Making Space for Us

Cultivating communities of resistance is an invaluable reminder that we are not alone in our struggle, goals, and experiences (Kholi, 2021). Affinity groups can provide support, learning, and community building through shared identifiers such as race or gender (Hughes et al., 2022). Such gatherings may take the form of formal or informal gatherings in which all members share something in common. These groups offer participants spaces to openly discuss and share their struggles, while serving as listening spaces that serve as both learning opportunities and sources of inspiration. Becoming part of communities can help participants feel they are not alone and isolated in their experience, inspiring and empowering participants (Kholi, 2021). BITOC affinity groups provide a safe place for individuals to share their racialized experiences without fear of judgment, shame, gaslighting, or negative repercussions.

Kholi (2021) shares the experience of one BITOC participating in an affinity group in their school: "[The affinity group] connects me to elders in the community … being around that kind of wisdom, but also enthusiasm and passion for justice, is just really inspiring for me" (p. 101). Their experience in an affinity group was transformative for them in which teachers of all ages and walks of life, who otherwise may not have come together, created an inclusive space in which each member could find support from one another and inspire one another. An affinity group can also provide a space for dialogue and synergy, where people come together to form

shared visions and action plans. One participant from Virginia shared their experience in a BITOC affinity group, noting that their participation had made their school feel safer, sharing:

> I have built relationships with other teachers in my buildings because of that. I now say what needs to be said, and I never did that before. And I'm not holding anything in, so I don't feel stressed at work anymore. (Kholi, 2021, p. 98)

Such spaces can help teacher retention, renewal, and thriving by creating spaces of authentic sharing and inspiration. Feeling empowered rather than isolated and alienated in the workplace may be a result because they know they are not alone and that can alleviate stress and worry.

Gaps in the Research—Public vs Private Schools

Much of the scholarship and research on BITOC experiences in education focuses on the attrition and challenges of BITOC in public school environments. The number of BITOC employed in private schools is 5% lower than public institutions (USDOE, 2021). However, a study in 2016 suggested that BIPOC made up for 35% of non-traditional teacher candidates enrolled in a higher education program versus only 2% enrolled in a traditional teacher preparation degree (USDOE, 2016). This data suggests that BIPOC are more drawn to non-traditional educational programs, which are often degrees needed for employment in private or independent schools. Research suggests that the longest retained BITOC matriculate from high-quality and specialized teacher preparation programs that have intentional pedagogies based on specific mission statements and educational goals (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Such teacher training programs emphasize an educational pedagogy congruent with specific educational philosophies and goals. Therefore, understanding the experiences of BITOC in private and independent schools is of great significance due to the higher recruitment of teachers who align their ideologies with educational pedagogy.

Although some aspects of teaching may overlap between public and private settings, current research regarding BITOC experiences in education has focused on public institutions leaving a gap in the private school movement. This study aims to illuminate the BITOC experience in K-12 private/independent institutions, revealing the elements and dynamics needed for their survival and flourishing. The primary focus is to provide suggestions and generative tools for BITOC working in private schools. Secondly, recommendations will be made for institutions regarding programs, resources, and institutional changes that can be implemented to support and retain BITOC as valued members of the school community, by finding ways to help them flourish. There has not been a study investigating an artistic practice such as poetry as a means of building community among BIPOC educators and the potential for the creation of transformative spaces and experiences in which educators can rejuvenate and reinvigorate their passion for teaching.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents action-oriented research, specifically participatory action research (PAR) as an appropriate qualitative methodology for examining the experiences of BITOC in independent schools and the co-creation of an arts-based form of community practice. A brief overview and rationale are provided before discussing the study methods. Narrative and poetic inquiry are employed as the methods for data collection, analysis, and reporting on findings. Data collection methods and analysis; timeline; ethical considerations and protections; and role of the researcher are presented as important foundational elements of this research project.

Research Questions

This project investigated the following questions:

1: What are the lived experiences of BITOC in private/independent schools?

The methodology utilized was chosen to amplify and center the experiences of BITOC participants as a means of expressing their stories in the most authentic way. The research methods chosen allowed the participants' embodied stories and experiences to be expressed and represented using their own words through data and found poetry. The second research question developed as a means of uplifting and collaborating on the thriving of BIPOC educators:

2: How can poetry serve as an effective generative tool in healing, reflection, affirmation, empowerment, community building, and expression for BITOC?

Through collaborative approaches, this question explored how poetry can serve as a personal and community practice of affirmation and empowerment for BITOC, helping them not only survive, but thrive and flourish within their school environments. Both questions required that the participants speak about sensitive and personal issues around their racialized experiences

in their personal and professional settings. Each participant's story was treated as a sacred source of knowledge and was cared for and honored, maximizing ethical considerations and sensitivity.

The methodology utilized, attitude, and understanding of the researcher prioritized the centering of participants' stories, words, and experiences, paying careful attention and care to ensuring their knowing and being were accurately represented in the findings. As the researcher and holder of the stories, I took seriously my responsibility to represent the findings in the hopes of weaving the threads that connected the participants' stories as a means of building bridges to those who may be isolated in their school community. Through the various methodologies employed in this research project, my intention was to amplify BITOC voices by providing a platform for their narratives and exploring what supports can help ensure they thrive and flourish within their respective school communities as a means of enacting transformative change for the research participants themselves.

Methodology Rationale

As an action-oriented research project, the methods of the study were in alignment with Saldaña's (2011) definition of action research, that the purpose and primary objective is not just the collaboration with the participants, but that "solutions and empowerment strategies are then implemented to initiate and hopefully sustain positive change" (p. 18). The participants' knowledge, voices, and experiences were centred in the project as co-collaborators. The research questions arose out of my experiences and observations within an independent school community. This research project was grounded on the tenets of action research because of the integral role the participants played in generating significant outcomes related to the research questions, data collection, methodology, and analysis. As an action research project, the aim was to not only center the stories and knowledge of the participants, but also to collaborate in the creation of a

community of BIPOC educators empowered to come together and make positive changes in their school communities.

Centering and valuing the knowledge and experiences of the participants was the guiding aim of the study as a means of aligning the research with practice. The aim of this study was to create actionable and meaningful changes for the participants and related educational institutions informed by the knowledge and experiences of BITOC. The epistemological assumptions of action research align with the aims of this study based on the assumption that knowledge creation does not rest solely on academic researchers, but rather important knowledge generation occurs with community partners and practitioners who possess invaluable insight and understanding (Meyer, 2000; Saldaña, 2011; Strand et al., 2003).

Participants in participatory action research (PAR) are integral co-collaborators in the research project and interview questions were designed to allow the participants to direct the conversation (Strand et al., 2003). In alignment with PAR, the interview questions were semi-structured allowing the participants the freedom to direct and guide the conversation based on their experiences. PAR was also chosen because I wanted to close the gap between research, practice, and participant empowerment. Utilizing PAR requires that the findings are also relevant and useful to the participants so that dissemination is meaningful to the community rather than used only for academic reproduction and use (Stringer, 1996).

Gaventa (1988) defines PAR by emphasizing the role of participants as the "attempts to break down the distinctions between the researchers and the researched, the subjects and the objects of knowledge production by the participants of the people-for-themselves in the process of gaining and creating knowledge" (p. 19). PAR seeks to disrupt the "monopolies of knowledge" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001, p. 70) by generating "power-from-within" (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001,

p. 379) by validating and empowering community participants as a form of knowledge generation. PAR was chosen as the methodology to enable participants to share their stories as a form of empowerment as integral knowledge holders and on-the-ground educators within private school settings. Utilizing this methodology ensured that participants were viewed as the primary sources of knowledge; validating their lived experiences to challenge dominant narratives in private and independent school settings.

Action-Oriented Research

Action-oriented research is a method of knowledge generation which engages both participants and practitioners and can be implemented for studies promoting social justice-related studies, such as this research project (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Social scientist Kurt Lewin (1946) was among the first researchers to popularize action research. Lewin proposed engaging practitioners directly rather than imposing hierarchical structures or policies without input from those working in the environment, thus he proposed that outcomes would be more fruitful and applicable for problem solving with the inclusion of practitioner voices (Small & Uttal, 2005; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Lewin recognized the value practitioners bring through their lived experiences and the inclusion of their voices in his research began a conversation regarding who should be a part of and how social research is conducted (Small, 1995).

Grounded in social change, action-oriented research according to Small and Uttal (2005), focuses on the generation of knowledge to be utilized directly *by* the affected community for positive social change and transformation. Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggest that action research entails self-reflective practices and investigation by practitioners within their social settings. Action research according to Meyer (2000) is not just the inclusion of practitioners, but the goal is to provide them with the power and tools to alter their current environment by applying practical

solutions arising from their participation in the research process. Although action-oriented research can take many forms, its main purpose is to effect change within a particular setting in collaboration with community members and researchers by centering the voices of participants (Small & Uttal, 2005). The tenets of action researcher underlie the intent and purpose of this research study, to center BIPOC educators who are directly affected, utilizing a self-reflective process that will provide the practitioners tools to implement change in their direct settings and professional lives.

Action research emphasizes the importance of exposing and addressing social inequities within communities; therefore, awareness of power structures and dynamics between community participants and researchers is crucial (Small & Uttal, 2005; Strand et al., 2003). Co-researchers must have their voices acknowledged and validated as part of the study, rather than being overshadowed by the researcher's perspective and assumed knowledge of a problem. This requires action researchers to be reflexive about their relationship to and bearing upon both the research process and the participants as co-collaborators (Hall & Callery, 2001; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). The collaborative approach of this project required that I as the researcher became a facilitator of the project rather than take on the traditional researcher role. The use of the term facilitator is consciously used as a means of explicitly breaking down the power assumed by a researcher versus the participants. This methodology is particularly relevant to this project because the participants must be actively and equitably involved throughout the research process in creation and collaboration of research outcomes.

The utilization of action research has been actively used in educational research due to its emphasis on engaging educational practitioners in both the research process and dissemination of outcomes (Clausen & Black, 2020; Makoelle, 2019; Mertler, 2019; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

This is particularly relevant to my study because not only is this educational research, but it also seeks to give voice to minoritized experiences that have often been ignored and silenced. Participants' active engagement was key for their empowerment and agency. They told their stories and came together in a circle of community to write poetry. My co-collaborators were actively involved in the generation of new experiences, reflection, and community building as individuals and as a community of BIPOC educators.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory action research (PAR) examines the lived experiences of the participants as primary data and valued knowledge (Atweh et al., 1998; Fals Borda, 2001). Participants are not passive but rather integral and active co-collaborators, engaged in solving problems within their social context. PAR aims to bridge the gap between theoretical research and practical implementation, an important alignment with my goal for the research project. PAR emerged as a research tradition centering the life experiences of oppressed people and was developed in Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Hall, 1981; Nyemba & Mayer, 2018). PAR has since spread around the world, including North America, as research enabling those with less power to gain access and work towards various forms of social justice and equity (Gaventa, 1988). Fals Borda is noted as the first to enact and fully define PAR (Lake & Wendland, 2018). Fals Borda (2001) defines PAR as a model of "research and action focused on local and regional problems involving emancipatory, cultural, and political processes" (p. 27).

The philosophical framework of PAR is based on Freire's (1982) body of work and was developed within movements centering education as a means of empowerment and emancipation for social change. Freire (1982) describes the relationship between PAR and emancipatory education stating, "I have to use methods for investigation which involved the people of the area

being studied as researchers; they should take part in the investigation themselves and not serve as the passive objects of the study" (p. 27). Likewise, Livingstone et al. (2014) asserts that "good research is research conducted with people rather than on people" (p. 286) emphasizing participants' role as co-researchers and not passive onlookers. This is particularly important in my research in which the balance of power is not hierarchical. The research project was aimed at not just validating the lived experiences as valuable and important knowledge generation, but collaboratively working with BITOC for the goal of making change in their professional practice by finding community with other educators and giving them tools for self-care and reflection. The participants as co-collaborators were invited to co-create a community based on an artistic practice of sharing, healing, expression, and action.

The findings, knowledge generated, and dissemination of outcomes must also be focused on and include the local participants of the project (Brydon-Miller, 2013). The generation of research findings in PAR are focused on practical implementation, local dissemination, and empowerment of the co-collaborators. The production of knowledge in PAR is to educate and empower minoritized groups toward action and transformative social change in their local settings (Small, 1995). PAR is a research method weaving academic inquiry and on-the-ground social change, whereby the participants in the project become empowered by the research process and enact change in their local communities. This is an important aspect of my research project, as the purpose of the project was for the participants and finding a way of contributing to their thriving in school communities. The hope is that this research project can begin to shift the paradigm of mere survival and retention of BITOC, to their thriving and flourishing in their school communities. Affirming and centering BITOC voices was a means of valuing and empowerment as integral agents of change in their school communities. Finding ways of building community

with one another through generative artistic self-care, in the form of poetry, was a means of transformative action for the participants.

PAR literature acknowledges that power exists not only in knowledge production and accessibility, but also in the social identities and positions one holds within an institution and in relationship to others (Burns, 2007; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). PAR researchers must recognize that individuals and groups do not exist in isolation but are in an ongoing relationship with the power dynamics in their social environment. PAR researchers aim to empower and give a platform to minoritized communities that may be confined or restricted by their identities within their social context (Atweh et al., 1998; Lake & Wendland, 2018). The examination of social relationships and inequitable distributions of power are central when examining the experiences of BITOC in their school environments and the impact their social identities may have on their stories. Through the narratives of BITOC, power dynamics and relationships within their communities were discussed and examined.

Narrative Inquiry

The stories and narratives we tell ourselves and others construct and reconstruct the view of self in an ongoing and contextual process (Wells, 2011). The untold and hidden stories of oneself are woven into the ways of knowing, being, and perceiving who we are (O'Grady et al., 2018). Connelly and Clandinin (1986) posit that experience is the central aspect of narrative inquiry, defining it as "the study of how humans make meaning by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (p. 385). Evolving from the postmodernist assumption that multiple truths exist, narrative inquiry enables a more nuanced examination of the complexity and multiplicity of perspectives of human experience (Mertova & Webster, 2020).

Narrative inquiry as a research methodology allows nuanced complexities to arise out of the study of human experience expressed through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The use of storytelling in human and social research provided the opportunity to encounter feelings, emotions, and experiences the reader might not otherwise experience, with the potential of eliciting a more expansive, personal, and human understanding of another person's story (Van Manen, 1990). Such nuanced and complex understandings of experience is central to the examination of counter-narratives. Narrative inquiry allowed for the sharing and representation of BITOC stories in an authentic way that may or may not have been previously heard, allowing new perspectives and voices to emerge in educational research.

Narrative inquiry has been a form of research to capture and make meaning of the multifaceted and diverse experiences of life (Kim, 2016). As a discursive means of understanding the self and others, narrative inquiry was developed in the social sciences. Squire (2008) suggests that narrative inquiry can represent experiences in an authentic way because they "display transformation or change" as a means of generating meaning about oneself and the world (p. 42). Narrative inquiry challenges traditional epistemological perspectives that knowledge is objective and definitive, arguing that there is not one objective truth (Munro, 1998). Rather, narrative inquiry allows for nuanced, and layered meanings of life, culture, and society where participants are the storytellers of their life experiences (Kim, 2016; Leavy, 2009). This is poignant to this research study as the often silenced and ignored stories of BITOC present a different perspective that may challenge dominant perspectives in private education. Narrative inquiry allowed for the layered experiences and identities of BITOC to be examined and explored as a means of knowledge generation. Such nuanced and authentic representation of their stories allowed for a deeper examination of different and inequitable dynamics to come to light.

Dominant narratives have controlled the generation of knowledge in educational and social research, and thus narrative inquiry seeks to create a platform for silenced voices to be heard and valued (O'Grady et al., 2018; Speedy, 2008). O'Grady et al. (2018) suggests that various researchers including feminist, postcolonial, experimental, and emancipatory writers utilize narrative inquiry as means to "make visible alternative knowledge often silenced and/or contested" (p. 153). Far too often dominant voices and narratives are unquestioned and accepted as the norm. Narrative inquiry challenges the dominant narrative and aims to pull back the veil of inequitable power dynamics, creating the "potential to implement new visions of dignity … and other postcolonial ways of being in the world" (Finley, 2005, p. 689). Storytelling allows for a deeper examination of social relationships including power and identity (Boyd, 2009; Kim, 2016). The amplification of minoritized BITOC experiences created the space for common perceptions, practices, and understandings to be disrupted creating an opportunity for shifting and changing the narrative. Narrative inquiry gave the often hidden or unseen BITOC perspectives the opportunity to be centered and made visible.

Narrative Inquiry in Education

Connelly and Clandinin (1986) were the first to apply narrative inquiry to educational research arguing that education itself is constructed by the weaving of teachers and learners lived and told stories. Narrative researchers recognize that the lived experiences of teachers and students are integral and valued knowledge holders of the complex systems of learning in the classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The use of narrative inquiry in educational research explores the diverse experiences of teachers and students, those at the forefront of education as a means of expanding knowledge generation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2010; Munro, 1998). The telling of stories in educational settings can advance educational research by centering

the lived narratives of those with direct experience including the experiences of BITOC (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Narrative inquiry was chosen for this purpose, those who have the most direct experience to tell their own stories, in their own words. The authentic transcribing of each participant's story was prioritized and represented as a tapestry of experience through poetry. The lived experiences of BITOC are situated in the research project as an integral means of expanding knowledge in educational research and practice.

Poetic Inquiry

The Doll

I am a doll, cross-stitched at the arms and legs
Soft and tender
Molded and stuffed - a comfort object
Each stitch sewn from the outside in
A weaving of *their* stories with the ones I've told myself.
Some threads are invisible, unseen
While others are visible scars, like the stretch marks on my soft skin
Brands for all to see
Inescapable
Imbued with meaning
Black hair
Almond eyes
Rolls of soft skin
Judgements in the blink of an eye

The use of poetry in research is an emergent form of qualitative research in which poetry is used in myriad forms of the research project including data collection, analysis, and representation of the findings (Janesick, 2016; Prendergast, 2009). Arts-Based Research (ABR) utilizes various artistic practices in research and poetry has been validated as a form of inquiry mainly through ABR (Eisner, 2004). In the past, research poetry was used to reference the use of poems in research, however, poetic inquiry has more recently been popularized in the research community (Faulkner, 2017**)**. Though a fixed and unifying definition of poetic inquiry does not exist, poetry used in qualitative research describes a method of "turning research interviews,

transcripts, observations, personal experiences, and reflection into poems or poetic forms" (Faulkner, 2020, p. 13). Poetic inquiry, like narrative inquiry, seeks to share the human experience in an interdisciplinary arts-based approach (Faulkner, 2020; Prendergast, 2009).

Moving from just the inclusion of poetry in research, Faulkner (2017) suggests that "the key feature of poetic inquiry is the use of poetry as/in/for inquiry" (p. 210). The utilization of poetry in research can be a way to express one's experience in deep and meaningful ways. Lorde (2017) spoke of the use of poetry as "the revelation or distillation of experience" and is the way "we help give name to the nameless" (p. 8). Experiences that have not been named or described can be expressed through poetry. This research project investigated sensitive and deeply personal stories. I chose poetic inquiry to ensure the stories were represented in the most authentic and integrated way possible, not just the cognitive themes and content, but more importantly, the feeling and emotion of each collaborator's story.

Poetry allows a new way of interpreting and understanding narrative data not just through the intellect, but allows the reader to participate in an idea, feeling, or reality and challenges traditional ways of thinking (Janesick, 2016). Poetry maximizes meaning in the experiences of the participants and inspires a new consciousness to another's story (Janesick, 2016). Knowledge is constructed from one's experiences in the world and the arts, including poetry, can deepen the way in which we reflect, question, digest, analyze, and express our experiences of the world. This is integral to this research study because the experiences of BITOC are nuanced and complex, sometimes painful to hear. Poetry was a way to represent the collaborator's experiences in a deeper way, not just through the intellect but through their feelings, as a way for the reader to enter their world in a deeper way. Poetry is an alternative way of describing, explaining, and interpreting the social world and can increase the depth of understanding in new ways (Faulkner,

2020; Janesick, 2016). The voices of BITOC expressed through poetry may offer alternative ways of seeing their world view.

Poetry also allows a deeper exploration of the taken-for-granted assumptions through the amplification of multiple, nuanced, and complex truths. Young (2010) suggests that "a poem asserts itself as poetry by being in dialogue with what it resists" (p. 38). Poetry's strength lies in the wrestling of complex resolutions. The participants of the research project were asked to share complex and nuanced stories, perhaps challenging the reader's assumptions and own lived experiences. Poetry in my research allows the reader to *feel* the experiences of the participants in different ways that purely academic forms data representation may not elicit. Poetry as a generative tool *for* BITOC became a way of creation, expression, reflection, and healing for the co-collaborators offering a multitude of ways to share their nuanced and complex experiences. The exploration of different truths also allows the racialized experiences of BITOC the space to be affirmed and validated.

Poetic Inquiry has been used to investigate various disciplines of research including poems of self, equity, social justice, identity, race, gender, parenting, family, and religion (Prendergast, 2015). The use of poetic inquiry is vast and goes beyond self-expression and allowed the weaving of scientific data with the emotive, allowing for a deeper understanding of a participant's social, historical, and personal background (Faulkner, 2020). Poetry can bring clarity and amplify aspects of the human experience because it allows for a different way of knowing, illuminating different perspectives in intimate and significant ways (Leavy, 2009**)**. More importantly, poetry allows the reader to resonate and enter the world of another in a way other forms of data and narrative prose do not (Neilsen & Knowles, 2008). Poetry as a means of revealing different perspectives and experiences, can aid in the weaving of social and historical

context in the participants' experience. Integral to BITOC experience is the exploration of identity and deeply ingrained ideas about gender, class, and race. Poetry can allow the reader to feel and enter the world of the participant in a deep and meaningful way.

Poetry is an ideal method for research and projects focused on identity and identity formation because poetry allows for more nuanced views of minoritized identities expressed through an embodied process (Faulkner, 2017). The use of poetry can create a space in which one may define, re-define, explore, and express one's identity in a way that is more accessible to others, making the invisible visible (Lorde, 2007; Prendergast, 2015). Written expression in various poetic forms can be a powerful tool to present experiences of intersectionality and the negotiation of multiple minoritized identities in a full expression of self (Faulkner, 2017). Identity is a poignant theme in BITOC experiences and poetic inquiry allows for a more fluid, evolving experience to arise. Poetry does not have to be static, but rather allows for a more human approach for discovering and interrogating issues of identity. Such interrogation is a significant aspect to BITOC flourishing. When resisting and challenging normative white standards, poetry is a potent practice for interrogating multiple and complex identities in school environments.

Embodied Experience

Poetic inquiry has the potential to be an embodied methodology. The idea of embodiment is a concept referring to the attention to and awareness of the body and the mind as an integration of the whole human being (Ellingson, 2017). Poetry at its core is an expression and exploration of the full human experience. Fairchild (2003) defines poetry as an "embodiment … a mode of being, radically different from other forms of discourse" (p. 1). Poetry is a form of embodied presentation rather than representation, created from the depths of an individual's life experience (Faulkner, 2020). A poem shows rather than tells of the complex, mysterious, fluid, and often

hidden parts of our humanity and asks us to listen to others. Leggo (2008) defines poetry as "a site for dwelling, for holding up, for stopping … Poetry invites ways of uniting the heart, mind, imagination, body and spirit" (pp. 166–167). Poetry can weave together the mind-body divide often found in academic research by integrating the thinking and feeling (Faulkner, 2020). Participants' voices and embodied experiences can be expressed in personal and meaningful ways through poetry.

Poetic inquiry can agitate for social change as a means of reflexivity, embodiment, and scholarship that connects the mind and body that "is bandage and salve" (Faulkner, 2017, p. 149). The use of poetry in my research project as a generative tool for healing, expression, self-reflection, and community building lies in the nuanced, fluid, and openness poetry may offer my research participants. The generative practice of poetry is the integration between thinking and the embodiment of feeling and expression. The use of poetry in my research is a means for the co-collaborators to examine the nuances of their identities, gently interrogating the intersectionality of their identities as a means of healing, empowerment, and reflection. Poetry in the research project created an opportunity for the participants to play with words and embody feelings as a practice of reflection, healing, and/or whatever arose in them.

Generative Poetry

Poetic inquiry as a methodology that uses poetry as a means of exploring and expressing personal experiences and perspectives has been used in a variety of fields as a generative practice including education and health care to facilitate self-reflection, community building, and resistance for social change. In the field of education, teachers and researchers have used poetry to explore and understand their own teaching practices (Mjanger, 2014), teacher preparation programs (Müller & Kruger, 2022), as well as to engage students in creative expression and

critical reflection (Cronin & Hawthorne, 2019). In the field of health care, poetic inquiry has been used to explore how poetry can decrease stress levels in health care students (Park et al., 2022) and deepen reflexivity and engagement with healthcare professionals (Brown et al., 2021). Poetry can also be used to explore issues related to healthcare and wellness, such as the experiences of individuals living with chronic illness or disability.

Poetic inquiry can also be used as a powerful tool for social justice, change, and resistance. By using poetry to explore and express the experiences and perspectives of minoritized communities, poetic inquiry can challenge dominant narratives and create spaces for alternative voices to be heard. Poetic inquiry can be used as a means for individuals and communities to express their experiences of oppression and resistance. By using poetry to explore the complexities of their lives, individuals can create powerful and emotional expressions that challenge dominant narratives and stereotypes. Through this process, poetic inquiry can help to create a sense of community and solidarity among minoritized groups, as individuals come together to share their stories and experiences (Miller, 2021).

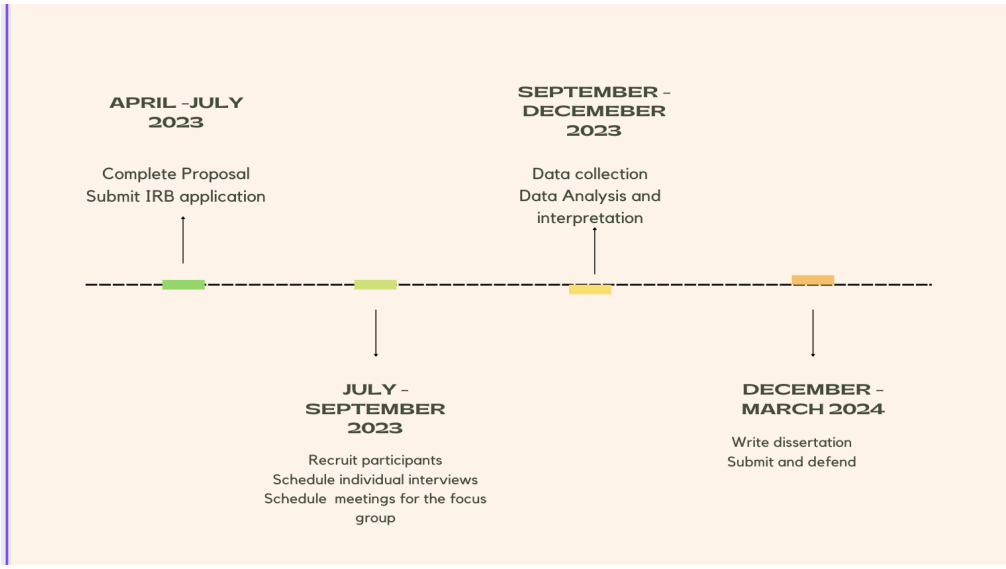
Poetic inquiry can also be used as a means of resistance, by challenging dominant ideologies and structures of power. Lorde (2017) asserts that our dreams "are made realisable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare" (pp. 10–11). Through poetry, individuals can question and subvert dominant narratives, and create alternative visions of the future. Poetic inquiry can also create spaces for dialogue and reflection. By using poetry to explore complex and nuanced issues, individuals can engage in critical reflection and dialogue, and develop new understandings of themselves and the world. Through this process, poetic inquiry can help to create opportunities for individuals and communities to work together to create positive social change.

Research Timeline

This study was conducted over the course of approximately one year beginning in April 2023 and concluding in March 2024. Figure 3.1 shows the timeline of each phase of the research process beginning with the formation and completion of the research proposal, recruitment of participants, data collection, analysis, and interpretation and concluding with the dissemination of results.

Figure 3.1

Research Timeline



Participants: Criteria and Sample Size

The participants of the study were seven PreK-12 school educators working in an independent school in the United States or Canada. The criterion for participation included educators who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color, having graduated from or currently enrolled in a teacher preparation program, and are currently working in an independent school setting. The participants included a diverse sampling of school levels, subjects taught, racial backgrounds, and years of teaching experience. Participants were expected to have access to technological devices if online interviews were necessary in lieu of in-person contact. The

participants met in-person or via Zoom for both the personal interviews and group sessions. Those who agreed to participate met for a 60–90-minute one-on-one interview and three focus group sessions for a total of 4.5–5 hours between September and December of 2023.

In line with Antioch University's IRB policies, all participants read and signed a consent form found in Appendix A and were given a participant rights form found in Appendix B, also included are the steps taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

In qualitative research, and in particular narrative inquiry, the goal is to examine the lived experiences, ideas, and perspectives of participants regarding a certain phenomenon (Islam & Aldaihani, 2021). Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest a sample size of one or two participants for narrative research and a sample size of six to eight for focus group interviews. Saldaña (2011) suggests that a sample size between three and six allows for a "broad spectrum of data for analysis" (p. 34). I followed both suggestions having seven participants in the individual interviews and six educators participated in three focus group sessions to broaden the range of experiences collected. Multiple forms of data were collected including narrative interviews, focus groups, researcher's reflexive journals, a WhatsApp group, and narrative self-reflection questionnaires from the participants.

Recruitment

Recruitment of potential participants was primarily done through personal invitations. The selection of BITOC candidates were from various independent schools, primarily Waldorf School communities within a specific geographic location. The geographical proximity was chosen to increase the chance of in-person data collection. Potential participants were sent a recruitment email outlining the research project, their role in the project, and project timeline. Following the email each participant had a personal conversation with the facilitator to review the process and

expectations and answer any questions. The intake session allowed both the potential participant and the facilitator the opportunity to assess whether they might work well together.

Ethical Protections

The premise of the research project required discussion of sensitive and personal stories. The ethical consideration of each participant was not taken lightly, and their emotional well-being was prioritized from start to finish. The participants' well-being was prioritized, such that at the beginning of each interview, consideration to the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed was laid out, allowing for extra time, pauses, space, and comfort being offered when needed. Each interview began with a verbal recognition of and appreciation for the sharing of the story, honoring my role as witness to their story and creating a vessel for their story to be held and valued. I previewed the possibility of triggering emotions that may be brought up in the sharing of their stories. When necessary, check-ins during the interviews and breaks were included and offered as needed. Attention to the participants' facial and body language during interviews were used as initiatives for breaks and pauses.

In line with Antioch University IRB protocols for ethical research projects, the project was approved by the IRB committee before any recruitment and data collection began. Participant consent forms along with an outline of participant rights (found in Appendix A and B) were reviewed orally and in writing with each participant, informing them of the research questions, the proposed purpose, research timeline, process, and their rights as participants. Processes related to participant privacy and anonymity were shared, including the use of pseudonyms and the redaction of any identifiable information in the published report. Participants were made aware of the security measures followed to safeguard their information. Signed consent forms were received prior to their individual interviews.

Separate confidentiality forms were explained and signed by the participants, outlining the format of the workshop. The nature of the focus group prevented a guarantee of complete anonymity and thus participants were informed before agreeing to participate. These consent forms were collected prior to the first focus group session.

Role of the Researcher

In line with PAR epistemology, the role of the researcher/facilitator is one that is equal to the participants. My role as facilitator was to connect and hold the stories of the participants. The inequitable power dynamics in the researcher process and relationships with the participants were continuously examined regarding my positionality and my own identities. As a facilitator, I was constantly reflecting on how my social, political, and professional identities are intertwined into the research process and required the continuous examination of how it may be influencing the research (Chandler & Torbet, 2003). As the facilitator, I engaged in self-reflexivity by constantly examining how my "multiple identities and locations of power and privilege, and the ways in which these understandings influence our interactions with others and our research practices" (Brydon-Miller, 2013, p. 204) through consistent reflective journaling practices. My positionality was transparent in the research process. I continuously reflected on how my own biases and position of power may be influencing the research process.

Data Collection

As an action research project, data collection and analysis were focused on the generation of knowledge to be utilized by the community members themselves to enact positive social change in their setting (Small & Uttal, 2005) and to empower them and generate "power-from-within" (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001, p. 379). The generation of such knowledge and power in this project emerged from the stories of the educators themselves, thus data collection

began by engaging the co-collaborators and listening to their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For this study the system of inquiry took the form of personal interviews, focus group sessions in the form of poetry workshops, a pre and post reflection, researcher reflective journals including reflective poems, found poems created from the co-collaborators verbatim words, co-collaborators written poems from the workshops, and the use of WhatsApp, an online communication platform.

The individual interviews were conducted both in-person and via Zoom teleconferencing. Each interview was audio recorded for transcription purposes. The focus group sessions were a hybrid of in-person and Zoom meetings that were video and audio-recorded. Initially two focus group sessions were planned, but upon further reflection, a third session was added to build on the developing momentum of the community as well as give the participants more opportunities for poetry writing. The online platform WhatsApp was also added after the proposal of the research project as a means of engaging the co-co-collaborators in between focus group sessions and further building community. This allowed for further discussion and sharing not only as a means of information sharing, such as logistics for the meeting, but also as a form of connection building. Researcher reflective journal entries and poems were yet another form of data collection, a synthesis and reflection of the process, engagement, and embodiment of the research process.

Individual Interviews

As a means of uncovering the individual lived experiences, individual interviews provided a deeper insight into the lives and context of the participants, especially when exploring sensitive topics, as in the case of this study (Islam & Aldaihani, 2021). The personal interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way to allow for key questions relating to the topic while allowing

the space and freedom to diverge and dig deeper where the conversation was carried (Evans & Lewis, 2018). As described by Islam and Aldaihani (2021), semi-structured interviews are among the most successful methods for "rich data exploration" (p. 6). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher two-way communication with the participants, using open-ended questions, found in Appendix C. This format of questions was chosen to allow the participant the opportunity to share and guide the conversation in a way that was authentic and genuine to their experience while also allowing for more in-depth exploration of certain areas. I prepared before each session, preparing the space and myself to welcome their stories. Table 3.1 are my researcher's journal entries before the personal interviews.

Table 3.1

Researcher's Journal Entry for August 31, 2023, and September 14, 2023

Researcher Journal Entry 8/31/23 and 9/14/23
8/31/23 ***Excitement and nerves, worry and enthusiasm rush through me. Breathing deeply I will open the space with calm, with warmth, creating the space, as best as I can, to welcome her whole self into this space. This is a space for her, to tell her story. It is sacred. It is special. It is important. I honor you and everything and everyone that has allowed us to meet at this moment. I cherish you. I value you. I see you. I will bear witness with openness, curiosity, and open listening.*** **9/14/23** ***I am opening the space for her to be open, feel comfort and safety. I will let her share and not intervene but let her words carry us as a river. I will also be attuned to moments when further exploration of a topic arises.***

Reflexive poems became a natural way for me to reflect and express my synthesis throughout the research process. The following poem was written before the first individual interview.

The Listener

I honor their stories.
I hold a space for
sharing.
A safe vessel
for dusty memories
Sometimes forgotten… for a reason
hidden
left to the past.
or perhaps bubbling just beneath the surface
waiting and wishing for the light of day.
I will let their stories gently emerge, sometimes as gentle as a spring shower and others as torrential downfall.
I will listen.

The co-collaborators were given the freedom to share as they felt comfortable and were not obligated to answer each question. Once the data was collected, it was transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose, a coding software.

Focus Group Sessions

The second form of data collection was three focus group sessions that were conducted both in-person and via Zoom video conferencing over the course of three weeks. The sessions were recorded using audio technology for transcription purposes. Prior to the first focus group session, each co-collaborator filled out a brief pre-reflection found in Appendix D as a means of pre-reflection, exploring their expectations, hopes for the workshop, and relationship to writing poetry. The co-collaborators also filled out a separate consent form for the focus group sessions found in Appendix E. An invitation email was sent to the co-collaborators prior to the first session including an agenda and poem intended to set the intention of creating an intimate community space for BIPOC educators to come together.

The focus group format varied slightly each session, but the beginning of each session was structured to welcome and settle into the space with one another. Each session began with a

welcome and invitation to do a body scan including guided breathing and visualization as a means of settling into the space. Next, I recited the above poem as an acknowledgement and grounding for the intentions of the circle of sharing, as the space for the care and focus on oneself. Each meeting also included a check in for each co-collaborator, the researcher included, to share how they were feeling in the moment. Meeting norms were also established for each session (included in Appendix F) in which we read through the list and each participant chose and read aloud the one that was resonating for them in that moment. From there, each session varied in terms of poetry writing exercise and sharing.

As I prepared the physical and mental space for the workshop, I was filled with immense gratitude, nerves, and anticipation for the beginning of our work together. Table 3.2 is my researcher's journal entry from the morning before the first workshop.

Table 3.2

Researcher's Journal Entry November 18, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 11/18/23
I feel so much gratitude to be in community with all the powerful, incredible women. There are two aspects to this work, one which is deeply personal and inner introspective as we reflect and listen to our own inner voices and the community aspect of the group, in our sharing together. I will open the space and set the mood, I must be vulnerable and share my story and my poetry with them. I am filled with buzzing butterflies. Reflective poem written in anticipation of the focus group. ***A Circle of Intention*** ***We are a circle, hearts connected by threads of light.*** ***We bring passion, will, desire, commitment.*** ***To bring the world a force of education*** ***In which we all belong to one another*** ***We find connection in one another.*** ***We find ourselves through one another.*** ***Each has a place*** ***And as a circle brings forth an impulse*** ***For love***

Focus Group Session One

A warm and inviting community space was curated for in-person participants with sheepskin rugs laid on the floor with pillows, leather bound journals and pens were given to each participant, and refreshments were provided. Gentle instrumental music was played to set a mood of warmth and welcome. As the participants entered both in person and online, there was a feeling of nervousness and anticipation. Some participants knew one another while others had never met. Navigating both the in-person and online meeting space required that I attend to physical mood and atmosphere while also ensuring those who were online were included and felt welcome.

The session began with words of welcome and appreciation for the co-collaborators and the reading of a poem. We then shared how we were feeling in the moment as a feelings check-in. The meeting norms and intentions were reviewed, and each participant chose the one that was resonating the most with them at that moment. I then explained the research project details including my own relationship and connection to the research question. Next, we began our first writing exercise entitled “name stories” in which each participant wrote a definition or poem or explanation of one of the other participant’s names. These were shared with the group. Next, we began our main writing exercise in which the participants were asked to go outside into nature and choose something to write about. It could be their observation of something in nature, a feeling that arose, or anything that they felt inspired to write. After 30 minutes of independent writing, co-collaborators were invited to share their work as they felt comfortable, either a short part or their entire poem. Each session ended with the reading of a poem I wrote for the group after the personal interviews:

Shining Lights

Each a spark
An ember
A flame
A fire
Glowing
Burning
Lighting the way

We come together
To share
To remember
Who we are

To celebrate our gifts
Our beauty
Our strength
Our collective individualism
In the I we become we

Connecting the individual sparks and lights
Into a circular network of connection and seeing and listening and honoring
And laughter
And joy
And embrace
And welcome

We share our stories
We Hear our stories

My struggle is our struggle
You belong
We hear you
You are heard
You matter
Just as you are

Table 3.3 is my researcher's journal entry after the first focus group session.

Table 3.3

Researcher's Journal Entry November 19, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 11/19/23
I am buzzing from the energy and community that we created yesterday. It took some time for participants to get comfortable and managing the hybrid setting was challenging, but I tried to create a warm, safe, inviting space. As the time went on, there was a sinking in, of being together and sharing the space. I have gratitude for all of them. ***There was laughter*** ***There were tears*** ***There was sharing*** ***Giving and receiving*** ***There was comfort and discomfort*** ***Flow and gestation*** ***Hesitation*** ***Reluctancy and care*** ***There seems to be a willingness, a hunger, a drive to create a space for us to come together to renew ourselves and share space together. There is a beautiful balance of self-reflection and group sharing. It already feels like the participants are comfortable with each other*** ***And can be themselves. I don't often cry in front of others, but the tears flowed, without worry or embarrassment. There's something here. We're creating…something.***

In between sessions, to keep the momentum going and the community connected, I decided to create a WhatsApp group with all the co-collaborators. This was done to keep the connection and engagement between members throughout the week, in between focus group sessions to strengthen relationships between participants and create a space for sharing. Words of encouragement were shared, and a short writing prompt was given for co-collaborators to engage with one another in between sessions. Some participants shared their poems they did not share in the larger group focus session.

Focus Group Session Two

This session began in the same way as session one, with a welcome, breathing exercise and settling, poem recitation, check-in, and group norm sharing. We also repeated the name story exercise, but each participant chose a different person's name. Next, participants were invited to share any of their writing they had done in between sessions based on the prompt shared in the WhatsApp group and/or revisions or additions they made to their poems written in the previous session. The main writing prompt for this session continued the thread of nature writing because of the universality, in that each collaborator could decide how deep and personal they wanted to go based on their connection to the land. They were invited to write about the sensory experience of a place in nature that holds special meaning to them and were given the following writing prompt: Connection to the land is deeply tied to the experience of being human, to decolonizing our curriculum and to remembering who we are. If you want to go outside if that helps you connect, I want to you think about a place in nature—park, trail, beach, a mountain trail, a childhood place you would go to, a place in nature that you are connected to: Write about what it smells like? What it looks like? What it sounds like? What it tastes like? What is feels like? What did that place give to you? Participants were given 40 minutes to write after which we came together to share our work. The session ended with the reading of the Shining Lights poem. At the end of the session the participants were asked to bring any information about their own name story including who named them, the significance and/or meaning of their name, and/or anything else they wanted to share to the next session.

In between sessions two and three, the WhatsApp group was used to share words of encouragement and work they had not shared within the group session.

Focus Group Session Three

This session was the final workshop together. The previous meeting protocols were repeated including welcome, settling, poem reading, check-in, and group norm sharing. The educators were invited to share their own name stories. Co-collaborators were also invited to share any revisions or new writing from the previous writing prompt.

The final writing prompt was creating a piece based on speaking to their younger self beginning with the prompt: *If I could visit my younger self I would go back to the day when…* The co-collaborators were given 40 minutes to write. Then we came back together and shared with one another. Deep appreciation was given to each of the participants and the final reading of a poem. At the end of the final session, participants filled out a post reflection survey included in Appendix G, asking them to reflect on their experience within the group. Table 3.4 is my researcher's journal entry before and directly after the last focus group session.

Table 3.4

Researcher's Journal Entry December 2, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 12/2/23
Today is the last group session. I'm excited to be in community again with these strong, resilient people. There is something about coming together and sharing our stories, sharing our time, sharing food, sharing space, sharing tears and laughter. I'm sad to think this is the end when it really feels like the beginning of something… ***I'm relaxed and yet there is always anticipation.*** ***With each meeting, the women feel more comfortable, greeting with hugs and ending with joy, rosy cheeks, excitement, smiles, a connection. It's interesting that poetry is a way of sharing ourselves without having to interrogate too deeply, touching on things for a brief moment without having to linger for too long. It's a way of expressing things that might be hard to speak about in conversation. It's a way of opening much quicker than might be possible otherwise. We'll see how each of them arrives. I feel more comfortable. I feel more confident. After each session, we talk and joke and speak.*** ***We reflect*** ***We debrief*** ***We mingle*** ***We linger for a little*** ***Something you don't get online*** ***My heart is open*** ***I am full of gratitude*** ***I hope each of them has gotten something out of this experience.*** **Post the final session 12/2/23** ***We will continue*** ***To be with one another*** ***Sharing our journey*** ***Our lives*** ***Our constant*** ***Becoming*** ***And learning*** ***And knowing*** ***And understanding*** ***Sinking deeper*** ***Into ourselves*** ***And each other***

After each session, the group poems were collated and transcribed. Alongside data collected from individual interviews and focus group workshops, I also documented my own experiences, reflections, thoughts, and questions throughout the research process in the form of researcher journal entries.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through the lens of CRT, centering the experiences of racialization as an integral rather than minor variable for the BIPOC educators. Over the course of the data collection process, transcription and coding were done after each interview and focus group workshop and continued long after all the data was collected. I read and reread the transcripts of the participants' stories. Their voices, their stories, their joy, and pain replayed in my mind, as certain phrases and words seemed to replay in my mind. As I read the transcripts, there were words and phrases that called out to me and inspired me to write poems. I used their words both from the interviews and the workshops to discuss and share the findings through data and found poems. The embodiment of poetry allowed for a deeper understanding of their stories and the feelings of the impact of their stories left lingering. Many of the findings of this study are communicated through such data and found poems.

Guiding the process of data analysis was Creswell and Creswell's (2018) procedure for qualitative research analysis. This process included preparing collected data in the form of transcripts, notes, and journals; reading for big picture themes; coding the data using an approach allowing patterns to emerge through review of data; looking for themes within the data set; and preparing presentation of findings (pp. 193–195). The first cycle of data coding and analysis for the individual interviews was done through thematic analysis. Saldaña (2021) describes themes as "descriptions of behavior within a culture, iconic statements, and morals from participant stories"

(p. 258). The focus was on the content of the text—*what* was said more than *how* it was said (Riessman, 2008). The thematic approach was appropriate for finding themes across research participants and events relevant to the topic.

The use of structural analysis then shifted the focus on to the telling of the story, the *way* a story was told and the emotion behind it (Riessman, 2008). This approach required detailed examination into the language and syntax along with the body language, tone of voice, and expression of how the story or poem was expressed. Saldaña (2021) emphasizes the importance of emotion coding for research studies connected to identity and social relationships. This research study investigated sensitive and personal biographical experiences of BIPOC educators and thus, emotion coding was an appropriate mode of analysis.

A central tenet of narrative inquiry is keeping the integrity and continuity of the story together as much as possible, by not separating ideas out of context, characterized by Denzin (1989) by using thick block descriptions. Blocks of text that hold the thread of a theme were categorized to present the context, setting, and social relationships of the participant. Thus, in vivo, or verbatim coding laid the foundation for how the data was represented, ensuring the full scope of the story was captured and expressed, and honored using the participant's own words. Verbatim coding was utilized in order that the essence of the participant's experience was captured and communicated in the most authentic means for the study findings (Stringer, 1996). To ensure the accuracy of the findings, in vivo analysis, researcher reflexivity, and thick descriptions were used. Member checking in the form of feedback from participants on report findings was utilized.

Report of Findings

The words of the co-collaborators resonated and lingered long after the personal interviews were conducted. The connections and relationships between the co-collaborators and myself during the focus group sessions echoed as I read through transcripts and listened to their voices. The disconnect between academic scholarship and the transformative power within the lived experiences and collaboration with the participants inspired me to ensure that the research process was impactful and meaningful for the participants and represented in deep and significant ways. The transformation of qualitative data into found and data poems represent the findings in creative and expressive ways as to embody the data and communicate the findings in an emergent and authentic way (Saldaña, 2011).

The following chapter will present the findings using various forms of poetry. Included in the representation of the data are three different types of poems, the first being found poems created by using the words of the participants. These found poems were created by selecting the words from the participants and forming poems that are reflective of the educators' narratives (Prendergast, 2009; Shashwati et al., 2022). The process of selecting words and phrases takes place over several weeks and months in an "intuitive and reflexive … data distillation" that often "brings out the essence in participants' narratives in a concentrated fashion" (Shashwati et al., 2022, p. 1624). Shashwati et al. (2022) outline a five-step process in which the data is analyzed, significant "data nuggets" are pinpointed, the data is "scooped out," the weaving of the poem is created, and member checking ensues (p. 1624). Two forms of found poems, the first was from the individual interviews in which the co-collaborator's experiences were captured in found poems utilizing Shashwati et al. (2022) process. These poems were then sent to the educators to in a process of member-checking to ensure they represented the essence of their narratives

(Shashwati et al., 2022). The consent to publish form is found in Appendix H. The second type of found poems were created representing some of the experiences from the focus group sessions by using the check-in words used to warm the space of each workshop. The second form of poems presented in the findings are reflexive journal entries and reflective poems written by the researcher. For example, several poems were written directly after the focus group session capturing my synthesis and observation of each participant's engagement in the session. The third type of poems are the collaborators' poetry written in the focus group and in between sessions as important data.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Sisterhood

They opened and shared,
and witnessed their stories
of becoming.
Passionate educators
called to action.
We listened to each voice, each word, each feeling.
A sisterhood was nurtured, forged, and emerged
through a holding of space, of seeing one another
without having to hide.
Connections created and a circle was formed, a vessel for grappling with things of the past, and visions for the future.
Caring for ourselves and one another.

This chapter presents the findings of the study including the stories and lived experiences of BIPOC educators alongside the practice of writing poetry in a group as a generative tool. Poetic inquiry is utilized to present the findings from the interviews and focus group sessions not just through the cerebral intellectualization of their experiences, but found poems, reflective poems, and the collaborators' poems represent the full embodiment of their counter-stories and experiences. This chapter will present the participants, process of data analysis, and the research findings from the individual interviews and the poetry writing focus group sessions. A note on the spacing of poems. To keep the intended visualization of the poems, the spacing may vary depending on the vision of the writer. Some collaborator poems are formatted differently according to how they formatted their work. The visualization of a poem and break up of stanzas and lines are purposely formatted as ways of further communicating and emphasizing certain prose and thus each poem may be spaced and formatted differently to keep the integrity of the writer (Faulkner, 2017).

Participants

We are…

We come from places near and far, our ancestors span the globe
We are rooted in lands of hard soils, and some of sand
some close to the salty sea, and others at the foot of mountains.

Coming from a diverse array of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the co-collaborators of the study were educators who self-identified as a POC and responded to an email invitation to join the study. Seven teachers responded and agreed to participate in the individual interviews and all, but one educator participated in the group focus sessions. For the focus group session, I was both facilitator and participant as I also wrote and shared poetry with the group. Over the course of the research project, spanning September to December 2023, the participants engaged in an individual interview, and three focus group workshops including communication and engagement in between workshop sessions via WhatsApp.

The educators shared their intimate lived experiences both in the form of personal interviews and through a collaboratively created circle of sharing in the focus group sessions. The space was cultivated into a circle of knowing, understanding, openness, and vulnerability. Although several co-collaborators knew each other, the intimacy and trust in the circle of sharing was forged almost immediately after session 1. Each collaborator leaned in, listened, and shared parts of themselves, the vulnerability growing with each successive gathering. Poetic inquiry was utilized to more fully express and represent the findings of the research study, the lived experiences of BIPOC educators in independent schools and the use of poetry as a tool for community building and healing.

The co-collaborators represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds, years of teaching experience, and area of teaching as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Participants

Educator	Years Teaching	Race	Subject Level	Home Language
Educator 1	20+	Latina	Early Childhood	Spanish
Educator 2	10	Asian	Elementary School	Mandarin
Educator 3	5	Biracial	Early Childhood/Adult	English
Educator 4	20+	Black	Elementary School	English
Educator 5	5	Black	Elementary School	English
Educator 6	10+	Prefers not to disclose	Secondary School	English
Educator 7	8 years	Hong Konger with Chinese Ancestry	Elementary and Secondary School	English / Cantonese

Sitting across from each participant as a witness bearer to each of their life stories, I listened, deeply, as each of them painted a tapestry of their childhood educational experience, the treasured memories of who and what formed them as young children. Their experiences were filled with joy and pain, and of important teachers and family members. We then explored some of the pivotal moments in their lives including when and why they decided to pursue the endeavour to become educators and the experiences in teacher training; each journey was filled with moments of curiosity, learning, and pain. Finally, they spoke to their experiences working in an independent school environment.

Layered and complex feelings, experiences, and interactions were shared and explored. How they spoke, the expressiveness or hesitation, cadence in their voices along with the words and phrases they spoke painted vivid images of their lives. Their words, their feelings, their expressiveness were woven into poems and themes began to emerge. The use of poetics was

chosen to allow the reader to resonate and enter the world of another in a way other forms of data and narrative prose do not, an integral aspect to this research project (Neilsen & Knowles, 2008). Utilizing the participants' words, I created data and found poems during analysis and throughout the data collection period and wrote reflexive expressions after each interview and workshop session. The data included in this study includes found poems created from the words of the collaborators, reflexive poems and journal entries throughout the process, poems written and shared by the collaborators, a self-reflection written pre and post focus group session, and the engagement of a group WhatsApp chat.

Process of Data Analysis

Over the course of a four-month period between September and December 2023 I listened to stories, reflected, wrote analytic and expressive journals, and had the honor of coming together into community with most of the participants to share and write poetry. Six participants took part in the focus group sessions, the seventh joined the study after the workshops because of scheduling conflicts. After each interview and group workshop, I transcribed their stories, read their words, and reflected on the data in a simultaneous collection and analysis process. The analysis of data was guided by Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five-step process for qualitative analysis including (a) organization and preparation of all data materials, (b) reviewing the data for a general overview of meaning, (c) code data, in my case this was through thematic, emotion, and in vivo analysis, (d) explore emergent connections among the data, and (e) represent the findings that emerged through the data. The data analysis was assisted using Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis program. The program helped to store, organize, sort, and search for text while also being able to write analytic memos throughout the analysis process.

Each interview was conducted either in-person or via Zoom teleconferencing. Each session was audio recorded for transcription purposes. At the conclusion of each interview the recording was transcribed, scrubbed of personal and identifiable information including names, and inputted into the Dedoose software program. A reflexive journal was kept before and after each interview. I read through each transcript numerous times. The first reading included thematic coding and analytic note taking. In vivo analysis was simultaneously done to highlight key phrases and words verbatim from the participant. Upon completion of the first round of thematic and in vivo coding, I wrote data poems and analysis was run through the software. The second round of coding required the reading and re-reading of the transcripts and emotion coding to garner deeper insights into the lived experiences of the participants particularly related to their identities and social relationships both personally and in their professional careers (Saldaña, 2021).

The analysis of data for the focus groups were a hybrid of in-person and online audio recorded transcripts via Zoom teleconferencing. After each focus group session, I transcribed the data. I kept reflexive journals before and after each focus group session. An addition to data collection added after the proposal of the research study was the use of two written reflections with open-ended questions for the participants to fill out before the first focus group workshop and after the completion of the focus group workshop, found in Appendices D and G. These were added as a means of allowing the participants to produce written reflections on the experience of poetry writing. Data poems were generated from the workshops along with the poetry of the co-collaborators and are used as a primary means of representing the data.

Individual Interviews

"It's important that stories, we think are little, they're not little, they're actually huge moments, are shared." ~Educator 5

As I began to interview each educator, their stories resonated and reverberated within my soul for several days afterwards. Each collaborator's narrative and experiences were honored and cared for; each was a sacred story. I value their honesty, willingness to share, and vulnerability. Table 4.2 is a researcher's journal entry during data analysis.

Table 4.2

Researcher's Journal Entry November 4, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 11/4/23
As I read and reread the transcripts of each participant's interview I see threads of common experience - microaggressions, emotional pain, strength, resilience, community, the desire to belong and be valued. And yet each story is so unique, formed by their upbringing and own educational experiences. ***Each, unique individual*** ***Just wants to be seen*** ***And heard*** ***And valued*** ***Just as they are*** ***To belong*** ***To be trusted*** ***Not having to second guess*** ***Their worth*** ***From their struggles*** ***Strength arises*** ***Often forged in the fires of*** ***Familial expectation*** ***Struggle*** ***Resistance*** ***Trauma*** ***Yet they rise*** ***They forge on*** ***They struggle*** ***And smile*** ***And laugh*** ***With joy*** ***Everyday*** ***Anew*** ***Comfort in knowing they are not alone*** ***There is community*** ***They belong***

Our Roots—Childhood

Our stories are not a monolith. But rather complex and nuanced, representing a vast and diverse quilt of experiences stitched side by side. Each collaborator's story became part of a rich tapestry of intersecting and interweaving perspectives, cultures, values, and mores. There were overlapping experiences and themes that arose within the group of co-collaborators. The use of poetry is used as a means of illuminating the richness of each participant's unique experiences in their own words. The found poems used to represent the data were stitched together from the words of the educators. Some poems are collective representations, while others are individual stories. The poems presented in the following section represent data from the seven personal interviews.

Our Roots

I grew up with Barbie dolls
white Barbie dolls
I [was a]very happy childhood
I found my Black relatives through genealogy
I felt kind of out of place
My Grandmother had been passing as white
You don't look Black enough to be Black
Almost automatically I would just say, oh what I did wrong?
As a person of colour my freedom is yet to be free, it is always being gnawed at, taken, squashed, stepped on
Being a person of colour you learn young how racism can be expressed
It was just a community that I felt really carried us
My mom had to take good care of both me and my brother
My parents were moving from town to town
People have told me I don't belong
That's kind of painful because I truly do not belong anywhere
My pass ability
Very nurturing, very happy childhood
We always liked to climb trees, climb mountains, swim in the river in summer and try to catch bugs
Where we lived, it's a beautiful, beautiful place
Will and action seemed to be around us
Your parents just love you so much, but sometimes it just feels too heavy

~Collective Educators

Who am I? Identity Development

The diverse backgrounds of the participants spanned countries in Asia, the Americas, and the African diaspora, creating a rich tapestry of experience. The biography of each collaborator differed in myriad ways and yet similarities emerged regarding the development of their identities, especially their racial identity. Those that grew up in their ancestral countries were often in more homogenous settings and therefore, their awareness of their own racial identity differed from those who grew up on land that is now called North America. The culture, language, and traditions were part of the majority, so it wasn't until they came to Canada that they experienced their racial identity in relationship to others, and often in a negative way.

Is it Me?

I don't have this experience
related to race and racism
Only when I came to Canada
I've had a few situations where
I'm not sure if it's racism or
people just don't like
me…
or were unkind just to
me…
I can't discern if
it's because
I'm Chinese
~Educator 2

Pretending

Race was more obviously negative
when I got to Canada
I hung out with other People of Color
embracing my Asian-ness
I soon realized
we are not going to be heard.
So I tried my very best to
assimilate.
I pretended.

I avoided.
To keep
the facade
~Educator 7

For these educators, their racial identities in Canada are also closely tied to their English language skills. The language difference was perceived as a barrier, something that made, and still makes, them feel less then, both as young children and as adults.

ESL

They put me in ESL
I realized it meant
you're lesser
than folks
that didn't go to ESL
~Educator 7

Challenges

It was challenging,
because of the
language
Speaking English
is always my
shortcoming,
my biggest
challenge.
I'm not
brave enough
to speak
I didn't speak much
I was scared of
speaking
Afraid of
people's judgements
~Educator 2

The Language Jar

There was a foreign language jar
Like a swear jar
When you spoke
Not a Canadian language

You put a quarter in.
That made me shift
I better
Assimilate
~Educator 7

Their identity development was shaped in relation to themselves and their new environment, significantly impacting their sense of self. The need to fit in, to assimilate to the dominant culture, was strongly expressed and seemed to negatively impact their sense of self and their ability to be authentically themselves. They felt they needed to pretend or couldn't quite express themselves in fear of judgement of their culture, traditions, and spoken language.

Many educators who grew up in Canada or the United States navigated their racial identity in a different way beginning at an early age. For most of these educators, there was a greater awareness of their race, especially if they grew up in predominantly white environments. Some co-collaborators grew up surrounded by a strong community that shared their ethnic identity, while others grew up as minorities in predominantly white environments. Their racial identity played and continues to impact their evolving consciousness of who they are in relationship to others.

Childhood

I remember grandma and grandpa lived with us
Grandpa worked in the woodshop
he made things for us
a sandbox
swing
a little garden patch
fruiting trees
that's how I spent my days
Community, my family
really
carried us
~Educator 4

Passing

My grandmother had been
passing
as white
so my father didn't know he
was Black
She was threatened
from an early age
to never
tell
anyone
she was
half Black.
when I was young
I'd go to my parents
"am I Black?"
They said, "no, your grandmother is SPANISH,
You just look SPANISH."
People would say,
you don't look white
enough
You don't
look Black
enough
I didn't know about my race at all
~Educator 3

The development of a personal sense of self and social identities is navigated from early childhood through the adults, family, friends, media representation, and schooling environment and children learn "who is and who isn't important in society" (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020, p. 38). The experience of two educators that were surrounded by and affirmed in their racial identity by family and teachers who looked like them, were also strongly influenced by the media representation surrounding them in their formative years. Although they had role models and strong community ties that affirmed their racial identity, both were significantly inspired to become teachers because of the power of white representation in the books they read and media surrounding them.

Barbie

I grew up
with
white Barbie dolls
white baby dolls
it was the 90s
the boom of
globalization
so my biggest
inspirational teachers
was white
and blonde
despite the other teachers
that looked like me.
I thought she was
the peak
of beauty.
~Educator 1

Little Women

I always wanted to be a teacher
the biggest inspiration
was Jo
after reading
Little Women
her independence and care
I connected to that
~Educator 4

Both educators were strongly influenced by the images they were seeing around them. The books they read didn't often have protagonists that looked like them or came from similar backgrounds as was the case with Little Women. The influence of whiteness as the standard of beauty through globalization for Educator 1 made a strong impact on her such that although most of her teachers at school were of the same race, it was her white grade three teacher that sparked her aspirations to become a teacher and she did not grow up in North America.

The influence of representation through overt and covert messages we receive as children influence our construction of identity, closely linked also to our self-esteem and feeling of worth (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). The messages that children receive from their environment including who is affirmed and visible has significant impacts on whether they feel important, feel they belong, and impacts if they feel pride or shame about themselves and their families (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). The messages we receive in school environments is especially important to our development of self and are the first places educators learn what it means to be a teacher, from their childhood classrooms (Rios & Longoria, 2021).

Childhood Classrooms

Our Childhood Classrooms…

School, it was very strict
Was quite institutional and cold
Underpaid teachers
I almost failed first grade
My experience in school seems cold
My teachers saw me, but they could only see what they knew
I did not enjoy going to school
I couldn't find a connection
I don't learn in the regular way
I felt I was an outsider
I had a hard time with school
I felt kind of out of place
I was sort of on the outskirts
I was starting to question whether or not I was seen
There was no warmth
There was certainly bullying
There was something about that whole community aspect
Was a mostly African American school
We needed to have opportunities to do everything everyone else got to do
We were expected to do something for the community
They try to stuff you with knowledge
I've never had a teacher in school with the same cultural background
There was definitely a racist undertone to the bullying that I was not aware of at the time
They don't consider subjects like painting and music important
It was an aspirational education
I loved learning, but that doesn't mean that school was easy

The social dynamic was challenging
The teachers just taught you in the old way
The relationships were more than teaching
~ Collective Educators

The educational experiences of each collaborator were vastly different, ranging from five countries and three continents. Some educators were surrounded by role models and teachers like them, while others may have had one teacher in their entire educational experience of the same race.

Teachers Like Us

I've never had a teacher with the same cultural background
There was one Asian teacher
It was mostly an African American school
I had many African American teachers
Yes, I definitely had teachers who looked like me
No
I've never had a biracial teacher.
~Collective Educators

Having teachers of the same race can help in the cultivation of a strong sense of identity by seeing yourself reflected and affirmed (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2021; Style, 1988). The scholarship investigating the relationship between BITOC and BISOC suggests that classroom environments are supportive, welcoming, and affirming often due to having experiences that did not invite and acknowledge their cultural identities (Gaytan, 2021; Gershenson et al., 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Having a teacher of Color does not guarantee this, as was the case with one educator. The educators had experiences of racialized bullying and othering in their childhood classrooms. When such othering is not seen or addressed by adults then it can result in the internalization that they themselves are to be blamed as was the case with the collaborators.

Am I Seen?

I liked school
I valued education
it was positive
but that doesn't mean
it was easy.
The social
was challenging.
There was
bullying
a racist
undertone to
bullying
when you're the
only brown girl -
you think it's you
I was smaller
and just
the hair on my body
was something they didn't have
that's what
othering looks like
I had great relationships with my teachers
I know I was loved
and with time and space
I started to question
whether or not I was seen
But if I didn't see myself…
~Educator 6

No One Saw

There was one Asian teacher
She was the only one
My home room teacher
But she didn't see me
I was bullied
Because of my size
In Asian culture
When you are big
Physically
You are invisible.
I got picked on.
Nobody knew.

I got in trouble when I finally fought back
No one saw the pain.
~Educator 7

Belonging

In junior high
it was a white girl
who told all the Black kids I was white
and all the white kids
I was Black
nobody spoke to me
for a long time
they didn't speak to me
People have told me I don't belong
~Educator 3

Subtly

being a Person of Colour
you learn young
how racism can be expressed
in a different way
~Educator 5

These classroom experiences were formative experiences for the educators, salient memories of their childhood classrooms. Their educational experiences shaped their idea of not only themselves but also what teachers could and should be attentive to. Our classroom experiences are the blueprint for what we think teachers and schooling should be (Rios & Longoria, 2021). The 12 years of schooling the co-collaborators experienced were seminal influences in their desire to become educators. For many co-collaborators their own schooling experience was not positive. Their education left them wanting more, wanting something different. Their painful experiences in school became the inspiration and motivation to become teachers so other students didn't have to have the same experiences that they had.

Becoming—Motivations to Teach

The desire to become educators was often a desire that began from a young age, something they always knew they wanted to become. This internal knowing or calling developed into a deep sense of vocation and purpose as they grew up. For most collaborators, they knew from a young age that they wanted to teach, there was a natural inclination.

Becoming…

I always played school
I always wanted to be a teacher
I really really love children
I naturally love children
I always wanted to be one,
I wanted to become a teacher,
always.
I came from a family of educators
I was 5 but I knew
I wanted to change my life, my career
I wanted to change things
I wanted to become a teacher
~Collective Educators

The motivation to become educators was also intertwined with powerful yearnings to be agents of change. The change they sought to see in education was often motivated by a desire to give students a different experience than they had as students or to become a part of the change they experienced in their education. Both motivations were also a significant reason why they sought a different or alternative educational pedagogy in an independent school.

Agents of Change

I Wanted Something Different

The experiences of the educators varied. There were certainly positive experiences that each of them experienced, but for many of the educators, their childhood classrooms were not ideal. For some, their learning environment was described as cold, or for those who learn in

different ways, that was not always acknowledged. For some the environment was too academic and they longed to be part of something different. These experiences became important motivating factors for many to become educators and create a schooling experience they longed for in their childhood.

Ranking

The teachers taught you in the old way
Try to stuff you with knowledge
It was getting heavier and heavier
There was massive pressure.
Four big exams each year
Your grades were disclosed
Everyone will know
your ranking
the teachers will rank you
and everyone will see
It's horrible for me
Whatever you do
how hard you work
you couldn't get higher
because people all around you were working so hard
Those who are in front
they are so smarter,
it's hard to get past them.
~Educator 2

Cold

I really did not enjoy going to school
I learn in a different way
It was rigid and authoritative
It's not that I wasn't smart enough
I didn't put any effort
I went to five different schools
Moving from town to town
I couldn't find my roots
I felt like an outsider
I was always on the outskirts
There was no warmth
I was counting the days to finish

I couldn't make a connection
It was very hard
~Educator 1

School

School was very strict
I have a learning disability
that was discovered in my thirties,
I had a hard time with school
I struggled with learning.
I stayed up late doing my homework.
~Educator 3

Fear

I was born in a colonial city
It was colonized
I went to an English speaking school
We had English names
English and Cantonese
Both of them
my mother tongue
Because
I had no choice
I switch back and forth
But a lot of my culture
Our ancestors culture
Were erased
Dismissed
I was at a Catholic school
We would pray
And I'm like
Who am I praying to?
Schooling was very scary for me
I didn't do well
I just got lost
I was fearful
Teachers were angry
There were nuns
We had to wear uniforms
It was top down
Authoritative figures at the front
You listen
You do what they tell you
I remember rulers were used for punishment

I did not like school
We go to school
Every other Saturday
After school we always have tutoring
Because we need to be up to par
Back then
If it's an English school
It's seen as better
I've experienced a lot of colonized education systems
Pressure
To be highly academic
~Educator 7

A Different Education…

An education that has the potential
for societal shifting
the blend
of academic elements
and artistic mixing
so other people
won't have to go through
the harsh
forcing
educational experience
that I went through
~Educator 3

Joy

I wanted to become a teacher
because my experience was so
poor
grim
cold
I wanted to change things
I love children
I wanted to bring joy
The warmth I didn't get as a child
I want to belong
we all have those kind of feelings
~Educator 1

For some of these educators their education was academically focused with a strong emphasis and pressure on grades and ranking. For others, it was a feeling of authoritativeness or

lack of warmth and care mixed with fear. Their educational experiences became significant motivations to pursue a different kind of education, one they didn't receive themselves, a similar experience to motivations for BITOC in mainstream schools (Gaytan, 2021; Kholi, 2021).

Something Different

I learn differently
I struggled with learning
        The teachers just taught you in the old way
I don't learn in the regular way
My experience was so poor
 I was fearful
I wanted to change things
I wanted to change my life, my career
        I wanted to become a teacher
                I wanted to be a change agent
                                ~Collective Educators

Agents of Change—Inspired by My Education

For other educators, their educational experiences became the motivation for wanting to be a part of an educational system like the one they had in their childhood. There was something they experienced that they wanted to carry on, to be a part of. Their educational experience was an inspiration to their teaching.

Aspirational Education

Mostly an African American school
        and many African American teachers
I developed wonderful relationships
with my teachers.
It was the 60s
there was anxiety around social and political issues
        will and action
        seemed to be around us
it was a community that carried us
people
        asserting their rights
that we need to have opportunities
to do what everyone else got to do

Vanguard women
had this mission…
an emphasis on excellence
and striving
it was aspirational education
and a little bit abolitionist
We were expected to do something
for the community
~Educator 4

More than Teaching

It was a good feeling
I wanted to be part of the work that was happening
it felt right.
What the teachers do was more than teach
I was still coming back in
and doing things
The relationships were important
collaborative teaching was important
the feeling there was a point
it wasn't just checking a box
~Educator 6

Their own educational experiences were central motivators to becoming educators as change makers to be part of an educational experience that differed from what they experienced or inspired by the type of education and environment they had growing up. The longing to be an educator was strongly influenced by their desire to be agents of change, by creating learning environments that welcome the whole student.

Challenges to Becoming

For most of the educators, the path to becoming a teacher was one that was not always an easy path. There was resistance and struggle and yet, still they persevered. These educators' stories of resilience and determination show the depth and strength of their calling to pursue the path of becoming educators.

Going Against the Grain

I don't want to do
other programs
my mom persuaded me
to go to accounting school.
so I gave up.
I was an accountant
for seven years
but
it's not from
my heart
I want to change my career
I know
my parents won't agree
to go back to get some education
so I did it
…sneakily
your parents love you so much
but sometimes
it's just
too heavy
when my parents found out
they were furious
disappointed
angry
I don't want to
hurt their feelings
but
I wanted to change my life
my career
So I came to Canada to study
I had my baby with me
it was hard.
but
I wanted to be
a teacher.
~Educator 2

Despite family expectations and pressures, Educator 2 quit her well established and secure career as an accountant and came to school in Canada to pursue a career as a teacher. Despite feeling she was not "strong enough," her story shows her perseverance and drive to pursue

something that felt right, felt like a calling. Following her heart meant immigrating to a new country and navigating a new language and culture, all with a young child.

Becoming

I always wanted
to be a teacher.
I always
played school
always tutored
I was an
intellectual soul
wanting to be a
teacher
my parents
and family who worked in public schools
my mom was a secretary
father a vocational teacher
uncle was a principal
aunt was a teacher
said do not go into teaching
do something else
cause the bureaucracy
didn't serve anybody
the kids weren't being served
I became a mental health social worker
in a mental health place
but saw…
you gotta get to folks earlier
than aging out of the system
I won a scholarship
writing an essay
"becoming a teacher"
an essay
that I wanted to be
a change agent
to work with people
developmentally.
you had to make school more
experiential
develop relationships
through the arts
so I went to Waldorf teacher training
~Educator 4

The drive and passion to be an agent of change as an educator despite some resistance from family was a strong driving force in finding an alternative education for Educator 4. She had a vision for schooling that meet the students through experiential learning, relationships, and the arts.

For each of the educators, a strong internal drive and desire to becomes educators for change motivated them to pursue a career in education despite resistance and setbacks. The next step in their journey was a pre-service teacher education program. The programs varied from university programs to independent programs.

Teaching Training—Do I Belong Here?

All the educators completed or are in the process of completing their teaching certification. The pre-service teacher education programs the co-collaborators were enrolled in were either university programs, an independent teaching certification program focused on a specific educational pedagogy, or both. All the educators sought something different from what mainstream education was offering so although many went through a university educational program, all the co-collaborators but one matriculated from an independent teacher training institute focused on a specific educational pedagogy.

Textures of Teacher Training

Because of the arts *and* the intellectual, I was more engaged
There many wise people
We were spinning, we were listening to stories, we were singing
The aspirational stuff was really there

I don't think I had any folks of colour
I was the only Latina
They're all white, older women and men
There's no diversity in our teachers
There were no faculty members of colour
They're trying to promote their school as diverse but what they teach is not

There were so many moments of shame
The white archetypes…
We were instructed to make white dolls
Are they debunking all of those damaging myths
There were triggering things and damaging things that were discussed
It was very painful
that tone of dismissal, it was horrible
Well before I was halfway through I already had no intention of teaching
The training was so spiritually taxing to my soul,
I was exhausted
The best gift that training center gave me, they gave me the fight to push them away

Topics of equity and inclusion and social justice and diversity were integrated into the program rather than an appendage that was tacked on as an afterthought
This sense that you are known, yeah that you are seen
It's a powerfully affirming experience
I wish others had that experience
~Collective Educators

The experience in their teacher training programs varied greatly depending on when and from which institution they graduated. All the educators sought out an alternative form of teaching and education and therefore their training institutions offered many of them inspiration for what schooling can be; however, there were also tones and subtle backdrops of white-centering and racism. For most educators, the experience came with an absence of teachers of Color both as teacher candidates and facilitators. The dissonance between finding an educational pedagogy that inspired them for some was also counterbalanced with white-centered curriculum and harmful and painful experiences of racism. For others, the depth and joy of the pedagogy they were absorbing allowed them to look past the white-centered practices and attitudes. For one educator, their experience was one of validation, affirmation, and integration, hope for what teacher training institutes can be.

Marketing Without the Color

Several educators commented on the conflict between what the program they attended was advertising—as a diverse and inclusive program and their experiences of being in the program.

Although flyers and marketing material showcased many people of Color, the educators commented on being one of a few or the only people of Color in their training programs. Furthermore, these same educators did not have a single person of Color represented in the faculty of the program.

Target

The flyers show all diverse people
it's actually a target
to be chosen to be presented
on the flyer
That is *not* an honor
They're trying to promote their school
as diverse…
but what they teach
who they are
is not.
They're sabotaging
the whole integrity
~Educator 5

Deceiving

The flyer
shows Brown folks
and yet
there's no diversity.
it's deceiving
Are they debunking damaging myths
Or hiding it
because of marketing
~Educator 1

The Only One

I was the only Latina
I was the only Person of Color
I was the only Chinese person in the program
I was the only one
I was the only one
I was the only visible minority

There were no teachers or students
the same race as me.
And the facilitators
were all white, older women and men
~Collective Educators

White Centering Practices

Not only did the marketing feel performative and disingenuous because there was a lack of racial diversity in both the student body and teaching faculty, but also because of the Eurocentric methods and curriculum being taught as the standardized norm at most of the teacher training institutions attended by the educators.

Undertones

The undertones are not blatant
they are not always clear because
they'd get in trouble
but it is clearly a mood of racism
that is clear.
The environment
is not inclusive
it's eurocentric.
~Educator 5

White Dolls

The white archetypes
The colonial messages
We had to make white dolls
It was the "right" thing to do
So we decided to make our dolls
with Brown skin
it brought conflict.
we were very upset
~Educator 1

Storytelling

It was so hard.
The pedagogical elements in storytelling
is you memorize
it lives in the teacher

so you can deliver it
but it needs to live
in the teacher
you create a home environment in your soul
that it can live in
through something you
identify with
it's hard to share with children
if you can't identify
you have to meditate on the story

It has blonde flowing hair to the ground
it's not kinky.
I've never heard a fairy tale during my training where the hair is kinky.
There's always a *certain* skin color

~Educator 5

Angels

I'm an atheist
The Christian language
when we talk about angels
and archangels
those religious images
triggers me
because I've seen so much abuse of the church
where I'm from.
It was triggering for many people
~Educator 1

The various experiences of Eurocentric, white centered pedagogy in many teacher training programs attended by the educators were not encouraging teaching practices that were inclusive nor consciously examining the default to whiteness in the curriculum they were teaching. The unquestioned perpetuation of whiteness was an arresting and triggering experience for some educators despite seeking an educational philosophy that resonated with their ideals for schooling.

Art Centered Pedagogy

For some educators, their teacher training program was a mostly positive experience. The resonance with the educational pedagogy, a way of schooling that resonated with their ideals and

values, perhaps allowed them to overlook the lack of diversity and white centering. The emphasis on the arts seemed to be an overarching connector for many educators. The integration of the arts was an integral aspect to their experience and resonance with the educational philosophy.

Arts

It was a good experience
I saw my artistic side
things I didn't do for a long time
but it was very challenging
because of the language
Speaking English is always
my shortcoming
I'm not brave enough
to speak in front of people
I'm afraid of judgements
~Educator 2

This Education Felt Right

The artistic element
and blend with the academic
felt right
so it's deeper
the potential
to bring back
connected thinking
connected community
That's what keeps me going.
I met inspiring teachers
In my regular schooling I had few people like that
~Educator 3

Creating

I was drop spinning
then knitting
listening to stories
singing
playing lyres
Painting wet on wet
coloured painting
just creating.
We did human development stuff
I was totally open to the world

The spiritual
The artistic
The educational
Nourished me deeply
~Educator 4

Despite the white centering curriculum and practices, most of the educators were able to persevere based on a strong belief in the artistic and integrated aspects of the educational pedagogy. The resonance with alternative educational pedagogy and a different way of schooling gave them hope, inspiration, and motivation to keep going.

The Outlier in Teacher Training

For one participant, an outlier in the group, their teacher training experience differed from the others in that the teacher education program they attended was designed by people of Color intentionally addressing and centering equity and inclusion work. This program had a tremendous impact on the educator.

Seen

Other programs told me
in a number of different ways
no.
You're not it.
I didn't have enough experience.
I should consider a different career.
They didn't even know me.
It was important
that the teacher training program was for now
and the future
Where topics of equity
inclusion
social justice
diversity
were integrated
not an appendage
not tacked on
as afterthought
had to be integral
which was evident in the one I chose

It is an overwhelmingly
positive experience.
The sense that
    You are known.
    You are seen.
Colleagues and faculty of Color
run the program.
There's conscious effort.
It's a powerfully affirming experience
It's making me a better person
and therefore a better teacher
I wish everyone had that experience
    cause I know that is not the case.
~Educator 6

This educator's experience was an outlier in the group. The pre-service program they are currently in stands in direct opposition to other educators' experiences of belonging and validation they experienced in their teacher education programs. This experience stood out in many ways and in direct opposition to the educators that felt triggered, pained, crushed, and burdened by their pre-service programs whereas this educator felt affirmed, seen, and valued. The impact this will have on this educator's teaching in the classroom and their student's experiences would be a worthy study of future investigation.

Educator 7 had a different but also validating experience in their teacher preparation program when taking an ESL course. This was the one and only course that reflected their personal experience but was an outstanding memory and experience.

Chin-Glish

In teacher training
The ESL course
Spoke to me
I wrote about my education growing up, but
in Chin-Glish.
I felt
Validation
For the first time
Of my actual experience

It gave me motivation
I need to keep doing it
I just need a door
It was hard to find a door
A permanent position
~Educator 7

The affirmation felt by this one teacher education course, was the first time their own experiences as a student were validated and acknowledged. The recognition and feeling of being seen for both educators served as significant and important motivations and inspirations to become educators. Unfortunately, this is not the experience for most BIPOC teacher candidates (Gaytan, 2021; Kholi, 2021) and was also not the case for some BITOC in this study.

The Pain of Not Being Seen

Congruent with the scholarship investigating BIPOC experiences in teacher training programs is one of isolation, not belonging, microaggressions, and not being seen (Endo, 2022; Kholi, 2021; Picower & Kholi, 2017). The experience of shame and white centering was unfortunately experienced by some educators in this study. The feeling of not being able to be themselves, of not belonging, and feeling like outsiders was an incredibly painful experience.

Shame

There were so many moments of shame
Moments
to do with character, honor, respect
That's shame
I've had to put it out of my subconscious
because it would actually cause illness
The ignorance and downright racism
I can't call it anything else because that is what it is.
~Educator 5

Speaking

I feel
I was not very
open
I didn't speak

I didn't speak much
I was scared of speaking
because of my English
~Educator 2

Triggered

There were moments of
feeling triggered
confused
attacked
~Educator 1

Although there were aspects to the training program that resonated with their aims for education, the experiences of shame, feeling triggered by content and teaching methods, and the feeling of being an outsider were significant and long-lasting impressions for these educators. The impact of experiencing such feelings throughout their pre-service training and into their school environments has detrimental effects on BIPOC mental and physical health (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

The Cost—The Mental Toll

The mental toll on BIPOC is one that is often overlooked or unseen. Kohli (2021) emphasizes the impact large and small acts of racism can have on the soul of BIPOC. The accumulation of assaults and insults, overt and covert, small and large build and begin to callus, especially when one has had experiences woven into their everyday lives from a young age. Educator 5 speaks to this callusing of the soul.

Exhaustion

The training
was so spiritually taxing
to my soul
I was exhausted
People would love to say
it has nothing to do with color

But it always does
Don't tell me it's not racial
~Educator 5

The experience of racism was so "taxing" that before finishing the program, the educator decided they would not become a teacher. Luckily, their qualities were recognized by a school's administration and offered them a position in their school.

Pain

After the painful experience
at teacher training
I had no intention to teach
My demeanor was burdened,
crushed
~Educator 5

Resistance

When met with resistance
It's painful,
I feel very stressed
I feel very vulnerable.
When you get hate taken to you
It's painful.
~Educator 3

There is a mental toll that some of the educators carry within, in addition to their teaching responsibilities and job-related stress factors. And yet, as Educator 3 said, "It's out of the pain that I've experienced around these issues, I have to do it for my own healing." Despite the pain and exhaustion, they persevere and continue to teach. Consistent with the literature suggesting that BIPOC are often drawn to educational systems with specific missions and goals (Carver-Thomas, 2018), these BITOC chose specific independent/private schools because of the educational pedagogy, in hopes of being a part of different types of school environments. However, being in a school environment is not always easy regardless of congruence with the philosophical underpinnings of their independent school. Some experiences of not belonging and

white-centering practices from teacher training were also experienced in their schooling environments.

In the Classroom

Our Classrooms

It hurts more, it's more painful
I can't ever be fully authentic
I don't want to waste time pretending
to be someone else
I knew I'd be surrounded by and have
a Black community
I couldn't teacher at any other school
There is something so ingrained
I was a bit isolated and overworked
I see racism
I have too many worries
I don't say things properly
I doubt myself
I'm still invisible
It takes a long time to trust
~Collective Educators

The diverse working experiences varied within the group of educators. However, there were some shared experiences of overt racism and microaggressions, ingrained systems of white supremacy. The exhaustion and mental toll were an added burden to the stresses of teaching.

Systems

We're working hard
but there was something so ingrained
Even though the supervisor
was constantly encouraging us
there was a whole systematic thing
~Educator 1

Call It What It Is

People love to polish it over
say
oh a misunderstanding of
this and that
whatever…

rest assure
if it was another teacher…
I find it hard
to call it anything other
than
racism.
Words are filled
with how a person views you,
your skin color,
your culture,
your history
and it negates what you can offer
because you shut down.
~Educator 5

Not Quite There

There is more diversity
but I feel
uncomfortable
not openness
to diversity in other ways but racially
At first I felt out of place
I was a little lost
I was isolated
in the classroom
from the whole school body
I feel isolated and overworked
I see racism
I was frustrated
So even in a school working so hard to bring DEIJ
you still see that
~Educator 1

Unknown

I'm a qualified teacher.
She sees me as a nanny.
They bypass me
There's no hello
I'm not identified.
The teacher has set this tone.
I heard with my own ears
The teacher said
I'm the help
~Educator 5

The existence of systems, policies, and cultures embedded with racism have been documented through the experiences of public school BITOC (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Some of the educators in this research study also must navigate such climates in their professional settings as exhibited by their stories. The impact of such harmful and sometimes daily experiences of racial microaggressions defined by Kholi (2021) as "small but significant, everyday racial assaults" (p. 12) slowly chips away at you. These experiences further add to the stress of teaching while also isolating BITOC. The emotional toll can be overwhelming and exhausting when your sense of simply being is questioned and/or devalued every day.

The Painful Impact

The backlash, resistance, and microaggressions felt by colleagues and sometimes the greater school community is painful and exhausting in any setting. The pain seems to be further exacerbated in independent schools because there is a feeling that everyone is there with similar intentions and visions for a deeper purpose for education, so when microaggressions or resistance happens, it is more painful.

Fragility

I was coordinator for teachers
and we can't talk because it's racist to have an affinity group.
They didn't want a diversity committee
and they were trying to take it down.
Things like that,
it's painful.
They don't want to hear.
Fragility is a real thing
~Educator 3

It Cuts Deep

It's always painful.
Particularly in a group of people
who are more than colleagues.
And a group
devoted to

an enlightened path.
When you
encounter
stumbling
related to
identity,
inclusion,
it hurts
more.
Like finding out your parents have flaws
Or anybody you respect.
It's further to fall…
So that
resistance
when you feel like you are working
in the same direction
yeah,
it hurts more.
It's more painful
than someone yelling
a derogatory slur at you down the street.
It cuts
deep
when it happens
it's overwhelming…
~Educator 6

Meeting Resistance

I feel
stressed,
vulnerable.
When I come up against someone
who's not hearing the message.
It's painful.
You keep trying
but people don't want to talk about it.

It takes a little of you
each time.
~Educator 3

Burn Out

Schools don't care about burn out.

A lot of teachers are struggling.
But
We power through
~Educator 7

The pain of feeling isolated, not seen, or unheard is particularly painful for these independent/private school educators because of the alignment of their values and belief in the schooling system. A part of the exhaustion and pain can also be connected to the feeling of not belonging in their school environment.

Authenticity—Can I Bring my Whole Self?

The question of identity and the ability to authentically bring their whole selves into their work was a common experience for these BIPOC educators. For many BIPOC, cultural identity plays a central role in the lives, values, and identities (Kholi, 2022; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

Where Do I Belong?

My mother was white
I got all kinds of white privilege,
so I'm conscious of that.
People have told me I don't belong
I'm too white
I'm not defensive
It's painful
I truly do not belong
anywhere
I accept that
~Educator 3

Comfort

The first year was tough..
facing the children
I was not confident
I felt
Helpless.
I didn't know what to do
It was hard.
I didn't talk,
connect
with other colleagues

I didn't talk to anyone else except my teaching partner
I didn't feel comfortable
Because of my English
Because of the differences in Western culture
Because of the difference in school culture
~Educator 2

Me

I can't ever be fully authentic
I've never
Explored my gender when I was young.
I knew it all along
But I finally accepted
I'm queer
I was avoiding it all my life
I didn't want to explain…
It is difficult
in a traditional family.
After the health scare
I don't want to waste time
Pretending
To be
Someone else
I try to be authentic
In spaces that are safe
I got backlash
In groups of parents
In previous jobs.
I was fired
For being non-binary
I went in thinking
I will be authentic
I was naïve
I've been hurt a lot by it.
~Educator 7

Doubt

No
I don't feel comfortable
I can't 100 percent
be my authentic self
I doubt myself
if how I'm reacting to the children
is correct.

I seldom speak in meetings.
It's hard
I'm worried
        I have too many worries
        I won't say things properly
or clearly express myself
so I just won't
                say it.
                ~Educator 2

Time

It's not there isn't the possibility…
But it takes more time.
I mean don't forget I'm a person of Color,
        So that takes a long time
especially when it started at birth.
Trust
                takes time.
                ~Educator 5

Weaving Teacher and Cultural Identities

On the contrary, two educators chose specific schools to work in because they knew they *would* have community and belonging. Both educators consciously chose this schools as the *only* school they would work at for this reason. The ability to be their authentic selves is why they feel belonging and community, that they are accepted for who they are.

Community

I can be
my authentic self.
        It's grown more
as the years went on,
        but that self has evolved
through the years.
There is a community
        I knew I'd always be surrounded
                by and have a Black community
I couldn't teach at any other school.
At our school

I can be
my
authentic
self
~Educator 4

You Matter

I can be my authentic self
It's years of more than colleague
Relationships.
Getting together
as people
My voices was
Respected,
it mattered.
Voices matter
Truth matters
I've been told over
and over again
you're good enough
what you say matters
what you do
matters
~Educator 6

These two educators feel seen and affirmed by their school communities. Their voices matter, they are respected for who they are, they are enough. The validation and affirmation these educators feel strongly impacts their thriving in their school environments. The sense of belonging and ability to authentically bring their whole selves contributes to their sense of purpose and flourishing in their schools.

Our Dreams of Education

The drive and inspiration to be educators despite resistance, challenges, and opposition is rooted in the aspirational vision and connection each educator has to teaching. The desire to create schooling experiences that have a meaningful impact on students is an integral aspect of what continues to inspire, motivate, and energize them despite challenges and barriers.

Inspirations…

The ideal of education.
I come for the people
A community,
support
I have been told over and over again, you're enough
The arts and the intellectual
The relationships
Voices matter, the truth matters
It never feels like doing the right thing is going to be knocked down by resistance
I feel like I can be my authentic self
The children
My children
I have people
I have to do it for my own healing
I've never been alone here
It feels right
What you say matters, what you do matters
Having someone to talk to
Connection,
I belong
More than teaching
Knowing that actually you are not ever alone
Feeling more connected
The sense of belonging
The warmth I didn't get as a child
This is a contemplative path of education for teachers
To feel that I am part of the school in a proper way
This whole opening to BIPOC, I'm just totally inspired
We are cultivating freedom
We really do our best to see people where they are
~Collective Educators

Presented here are the dreams of the educators for the possibilities of what their independent schools can be. It must be noted that woven into these dreams and visions of education, are many of the qualities these educators sought in alternative educational pedagogy. For many of these educators, the ability to persevere and continue each day is grounded in these aspirations for education. These dreams and visions are essential ingredients in their independent schools, as important aspects that motivate them to keep going, a greater purpose.

Education for the Future

We need creative thinkers
People who can think
For themselves
Using their voices
We need critical thinkers
Rubrics and scales
        Just pass or fail, nah.
We need teachers
Who are motivated
To go above and beyond
Education needs a new way
What is happening around the world
Rather than
What happened in the past
Education is supposed to
Enrich minds
They must hear the truth
Voices they haven't heard
                ~Educator 7

Contemplative…Education

This is a contemplative path
of education
        for teachers
We keep the human being
                in front of us
There is a community aspect
Aspirational
we think in terms of decolonizing
                ~Educator 4

Not Neutral

People think
Grace and humility is to be
                Neutral
What we need now
Is liberation education
Not trying to stay neutral
                ~Educator 7

The Potential in Education

It's deeper,
The potential
to bring back
connected thinking
connected community
That's what keeps me going.
The potential
for societal shifting
~Educator 3

The Need for Discomfort

There are so many teachers
Afraid of being
Wrong.
Or risk getting into trouble.
They stay still.
To be a good teacher or human being
You have to have a beginners mindset
learning is…ongoing
To actually dive in
sit with discomfort.
Teachers don't have
the opportunities
They are swamped
With the day to day
They don't have time
To reflect
They replicate
What other teachers do
~Educator 7

Warmth

I was considering changing careers
then I found this educational pedagogy.
It was beautiful,
dreamy.
I'm like, this is what I want to be.
An experience of
coherent
cohesive
warmth
The ideal of education

I wanted to change things
bring a change
to education
~Educator 1

Integrated Education

The artistic elements
the blend with academic elements
I see society
and wish for
a longing
to bring the
head
hands
and hearts together
to not be so
cut off.
Closer to nature
Closer to community
Closer to not separating
Movement
Connecting to things
rhythm
human being
relationships
Between human beings
~Educator 3

Freedom

Education
Can change children's lives
Can change a child's life
The architecture of the human being
can transform into
flexibility
Understand the child
How they can transform
New thinking
through the will
through the heart
freedom
cultivating freedom
in the children
every day
through math
through gardening

moral development.
as a person of colour
my freedom is yet
to be free
it is always
being
taken
squashed
stepped on
I don't want that for
the future
cultivating freedom
in the child
is
top of the list
~Educator 5

Togetherness

Relationships,
More than teaching.
Conversations
With developing minds
Stretching into the world
Teaching.
not just teaching
there is more to it
Relationships.
Collaborative teaching.
it's not just checking a box
A feeling.
Equity.
Social justice.
Inclusion.
More than teacher-student relationships
More than colleague relationships
Relationship to be seen and loved
~Educator 6

The dreams and inspirations education and the future include integration of the human being, freedom of the human being, warmth, love, to be seen, justice—centering the human being. To create these schools these educators are integral and amidst the pain, resistance, and struggle,

each of them continues to strive each day to make these dreams a reality. How can we thrive and not just survive to continue to create these school environments of our dreams?

How We Thrive

For such dreams of education to become a reality, BITOC must flourish, all teachers must flourish. The educators in this project spoke of the various elements that inspire and help them thrive amidst pain, amidst exhaustion, amidst resistance. Belonging through community was a powerful thread that wove through and connected each educator's story. A community can be as small as one person or a group of individuals in an affinity group. Community and belonging comes in many forms.

Belonging and Community

Thriving

Community
I come for the people.
You're enough.
We're creating
The arts
The relationships
I can be my authentic self
I have people
Healing.
The children
My children
What you say matters,
What you do matters
Connection.
Someone to talk to
I belong.
You are not alone
Feeling connected
Self-care.
To feel I'm part of the school

~Collective Educators

The ability to thrive and flourish for each educator was based in a sense of belonging, of being seen, and feeling valued. Even if their community was made of a single person, having one lifeline, one person they can be themselves with and find support and comfort with was incredibly powerful. The sense of belonging and welcome that comes from feeling seen and a part of the larger school community was also integral to their flourishing and perseverance.

Affinity Groups

Being a part of a specialized group such as a BIPOC affinity group where participation in the group requires that you identify as a POC educator was an important support system for many educators. Belonging to such communities are vital spaces for connecting, understanding, and support. The connections formed through such communities are significant support systems for several of the educators, contributing to their rejuvenation and continued striving.

Inspiration

Relationships.
Good friends
Good people
The BIPOC affinity group
It's been a long time
        to get folks together
Now there's conversation.
Recognition of BIPOC.
There's an opening.
I'm inspired.
                ~Educator 4

You are Not Alone

The BIPOC affinity space.
There are so many
        who feel like
                they don't have anybody
That hears them
                That sees them.

There are a number that are
the only.
so to be a part of a space
that gives people
community
is important.
~Educator 6

The feeling of belonging, of being seen, in simple yet profound ways has been transformative for many, to feel they can speak with others who may be experiencing similar things at their schools and simply knowing they are not alone. This form of support and community seemed particularly impactful for BITOC who share an understanding of the struggles in their school environment and serve as a space of belonging, acceptance, empowerment, and fortitude.

Community within the School

The feeling of community, affirmation, and belonging is not only found in affinity groups but in larger school gatherings of faculty, through genuine colleagueship and authentic relationships.

I Belong

I feel supported
When I interact
with other teachers
other people in the school.
Being more connected…
that changed entirely
the sense of belonging
that I was lacking.
Having somebody to talk to
I don't have anybody.
Have a connection with somebody
to inspire me
a deeper connection
would inspire me.
help me feel
that I am part of the school,

that I'm faculty.
The in-house conferences really inspires me.
I feel
I'm part
of the whole school
~Educator 1

Reaching Out

I feel more comfortable,
not very comfortable
but more comfortable
to reach out to people.
I need people for support
to talk about teaching
and the children
~Educator 2

It's the People

People inspire me.
Colleagues doing interesting things
I love being around
people.
I know I'm in the right place
Even on my worst days
I want to go to school
Being supported
knowing you are actually
never alone.
Feeling overwhelming support
~Educator 6

Community

I didn't feel supported before
I do now.
Through that workshop
I felt camaraderie,
Support,
Community.
I felt community
of fellow teachers
administrators
the whole body of the school
I felt a consciousness

towards
including me
in the classroom
even hearing my name,
such an important thing
you're identified
with your name.
it's meaningful
just to hear it spoken.
~Educator 5

I'm Not Alone

I know I'm not the only one in my school
I'm lucky
that I've never
been alone.
We've had the right people
in leadership roles
allies
who can take action
I know there are so many people
who feel they don't have
anybody
who hears them
there are a lot
who are the only
~Educator 6

The feeling of belonging is simple and complex. Belonging to these educators could mean having just one person to reach out to for support and feeling a part of the whole school community. The feeling of endeavouring together, as a community of teachers in a private school with a particular school mission, also created a longing for and sense of school community that was very important to all the educators. The community of the school also meant feeling support and alignment with the leadership in the school.

Inspiration—The Students

Another form of thriving and inspiration for all the educators is the children, the students in front of them. The love of children and working with students is the foundation from which each educator continues to rise to the challenges presented every day.

The Children

I trust the children.
The children I receive.
There's just
nothing
else.
~Educator 5

Inspiration

My children.
I was all about being
the model minority
I don't want them to go through that.
I'm trying to make changes.
In the smallest ways
So they can be
More authentic
To themselves
~Educator 7

Institutional Support

Structural support from the school and school leadership are also important components of thriving, belonging, and feeling seen. This can come in the form of support in the classroom and feeling valued and appreciated by colleagues. Practically, school leadership can show their support of the teachers by providing basic things such as a budget and supplies.

Structural Support

I'm very thankful
to the school.
Whenever I ask

for support
the school
meets my needs.
I asked
for an assistant
to help me learn
when I couldn't
find the
proper words
to express myself
to resolve conflicts
in class
and they said yes.
~Educator 2

Awareness

I need so badly
an understanding
and support of
my position
from teachers
and
A budget for supplies.
An awareness of the tools
I would need to teach
books
jump ropes
giving me a budget
and a space to do my work.
~Educator 5

We are ALL Faculty

The faculty profiles on the school website
the childcare profiles
are not in the faculty profiles
it's damaging to not be included
today I checked
and they added the profiles
with the other staff members of the school.
that's a big shift
to feel included.
~Educator 1

Structural level support from colleagues and school administration in the form of supplies, in-class support, and material validations of their work had a significant impact on their feeling of being recognized and valued for the work they are doing in the school. Such support creates a more conducive environment to feeling belonging and affirmation.

Self-Care

Self-care practices in the form of meditation, yoga, and the arts were also consistent and integral components of the educators thriving in their school environments. The self-care practices were often self-reflective and affirming rather than relaxing and luxurious. The inner meditative work was an important component for many educators.

Meditation

A humble
meditative practice.
I have to.
Everyday.
I feel
really inadequate
so that practice
gives me
definite strength
support
encouragement
to keep going
~Educator 5

Self-Care

I do yoga
everyday
I wake up
I do yoga
gratitude meditation
A meta meditation
A love meditation
feeling grateful
for myself
for my body

as a vessel for this life
I feel gratitude
I send gratitude
to the universe
my inner work
to find happiness
every day.
~Educator 1

I Thrive

To be in company of people
and feel moved
through biography
social art
it's creative
it's artistic
It's out of the pain I've experienced
I do it for my own healing
I'll keep trying until I die
~Educator 3

Thriving in the form of meditation, self-care, and artistic practice seems to be a necessity for the educators to rejuvenate as life-sustaining practices that help them face each day. Meditation, artistic practice, and movement are needed to work through and inspire them on their own journey of self-healing. The importance of reflective self-care practices is reflected in the second research question examining the use of poetry as a generative tool for healing, self-care, community building, empowerment, and strength for BITOC. The findings from the three focus group sessions are represented below.

Focus Group Sessions—Poetry for Us

Writing poetry was not new to any of the co-collaborators in this research project. All of them had prior experiences; however, none of them had experienced writing and sharing their poetry in an affinity group setting with other BIPOC educators. Poetry writing was chosen as a medium for reflective self-care and community building because of the potential to tap into

feelings, thoughts, and experiences that may lay dormant, ignored, or untouched. Poetry has the power to stir untapped feelings, to bring about action and change. Lorde (2007), emphasizes the use of poetry not just as an extraneous practice but as:

> illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless—about to be birthed, but already felt … For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (p. 37)

Writing poetry can be a way to form, express, and act upon our ideas. The focus group sessions were organized so a community circle of BIPOC educators could come together for an opportunity to self-reflect, illuminate, and bring to life aspects within us that may have been hidden or masked. In this community, in a supportive environment the space was given for anything and everything to emerge.

Each poetry writing session included opportunities for self, inner reflection, and group sharing. Poetry was the vessel and "way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought" (Lorde, 2007, p. 36). The work was not for the consumption or commodification of anyone else but the collaborators. The work was for us. The poems were for us. Time and space were created for us. The focus group sessions were a hybrid of in-person and Zoom sessions. Representation of the data includes found poems, reflexive researcher journal entries and poems, collaborator reflections, WhatsApp communication, and poems written by the collaborators. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, the organization of the workshops had a similar structure each session with differing writing prompts to create a rhythm and continuity between workshops.

Poetry For Us—Group Session One

The first poetry writing workshop was held in November 2023. There were six educators present including myself. The session was a hybrid in-person and Zoom teleconference that was audio recorded. The session was 120 minutes long. As the participants arrived, they were welcomed with sheepskin rugs laid out in a sunlit room. Snacks of sweet and savoury and hot tea were offered. Music softly played in the background as each collaborator was welcomed into the space. Before the first session, each educator filled out a pre-reflection found in Appendix D asking them to reflect on how they were feeling in the moment, their hopes for the workshop and their familiarity and comfort writing poetry. Once all participants had arrived, welcome was shared, introductions were made, and we did a check-in, sharing how we were feeling in the moment.

We are Feeling…

Nervous
Needing to slow down
Nervous…excitement
I feel more in gratitude
Neutral
Ready to go
Sore
Peaceful
Grateful and curious
A bit nervous
~Collective Educators

Along with a check-in, each workshop also included the setting of group norms, practices, and agreements in our work together found in Appendix E**.** The list was read round robin, each collaborator speaking a norm and then each of us chose the one that was living in us at that moment.

Our Intentions

Listen deeply
Stay curious and open
Let's all help each other
Practice self care and accountability
Listen deeply
Listen deeply

A deep sigh and hush fell over the group. We were beginning to warm within the circle. Our shoulders began to drop, we began to breathe a little deeper. I then shared my story, my relationship to the research project and the project goals. I shared a poem I wrote about my journey writing poetry.

Just for Me

It is for no one else
But me
It is a chance to dig into some of the nooks and crannies that I keep hidden from the world
For me
It is a gentle hand on the shoulder when I'm too afraid to ask for help
It is a breath of centering when I feel the whirlwind and overwhelm of the world
It's for me
It is a soft rocking lullaby for all of the past hurts
Healing me, word by soft whispering word
I am unbridled to conventions
Or norms
Or expectations
Or standards
Or formats
Or spelling (well maybe not spelling)
I don't have to restrain my anger
Or hold back my tears
Or think before i speak
I don't have to hide any parts of myself
From myself
or the world
I can be exposed
And raw
And vulnerable
I can be soft
And gentle with myself

Poetry becomes my pause, from the world, from expectations and worries and checklists and emails and efficiency and productivity
I am not a cog in the machine
My worth does not come from what I produce
And so
I sit with myself
And remember this
A gentle pause
And stay there for a while
In poetry i get to know and explore myself
In different ways
And tones
And colours
And hues
And textures
I Bathe myself if the deliciousness of language and words that envelope me in a warm blanket of prose
I am Free of form
To be as I am
Free
I can feel.
I allow myself to feel
And in so doing I
Heal
I heal myself
I heal my burdened soul
Poetry can express me in more than the two or three dimensions others see
And how I see myself
I explore my eternal self
These words are just for me

There was a pause of acknowledgement, of knowing, and reverberation from the participants. Next, we began our first writing practice. We chose another person's name in the group and wrote a name story for them, either a created meaning based on the sound or made-up meaning. The participants wrote for 10 minutes and then each of us shared our creations.

Name 1

When the brightest stars can still be seen
But the first light of dawn glows on the horizon
As the birth of a new day
The convergence of night and day

High mountain
Under blue sky

Name 2

She rocks grace
She is substantial material
and light as a
whisper.
She is spiritual
and physical
She rocks Grace

Kind strength

Name 3

At the crossroad
New horizons
are formed
Step over the line
of choice
Decide with firm
conviction
Now walk
into destiny

Rainbow in deep, deep water

Name 4

Bright star

Name 5

Fiery compassion

Table 4.3 is my research journal entry after the first focus group session.

Table 4.3

Researcher's Journal Entry November 18, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 11/18/23
In saying one another's names there was a different type of seeing of the other. There was a recognition, a moment for each of us to be seen by the rest. After each person shared their creation, there were deep sighs of acknowledgement or sinking deeper into the presence with one another. A way of seeing the others, without sharing intimate details of our personal lives, but getting to the root of our essence in some way. We took more time to write and share than I had expected. The opening had begun.   ***Knowing***   ***to hear your name***   ***said by another***   ***thought about***   ***by another***   ***time***   ***and energy***   ***thinking***   ***and feeling***   ***about***   ***your name***   ***was a way***   ***of seeing ourselves***   ***a new***   ***we knew about***   ***each other***   ***somehow.***   ***The name stories resonated.***   ***There was a deep***   ***Knowing.***

The next and what would be the final writing prompt of the session was based on nature. This prompt was chosen as a neutral topic. We each went outside (if we could) or went towards a window to observe and write about something we saw, what we felt. We wrote for 30 minutes, some needed longer so I was flexible with the time and tried to feel when it was time to come

back in a circle for sharing. Co-collaborators were invited to share a line, an excerpt, or their entire piece; whatever they felt comfortable reading aloud with the group.

Reach.

Come now, reach!
Soaring bending branches
Into the crisp cold air
Further still, do reach
And sway in inclement of fogs
Drifting here and there
Tugging at your maze of limbs
But you soon let go
Your earthed rootiness
Anchors taunt in the ground
Hold tight, winter's coming

~Educator 5

Contemplation of a Pot

A small flowering plant in a large peeling terracotta pot.
The flowers are violet, like violets, with little faces, but tubular in shape.
The leaves are different shades of green. the larger, older leaves are dark, and the smaller, newer ones are light.
The flowers reach up on stalks of light green lavender.
and the leaves curling down in genuflection, I guess, with the leaves curling down. A smooth grey rock has been placed on top of the soil, which is flecked.
flecked with tiny white stones.
It says family in delicate lines of silver paint.
3 tiny sprouts grow around the pot's perimeter.
one tiny leaf on each side of a tiny stalk.
Good morning, little family.

~Educator 3

She is Eternal

She once flourished with green flowering buds of summer.
Her leaves
Shining in the summer's glowing light.
The branches are bare and dry. her limbs tremble in the winter wind.
no longer swaying to the gentle summer breeze.
She is hard and rigid
she is solid
sturdy

strong
resilient.
She knows spring will come again.
She has seen many seasons come and go.
Her branches still a refuge to birds near and far
And while others may see fragility,
I see strength
For when the white winter snow falls and weighs heavy on her limbs,
she will sustain
She will bear the cold,
and wait
And glisten in sparkling beauty
Waiting for the first days of spring
~Educator 8

In between the sharing of each collaborator, space and pause was given for reflection, for gratitude, for letting the words sink in. Some had eyes closed as they listened, as if forming the pictures in their minds, others breathed in deeply as their shoulders relaxed, and still others smiled gentle smiles at the beauty in the language and the vulnerability in sharing. The session was closed with the reading of a poem I wrote as my hope for this research project.

Shining Lights

Each a spark
An ember
A flame
A fire
Glowing
Burning
Lighting the way
We come together
To share
To remember
Who we are
To celebrate our gifts
Our beauty
Our strength
Our collective individualism
In the I we become we
Connecting the individual sparks and lights
Into a circular network of connection and seeing and listening and honoring
And laughter

And joy
And embrace
And welcome

We share our stories
We Hear our stories
Warmed by the knowledge we hold as beacons of light
Your struggle is our struggle
You belong
You are valued
You are heard
You matter
Just as you are

The feeling from the workshop echoed within me for many days afterward. As a way of synthesizing my own experience and observations I took time after each workshop to write reflective journal entries. I also found myself writing about each collaborator. Table 4.4 is my researcher's journal entry after the first workshop.

Table 4.4

Researcher's Journal Entry November 19, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 11/19/23
There was laughter ***There were tears*** ***There was sharing*** ***Giving and receiving*** ***There was comfort and discomfort*** ***Flow and gestation*** ***Some Hesitation*** ***and so much care*** ***There seems to be a willingness, a hunger, a drive to create a space for us to come together to renew ourselves and share space together. There is a beautiful balance of self-reflection and group sharing. It already feels like the educators are comfortable with each other. And can be themselves. There is excitement and energy to meet again and connect. In the room there was a visceral change of energy, of feeling. From nervousness and uncertainty to grounded knowing and seeing of one another. As a continued practice of my synthesis and processing of their engagement, and as a way of trying to stay attuned to each collaborator the following are the poems I wrote for each educator. Below are two examples.*** ***Reflections of an Educator*** ***She is open, warm*** ***Expressive and poetic*** ***She feels with depth*** ***She is contemplative and spiritual*** ***She is beginning to trust*** ***And let down her guard*** ***There is an openness I didn't see before*** ***Reflections of an Educator*** ***She is hesitant*** ***And worried*** ***Holding back*** ***The language, a barrier*** ***Like chains*** ***But waters run deep*** ***She feels much*** ***But gives away little*** ***I want her to feel safe*** ***To share what is living within her*** ***I want to hear her voice***

WhatsApp Connections

In between workshop sessions, a WhatsApp group was created not only as an information sharing tool, but also as a way of keeping in touch with one another and keeping the connection and momentum of the group going. The educators were kept in the loop of the logistics for our next meeting, but the platform also became a tool for further engagement and connection. Table 4.5 are messages sent to the WhatsApp group chat in between the first and second focus group sessions.

Table 4.5

WhatsApp Communication on November 20, 22, and 23, 2023

WhatsApp communication on 11/20/23 and 11/23/23
WhatsApp communication on 11/20/23. **"Dear friends, I hope the week has begun with some levity and light and joy. Here is a poem that was resonating with me after our work together this weekend.** **'that we are each other's harvest:** **we are each other's** **business:** **we are each other's** **magnitude and bond.'** **~Gwendolyn Brook"** **WhatsApp communication on 11/22/23.** **"Good morning friends. It is a rainy day, so as we all weather our own storms, both literally and figuratively, Don't let the winds carry you too far away from yourself. Let poetry be your pause in moments of whirling winds. Take a moment today, close your eyes, take a deep breath and pause.** **If you have the chance to connect with yourself for just a few minutes, pause. When the sand settles to the bottom, write down the few or many words that come to mind. Please feel free to share.** **Heart emoji x7** **I'm holding space for each of you.** **WhatsApp communication on 11/22/23.** **"My reflections:**

WhatsApp communication on 11/20/23 and 11/23/23
I feel **turbulent and frazzled** **but in this moment** **I pause, even for a brief and fleeting minute** **and connect to my center** **I can be my own inner light** **I can bring pause to the ravaging,** **storming seas** **I remember back to myself** **and breathe** **I remember I'm not alone** **There are lighthouses** **and lapping shores** **for rest** **I pause** **and listen** **and remember"** **"Here's what I wrote:** **Thanksgiving:** **A time to give thanks for what is most essential for us personally,** **as a family and as a community.** **Gratitude is good, not to be argued with like many truly Christian or any other major/minor/known religion's stated values.** **I don't doubt there was a shared meal or more between Pilgrims and Native Americans but it was known that this was followed by colonial treachery and slaughter.** **November 27, 1970 was the first National Day of Mourning when many Indigenous people fast and remember the hardship and genocide their ancestors faced.** **Giving thanks for the good connection, home, brother/sisterhood, peace, love, plenty good but better balanced by mourning for all that was lost and continues to be lost in fear, greed, destruction, enmity and murder.** **Ho'oponopono could be apropos:** **"I'm sorry,** **Please forgive me,** **Thank-you,** **I love you."** **Happy Thanksgiving/National Day of Mourning"**

WhatsApp communication on 11/20/23 and 11/23/23
WhatsApp communication on 11/23/23. **“Here are my reflections:** **Too much blunder and mumbles** **about** **Anti this and anti that…gosh** **Toss it all away** **To bed, to bed let it lay** **Bring a better day”** **“A picture and quote were shared by James Baldwin:** **‘The longer I live, the more deeply I learn that love - whether we call it friendship or family or romance - is the work of mirroring and magnifying each other’s light’**

Poetry For Us—Group Session Two

The second workshop was conducted in November 2023. This week there were seven educators present, including myself. The session was a hybrid in-person and Zoom teleconference that was audio recorded. The session was 120 minutes long. Like the first workshop, the educators were greeted with food, music, and a cozy environment of sheep skin rugs. This session began with the reading of the same poem as the previous meeting.

From the Ashes She Became

Before she became fire, she was water.
Quenching the thirst of every dying creature.
She gave and she gave
Until she turned from sea to desert.
But instead of dying of the heat,
The sadness, the heartache,
She took all of her pain
And from her own ashes became fire.
~Nikita Gill

I led the co-collaborators in a deep breathing and body scan exercise to settle into the space, to let go of wandering thoughts, and set our intentions on being in the moment, together. As there were two new participants, we introduced ourselves. This was followed by our feeling check in.

We are Feeling…

Nervous
Anticipation
Calm
Settled
Rested
Less nervous
Content
Blurry
Chaotic

Each collaborator had various life circumstances and personal things happening in their lives. Coming to the space, the check-in allowed for a letting go and a striving for being in the moment. Following our check-in we read our meeting norms, each collaborator reading one from the list. Then each of us chose the intention/norm that was resonating within us at that moment.

Our Intentions are to…

Make space take space
Without judgement for sensations, emotions, feelings such as anger fear and self doubt that can be barriers
Practice sacred pausing
Listen deeply
Practice self care and self responsibility
Give yourself and each other grace
Take positive action to right the wrongs we uncover

Next we continued with the name story exercise, choosing a different name to write about.

Name Story 1

A holiday gift,
Regal beauty and grace
Curved line, symphonic tones of musical outpouring

Huge meadow of yellow flowers

Delicate, cooperative
Strong and peaceful

Name Story 2

Her parents named her for nube, as a gentle,
flowing cloud.
It was a surprise to her parents
that as she started growing up she showed to be more rooted
more earthly,
and they realized that she was less like a cloud
and more like a tree

Name Story 3

Air
the sound i - as in the "I"
HA - Floats above but grounded - In the I of self - With glee of joy
laughter satisfaction - Of breath clear breath -

Name Story 4

Sounds from your rhythm and flowing steady strength in spirit
The rushing, that energy just flows through
There is openness

Flowing, steady
Strength in spirit
Warrior of spirit

Solid rocks
Standing on the earth
Under the blue sky with the strength,
Firmness and deep love for the world

Name Story 5

Image of the
depths of the ocean
A deep indigo

Compassionate

Depth of feeling
and knowing
and understanding

Name Story 6

Sparking
inviting
The sun, shining on a vast and varied plan
Brimming with warmth
beauty
life
care
hope
light
Embodied
LOVE

There was a feeling of recognition. When the co-collaborators told their name story for another, gentle smiles of bashfulness, gratitude, honoring, and affirmation filled the space as if each of us had been seen. Once the space had been warmed up, we began the next writing prompt. This prompt was also nature based, as a way of remembering who we are, in connection with the land. The co-collaborators were asked to think about a place in nature—a park, trail, beach, mountain trail or childhood place you know very well, a place perhaps you would or still go to as a refuge, a place in nature that you are connected to. They were asked to write about what it smells like. What it looks like. What it sounds like. What it tastes like. What it feels like. What did that place give you?

Beach

Beach is where my mom and I would escape to breathe in the beauty of the world
It was her escape and refuge from a violent home
I learned to love the beach because that's where I saw my mom happy,
At peace

I longed for those long weekends
I expected anxiously the warm, humid breeze that curled my hair
I didn't need to wear clothes anymore

I spent the whole day building sandcastles and jumping waves

It smelled like coconut scented sunscreen
It tasted like ice cream covered in sand
It felt warm, just perfect for a midday nap

Now, many years later it is still a safe space
Beach is where I see my son building sandcastles,
jumping waves,
gathering seaweed,
taking long midday naps under our tent.

Beach is my retirement dream
It's where I see myself getting older
This time it's not an escape anymore,
It's the home I'll chose for my family and myself
And my mom.

~Educator 1

The Greeting

This land waited for me to come
It needed me to come
As I too needed to come to it
It was broken
I was broken
It was dry
I was dry
It was colourless
I was colourless
It smelled putrefied
I was putrefied
…and the we began
We greeted each other out of love
My tears watered its parched seeds
My laboured hands pried open the clots of caked soil
My back lifted its dead clustered knotty woods
My waist bent and bent and bent
Casting out its barren shame
Time went on for some time
Then soon my soul gave rise from their earth
Soon my heart gave nourishment to their roots, buds, flowers
Soon my resuscitated breath gave fructification in abundance
Now, I call this, Home

~Educator 5

From A Cree Song, Translation

Listen to the land.
We take care of it together
It teaches us many things
~Shared by Educator 6

My Place is…

Green forests
a fortress of childhood
Running through thickets of birch trees
And the smell of moist moss.
The prickles of thorny brushes
scraping against
bruised skin.
Hair flowing, as bare feet
run on dirt,
forest floors
The sound of rustling leaves and
squeals of surprise and anticipation
Of hide and go seek
The sound of beating hearts and heavy breaths
The taste of juicy raspberries fresh from the bush.
The taste of childhood
It feels like freedom
The trees our watchful guardians
holding us
and bearing witness to our innocence
our joy
our wonder
This forest, this ravine was a place to run and play
to create worlds of wonder
A home
To escape to
Held by the guardians of the earth
To truly be free.
~Educator 8

Childhood Memories

Spring - sights
Fields of Canola flowers stretched to the foot of the mountains,
A vast array of blooms:
Pink peach blossoms,
White pear and apple blossoms,

As a breeze whispered through,
Petals danced gracefully down through the air.

Summer - sounds
Bamboos swayed in the crisp morning air,
The river flowed away joyfully accompanied by the playful splashes of children,
Cicadas' high-pitched serenade disrupted a sleepy, silent noon,
Thunderstorms weaved together the sounds of wind, rain, and thunder.
Night fell peacefully amidst the rhythmic chorus of croaking frogs

Autumn - tastes
The freshly harvested grains,
Tangy-sweet oranges and tangerines,
Juicy, crisp pears,
And crunchy apples
Delighting our taste buds

Winter - scents
Though nature laid dormant, the joy of winter storage filled the air.
Spicy sausages,
Meat cured in savory sauces,
Fermented rice emitting wine-like fragrances,
Sunflower seeds and peanuts roasted in sand and salt,
The aromas crafted by our hands drifting through the air,
Welcoming many festivals as well as the spring.
~Educator 2

Religion

Just as it was with Adam and Eve, religion began for me in a garden. Before I started kindergarten, I had free rein within the bounds of our backyard. The front was too near cars. The back bordered with benign and known neighbors.

There was a flat expanse nearest the house that was most often in shadow, yet covered with thick green grass and featured a painted green wooden picnic table, made by my father's hand.

Going down the rock stairs on either side, was the mysterious and complicated rock garden that held a riot of plants and flowers: Peonies, Rose of Sharon, Violets, Butterfly milkweed, Petunia, Fragrant sumac, Christmas fern, Wood aster, Geranium, Honeysuckle vine, rhododendron and who knows what else. The rocks were taken by my father from the local landscapes of woods and cliffs, and within them lived all manner of lady bugs, beetles- winged, long horned and darkling, ants, wasps, bees, worms, frogs, grasshoppers, caterpillars both sleek and hairy. These bugs seemed infinite in supply. Any highway drive, back then, would constitute a blood bath of smashed bugs on the windshield and a

> collection of gore accumulating until we had to stop and clean windshield in order to see the road.
>
> Every part of the earth was where the earthworms would come out after rain and where in winter the snow was higher than my entire body and no one went out until my father, with salt and shovel in hand, made safe passage to the wonderland of sparkling snow and dangling icicles, after a seeming 15 articles of clothing were applied to my body by my mother, who greeted me with hot chocolate and cookies during breaks indoors to warm up.
>
> Our house was at the top of the hill. To the West was the end of the road where the bulldozers stopped, creating a cliff topped by woods, undeveloped land that had not yet been made into housing developments for the families of the generation of men who participated in the Korean war effort as my father had.
>
> To the east one could see areas of more dense population and taller buildings. Both directions called to me. I longed to walk in the woods in the quiet solitude of whatever could be found there among the trees visible from my yard, but fearful of the possibility of lions, tigers and bears. The city called too, as somewhere I would go someday when I was older, believing it was something for grownups only and so unfathomable that I dared not think about it at all.
>
> This garden was my safety, my beauty, my love, my freedom, my imagination, my peace, my paradise - from which I was destined to fall.
>
> ~Educator 3

These places, the natural world were refuges for many collaborators, places to be themselves, to escape to, to be nurtured by. The act of writing about a special place in the natural world coincided with our feeling of a natural belonging. The act of writing was deeply connected to our childhoods, to healing. One collaborator spoke of her place being an escape from violence, a salve for healing. There were deep emotions that were stirred and tied to these places. Another participant spoke of the poverty they grew up in, there wasn't enough food, they had one pair of pants a year, but they speak of their childhood as "very rich" because of the natural surroundings they grew up in. That nature "nourished, yeah nourished myself, forever."

The session was closed with the reading of the poem, *Shining Lights*. There was a real sinking in, a feeling of growing intimacy and connection. The co-collaborators were asked to

bring *their* name story for our final focus group session. The use of the WhatsApp platform was also utilized for engagement, information sharing, and encouragement. Table 4.6 is my researcher's journal entry after the focus group session.

Table 4.6

Researcher's Journal Entry November 26, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 11/26/23
We sat in circle and got right into writing. From the first sharing of name stories, the expression, depth, and connection was deep! The essence people brought through sound was powerful. The time needed for sharing and writing is longer than expected. We live deeply in the experience, and we need the time to dig into the depths of our souls. The time for sharing is longer than I expected, as there are pauses and deep sighs of acknowledgement. What I thought would be a warming exercise, turned out to be an incredible experience of witnessing, of listening, of seeing, of taking in the person in a completely different way. There was an opening, the first session was a warming, the second was an exploration, tenderness, care, pain, history, family, connection, belonging, remembering, and tapping into a part of ourselves, our feeling, our ability to express that is different from normal writing. After this session those that were in person couldn't help but say our farewells with long moments of embrace. ***A participant shared that poetry is like music, taps into another place of expression, the words can flow and paint a picture, and express in ways that have no boundaries. There is freedom for each to express in their way, to bring their individuality, their story, their voice. This was a profound moment of reflection and sharing that inspired the following poem.*** ***Like Music*** ***Poetry is like music,*** ***taps into another place*** ***Where words flow without forced structure*** ***Words paint a picture like the strokes on a canvas*** ***Expresses the rawest human experiences and feelings in ways that have no boundaries. Poetry is freedom*** ***For each person to express*** ***to bring their individuality, their story, their voice*** ***The prose, the images, the stories*** ***Pierced the heart*** ***Full of vulnerability*** ***Of feeling*** ***Of embodiment*** ***To go to the rawest places and feelings that lie within*** ***Often hidden*** ***Or dormant*** ***The powerful stories and voices***

Researcher's Journal entry 11/26/23

Each woman
Spoken into existence
Given space
The tears of knowing
The tears of pain
The tears of our pasts
The tears of our families
The tears of our struggle
Met the tears of each other
Of belonging
Of comfort
Of knowing
We were truly seen
Heard
Honored
Loved
This circle of caring
This circle of seeing
This circle of love

I have never been able to cry openly, even with my closest people and family and here I did not have to hold back, I was free to truly be myself, to feel, without judgement, with understanding, with care. It was profound. My heart is open. I am full of gratitude.

Reflections of an Educator

Her gentleness
Her warmth
Gathers and weaves stories of
Feeling
And depth
Her vulnerability and strength
like two sides of a coin.
Family, Pain, Joy, Wonder, And hope

Reflections of Educator

She has softened
She has opened
She is gentle
She is wise
She has quiet strength
She is fierce
She opened and shared

Researcher's Journal entry 11/26/23
Peeling back a layer ***Exposing her wound*** ***Full of pain*** ***Her journey*** ***Her longing*** ***Her desire to belong*** ***She is incredible*** ***Reflections of an Educator*** ***She spoke in a voice*** ***Of confidence*** ***Of vulnerability*** ***Exposing*** ***A clarity*** ***Beauty of essentializing*** ***Crystallization*** ***It was incredible to bear witness*** ***To her unfolding*** ***The depth of her waters runs deep***

The depth, vulnerability, connection, and understanding that was created amongst the group in just two sessions really surprised me. I was blown away by the beauty, depth, and incredible richness each collaborator contributed to the creation of this poetry group. Table 4.7 is my researcher's journal entry two days after the focus group session.

Table 4.7

Researcher's Journal Entry November 27, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry 11/27/23
The second session is still resounding and reverberating within my soul, days later. My cup is full. ***<u>Echoes of a Burgeoning Sisterhood</u>*** ***It feels like the beginning*** ***A circle*** ***Of belonging and trust*** ***Of sisterhood*** ***And sharing*** ***Vulnerability and authenticity*** ***No need to hide*** ***Affirmed by one another*** ***Hearts connected***

WhatsApp Connections

Table 4.8 shows some interactions on the WhatsApp platform in between the second and third workshop.

Table 4.8

WhatsApp Communication on December 1, 2023

Communication in the WhatsApp group chat on 12/1/23
"Dear Friends, I'm looking forward to connecting again. This is for all of you: **'I hope you find people in this life who make you feel like you are meant to be here, who make you feel like you belong exactly as you. I hope you find the kind of people who calm your soul when you see their face or hear their voice. I hope you surround yourself with the kind of people who make you feel like there is nowhere else you'd rather be in this world than right here with them. I also hope you find this in yourself too.** **I hope you know that you belong here, *exactly as you are*'** **By Charlotte Freeman** **And if anyone would like to share their work from last week or have refined something you are welcome to share"** **"Excerpt from my work:**

Communication in the WhatsApp group chat on 12/1/23
Dream 1 **I am being carried by parent, I think both parents are there, through a room/rooms quickly.** **They also carry a report about me as if from a school. I think I am five, kindergarten age. I didn't start ballet until age seven.** **The report is on typewriter sized pages, white pages, maybe three or four. One page has a little passport-like square photo of my baby face. I am not smiley, not somber. My face is happy enough but asks questions, is positive, wondering and open for answers. There are other things on pages not discernible. What is highlighted by my parents is that I was graded 258% on dance and they are going way way overboard praising me about it. The scene is on loop and keep repeating - walk through room, walk through room, turn the pages of the report as we go, praise, praise, praise, my pale yet mixed breed face clearly overwhelmed. I am being carried, triumphant and praised but it is uncomfortable AND comfortable. My parents are nervous, afraid of something, covering something up, overcompensating, filling my empty cup with their emptiness.** **Dream 2** **Part of a dream/scene, the part that I remember…I'm with an amazing looking, very tall man, who may be African, Latin, Indigenous, definitely some non-white culture and he is wearing his cultural makeup and costume. I'm looking at him in fascination, and just to make idle conversation, just some unconscious something to break the silence, and I ponder OUT LOUD that he looks like a saltshaker or a TV commercial character. When he really looks like a god or a work of art that I simply don't understand and that makes me feel uncomfortable. And I see him flinch in my dream. I see him suppress his feelings and his words. I hear him murmur some inaudible response to me. And then I wake up.** **These two dreams remind me a realization that I had a couple of years ago about how white children in America have books and parents and a country that is compelled to try to cultivate narcissism in them: Disney Princesses, 'fairest in the land,' Barbie…Each Princess, each girl is alone in her best-ness. Friends and family are just accessories. Of course this is true for boys only with a macho vibe. This white narcissist cultivation is directly related to racism. The protagonist in Mean Girls was raised in Africa. What a bolder choice if she were Black, but they couldn't show it. If she were Black, they couldn't show all the things they would do and say to her. The things that they do actually do and say to the hers and the hims of color.**'

Poetry for Us—Session Three

The final focus group workshop was held in December 2023. There were six co-collaborators present including myself. The session was a hybrid in-person and Zoom teleconference that was audio recorded. The session was planned for 120 minutes but due to extended sharing and conversations, our session was extended to 150 minutes long. Table 4.9 is my researcher's journal the morning before the final focus group sessions were held.

Table 4.9

Researcher's Journal Entry December 2, 2023

Researcher's Journal entry on 12/2/23
Today is the last group session. I'm excited to be in community again with these strong, resilient people. There is something about coming together and sharing our stories, sharing our time, sharing food, sharing space, sharing tears and laughter. I'm sad to think this is the end when it really feels like the beginning of something. ***The exercise we'll do today is digging in a bit deeper, tapping into parts of ourselves that may be painful, or may bring joy. I want to be sure to give us the time and space - enough time for all of us to enter the writing prompt, explore, and share.*** ***With each meeting, the women feel more comfortable, greeting with hugs and ending with joy, rosy cheeks, excitement, smiles, a connection. It's interesting that poetry is a way of sharing ourselves without having to interrogate too deeply, touching on things for a brief moment without having to linger for too long. It's a way of expressing things that might be hard to speak about in conversation. It's a way of opening up much quicker than might be possible otherwise.***

The co-collaborators arrived in-person and via Zoom teleconference, in the same space with the same sheepskin rugs, beaming sunshine, snacks, and tea. One of the co-collaborators was unable to come due to a storm and power outage. Once all the participants arrived, we had a moment of greeting followed by a guided breathing and body scan to settle and connect with being in the space and being together with one another again. This was followed by a feeling check-in around the circle.

We are Feeling…

Frazzled
Here and there
And also feeling excited
It doesn't feel like the end, it feels like this is a beginning maybe
I'm Exhausted
But still wanting to give
Plow through the exhaustion and put it on the sideline
And have a focus of giving
Little stressed this month
Less nervous
When I come to this space I'm calm
November was the entire month of my body telling me to slow down
But I'm okay
Tired but okay
Feels like winter, having to create your own inner light
~Collective Educators

Our feeling check-in was followed by our group norm setting of intentions for our work together. We each read through the list and then each collaborator chose the one that was resonating most with them in the moment.

Our Intentions

Give yourself and each other grace
Practice self care and self responsibility
Be fully present
Practice sacred pausing
Listen deeply
~Collective Educators

Our next exercise invited each collaborator to share with the group their name story, the meaning, the significance, or anything they wanted to share about their names.

Name Story

My parents were communists and still are
They had me and named me
A Russian name
Meaning the birth of Christ
It's a strong name
I'm a strong person

In many ways
And
I'm very sensitive
        In other ways
It resonates with me

Name Story

My name can be pronounced in both English and Japanese
A mixture of two worlds
Where I always feel like
I have a foot in each world
But I'm not actually fully present
                In either one of them
My middle name was chosen because
My mother had a stillbirth two years before me
And was named after the character for mystic
Which is the first in cause and effect.
In that moment
My parents decided their next baby
Would be named
The second character meaning law
Effect
So we are bound together
I've never liked my English name.

Name Story

It means rising of the dawn
Beginning of the day
My parents chose it
Predominantly my father
Who is a poet
Put a lot of attention
Was very conscious about it
And the last part means grace
My name has three meanings
The first is walk - the connection to the earth
It forms the earth
And then grace, the opposite gesture
Then X sound in the middle
X is unknown, like great activist
Malcolm X
X because his ancestors were slaves
He didn't know what his true last name would have been
X is also a crossing

Collaborating for a specific purpose
My last name is my slave name
The plantation my ancestors
Were enslaved on

Meaning of My Name According to My Name

Between a rock - might and of courage
And grace - loving and forgiving
Marks the treasured spot
From whence the Sun breaks open the day
Awake to this I have been
For 21, 294 days and counting
Of witnessing the rhythmic multiplicity
Of the cosmic movements through time and space
Brings each day
A new Dawn, bursting in freedom
A new Waking, tingling with jubilation
A new Life, to dream and fulfill
A new Beginning, to set in motion

May I rise forth to live my Name

Name Story

It's not my parents who named me
It was my grandma
From my mom's side.
When my mother was pregnant with me
My grandma visited and stayed for quite some months
And take good care of her
It was a hard time
In China everywhere
They didn't have enough food
And had to figure it out
What to
How to feed your children
How to feed yourself
So my grandmother
Was like a magician
Resourceful
In that hard time
My mother gave birth, my dad was not there
My grandmother took great responsibility to take care of me
So after I came into this world
My Grandmother said,

"this baby girl is so quiet so we will name her xxxx"
Which means silence and quiet
My mom used her family's name instead of my dad's family name
It is tradition for them to name a child after the father's name
It's a very strong tradition
But my grandma just took my mom's family name
To name me
It was very rare at that time
My last name, my family name
Means thank
My name is thanks for silence
I'm a quiet person
I always wait to be last to speak
I'm not a speaker, I'm a doer
Is that my destiny

As the conversation and sharing flowed, time flew by. I noticed that we wouldn't have enough time to write and share and so we decided collectively to extend our time together by 30 minutes and anyone who had to leave was more than welcome. Everyone stayed. The final writing prompt allowed each collaborator to weave a story, using imagery and metaphors in a writing exercise named Visiting my Younger Self from Kaur's (2022) poetry book. The educators had to weave the following words into the writing prompt, *If I could visit my younger self I would go back to the day when*…laugh, lion, fork, blue, hundred, water, butterfly, cloud, gem, clock.

Visiting My Younger Self

If I could visit my younger self I would go back to the day …
when my depression left me crippled in bed,
Drowning in my own tears
I would tell myself I will laugh again
Even though now there is only despair
Even though it feels like walking with a cloud over your head

Let me introduce you to your ancestors, they're protecting you!

I would tell you that I will take care of you,
I will not disappoint you, unlike everybody else
I would give you a small glimpse of your future
And you would understand that the smile of your son is worth living for
I would remind you of your momma's love,

It may seem you're a burden for her, but you are not!

There is so much in life than this,
Just breathe…

There will be a day when future you will turn back clocks and visit you
You will be strong at the edge of your bed,
Staring at the darkness
Feeling lonely
Cold
Crying
You will feel a presence behind you
I will be hugging you
You will be ok
You are loved
I love you!
~Educator 1

Visiting My Younger Self

If I could visit my younger self I would go back to the days when
we would listen to our Fisher Price record player and laugh in our bunk beds,
the uneven wood creaky floors, would squeak beneath our little bodies as we danced to
the scratchy strawberry shortcake and Sesame Street vinyl records
When those summer nights were so hot and humid
after playing on the streets with our neighbourhood friends,
we would lie awake on the light blue carpeted floors
all squeezed in the tiny hallway entrance with the screen open,
hoping for the slightest breeze on our sticky skin.
I would sit on my grandmother's lap
one more time
as she smoked and take in her smell - baby powder mixed with the cosmetic smell of her red lipstick
I would look into her grey eyes and touch her frizzy, charcoal hair once more
I would hug my mom extra tight even though she was seemed to recoil at my touch
knowing that she must have been exhausted raising four kids, basically on her own.
I would bask in the watching the butterflies of summer flutter by
and I would whisper into my five year old ear
You belong
You are loved
You don't have to change who you are.
I would hold my little hand and I would sit with her so she didn't have to feel alone and scared anymore
we would sit and watch the clouds float by in the endless expanse of blue
We could just be
she would not have to ask to be loved

she would not have to prove her worth
to be loved
she would not have to hide her worries
or tears.

I would hold her without a thought of the minutes passing by
It would be eternity, in a moment
We would feel whole
Even if just for the moment.

~Educator 8

If I could visit my younger self I would go back to the day…

when I would go into my closet and step into my imagination, entering into worlds far and wide, near and close, to somewhere and everywhere and fork through my creative waters of soul in this magical and wonderful closet.

Oh, the laughter from my brothers and sisters as they could hear from the door cracks that let our morals of buttery bits of the worlds I enter, 'Roar! I the Lion does sound as my paws climb onto blue mounds of clouds making way to the horizon, yonder. Yes, I am the Lion, born in the sign of Leo. My roar rings loud for I am crowned of Royal lineage. Many say that this far world was only a 100 years formed when I was born from its worldly gems of sapphires and emeralds.'
'Come for supper!' bellowed my mom 'that clock says what my dear?' '5:30 mom but I'm not finished exploring. I've only been in this closet for 30 minutes or 1000 years, in closet time.' 'Okay, I'm coming.'

~Educator 5

Visiting my Younger Self

If I could visit my younger self, I would go back to the day when my father died. I would show up when my younger self almost blacked out at the top of the stairs looking at the old portrait of a great, great relative, depicted as a saint, that now hangs in my living room over the fireplace. I would put my arms around her and show her the compassion that no one else had the capacity to show her at the time. I would mourn with her, the lost friends, teachers and passions that were wasted in the moves, the poverty, and the waiting on that man to deliver what he kept promising- that we would all be together again soon, as we used to be.

Then, I would be there when my mother came home and told me how my father had died. I would jump up and yell at my mother when she asked my younger self, age 10, why I hadn't called her to tell on my father, the patriarch of our 50's formed family, in 1966,

> when he behaved strangely, in essence, blaming my younger self, as if to say that if I had done the right thing, he would still be alive. I would defend my younger self and point out all the times that none of the adults in the family did the right thing at any time up to this point.
>
> Then I would have gone with her to the funeral and stayed with her and held her and cried with her when our mother was not with her, but doing all the logistical things required of a young widow.
>
> I would somehow tell my younger self that this was done to her and not caused by her, that she had been lied to all along and betrayed more than she could imagine. I wouldn't tell her any details because she was too young. But I would get across to her that nothing was her fault and how impossible it is for anyone to live surrounded by so many lies that the truth becomes but a distant dream that nevertheless can be one day be reached.
>
> Now I can laugh when I recall the lion my family saw at the Central Park Zoo, the pattern on my grandmother's silver fork, the fact that blue was the favorite color of my parents and brother and that mine was red, 100 memories of my family playing with water from the sprinkler in the yard or at the lake or the beach, the butterflies in our garden, the clouds of my childhood that were bigger and more filled with meaningful and fantastic shapes, the gem, a ruby in my birthstone ring and the clock looking over my grandmother's kitchen which was filled with delicious food.
>
> ~Educator 3

After the sharing of our work I read an excerpt from Kaur (2022) on healing:

> Healing is to wake up every morning and dedicate yourself to yourself. It is a practice that has no end or finish line. It is never complete. It will remain a work in progress as long as you walk this Earth. Healing is reaching out to ask for help however many times you need it. Having the courage to take care of yourself. Healing is never linear. Healing is breakdowns. Being compassionate. Knowing that even at your best, there will be downward spirals. Healing is bringing all of yourself to the table and saying I probably have no idea what I'm doing, but I'm still going to try. Healing is beginning where you are. It is falling off the practice and getting back up knowing nothing was lost. No one gets through life without scars. Everyone is doing their best with what they have. To be human is to be imperfect. So go easy, be kind to yourself and each other. (p. 221)

After closing our session with gratitude, the participants took a post-reflection home to answer.

Table 4.10 is my research's journal entry after the final focus group session.

Table 4.10

Researcher's Journal Entry December 3, 2023

Researcher's Journal Entry 12/3/23
There was joy and pain ***There was connection*** ***and belonging*** ***vulnerability*** ***we allowed ourselves to truly sit and be with one another*** ***mirrors for one another*** ***We didn't want it to end*** ***So perhaps it won't….*** ***The final focus group session is complete but it doesn't feel over. I was blown away by the collaborators, as usual. What reinforced the potential power in these sessions is that even though this time of year for educators is a hectic time and time of transition and change this was apparent for each collaborator, they ALL SHOWED UP. The changing seasons, the heaviness of winter, the whirling of busy schedules, illness, were all present for each collaborator and yet, they ALL SHOWED UP except for one who had an emergency, her house was flooded. Despite being ill and bedridden, despite their child's birthday celebration being the very same day, despite exhaustion, they ALL SHOWED UP. They showed up for themselves and each other. Wow. Just wow.*** ***The experience of writing about one another's names for the past two sessions was rounded out by our own sharing. This opened up new ways of seeing and understanding one another and ourselves. There was so much richness and depth. We learned about their family, how they grew up, we learned about their culture, customs, and traditions.*** ***WE*** ***We shared stories of poet fathers naming their poet daughters*** ***Imbuing their name with meaning making*** ***We shared the philosophical and religious beliefs*** ***Woven into our names*** ***We shared the strength of grandmothers*** ***Going against tradition and norms*** ***We learned of the breaking of tradition*** ***and the forging of new paths*** ***of the interweaving of past and present*** ***cause and effect*** ***We shared the importance of meaning and sound*** ***The carrying on of ancestral heritages***

Researcher's Journal Entry 12/3/23
Of Pride and shame ***Of sometimes not knowing our names*** ***And where we came from*** ***Having taken on the name of our oppressor*** ***We learned how x marks the spot*** ***Just the Beginning…*** ***This is just the beginning*** ***To be with one another*** ***Sharing our journey*** ***Our lives*** ***Our constant*** ***Becoming*** ***And learning*** ***And knowing*** ***And understanding*** ***Sinking deeper*** ***Into ourselves*** ***And each other***

Pre and Post Reflections

Before and after the workshops, each collaborator filled out a pre and post reflection to gain insight into their experiences of the workshops. The findings are below.

Pre-Reflection Data

Prior to the first focus group session the educators were asked to fill out a brief reflection found in Appendix D. Table 4.11 include the questions and synthesis of their responses.

Table 4.11

Pre-Reflection Data

Pre-Reflection Question	**Synthesis of Responses**
Have you ever written poetry?	All the participants had written poetry before though at various times in their lives and had various comfort levels. Some were experienced writers while others had only written poetry a couple of times.

Pre-Reflection Question	**Synthesis of Responses**
Do you currently have a practice of self-care?	All the co-collaborators have a self-care practice. The forms of self-care varied in form and consistency. Some responded that they had a consistent daily practice, while others dipped in and out of activities.
How do you feel about the opportunity to write poetry?	Emotions ranged from nervous, to excited, interested, and curious. *The opportunity to write poetry feels…* like a challenge because it requires self-reflection searching and soul purging nerve wracking, it will be hard excited to come back to writing anxious and nervous to share with others interested curious with a dose of trepidation ~Collective Educators
How are you feeling now in this moment before beginning?	The co-collaborators were feeling a range of emotions, from feeling neutral, to not feeling physically well, nervous, tired, and hopeful. There was illness and physical injury over the course of the workshops but despite taking time on a Saturday, travelling and amidst the chaos of life, they showed up. *We are feeling…* in the middle not subjective or objective not well physically but the sunny room and cozy blanket helps me relax a bit nervous and insecure tired sore hopeful ~Collective Educators
What do you hope to gain from the experience?	The responses varied from wanting a connection with others or a special experience,

Pre-Reflection Question	**Synthesis of Responses**
	while others came open with no intentions or expectations for the experience, they liked the surprise of what might arise. *We Hope to Gain…* Clarity of human striving More confidence in writing connections to poetry connections to people a special experience I have no expectations An opportunity to connect with others ~Collective Educators

Post-Reflection Data

After the final focus group session, each collaborator took the time to reflect on the experience guided with the questions found in Appendix G. Table 4.12 presents the questions and a synthesis of their responses.

Table 4.12

Post-Reflection Data

Post-Reflection Questions	Synthesis of Responses
How did you feel about the experience?	The responses were all very positive. The experience was a feeling of safety, connectedness, and appreciation. *We Felt…* it was very intimate sweet a very safe space it was a healing experience fostered outstanding engagement and depth connected appreciative nervous and relaxed touched by others really good

Post-Reflection Questions	Synthesis of Responses
	realized it should be a rhythmic practice for my own health my mind and soul were put at ease a remind of how much I miss writing and how good it makes me feel ~Collective Educators
How was your level of engagement?	All the participants responded positively. Their engagement was good, the best I could (due to illness and injury), very good, 100%, and all in. The in-person co-collaborators especially responded with very high levels of engagement.
What stood out to you?	There was a diverse response to what stood out for each collaborator. For some the experience of hearing other people share their work, rather than reading poems was impactful while others were shocked by the talent of the collaborators. There was significant amazement of the emotion and vulnerability within the group and the willingness of the co-collaborators to go so deep, fast! *What Stood Out to Us Was…* hearing others share the outpouring of emotion We went DEEP! FAST! everyone is a poet it is nerve wracking to show your vulnerability to others, and how easy it is to shake that off when surrounded by people who support and listen with no judgement through poetry, we learned communicated with each other in this soul form of sharing ~Collective Educators
What did you get out of the experience?	Experiences varied from finding inspiration and reflection, reinforcement to their connection to writing poetry and their connection with others. The feeling of community and friendship was appreciated and valued by all the collaborators. The motivation to keep writing was also strongly expressed. *We Experienced…* self reflection

Post-Reflection Questions	Synthesis of Responses
	inspiration healing and reinforced my connection with poetry the connection to people love in community to learn more about each other more motivation to keep writing friendships A community this is so valuable we shared each other's hearts ~Collective Educators
Do you consider poetry as a tool for self-care and expression?	All co-collaborators responded with a resounding yes. Two co-collaborators already used poetry, but both said they would use it more consciously as a practice more regularly, making it a part of their routine.
Would you like to continue meeting?	All co-collaborators responded yes. The desire to continue to work together was unanimous. One collaborator said just being together in some form is what they want to continue. *We Will Continue* I was hesitant at first because of how exposing it could be but I realized we have established a real community of heart for each other ~Collective Educators

Conclusions

We gathered as educators, as People of Color, as immigrants, as women, as mothers, as daughters, as partners, as friends, as collaborators. We created a space, for gathering, for listening, for pausing, for reflecting, for being together. The journey of each collaborator has been filled with different tastes and sounds, affirmations, and rejections; of being seen and being told to hide. Childhoods were filled with moments of joy, caring, pain, and struggle. Educational experiences of being seen, or not seen, of having to assimilate and fit in, or feeling empowered. Despite the different experiences all educators were fueled by an intrinsic drive, a listening to an inner voice,

a knowing, a calling to teach. Each collaborator found an educational pedagogy that aligned with their values, with their ambition to be a changemaker, either to be a part of something that was better, more cohesive than their experience, or to become a part of the type of educational experience they received.

The path to becoming was not always easy, in fact it was usually a winding, twisting path. A contrast between seeking an educational philosophy that was more human, that integrated the arts, was experiential alongside the feeling of the pain of experiencing white centered practices and racism, both overt and covert, in their teacher training and current schools of practice. And yet, they are still here, they are strong, they are resilient, they are passionate, and they can thrive. Although their journeys and life experiences are wonderfully diverse, interweaving with one another, the ingredients for thriving are there. Belonging, a sense of community and having others to speak with is integral. Institutional support and validation are crucial. The ability to be authentic and bring their full identities attends to their sense of belonging. And self-care, a form of rest, rejuvenation, renewal, in various forms. Poetry can be a generative practice not only for oneself, but also in the building of a community. There is great potential for spaces to be created and held for the thriving of BITOC in their school environments.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

For Us

Poetry to show the truths
Our truths
    That are often not centered
Understood
Listened to
    Prior–it-ized

Interlocking experiences
 Of longing to belong
the joy of seeing ourselves
    and each other
the collective strength
empowered
    Resist-ance

    We can become one
We can generate
    TOGETHER
Our shared experiences
    Of the between the lines
    Unspoken
Feelings
    Of what it looks like to
Not always fit the mould
    To fight against a mould to begin with
Who is considered an insider
And who is made to be an outsider?
We will make a new circle where we all belong.

This study brought together a group of BITOC from independent/private schools as a means of uncovering and centering their lived experiences and rich depth of knowledge. A circle of understanding, seeing, and knowing was formed. In the middle of the circle, the stories of each individual were woven together in a tapestry of overlapping and interweaving threads. The stories

of their childhoods, their own education, their desire, and longing to become educators, their winding paths to becoming teachers, their experiences in the classroom, and the inspirations and supports that aid in their thriving and flourishing were uncovered and shared. Woven into the intricate fabric of their stories were moments of joy, love, ambition, and of pain, hiding, and longing to be seen.

The circle was forged through the collective efforts of each individual, coming together in focus group sessions to write, share, reflect, and see one another, poetry as their guide. A connected community was forged in a short amount of time. Vulnerability, care, and comfort allowed a deep knowing and a seeing of one another, in which the co-collaborators did not have to explain or hide aspects of themselves. Poetry became a practice of self-reflection, sharing, healing, and community building. The embodiment of poetry allowed for the co-collaborators to express, feel, and see one another in deeper ways as words braided their stories, feelings, and experiences into encapsulated word pictures. The sharing of their personal stories was held in a sacred space, a vessel of acknowledgement, recognition, and honoring. The circle was a safe space, of letting go of judgement, of explanation, of worry. We could take our masks off and little by little we were able to be free, to be our whole selves. The circle was a collaborative and collective effort, each educator adding their own flavor and spice.

Review of Methodology

The use of poetry and poetic inquiry for data collection, analysis, and representation of the findings allowed the collaborators' ideas, thoughts, and actions to take center stage in the project. *Their* voices told *their* stories. The embodied research methodology and report of findings reinforces Lorde's (2007) assertion that "poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved

from the rock experiences of our daily lives" (p. 37). Poetry not only allows for the expression of what lives within us, but more importantly becomes the place from which we become empowered to dream what can be, futures we never knew were possible. Such was the aim of this research study, to empower, to create community, to uplift and center BITOC for their thriving and flourishing.

The representations of findings are mostly in the form of poems. Poems that were created by the collaborators, found poems using their own words, and my poetry as reflections of the research process. Their stories and their words illuminated what may have been previously unknown to the reader. The poems were not only an expression of the co-collaborators but are meant to invite the reader into their lives, into their experiences not just conceptually but in a way that stirs one's feelings, thus integrating the scholarship and research with the lived experiences of minoritized educators. Within the body of educational research, the experiences of BITOC are sorely underrepresented.

The methodology, utilizing action-oriented research, was integral in the empowerment of the collaborators; they were co-creators. These are their stories. These are their lived experiences. These are their words. They formed our circle. They collectively co-created our community. The data included their personal interviews—the stories of their lives in the form of found poems. They wrote pre and post reflections before and after the workshop experience. They collaborated in the creation of our focus group workshops, writing poetry and poems in their words. The use of a WhatsApp group chat also became a data source, not just as a platform for information sharing, but a connective tool for further engagement and encouragement. Throughout the research process I wrote reflexive researcher journal entries and was inspired to write countless poems about the educators and the project.

Over the course of a five-month period I met with each educator for a personal interview and together we held three focus group sessions. The creation of this hub of activity and rich complexity sought to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of BITOC in independent/private schools?
2. How can poetry be used as a potentially generative tool in healing, reflection, affirmation, self-care, community building, and expression for BITOC flourishing?

The findings of this research add to the scholarship of the renewal of teacher training institutions, of structural support within school communities, of empowering BITOC, and creating practices for community building, self-care, and sustenance. This research can contribute to a new and growing body of research regarding teacher burnout, BITOC flourishing, and equity- based education.

Findings

The findings were not simple, but rather demonstrate the rich, nuanced complexity of the human experience. Woven into the fabric of each lived story were threads that overlapped creating themes that arose to reinforce the emerging body of literature regarding Teachers of Color. There were significant findings that emerged as BIPOC educators in independent/private schools versus BITOC in public schools. The centering BITOC narratives add to the body of literature of counter-stories, the voices, and experiences of POC in a field dominated by whiteness (Sleeter, 2017). These stories are important. Each voice is important. And together, as a chorus of stories, momentum, inspiration, empowerment, and community is created. These stories matter. The findings include important topics for teacher training institutes and school administration as ways of supporting BITOC. Themes such as identity, authenticity, belonging, and support are identified as important aspects to BITOC flourishing and thriving.

Hear Our Voices Rise—Counter-Stories

Together

There was power
in the gathering.
There was energy.
We listened to one another's stories
We shared our own stories.
I became we.
Together there was strength
Together there was connection
Together there was energy
To create something new.
~Collective Educators

Truth Telling. This research project was designed to share stories for truth telling. An intentional space was created for BITOC to tell their truths. For change and at the "heart of justice is truth telling" (hooks, 2016, p. 33). The co-collaborators were willing to go through the pain of reliving some of their stories because having their truths be told and heard "brings healing rather than harm" (hooks, 2016, p. 32). Although there is a growing body of research focused on BITOC, the mainstream and dominant narrative in educational spheres, in teacher development, and teaching practices continue to perpetuate whiteness consciously and unconsciously as the norm and unchallenged status quo (Matias & Liou, 2015; Pabon & Basile, 2019; Player & Irizarry, 2022). It is not because BIPOC educators were not telling their truths, but often, these stories were kept private, where these truths did not have to be censored, or questioned, or proved (Teacher of Color Collective [TCC] & Souto-Manning, 2022). However, the emotional cost of keeping these truths hidden, in private spaces, "are far greater than we ever realized" (TCC & Souto-Manning, 2022, p. 68). And so, this research project was aimed at bringing these stories and truths out of the shadows and private spaces to the center stage.

This project aimed to confront and challenge dominant narratives in education; to empower BITOC. To not have to hide behind false masks. This project was a means of "truth telling as liberation" (TCC & Souto-Manning, 2022, p. 68). The stories serve as counter-stories and add to the established literature produced by People of Colour to illuminate, empower, and affirm their knowledge, value, and experience. Solórzano in Kholi (2021) writes that, "we need more counter stories. We need to tell more stories of racialization, resistance, and reimagination at all levels. These stories are gifts to this generation of educators and those to follow" (Kholi, 2021, p. xv). This research project aimed to do just that, centering the counter-stories of BITOC. And so, their voices speak their stories. The found poems pierce the heart and soul of their joy, their struggle, their strength. Their poetry speaks to the collective, to creating community, solidarity, to the creation of spaces where they belong. Their voices will be heard. They will not be silenced or told to sit and wait. They will rise. They are the path bearers for change.

Scholars such as Matias and Liou (2015) have argued for a deep transformation, specifically in teacher training, to move away from the existing white centered paradigms and move toward a community of color epistemology that recognizes the impact of racism and white supremacy in education. Such a transformation begins by centering the experiences of BITOC, by ensuring there are Teachers of Color in teacher preparation institutions, and that diverse teacher identities are welcomed and encouraged into the classroom.

Identity

Who am I?

Who am I?
A mother
Protector of my younglings.
Re-emerging from the rawness of bringing life into this world
An identity mixed and blurred
Connected by the cord of life, forever a part of each of them
Where do I begin and end

A teacher
Educator
Destined to spark the flint of curiosity
To help those who don't fit in
Feel seen
And heard
For what else is education but a self-education
To know oneself in order to know the world
So through the weaving of all that I am and more
I am complex
More than one thing
I am messy
And a contradiction
I am changing
And transforming
Moving forward and backward
I am an art form in constant
Becoming…

Identities were an underlying thread that seemed to run just under the surface of each question and poem throughout the study. The collaborators' intersectional and ever evolving identity as people, as women, as educators, as partners, as parents, as friends, as People of Color, as independent schoolteachers, and as leaders are in constant flow and movement in a never-ending becoming. Rios and Longoria (2021) argue that "identity affects and informs how we both teach and learn. To not recognize identity as at the core of schooling is to deny the

centrality of this key aspect of learning" (p. 90). Beginning in their childhood classrooms, the development of their self-identity and social identities that are "externally imposed and internally constructed" (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020, p. 35), schooling had a powerful influence on how they developed and grew, impacting how they saw others and themselves.

The development of our social identities are formed in our youngest years. Derman-Sparks et al. (2020) states, "when children see themselves and their families reflected in their early childhood setting, they feel affirmed and that they belong. When children's identities and families are invisible, the opposite happens" (p. 38). As the co-collaborators entered school age, coming into social contact with others, this became an important aspect of finding their place, of feeling a sense of belonging, of being seen or not seen. This included whether they saw themselves reflected in their schooling environment, what they were learning, and who was teaching them. Understanding their social identities, specifically their racial identities in relationship with others was often a winding road that they navigated on their own.

Identity is not static but rather fluid and constantly evolving. The co-collaborators continue to navigate their intersecting and evolving identities as People of Color and as teachers. Their cultural identities including rich traditions, languages, values, and mores are integral aspects of who they are, and as such, what they bring into the classroom. However, as presented through their stories, these caverns of cultural richness and experience are not always welcomed into their schooling environments. They don't often feel they can be their authentic selves. This doesn't mean they don't feel that they can ever be authentically themselves, but rather it takes time and trust in the environment, practices, and attitudes within a school culture. These lessons were often learned at a young age, where they knew they were different, they were told they were different,

that they didn't fit in, and often that became internalized, believing there was something wrong with them, that they needed to change themselves to fit in and be accepted.

Othered

I pretended
I avoided
I better assimilate
I'm not sure if people just don't like me
or if it's because I'm Chinese
"you don't look white enough"
"you don't look Black enough"
I was an outsider
There was bullying
when you're the only
you think it's you.
When you're physically bigger, you are invisible
no one saw my pain
People have told me I don't belong
Being a person of Color you learn young
how racism can be expressed in a different way
~Collective Educators

The Need for Authenticity

All the educators had experiences of othering and of exclusion due to their racial identity. However, as stated in Chapter II, the literature review suggests that the assets of BITOC are numerous and far reaching. BITOC have insight, based on their own racialized experiences in and outside of the classroom that often leads to supporting and advocating for students of Color and their families (Kholi, 2021). Rios and Longoria (2021) state the importance of "affirming and sustaining your social and cultural background—that is, your full identity—and helping you find ways to use this to foster the success of all students" (p. 2), specifically for BITOC when historically, they have been asked to neutralize their identities.

Rios and Longoria (2021) call for the creation of "humanizing spaces" within the classroom in which teachers who can be authentic invite and welcome the authenticity of the

students (p. 2). However, the wealth of understanding and cultural knowledge BITOC bring to the classroom is not always embraced and supported in education (Kholi, 2021). The teaching profession, teacher education programs, and school institutions perpetuate the ideology that one's cultural identity should be invisible, that schooling should be identity neutral as the default practice for teachers rather than embracing their cultural identities (Kholi 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). Further, the prioritization of a teacher identity trumps one's personal and social identities. This is especially strenuous for BIPOC educators as their cultural identity is "central to who they are" (Rios & Longoria, 2021, p. 90). This feeling of having to neutralize or hide certain aspects of themselves was experienced by the co-collaborators in this study who feel that they cannot be their authentic selves because they "don't feel comfortable," "seldom speak," and at times feel "invisible." Ahmed (2012) echoes this feeling, that "People of color are welcomed *on condition* they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture" (p. 83). This further adds to the feeling of isolation and not belonging.

Authenticity

I can't ever be fully authentic
I try to be my authentic self in spaces that I feel relatively safe.
I was still naïve and I've been hurt a lot by it.
I can't 100% be my authentic self
I have too many worries I won't say things properly
It takes time
especially when it started at birth.
~Collective Educators

The educators who felt they could be their authentic selves felt strong support and confidence in their roles at school. They are in positions of leadership and feel as though their voices matter, they are heard, and they are a strong part of the community. Of note is that these are the same

educators who specifically chose the private/independent schools they are working in because of the belonging and community to their particular school.

Finding Communities

I can be my authentic self
there is a community
I knew I'd always be surrounded by and have a Black community
I can be my authentic self
it's years of more than colleague relationships
my voice was respected, it mattered.
~Educators 4 and 6

Identity is strongly tied to one's sense of belonging within the school community and finding a school community that affirms and values one's identity is integral to flourishing. This was also true of one educator who was an outlier from the group, their teacher training experience has been vastly different from all the other educators in that they felt tremendously affirmed and their life experiences reflected in the program, impacting not only their teaching but their life.

Teacher Training Affirmation

Colleagues and faculty of Color run the program
There's a conscious effort
It's a powerfully affirming experience
it's making me a better person
and therefore a better teacher.
I wish everyone had that experience
Cause I know that is not the case.
~Educator 6

The impact of affirming and empowering BITOC to be able to fully live into and bring their whole selves to the classroom is a key ingredient to their flourishing and thriving in schools. Kholi (2021) speaks about professional teacher support that "is helping teachers move back authentically into who they are—their roots, their ancestry" (p. 135). The gifts and strengths that BITOC can bring to their students is rooted in their ability to live fully into who they are, their culture, their background, their upbring, their roots.

Agents of Change

All the co-collaborators set out on the path of becoming teachers because they all wanted to make a difference and be change makers. Either they wanted to create schooling experiences that they didn't receive or be a part of an education system that was like the one they experienced. The collaborators' motivations to become educators were strongly rooted in their desire to be champions of change despite the barriers and struggles they encountered, reflected in the scholarship presented in Chapter II (Gaytan, 2021; Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). The critical perspectives and experiences related to the social inequities and impacts of race on their educational journey serve as important motivators in their choice to be educators (Rios & Longoria, 2021). Almost every single educator knew from a very young age they wanted to be a teacher, there was a calling, a vocation. Despite the resistance and pushback, they all experienced along the way, from their family disagreeing with the choice to become teachers, painful experiences in their own education, teacher training experiences, or the struggle to find a teaching position, they all persevered. For some that even meant leaving their country of origin to pursue a degree and career in a completely different place.

For some educators the drive for change was motivated by their less-than-ideal schooling experiences growing up. This sentiment is strongly echoed in the body of literature regarding BITOC. Kholi (2021) shared the sentiment of BITOC deciding, "I'm going to be the teacher that I didn't have" (p. 126). The provocation to create a schooling environment that was different from their own was a strong motivation for many collaborators. Interestingly, there were two co-collaborators from which their passion and drive to be agents of change came from a strong

schooling experience that empowered them to want to become a part of what they received; these were the same two participants that felt they could also be their authentic selves in their current school communities.

Alternative Education—Hopes for Change

An important caveat is that all the co-collaborators in this study sought an alternative schooling system or educational pedagogy specifically because of their dissatisfaction with mainstream education. Current data suggests and this study further reinforces that BIPOC retention rates are higher in schools with specific and intentional educational pedagogies perhaps due to the alignment of educational values and ideals (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Each educator made a conscious and intentional decision to teach in an independent/private school, choosing a specific pedagogy that resonated with their aims and goals of education, for the betterment of the students. Although no schooling system is perfect, most of the educators feel the pedagogy they are currently teaching within, at its foundational essence, has the potential to achieve the type of change they are searching for, which has also led to their retention in their current teaching position thus far.

Alternative Education

I wanted to be a change agent
This is a contemplative path
Aspirational
Decolonizing
it's deeper
        the potential
connected thinking
connected community
societal shifting
coherent
cohesive
ideal of education
warmth
the artistic

blend with academic
closer to nature
closer to community
closer to not separating
the rhythm
the human being
relationships
new thinking
through the will
through the heart
cultivating freedom
not just teaching
collaborative teaching
experiential
equity
social justice
inclusion
to be seen and loved
I wanted to change things
bring change to education
~Collective Educators

Teacher Training

The educators laid their hearts and soul to bear in the sharing of their stories including their stories from teacher training. There were many positive experiences for some of the educators, coinciding with choosing a specific educational pedagogy that aligns with their values and ideals for education. However, most experiences support the current body of literature addressing the centering of whiteness, white supremacy, and over-representation of white teachers in mainstream teacher pre-service programs, and further illuminate the detrimental effect this has on BITOC (Pabon & Basile, 2019; Player & Irizarry, 2022; Sleeter, 2017). Although they attended specialized teacher training programs because of the alignment with their values and hopes for change in education, they still experienced the same, white-centered attitudes, values, and practices. However, there was one shining glimmer of hope, the experience of one educator who is enrolled in a teacher training program that has consciously de-centered whiteness and is

striving to create a transformative program with people of Color steering the ship. This program is not simply adding on values of equity and social justice but has approached the program from a different lens, one that is critical and conscious of the impact of race on their curriculum, practices, and educators.

White Centered Programs

The ways that whiteness dominated the teacher training programs attended by most of the teachers was not just invisible, but in some cases was quite blatant. The pervasive mood of racism that was felt by some along with the Eurocentric curriculum design further exemplified the dominance of whiteness in their training institutions.

A Mood

The undertones
it is clearly a mood of racism
The content, reading certain kind of fairy tales to tell the children,
The color black has a lot of stigma
Skin tone was referred to as peach blossom as the universal, best color for skin.
There were so many moments of shame.
I have had to push it out of my consciousness because it would actually
cause illness.
The ignorance and downright racism.
I can't call it anything else because that's what it is
~Collective Educators

Advertising Diversity

The advertising of diversity within certain training institutions was in direct misalignment and misrepresentation of the experiences the educators had in these programs. There has been a recent cultural trend to "diversify" teacher training programs and marketing has been influential in the advertising of diverse programs, however this is misleading and harmful as there is often no real change happening within these institutions (Endo, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1999). This was also the experience of several collaborators. Programs find ways to show how diverse they are by

picturing POC on their flyers and website advertisements giving the impression that they are a diverse institution that is welcoming and safe for everyone. However, they are often only making "surface level initiatives" for change (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 221). The co-collaborators in this study experienced similar marketing strategies to show their "diversity;" however, the educators did not feel that the program was changing at the deeper levels by prioritizing the needs of BIPOC in their programs. Rather, their marketing showcased their diversity on a very superficial level (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023).

Hiding

The flyer, it was incredibly triggering
the pictures of the training,
    showing Black and Brown folks
It's deceiving.
    We accept all sorts of people
but the people teaching are white
    there's no diversity in our teachers.
Are they changing or simply hiding because of marketing?
We are trying to teach
trying to teach them about bringing goodness into the world
forming the character of the child and here is a straight lie.
The flyers show all diverse people
    it's a target actually to be chosen to be presented on the flyer
It is not an honor.
they're trying to promote their school as diverse
but what they teach is not.
They're sabotaging the whole integrity
~Collective Educators

The false optics of diversity is not only disingenuous, but also harmful to BIPOC. Their "diversity" is used and commodified for the profit of the organization. Their "diversity" is only celebrated on a superficial level when it benefits the organization (Ahmed, 2012), whereas their true selves are not actually represented in any other aspect of the curriculum or teaching methods, and their voices are not included. BIPOC often must assimilate to the culture of the organization and hide aspects of themselves, or they are used as diversity spokespeople, when they are often

the only BIPOC in the program. As spoken by the collaborators, it is “triggering,” “it is not an honor” and is actually “a target to be chosen to be presented on the flyer.” Not only is the marketing falsely representing the actual demographics and curriculum, but BIPOC identity is manipulated for the benefit of the organization and not in genuine interest and welcome of the authenticity and belonging of the individual.

The marketing of diversity in teacher training programs is harmful and triggering because what is being highlighted is not what is experienced in the program. Although diversity and multiple perspectives are seemingly showcased as a program of inclusivity and belonging, this was not the case in all but one educator’s experience.

Eurocentrism as Default

The use of color blindness and race neutrality experienced within the various institutes continued to center witness as the unquestioned standard and default. The experiences and perspectives of BIPOC were left unnamed and ignored. The color blindness expressed in curriculum and teaching methods, only acts as a disguise for the normalcy of whiteness to be the default. The standardization and invisibility of whiteness as the universal norm was certainly experienced by the collaborators. This was shown through the Eurocentric curriculum taught in the training centers.

Eurocentric

White archetypes
White dolls
The long hair is blonde, flowing to the ground
it’s not kinky.
I’ve never heard a fairy tale where the hair is kinky
There’s always a certain skin colour
Peach blossom is the universal skin tone
it’s very Eurocentric

it's not inclusive
Mostly racist now that I listen to it
~Collective Educators

Where are We? The Absence of Color

Foundational to the centering of whiteness is the exclusion and absence of BIPOC voices and epistemologies in teacher training programs, which further isolates BIPOC in the teaching profession (Endo, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023). School as a form of social reproduction is integral in what perspectives and lenses curriculum is taught (Giroux, 2010). If teachers are not learning to critically examine and broaden the perspective in what they teach, by being conscious of the voices that are missing in their curricula, the standardization of white centering will continue to be the unquestioned status quo.

The importance of BIPOC perspectives and voices in teaching is a dire need as the students coming to us are more and more diverse (Passel & Cohn, 2020; Takaki, 2008). The need for teacher training programs to unearth and critically examine the ways that whiteness is upheld and normalized is of paramount importance for dissolving the perpetuation of white supremacy in education. Teacher preparation programs need to go beyond surface claims of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives by examining what is being taught and who is teaching the teachers.

The overrepresentation and centering around whiteness is not only evidenced in the curriculum but also in the overrepresentation of white teacher candidates and teacher training faculty (Pabon & Basile, 2019; Player & Irizarry, 2022). For all the educators, they were the only or one of a small number of BIPOC in their training programs. This was true across the various institutions, both private and university programs, and geographic locations reinforcing the overwhelming presences of whiteness (Sleeter, 2017).

The Only One

I was the only Latina
I was the only Person of Color
I was the only Chinese person in the program
I was the only visible minority
I was the only one
I was the only one
~Collective Educators

The absence of BIPOC educators in teacher preparation programs is a serious concern and researchers have been examining the over representation of white teachers and white teacher educators for the past 15 years (Endo, 2022; Kholi, 2021; Matias & Liou, 2015; Picower & Kholi, 2017). At present in the United States, the teaching faculty in mainstream teacher preparation programs in universities is 75% white (Dave & Fry, 2019). The data of teacher education programs shows to be less diverse than other academic fields (Endo, 2022). This was supported in the experiences of all the educators in this research project, apart from one educator who we will examine more closely as an example of teacher training reimagined.

Missing Voices

I don't think I had any folks of color
No, I used to speak a lot about recruiting more People of Color
There's no diversity in our teachers
They're all white people
The facilitators were
all white, older women and men
There were no teachers or students of the same race as me.
~Collective Educators

The absence of BIPOC epistemologies has significant and detrimental impacts not only on the future of education as an integral tool of social reproduction but also to BIPOC teacher candidates' recruitment and retention (Endo, 2022; Picower & Kholi, 2017; Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022). BIPOC teaching faculty bring similar assets as BIPOC teachers bring to their students, integral and different perspectives, and an understanding of minoritized experiences by

seeing the students through a strengths-based lens rather than deficit model (Endo, 2022; Kholi, 2021). The integration of BIPOC perspectives in teacher training curriculum and teaching is integral in dissolving the white-centered worldview (Matias & Liou, 2015; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023).

The educators in this study experienced white-centered curriculum, values, and epistemologies in their teacher training programs; however, the resonance and passion for the alternative educational path they followed and independent school they work in outweighed the negative experiences from teacher training. Despite feeling unwelcome, despite feeling unseen, and despite the harm they endured, their passion for educational change and the resonance to the educational pedagogy allowed them to persevere. This does not mean they have come out unscathed. Quite the opposite, the calluses and scars have had an impact on their sense of belonging and thriving in their schools. In part this pain and hurt acts as motivation to offer their students something different, but at a cost.

It is Possible—One Example of Change

The experience of one educator's teacher training experience stood out as an example, a shining beacon of hope for what is possible. They are enrolled in a teacher training program that was initiated and created with intention and critical consciousness to create a program that actively questions the norms and defaults in educational practice and works to dissolve the centering of a white worldview.

Teacher Training for Now and the Future

It was important it was going to be a teacher training program
for now and the future.
Where topics of
equity and inclusion and social justice and diversity
were integrated into the program
rather than an appendage tacked on

as an afterthought.
it had to be integral
which was evident in the way they present themselves
and in the work they do.
I'm incredibly happy with the choice I made.
It's a powerfully affirming experience.
it's making me a better person
and therefore a better teacher
I wish everyone had that experience
cause I know that it's not the case.
The diversity scholarship made a huge impact on my tuition
it's an attempt to increase the number of BIPOC educators in our movement
It's a powerfully affirming experience.
~Educator 6

This emergent teacher training institute is run by teachers and faculty of Color, from the development of the program to curricula, to teaching methods and underlying philosophy. There is great consciousness and intentionality put into every aspect of the program including actively taking away any barriers for teacher candidates of Color to attend. One such program is a diversity scholarship that recognizes the value and proactively seeks to attract Teachers of Color. The program is assiduously deliberate in creating a program that centers and values BIPOC voices and perspectives. This is an inspirational experience for the educator, participating in a program that was thoughtfully crafted in such a way that various perspectives are valued, honored, and included. This experience affirms them. This experience validates them. This experience makes them feel seen. This is revolutionary.

In Our Schools

Teaching is an occupation that can be highly rewarding and fulfilling and can also be associated with tremendous stress and high levels of expectations. Global reports suggest the high levels of stress experienced within the teaching profession are attributed to long work hours in and outside of the classroom, administrative tasks, parental expectations, and needs of students, academic and emotional (Bottiani et al., 2019; Brady et al., 2023; Carroll et al., 2022). The stress

of being a teacher has therefore impacted attrition rates and teacher shortages and this was before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the pandemic, education has changed and there have been increased workloads with the change in teaching practices and expectations (Marshall et al., 2022). The stress that comes with teaching is further compounded for minoritized teachers as the mental exhaustion and cumulative effect of microaggressions add to their emotional exhaustion (Kholi, 2021; Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022). The effects of repeated racism and the feeling of not belonging has considerable impacts on the mental health of BIPOC (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kholi, 2021). The experiences of the educators in this research project echoed the findings of the current scholarship.

Our Pain

I can't ever be fully authentic
I was a bit isolated and overworked
I see racism in our school
I have too many worries, I doubt myself
I'm still invisible
I feel very stressed out
I feel very vulnerable
People love to polish it over,
    say, oh a misunderstand of this and that,
    I find it hard to call it anything other than racism.
I heard with my own ears, the teacher said, I'm the help.
Words are filled with how a person views your skin color
your culture, your history
    and it negates what you can offer
because you shut down.
I feel uncomfortable
I felt out of place
        ~Collective Educators

These stories illuminate silent experiences that are often kept to themselves, stored somewhere within, like little cuts that eventually leave deep wounds and scars. If there is no one to speak with, to confide in, these experiences go unspoken, living under the surface, left alone to rot and slowly eat away at the soul of a person.

It's More Painful—Independent Schools

This group of independent school educators all sought out an alternative form of education, an educational pedagogy that aligned with their ideals, values, and aspirations for what education can be. Being a part of a school that strongly aligns with their passion for education as BIPOC made the experiences of microaggressions and isolation more painful. Not found in the existent body of literature, is the impact of being BIPOC in an aspirational educational setting and the particular pain that comes from being in a community with shared values and goals, only to experience the same racial harm.

The Pain

It's always painful, particularly in a group of people where you are more than colleagues
in a group of people devoted to this enlightened path.
when you encounter these stumbling blocks related to identity inclusion
it hurts more.
it's further to fall.
That level of resistance,
when you feel like you are working in the same direction…
yeah, it hurts more.
it's more painful than someone yelling a derogatory slur at you down the street.
it cuts deep.
it's overwhelming.
really intense.
I got attacked, I got hate mail, I got slandered.
When I come up against someone who's not hearing the message
it's painful.
So you keep trying to bring up topics that people don't want to talk about.
It takes a little out of you all the time.
they didn't want a diversity committee
they were trying to take it down
they didn't want to hear anything.
I have to do it

~Collective Educators

Each educator chose to be a part of these school communities, bound by shared values and dreams for the future and yet, when there is resistance and outright racism, "it cuts deep" as one educator put it. The experience for these educators was that it can be more painful because of the

supposed shared community values and ideals. The drive to be agents of change and find educational settings that can be institutions for change can be "further to fall" as one educator stated, when that alignment is conditional. So how do we find the sustenance to resist, to unify, to carry on? How do we thrive?

How We Thrive

The varied and diverse life experiences, educational, teacher training, and current teaching experiences of the educators wove together a fabric of rich depth, understanding, and resonance. The ingredients to not just surviving but thriving and flourishing as independent/private school educators was quite clear: the need for a sense of community such as belonging in an affinity group, institutional support, and self-care practices.

You Belong—Affinity Spaces and Poetry

The importance of community for BIPOC is as hooks (1990) captured, "one of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone" (p. 213). The need to belong, to be seen, to be able to share without fear of judgement, with understanding of knowing and without having to explain is integral to BITOC flourishing. Community and sharing for BITOC in the form of affinity spaces is a particularly important support mechanism as reminders that we are not alone. Affinity groups based on a shared racial identity have a tremendous impact on the retention and growth of BITOC (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). This feeling of belonging, being seen, feelings of solidarity, and therefore inspiration was certainly echoed and reinforced in this research project.

In a very short span of time, BITOC educators created a circle of sharing and a community that was able to connect on a deep soul level. Qualitative scholars have written about the opportunities for community building through poetics, because writing and reading our poetry

aloud builds relationships and community through vulnerability and authenticity (Faulkner, 2017; Janesick, 2016). Deep levels of vulnerability and raw sharing were developed in this research project, for those who could join in-person there was a palpable feeling in the room as co-collaborators spoke their work aloud. From such sharing new possibilities and ways of seeing the world were opened (Janesick, 2016). Over the span of three sessions, the relationships that were garnered and the level of openness that was developed surprised all of us. There was an ease, there was a comfort. There was a knowing.

Together there was…

support
listening
no judgement
love
learning more about each other
friendships
connection
community
motivation
healing
we went deep! Fast!
~Collective Educators

Being together as an affinity group of BITOC, created the conditions for a space for sharing, for knowing, for seeing one another. The circle valued each individual's gifts, wisdom, and joy, important ingredients for thriving (hooks, 1990; Love, 2019; Rios & Longoria, 2021). These spaces were where we were able to take our masks off, tell our truths, and as hooks (2016) asserts, "provide a sanctuary from the world of facades, a sacred space where we can be ourselves" (p. 32). Affinity spaces are integral communities for BITOC, as respite, from having to hide parts of ourselves. The circle was a conduit for the development of powerful connections in a very short period of time. Part of that connection is that this space was not only an affinity space,

but an affinity space combined with poetry writing, a practice of expressive, creative, embodiment.

The use of poetry allowed a space and medium for self-reflection, healing, sharing, affirmation, validation, empowerment, and healing. Writing poetry allowed the co-collaborators to tap into the depths of their feeling, each deciding whether to just dip their toes in the water or dive in. Poetry was a means of building resilience, creating a space for the emotional and feeling life of each collaborator to rise to the surface igniting creativity and imagination (Janesick, 2016). Going to the places of knowing and feeling as Lorde (2007) speaks of the "place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises" (p. 36). Poetry is the means of finding,

> The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep …. But as we become more in touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore lasting action comes (Lorde, 2007, p. 37).

A physical and emotional space was created, with great intention and care to welcome each collaborator the opportunity to center their feelings, their inner worlds of knowing that often is not centered. The space was created for each of us to explore what lies within the deep parts of our knowing, our feeling, our dreams of past and future, the opportunity to rise. The building of the circle was a sacred place of seeing one another on deep levels, of acknowledgement, and for seeing ourselves, reflected in others. The words, the images, the stories told through their poems allowed a sharing of our souls.

The engagement level of the participants was very high as we explored various parts of ourselves through words. Poetry became a vessel for reflecting on our past selves and experiences. Poetry became the medium for exploring our heritage, our names, our family histories, our visions for the future. Poetry was our counsel and friend, a page waiting for our stories to unfold, little snippets into our inner worlds and workings. Poetry became the way that we honored ourselves, we shed tears for our families, for ourselves, and for one another. Tears of knowing, tears of recognition, tears also of belonging. Our poems brought our innermost ideas and dreams to the surface. Our poems gave "us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare" (Lorde, 2007, p. 39). We named the nameless within our souls and shared some of our rawest and most vulnerable parts of ourselves with the trusted circle.

The poetry that was created was not for others, but for us, for our survival, for our healing, and for our flourishing. The poems were deep, beautiful, painful, reflections of our innermost feelings. As hooks (2016) argued, "embracing our wound is the way to heal" (p. 233). The poetry we wrote allowed us the opportunity to explore our past wounds that have often been hidden or buried away, to tend to them, care for them, express them, as a way of healing ourselves. The circle was a meaningful experience to all the co-collaborators so much so that the desire to continue meeting was unanimous. The future of this community is unknown and yet the possibilities are endless.

Virtual Support and Community—WhatsApp

Important to note was the use of WhatsApp as a connective tool in the development and building of community. The use of the digital platform was intended mostly as an information sharing tool; however, it became a means of engagement and connection in between workshop sessions. Through brief interactions throughout the weeks our WhatsApp chat group became a

place to check-in with one another informally. It became a place for sharing with one another; it became a hub for encouragement and community amidst our professional lives as teachers. The potential for future research and use of such platforms for community building and engagement can be significant especially in the possibilities of connecting educators who are alone or geographically distant from others.

Self-Care Practices

For the continued thriving and flourishing of BIPOC, the need for various practices of self-care is integral (Hersey, 2022; Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021). All the educators reported to have at least one self-care practice, although the consistency and regularity varied. Self-care is often associated with self-indulgent luxuries such as spa days and relaxing bubble baths and these are valid forms of taking care of our needs and pausing from the hustle of life. The self-care referred to in this study are practices of self-reflection and care for one's physical and emotional wellbeing. Literature surrounding BITOC experiences show that because of the challenges faced every day, a key component to not just survival but flourishing is at least one self-care practice (Kholi, 2021; Rios & Longoria, 2021).

Consistent with the findings in this study, the challenges that come with being a BITOC in an independent/private school have been evidenced and so the ways in which each collaborator finds a rejuvenating and generative practice for self-renewal, rest, and recentering is highly individualized and personal. All co-collaborators reported various forms of meditation as important self-care practices, to come back to their center, to build confidence in themselves, and meet each day with renewed energy and insight. This project specifically explored the artistic practice of writing poetry as a potentially generative tool.

Poetry as Rest and Rejuvenation

Hersey (2022) advocates for the renewal of BIPOC through the power of rest, that centering rest is "a means for healing and liberation" (p. 33) and that rest as a self-care practice allows us to reconnect with ourselves. Rest can come in many different forms. The basis of rest is restoring, slowing down, and pausing for moments alone or in community (Hersey, 2022). Poetry in this study could be considered as a restorative practice and a form of rest. Coming to write poetry meant each collaborator carved out the time for each focus group session to sit with themselves and go inward. When writing poetry time often passes unknowingly and yet stands still. Poetry can be a moment of a pause.

Poetry as the Pause

In the pause
We give ourselves the time
To reflect
Be still
And listen

In the pause
We breathe
And return to self
In the pause
I am
With
The world
We become one
Integrated
I am united with the cosmic knowing and feeling
There is stillness

In the pause
I feel
The complexity and simplicity

The nuanced and universal
In the pause
I return to myself

Poetry in this context was a form of rest, rest from the constant movement found in a day of teaching, of constantly speaking and making decisions for others. For educators, poetry can be a form of coming back to, listening, and reconnecting with themselves. Upon reflection of this research project the co-collaborators found the circle to be a generative time for self-reflection and pause from the normal grind of their everyday lives. From these moments of pause, rest, and reflection, the co-collaborators found inspiration and a safe space for feeling connected both to themselves and others.

Reflections on Writing Poetry…

I feel good
It was just for me
It was time and space
to reconnect with myself
It helped me feel more at ease
in my mind
I realized how much I miss writing
and how good it makes me feel
I feel connected
depth
engagement
intimacy
sweetness
healing
that should be a rhythmic practice for my own health
~Collective Educators

All the co-collaborators responded that they intend to incorporate poetry writing as a tool for self-care. The co-collaborators found poetry to be their pause for rejuvenation and deep soul soothing. Faulkner (2017) beautifully writes that "poetry is bandage and salve" (p. 149), a practice and tool for returning to the self and healing, resting, and renewing, something tremendously important for BITOC. The potential for poetry writing circles to be used for

self-renewal in various educational settings are endless as a means of inviting deep reflection, imagination, creativity, healing, resilience, and community building.

Implications for Change

This action-oriented research project centered the lived experiences of BITOC in independent schools as counter-stories to the dominant narrative in education. As a means of shifting the paradigm from BITOC retention and survival in private/independent schools, this study sought to explore the generative potential of poetry as a means of self-care, healing, reflection, and community building. The findings of the study have implications for pre-service teacher training institutes, school leadership, and the BITOC community at large.

Teacher Training Institutes

The stories of the educators in this study further illuminated the need for teacher training institutes to dissolve the white-centered perspectives, practices, and curricula brought to teacher candidates. The continued and detrimental effects on BITOC from performative marketing and surface level changes needs to be addressed. The voices of BIPOC need to be taken seriously for real transformation to occur. Critical investigation into what is being taught, who is teaching, and whose voices are missing are needed to begin to dissolve the perpetuation and default to whiteness as the status-quo. In-depth investigation into the Eurocentric curriculum being perpetuated must be critically evaluated and scrutinized. As such, if a teacher training institute is marketing their program as “diverse” and “inclusive,” evaluative examination of the teaching practices and faculty is a necessary course of action towards real change. Institutes can begin by exploring whether the voices of communities of Color are centered, represented, and listened to. Further examination of whether they are only serving and centering the needs of White students or whether People of Color in their programs feel valued, seen, and affirmed is needed.

Reimagination and real transformation of teacher training institutes is possible. One such program was described in which equity and inclusion work was not an afterthought or separate add-on, but was built upon values of equity, such that they are consciously incorporated throughout the entire program, co-created with teachers of Color. Additionally, financial support in the form of grants and scholarships to support and provide more access for BIPOC to attend teacher training programs can be an instrumental tool in removing barriers for their attendance. Such support is a tangible action signaling that BIPOC educators are valued, wanted, and welcomed.

Schools—Institutional Support

Although the level and regularity that BITOC may experience microaggressions and the feeling of belonging in their institutions vary, there are supports, policies, and practices that can be implemented as shown through the experience of these educators. Formal systems and policies for racial discrimination must be put in place, not only for the teachers but also for the students. If racialized aggressions occur, a formal process for the investigation of such occurrences must be formalized, instituted, and practiced. BITOC must also feel that they will be listened to, and their experiences are taken seriously. This requires the school leadership having critical consciousness to the impact of race in the educational system. The thriving of BITOC is strongly tied to the feeling of being valued, heard, and affirmed in their experiences. Therefore, any repeated microaggressions must be met with consistent action by school leadership and administration.

Proactively acknowledging and strategizing for the fact that BITOC may not automatically feel welcomed into the school may include opportunities for and support of affinity group activities and gatherings. The encouragement and support of affinity groups within independent/private schools, as evidenced by this research study, can have significant

implications for BITOC retention and thriving. Specifically, an arts-based affinity gathering can have tremendous impact. Further belonging can be fostered in an independent school community by relationship building among the entire teaching community. Most educators' feelings of belonging were positively impacted and affirmed when they felt part of the greater school community. Creating cultures of belonging can be developed through meaningful all school gatherings which typically happen at the beginning of the school year. The use of artistic practices such as poetry can aid in the development of deeper relationships through embodied and reflective processes. Support for BITOC can further be structurally implemented through formal support such as mentors or talking partners that are also BITOC, with whom they can develop relationships and not feel isolated or alone is integral to their flourishing and feeling of belonging.

Institutions may also consider formalizing self-care practices for BITOC. Incorporating artistic practice such as poetry writing into professional development days and encouraging a culture of self-reflective self-care can be beneficial in recognizing the mental toll and exhaustion. Mental health days can be proactive ways of supporting and encouraging BITOC to take the time and space they may need to renew. Providing spaces for pause, quiet, or self-reflection in school environments can be a simple and effective way of caring for the needs of your teachers and encouraging an environment of self-care, rest, and pause.

For Us—Finding Community

The collaborators' experiences writing poetry as an artistic, expressive form of rest and pause suggests that the use of an embodied form of expression while working in community is a worthy self-care practice. The prioritization of a self-care practice utilizing artistic self-reflection resulted in the co-collaborators creating a community to be vulnerable in; to explore their inner worlds, ideas, and give name to their dreams (Lorde, 2007). Poetry became a means of listening

to our inner voices, trusting our feelings, and reconnecting with ourselves. Masterfully articulated by Lorde (2007), “Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before” (p. 38). The practice of writing poetry creates an opportunity to dream a future into existence, not just for ourselves, but with others. These potentially life affirming experiences are also enriched by being in a community of others who do not need explanations. For educators, finding or creating affinity groups and interweaving an artistic practice such as poetry and affirming one another through it, can be transformative, knowing you are never alone.

Find your community, build a community. In a world built and institutionalized, “our feelings were not meant to survive … it is our dreams that point the way to freedom” (Lorde, 2007, p. 39). Listen to your inner voice. Let your dreams rise to the surface through the prose of your poems. Let those dreams help you remember who you are, your hidden power, your hidden strength. Let those dream poems turn to action for the possibilities are unknown and endless.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative research study did come with some limitations that must be recognized. The sample size, although it fell within the normal range of this type of qualitative study, was small. Seven educators were interviewed and six educators plus me participated in the focus group sessions. The small sample size does affect the generalizability of the study. Another limitation is that all the participants identified as female or non-binary. Unintentionally there were no male BITOC in the study, therefore, it did not include male experiences. Lastly, most of the co-collaborators were teachers from one alternative educational pedagogy and therefore did not represent a wide swath of independent/private school experiences.

Future Research

Counter-stories are integral to the transformation of teacher training institutes and independent/private school environments and must lay the foundation for future research centered on BIPOC educators. These stories need to be told and retold, shared, and heard. Future research concerning equity-based education must center the voices of BITOC. This study unintentionally only included the experiences of female and non-binary educators and future scholarship should incorporate male BITOC experiences. Research might also look at the impact of BIPOC school leadership, carving a place in the literature for their counter-stories and experiences in leadership roles in independent schools. Likewise, future research focused on teacher training institutes that are working from the ground up to dissolve white centering and the impact on BIPOC teacher candidates can serve as models for other institutes.

Continued focus on the thriving of BITOC, including further research on how community can be built within an independent/private school can further add to and grow the emergent scholarship. Arts based self-care practices and creation of community circles is worthwhile and important research. Integral to the future of any research is the centering of BITOC voices that have too often been ignored or brushed aside in a profession that upholds the standards of whiteness (Sleeter, 2017). The centering of such perspectives helps to create community and empowerment of BITOC. Together we rise.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Poetry for Us: Centering the Voices of Black, Indigenous, Teachers of Color Through action Research Poetry

Informed Consent Form

CONSENT AND INFORMATION

You are being invited to participate in a research project entitled Teaching in Color: Centering the voices of Black, Indigenous, Teachers of Color. This form provides information about the project and what your participation would look like. Participation will require video or audio-recorded personal interviews, group conversations, and a workshop. Please read it carefully before deciding whether you would like to participate. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided below as an indication that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. If you agree, you will receive a copy of this form.

What is the Project

The purpose of this project is two-fold: 1) to center and give a platform to the stories of Black, Indigenous, Teachers of Color (BITOC) in private schools; and 2) to investigate how poetry can be used as generative tool for BITOC for healing, reflection, community building, expression, and empowerment.

What will Participation Look Like?

Participation in this project will require you to meet first with the facilitator either virtually or in-person for a one-hour recorded session (either audio or video depending on whether it is in-person or online). This personal interview will be a space for you to share your stories about your personal educational experiences, pre-service teacher education experiences, and current teaching environment.

You will then meet with the group of participants in community with one another for two, two-hour sessions either in-person or virtually. Each session will be an opportunity to explore poetry as means of reflection, empowerment, healing, and community building.

Audio-video Recordings

The sessions will be recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. The recordings will only be viewed by the facilitator and will not be shared for any other purpose including public viewing. The recordings will be stored in a password protected computer and file and will be destroyed after three years including all other data collected.

Potential Risks

The research project described above may involve some discomfort when asked to share your stories. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent and end your participation at any time during the project. You may also ask that the information you provided be withdrawn without penalty or negative consequences. If you decide to withdraw your information, please tell the facilitator within one month of your participation.

Potential Benefits

You may receive benefits from the opportunity to share your perspective and story as BITOC in a private school. You may also benefit from the opportunity to engage with poetry as a form of community building, empowerment, and reflection. The private school community will highly benefit from research that center the voices that are too often ignored, silenced, and devalued.

Confidentiality

All information you proved will only be used and viewed by the facilitator for the sole purpose of the research described above. All your information including names will be kept confidential. In any published report, your identity will remain confidential. Information that reveals your identity will not be included in published reports. All identifying information and collected data will be kept on a password protected computer and file.

The information collected will be coded, linking each participant's name and data to a code. The facilitator will have a list of participants and their code which will be kept and secured separate from the collected data. Pseudonyms will be used in all publications. All identifying information will be destroyed three years after the end of the project.

Should you choose to withdraw from the project all your information will be removed from the study.

Conditions of Participation

Participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time without risk to yourself. You may ask that the information you provided not be used in the project and your choice will be respected. You may also choose to skip any question that you are uncomfortable with. There are no negative consequences for the withdrawal of your participation at any point in the project.

Should you any questions now or later you may contact the facilitator Erika Starzynski at xxx-xxx-xxxx or at xxx.

I have read and understand the information in this form. I had the opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research project.

Signature:
Date:

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY - PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Researcher:
Erika Meers Starzynski

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

1. I have read and discussed the research description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.

2. My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty or consequence.

3. The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.

4. If, during the course of the study, new information that has been developed becomes available which may related to my willingness to continue to participate, the researcher will provide this information to me.

5. Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent.

6. If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the researcher, who will answer my questions.

7. If at any time I have comments, or concerns regrading the conduct of the research or any questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact Erika Meers Starzynski at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx or the Antioch University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The email for the IRB is xxx

8. I should receive a copy of this Participant's Rights document

I give my consent to be audio taped. I understand that written, photographic and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the researcher.

APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your own educational experience, what were some pivotal moments for you?
2. Did your race have an impact on any of your experiences either positive or negative?
3. Have you ever had a teacher that is the same race as you?
4. What made you decide to become a teacher?
5. Tell me about your teacher training experience?
6. Were you the only teacher of your race?
7. What were some of the most memorable moments?
8. How did you choose the current school you are working at?
9. What have your experiences at your current school been like?
10. Do you have people to support you? Do you feel supported?
11. Do you feel you can be your authentic self?
12. What inspires you, helps you thrive in your work?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP PRE-REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Focus Group Session Pre- Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever written poetry?
2. Do you have a practice of self-reflection/self-care currently?
3. How do you feel about the opportunity to write poetry?
4. How are you feeling now?
5. What do you hope to gain from this experience?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

Confidentiality Agreement for the Poetry Workshop

I _____ (please print first and last name) understand that the content that I will hear in the focus group may be of a sensitive nature. I will keep confidential the conversations and information from the workshop.

Signature of Research Participant,

_____

Date

_____

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP MEETING NORMS

Focus Group Meeting Norms and Intentions Adapted from the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) BIPOC Affinity Group

- Be fully present
- Give and receive welcome
- Listen deeply
- Stay curious and open
- Make space, take space
- Speak from your own experience
- Embrace difference and diversity
- Confidentiality - what is said here stays here; what is learned here goes out
- Take positive action to right wrongs we uncover
- Give yourself and each other grace
- Allow feelings to arise - without judgment or marginalization for emotion - feelings such as anger, fear, and self-doubt that can as barriers
- Practice self-care
- Practice sacred pausing

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP POST-REFLECTIONS QUESTIONS

Focus Group Post Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel about the entire experience?
2. How would you describe your level of engagement?
3. What if anything, stood out to you?
4. What did you get out of this experience?
5. Will you consider using poetry as a tool of self-care, expression in the future?
6. Would you like to continue meeting?
7. Are you willing to share any of your poems, if so, please email them to me.

APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO PUBLISH FORM

Poetry for Us: Centering the Voices of Teachers of Color Through Action Research Poetry

Consent For Publication

I (participant name), agree to have my written contributions and found poems created by the researcher published in the project titled Poetry For Us: Centering the Voices of Teachers of Colour Through Action Research Poetry, conducted by Erika Starzynski who has discussed the research project with me.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this research and I have received satisfactory answers.

Name:_____(please print)

Signature: _____

Date:_____