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**Narratives of Becoming: Conceptualization of Teacher Identity Through the Experiences of Educators from Racially, Linguistically, and Culturally Minoritized Backgrounds**

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in the partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Education

September 2022

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs are predominantly White spaces with their faculty, teacher candidates, curriculum, and practices. In these spaces, the experiences of teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds can be alienating and their voices can be overlooked or silenced. In three interrelated but distinct studies, this research aims to highlight the experiences and perspectives of educators from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds as they are conceptualizing their professional identities as educators. These three studies are narratives of becoming as they explore conceptualization of teacher identity through three different narrative methods namely autoethnography, counterstories, and narrative inquiry. Although each study has its unique focus and specific research questions, the overarching questions this project answers are (1) How do the social and cultural contexts in which teaching, and learning occur empower/disempower minoritized identities? (2) How can the experiences of teacher candidates and novice teachers from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds inform teacher education programs to create spaces that can support them to conceptualize their professional identities as teachers? The first study responds to these questions through an autoethnographic account of my own identity conceptualization as a novice teacher educator, a former language teacher, and an international doctoral student who identifies as a Turkish immigrant, a translingual and a transnational woman. The second study is a critical dialogue that I conducted with a colleague, who is a former student, as we explored how our linguistic identities influenced our pedagogies and approaches to language learning. In this smaller study, my collaborator discussed how she refrained from tapping into her African American Vernacular Dialect while teaching, whereas I talked about my insecurities with being positioned as a "non-native" English speaker. We discussed the ideologies we had internalized and analyzed how this affected the

decisions we made when we first started teaching. Finally, the third study is a narrative inquiry following three novice teachers of color as they talk about their early schooling, teacher education programs, and their interactions with their students and colleagues in order to understand how they conceptualize their emergent teacher identities.

Theoretical frameworks used throughout the studies are intersectionality, raciolinguistics, and teacher identity. Teacher identity in this work is theorized as multiple, and changes based on social interactions with other teachers, students, teacher educators, administrators, and the broader community (Barkhuizen, 2016) and is conceptualized in conjunction with teachers' own social and cultural identities. Intersectionality helps analyze the conceptualization of teacher identity across the smaller studies through the complex ways that marginalization and privilege operate and it accounts for complexity and diversity within various identities and communities a person becomes a part of (Tefera et al., 2018). Thus, intersectionality was critical in analyzing how the social, cultural, and political contexts of participants, as well as their multiple identities, influenced their pedagogies and narratives of becoming. Completing my analytical lens was raciolinguistics, which explains how certain bodies are racialized and positioned as inferior and their linguistic practices are perceived as deficient (Rosa & Flores, 2017). As racial and linguistic identities were centers of discussions throughout the smaller studies, raciolinguistics helped frame participants' experiences within the power dynamics that privilege whiteness and standard American English. Overall, the aim of this overarching project is to highlight the voices and experiences of educators from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in order to inform teacher education programs to better meet the needs of teacher candidates from non-dominant backgrounds. Moreover, this project contributes to the conversation about "who has power and what counts as "expertise" in teacher education (Pham, 2018).

Synthesis of all three studies show that the participants, who are educators from minoritized racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, experience in-betweenness in one shape or form such as in-between two races, two cultures, or two communities, feel hesitant to take space in critical conversations around race and identity, and strive to claim agency over one or more aspects of their identities. Furthermore, participants across the three studies were using their own stories and experiences to empower their students. Overall, these narratives of becoming can be used to inform teacher education programs into more inclusive spaces. First of all, autoethnography, which is the methodology for the first study, can be used in teacher education curriculum as a self-reflexivity tool for teacher candidates and teacher educators to examine how their experiences influence their pedagogies and how these experiences are situated and influenced by the larger socio-political contexts. Secondly, exposure was a recurring concept that shaped the participants' experiences in their programs. This includes exposure to diverse voices in the curriculum and exposure to diverse student populations within student teaching. This was particularly important for educators of Color in these studies because teachers of Color are assumed to inherently know how to work with diverse student populations simply on the basis of their race and ethnicity (Jackson et al., 2015). However, the narratives of participants demonstrate that although they were eager to have critical conversations with their students, they sometimes struggled or felt hesitant to do that. All in all, studies in this dissertation are limited in their scope to the experiences of a few participants but they provide valuable insight into the conceptualization of teacher identity at the intersections of race, ethnicity, language, and culture.

# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2017–18, 79% of public-school teachers in the U.S. were White, whereas 53% of public-school students in 2017 came from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, of prospective teachers enrolled in traditional programs, 74% were White; of those enrolled in university-based alternative programs, 65% were White, and in non-university based alternative programs, 59% were White (Sleeter, 2017, p. 156). Accordingly, the majority of research on pre-service teacher education focuses on preparing White monolingual teachers to work with multilingual and multicultural students. As a result, literature on preservice teachers of color in mainstream teacher education programs are defined by Whiteness (Sleeter, 2017). This leads to marginilization as experiences of non-White preservice teachers are included in the curriculum only on topics related to diversity and the stories and experiences of preservice teachers of color become counter stories. These counter stories shed a light on how teacher education can be alienating and ineffective for teacher candidates of color when it comes to giving these teachers what they need to develop socially and culturally just pedagogies (Brown, 2014).

As the demographic discrepancy between students and teachers becomes more prominent, there have been more efforts to diversify the demographics and recruit more teachers from minoritized backgrounds. By 2010, a total of 31 states had adopted “minority teacher” recruitment policies. Those policies provide financial incentives aimed at teacher diversification such as recruitment plans for teachers of color, early outreach, alternative route programs, and creating centers and offices for various efforts related to the recruitment, placement, and

retention of teachers of color (Villegas et al., 2012). However, in addition to these attempts, teacher education programs, their curriculum and fieldwork, as well as the spaces within them should be critically examined. Otherwise, teacher education programs may strive to admit teacher candidates to diversify their demographics without much regard to meeting their needs. For instance, re-examining the curriculum can uncover what a program prioritizes, who the target audience is, and which voices are missing. Oftentimes, teachers of color or teacher candidates of color are expected to work with students of color, instead of all students (Haddix, 2016), and this expectation is often reflected in the coursework as well as the attitudes of teacher education faculty. However, teachers from minoritized backgrounds can serve as role models for all students as they bring to their teaching a deeper understanding of the cultural experiences of non-White students and help White students to unlearn some of the stereotypes they internalized about people from other backgrounds (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Therefore, diversifying the teacher demographics cannot entirely succeed if diversification attempts are only regarded as numbers without regard to the needs and experiences of teachers and preservice teachers of color and this awareness needs to start in the teacher education programs. Students of color who are pursuing teaching need to not only stay in college and become teachers, but also must develop the skills and dispositions needed for effective practice in order to remain in the profession (Plachowski 2019). Moreover, there needs to be more opportunities for preservice teachers of color to see themselves and their communities in non-deficit ways (Jackson, 2015).

Studies in this dissertation will contribute to the field of teacher education by providing voices from educators from diverse backgrounds. The terms "from minoritized backgrounds," "non-dominant backgrounds," and "underrepresented backgrounds" are used interchangeably throughout this project and these terms indicate racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. In the

individual studies, the terms “teachers of color” or “teacher candidates of color” are also used but these terms specifically refer to those who identify as racially non-White, whereas the aforementioned terms are inclusive of identities other than race. The three studies within this project are all narratives of becoming, following the teacher identity conceptualization of educators from minoritized racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Together, they will provide an understanding of what attracts future teachers from non-dominant backgrounds to teaching and how teacher education programs can be improved to make these spaces more inclusive through different narrative methods. Furthermore, I will explore how we, as teacher educators, can benefit from having multilingual and multicultural teachers as resources by providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to have the space to serve as key informants by using their backgrounds and experiences. Hence, this project contributes to the conversation about “who has power and what counts as “expertise” in teacher education in order to effectively serve students from racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse backgrounds” (Pham, 2018, p. 55). The broader impact of this research is to recruit and retain teachers from minoritized backgrounds who can be role models for all students and disrupt students’ biases about people from other backgrounds.

## Literature Review

Addressing the growing diversity in student populations by focusing solely on preparing White monolingual teachers for multicultural education overlooks the needs of teacher candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. An unintended consequence of multicultural teacher education is that non-White, racially and linguistically minority pre-service teachers are silenced (Haddix, 2016). As a result, even if teacher education programs plan to recruit more diverse teacher candidates, they often do not create spaces for them to learn to use their

backgrounds and cultures as resources to teach diverse student populations. There is often the assumption that preservice teachers of color by virtue of their ethnicity know how to teach diverse students (Jackson et al., 2017). This becomes problematic because this assumption leads to the generalization of teachers of color and disregards the diversity within cultures. Moreover, it reinforces the notion that the target of teacher education should be preparing White monolingual teachers for multicultural education. With this mindset, teacher education programs may unintentionally support the misconception that simply recruiting more pre-service teachers is sufficient to transform teacher education programs and schools in general. Hence, the needs of pre-service teachers from underrepresented backgrounds tend to be overlooked and their voices are limited in the field of teacher education research.

Research on the experiences of teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds show that they feel overlooked in teacher education courses until it's time to talk about and explore the "other" (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2020). In these cases, they are often expected to represent a whole culture or a race with their perspectives and to provide unique perspectives to help their fellow pre-service teachers who come from dominant backgrounds. However, "by excluding, silencing and ignoring the presence of preservice teachers of color, multicultural teacher education is, paradoxically, securing the norm of Whiteness in teacher preparation" (Montecinos, 2004, p. 168). Other studies show that teacher candidates of color use various coping mechanisms and strategies to deal with this frustration and feelings of isolation (Gist, 2017). These coping mechanisms could present themselves in a variety of ways. However, the most common method to deal with microaggressions is verbal silence (Endo, 2015).

In my analysis of the experiences of teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds, I drew from research on creating inclusive spaces for teacher candidates of color, re-examining

teacher education programs and curriculum, making space for critical conversations in coursework and fieldwork, and the theories in ELT that challenge the dominant notions of identity and what means to be a language teacher, which was my starting point and my introduction into this field of teacher identity. It is important to note that there are many other studies and strands that address the issues of minoritized teachers and teacher candidates, however, my focus is on teachers and teacher candidates in overall K-12 U.S. education, even though I have also inhabited the world of applied linguistics and global English language teaching. The following sections constitute works and theories that contributed to the analysis of this study and/or set the groundwork for it.

**Recruiting Teacher Candidates**

There are various projects that promote early action by reaching out to future teacher candidates while they are still in K-12 to attract them to the teaching profession earlier and work around their expectations and resources. Although there are many initiatives and projects that have similar purposes, I will only include a select few projects, which I drew from during the early stages of this dissertation. The most prominent one of these projects is called Grow Your Own (GYO) initiatives. GYO was started by Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA), a community group working in a low-income Latino neighborhood (Sleeter, 2014). LSNA, then, came together with Action Now, a community organization working in Chicago's African American neighborhoods as they were struggling with teacher retention, and along with other groups, they created what would become the GYO initiative (Bartow et al., 2014). In time, GYO became a way to prepare teachers who are advocates of equity and equality for Chicago's communities. Although Grow Your Own grew out of Illinois, it expanded to various other teacher development programs that were founded in order to increase the retention of teachers,

especially teachers from underrepresented backgrounds in urban communities. Programs like GYO allows students to have access to experienced teachers who can work to improve the quality of the education system as more teachers stay in the profession and have the experience and the community knowledge they need to work with their students (Gist, 2017). Furthermore, students benefit from being exposed to a teaching force that is racially and ethnically representative of the student population (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). As a social justice project, GYO calls for creating opportunities for teachers to adopt "pedagogical practices that are meaningful and transformational for students, and supporting student learning in ways that are sustaining their development as critical beings" (Gist, 2019, p. 16). Some of the criticisms GYO initiatives face are the length of time it takes for candidates to graduate, lack of full commitment to the GYO mission, state funding, and academic proficiency tests (Bartow et al., 2014).

Another well-known teacher recruitment initiative is the California Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program (PTTP). In response to the shortage of bilingual teachers, 13 paraprofessional teaching training programs were created in California. The goal of PTTP was to assist paraprofessionals in the districts to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Multiple Subject teaching credential (Valenciana et al., 2005). Similar to GYO, this project was also a collaboration, but between the school district and two higher education institutions. Similar to PTTP, pathway2teaching initiative also offered alternative paths to teaching and encouraged candidates to critically examine institutional racism and policies and practices in schools that marginalize certain groups (Tandon et al., 2014). All three of these projects and many more were created on the premise that communities that are struggling with teacher retention, especially low-income and racially diverse communities, could benefit from a school to teaching pipeline by recruiting, training, and supporting future teachers from within the community. These

teachers would share experiences and backgrounds with their students and be better able to meet their needs.

There are several other community-based programs that advocate for educating and training teacher candidates within the communities they are expected to work with. However, this also brings about the criticism that teacher candidates of color are often recruited into the field to work with students of color, and thus their racial and linguistic backgrounds are positioned both as the problem and the solution (Cheruvu et al., 2014). The underlying assumption behind these initiatives is that teachers of color working with students of color from high-poverty communities will transform the educational experiences for these students and close the achievement gap (Haddix, 2017). Thus, the burden of "fixing" high-poverty and majority racially diverse schools tend to fall on teachers of color and this can be overwhelming. Therefore, it is critical to re-examine the unintentional consequences of diversifying the teacher demographics and not regard teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds as merely solutions to a problem. Consequently, teacher education programs must provide opportunities for teacher candidates from non-dominant racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds to see themselves and their communities in non-deficit ways, and not additive to teacher education (Jackson, 2015) and prepare them for the realities of K-12 classrooms and policies that inherently support hegemonic whiteness through coursework and fieldwork. Furthermore, as the initiatives to increase diversity in recruitment to teacher education programs increased, the experiences of novice teachers and teacher candidates of color, as well as why they came into teaching and what draws them away need to be examined to inform future initiatives (Haddix, 2017).

Although my participants were not a part of any community-based projects and I did not interview them about their recruitment experiences, their K-12 experiences were a major part of their narratives, and their early schooling shaped their pedagogies. Hence, community-based pedagogies and teacher education that is situated in community learning are important elements of transforming teacher education programs.

**Teacher Education Curriculum**

After teacher candidates are admitted to teacher education programs, they need to feel prepared through coursework and fieldwork for the realities of their future classrooms. This involves navigating school politics, working with the hidden curriculum, methods for co-teaching and working with diverse student populations (Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016). Re-examining the curriculum is an essential part of this. Courses that are offered with their preferred readings, methods, assignments all influence how teacher candidates come to see as part of their responsibilities as curriculum is never neutral and is always implicated in power relations (Morgan, 2016, p. 712). It is in these spaces that teacher candidates learn about the sociopolitical contexts of K-12 schools and their positions within them. Thus, by critically examining the curriculum, teacher education programs can make space for courses, materials, and discussions that could minimize the frustration novice teachers of color might face in their first years (Gist, 2017).

In addition to the courses that are offered, it is also important to examine how these courses incorporate the experiences of teacher candidates and use them as resources. When teachers from minoritized backgrounds start teaching, their pedagogies and identity conceptualization as novice teachers are influenced by their experiences in their teacher

education programs. Learning to be empowered by their own backgrounds, viewing their identities and experiences as assets, and being familiar with how to have difficult conversations with their students are just some of the factors that can contribute to whether or not they stay in the profession. In a study conducted with Black male teachers, Bristol and Goings (2019) have found that teachers of color often doubted their own competency and were hyper aware of the expectations to blend in and interact with their White colleagues. Thus, understanding the conceptualization of teacher identity, especially to support teachers from minoritized backgrounds, calls for seeing the teacher as a product of experiences, pre-service learning, and personal qualities within a larger system of discourses and contextual circumstances (Strom et al., 2018).

**Student Teaching Experiences**

Student teaching experiences are important spaces in understanding how pre-service teachers from minoritized backgrounds are conceptualizing their emergent identities as new teachers. Studies show that they may feel unwelcome by the school staff, uncomfortable due to deficit and racist comments made by cooperating teachers and facing challenges enacting social justice pedagogies (Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020). Thus, student teaching should be viewed as a segue into "mainstream" teacher culture, which helps teacher candidates understand the particular linguistic and cultural norms (Haddix, 2010a) and equip themselves with the tools to navigate these new spaces. Conversations should address “issues related to race, equity, social justice, and critical theories” (Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016, p. 32). Furthermore, their own experiences navigating their social, cultural, and political spaces need to be incorporated because having them reflect on their own education and the oppression they faced in their lives could

contribute to teacher education faculty's understanding of the current realities of students from minoritized backgrounds (Kohli, 2009).

Other factors affecting novice teachers' conceptualization of their professional identities during fieldwork are: whether or not students and families perceive them to be competent teachers based on their identities, witnessing power dynamics and inequities in schools, interactions with colleagues and administration, feeling of othering, misalignment with school policies and curriculum, and having to compromise their own values (Bettini et al., 2021). These are experiences that teacher candidates are faced with when they start student teaching or teaching after graduation. In order to prepare them for the realities of K-12 education, they need to have these conversations, question and challenge the systems of power, and learn to find ways to cope with all of it.

**Research on Teacher Identity**

All of the aforementioned sections, namely recruiting teachers, teacher education curriculum, and fieldwork, all contribute to novice teachers' conceptualization of teacher identity. Three smaller studies in this dissertation all build upon the concept of teacher identity through different perspectives. Using narratives, these studies tell the stories of becoming as participants continue to conceptualize their social and professional identities. In this research, teacher identity is framed as a process of becoming because teacher identity is the shift to becoming a teacher and teacher candidates develop their teacher identities as they discover "within themselves the characteristics they share with 'good' or expert teachers" (Marble, 2012). Webb (2013) argues that teachers cannot achieve a presumed, fixed state of identity, therefore teacher identity conceptualization is ongoing and a process of becoming. Drawing from the

literature of “becoming,” I define teacher identity as dispositions, values, and pedagogies teachers develop as they are making sense of their roles as teachers and draw from their own lived experiences in different social, cultural, educational, and political spaces.

Examining teacher identity through narratives has been a growing field of research. Ross et al. (2022) explain that using a narrative inquiry to examine the conceptualization of teacher identity helped them understand how the participants make meaning of becoming and being teachers as novice teachers in a district facing equity issues. They analyzed the experiences of their participants through their understanding and adaptation of “best loved self,” which they explain as involving the individual in developing a sense of themselves as teachers, their convictions that shape those identities, and their desires to engage in the curriculum process (Ross et al., 2022, p. 3). Narratives of becoming a teacher and examining teacher identity are also used to explore the experiences of novice teachers of Color, which is more similar to the scopes of studies within this dissertation. Pizarro and Kohli’s (2020) analysis of teacher identity involved counterstory telling as novice teachers of Color told their narratives of navigating racial battle fatigue. The participants in this study talked about the influence of their racialized experiences while teaching, feeling undervalued by colleagues, and learning to cope and show resilience to stay in the profession. This shows how the teacher identity conceptualization for teachers of Color also include confronting dominant paradigms that create inequities and microaggressions as well as feeling pressure to be the school superheroes from being the only ones expected to advocate for students of Color (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Similarly, following seven first year teachers’ of Color to highlight their successes and challenges as they are adapting to their new roles as teachers, Borrero et al. (2016) have found that novice teachers of Color in their study faced barriers from the administration in trying to enact culturally responsive

pedagogies in their teaching, which made them struggle to stay motivated. These teachers were striving to find their voices as new teachers and as teachers of Color. Another important contribution to the field of teacher identity comes from Hernandez-Johnson et al. (2021) as they analyze the experiences of teachers of Color who left teaching in order to examine the challenges they face and offer implications for teacher education programs to better prepare teacher candidates of Color and for schools to create more inclusive spaces to retain these teachers. Through focus groups with PK-12 teachers, administrators, other licensed personnel, non-licensed personnel, students, and family members, they have found that lack of support, appreciation, and respect for teachers of color, as well as forms of injustice in school settings contributed to the retention problem of teachers of Color. Furthermore, these teachers who left teaching expressed that leaving the profession was an emotionally complex decision but their commitments to working with students remained (Hernandez-Johnson et al., 2021). The narratives of becoming in these three aforementioned studies, therefore, show us that teachers of Color go through struggles to enact their pedagogies, feel fatigue from dealing with microaggressions and racial battles, and are learning to navigate their cultural and professional identities as they are conceptualizing their teacher identities.

It is important to note that the majority of the research on teacher identity centers on teacher education programs because these are spaces where teacher candidates start to conceptualize their professional identities as teachers and begin to see themselves as becoming teachers. This is because teacher education is embedded in cultural, social, ideological, and political contexts, which influence how they form their pedagogies and perceive their roles in the profession (Jenlink, 2022). All three studies in this project also have sections specific to teacher education programs, and therefore, the works that influenced my research the most are on

conceptualizing teacher identity as teacher candidates. Examining the narratives of four teacher candidates during their internship, Varghese and Snyder (2018) report that teacher candidates in their study experienced marginalization within their teacher education programs on a number of levels, which resulted in racial microaggressions and questioning of their linguistic abilities. What contributed to their construction and negotiation of their teacher identities were the influences of their mentors, advocacy resources and support within their school districts, their personal histories related to their intersectional identities, and cultural connections they shared with their students (Varghese & Snyder, 2018). In a similar study, Wall (2016) followed six pre-service teachers for two years, using narrative methodologies such as autobiography and longitudinal interviews and observations. Wall's (2016) study showed that pre-service teachers had certain assumptions and beliefs regarding the role of teachers, which were then challenged as they took more courses and were involved in fieldwork. These pre-service teachers started to conceptualize their teacher identities even before starting their teacher education programs. However, this conceptualization process was ongoing as they gained more experience. In addition to being ongoing, Lee and Schallert (2016) assert that this process of becoming is also contextual. In their qualitative inquiry of pre-service teachers, they found that the participants' present selves were recognized differently depending on context. Depending on their interactions with their students and mentors, they were positioning themselves as student only, teachers only, or students and teachers simultaneously. As they learned more about student growth, learning differences, and felt more comfortable teaching, they increasingly positioned themselves as teachers (Lee & Schallert, 2016). Other studies report that teacher candidates negotiated their teacher identities around their own racialized schooling experiences and drew from their lived

experiences and cultural identities when conceptualizing their professional identities (Haddix, 2010b; Plachowski, 2019; Brown, 2014; Gist, 2017).

Under the scope of teacher identity, I have also included language teacher identity. Although the overall project is focused on teacher identity in general, linguistic identity is highlighted and explored in all three studies and two of the studies explore the concept of language teacher identity. In order to define and theorize language teacher identity, I relied on the field of English language teaching (ELT), which helped frame my analyses of my own experiences and the experiences of my participants. Language teacher identity refers to "the way language teachers see themselves and understand who they are in relation to the work they do" (Barkhuizen, 2021, p. 549). The two main concepts that influence language teacher identities were non-native speakerism and translingualism. Non-native speakerism challenges the deficit and binary notions of language that separates speakers as native versus non-native but instead frames languages as unified and coherent (Jain, 2021). The monolingual, binary views on English, for instance, positions English speakers from the West as the owners of English and by doing so, it also creates a hierarchy between languages and justifies the misconception that the purpose or the target of teaching English to speakers of other languages is to help them use English like a native speaker. This monolingual view argues that anyone who is using or learning English as a second language should adhere to the system of rules for the language in order to be perceived as competent (Motha et al., 2011). Furthermore, those who speak English like native speakers of "standard" English, are more favored, feel less insecure, and struggle less when learning English (Davies, 2004). As such, native speakerism creates power dynamics between various groups of language users and causes certain groups to have more privileges linguistically, socially, and politically. However, not all native speakers share the same

privileges. Native English speakers from Non-Western countries are more stigmatized than native English speakers from Western countries of British descent. Similarly, language users who speak African American English or other dialects of English that are not considered to be "standard" are favored less, which will be further explored in the studies through the lens of raciolinguistics. In this regard, a native speaker identity is closely linked with a White U.S. American monolingual English speaker identity. As a result of this normative discourse through standard English, ideologies and practices related to racism and oppression are naturalized (Macedo et al., 2016). English only policies, the standard English notion, and considering "native" English speakers from non-Western countries as "non-native" are just some of the concepts that support these linguistic hegemony ideologies. These were the ideologies that influenced the teacher identity conceptualization of language teachers from non-dominant linguistic backgrounds.

The field of translingualism, also in conjunction with transnationalism, offers a lens for translingual language teachers to reconceptualize their identities and experiences outside of the dichotomous categories that exist in the monolingual perspective. These are the concepts that informed my analysis of linguistic identity throughout the studies in this project. Translingualism creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience (Wei, 2011, p. 1223). Translingual pedagogies involve understanding and addressing language ideologies that teachers had been socialized into and acknowledging that teachers' lived experiences contribute to shaping their identities and pedagogies (Sanchez-Martin, 2022). Consequently, translingualism is a concept

that needs to be a part of the teacher education curriculum as it provides teacher candidates with tools to challenge the monolingual ideologies and counteract linguistic biases (Flores & Aneja, 2017). Translingualism and transnationalism will be explored further within the smaller studies in this project.

All in all, teacher identity and translingual language teacher identity were explored throughout this study. This study builds on this field of teacher identity by offering three different perspectives to analyze the narratives of becoming a teacher of participants from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds as they claim agency over their identities, empower themselves and their students, and face challenges asserting their voices.

## Theoretical Frameworks

What unites the three studies in this dissertation is identity. Although each study is distinct in its focus, they all highlight racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities of educators from minoritized groups and explore how these social and cultural identities help them conceptualize and negotiate their professional teacher identities. First of all, in order to make sense of how socio-cultural and professional identities interact and intersect with each other, they need to be examined with reference to larger social structures and how these structures are reproduced in everyday experiences need to be understood (Norton Peirce, 1995). In the studies that follow, participants talk about how their race, ethnicity, and language influenced their schooling experiences, discussed how their preconceived notions associated with their identities influenced the way people viewed them, and how certain identities were more visible than others. This also brings about the role of agency in identity, which is a part of my theoretical framework under the scope of identity. Agency is individuals taking action to take control, give significance,

empower, and transform themselves and/or the conditions of their lives (Moore, 2008). It is bound to context; therefore teachers may exercise agency in different ways depending on with whom they interact, the power dynamics at play, and other context specific factors that may affect how they present themselves (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019). In some spaces, we are assigned identities. Sometimes we accept these assignments but at other times we attempt to assert our own agency to claim or reject those assignments. Studies in this dissertation explore participants' experiences when they were assigned an identity, when they tried to claim an identity, and when one aspect of their identities were more visible than others. Their attempts to assert agency over their social identities also influence the conceptualization of their professional identities as teachers, teacher candidates, and teacher educators as teachers draw from their own social and cultural experiences. Teacher identity, in this project, is defined as theorized as multiple, and they change with social interactions with other teachers, students, teacher educators, administrators, and the broader community and in different social and professional spaces that we become a part of (Barkhuizen, 2016). Furthermore, social and professional identities cannot be completely different spheres because our teacher identities are negotiated through our interactions with others in various social, cultural, and political contexts, as well as our perception of power within these spaces (Wallen & Tormey, 2019). Therefore, a teacher's identity conceptualization cannot be performed separately from their own social and cultural identities, and in order to make sense of how teachers conceptualize their identities, identity needs to be framed as dynamic, multi-layered, and in interaction with each other (Norton Peirce, 1995).

Identity is often used as an analytical lens to highlight the perspectives and voices of people from minoritized and non-dominant backgrounds. One of the strands within this field is

decentering whiteness. This strand argues that whiteness is used to represent the idealized White subject as the ideal informant and expert while positioning everyone else as the opposite and the other (Flores, 2016). As a result, this hegemonic whiteness allows White people to claim a raceless, languageless, cultureless identity by positioning them as the “norm” and the “standard” (Haddix, 2016). Thus, by decentering whiteness, it is aimed to move the conversation away from the power of whiteness and focus on voices that are silenced. Although this strand generates important conversations by critiquing whiteness, questioning the power and privileges that comes with it, and challenges the positioning of minoritized groups as the other, this is not the strand I am using to highlight the perspectives of those who are and feel othered. There are two reasons for this. First of all, navigating predominantly White spaces as teachers from minoritized backgrounds is a key theme across all three studies, meaning that the studies are focused on the experiences of participants. Secondly, due to the cyclical nature of this strand, by using a decentering whiteness lens, whiteness is unintentionally centered in the conversation and the experiences of non-White groups are evaluated or explained within the scope of whiteness and its power. However, it is important to note that whiteness is still present throughout the studies in this dissertation but in a different form. When I talk about whiteness in the following chapters, I am talking about what it represents; the dominant groups and systems that have power. This could be an identity that is U.S. American of European ancestry, from a middle-class Christian background, who is monolingual and speaks “standard” American English. Although there are many other identities that are dominant and have power over others such as gender, sexuality, ability, etc., the scope of the studies in this dissertation was limited to race, ethnicity, language, immigration, socioeconomic status, and religion. As a result, though whiteness is a concept that comes up in certain parts of the studies, instead of using decentering whiteness as my analytical

lens, I have relied on intersectionality and raciolinguistics as they examine and bring forward the experiences of groups from non-dominant backgrounds through multiple perspectives.

Intersectionality was used to examine identity as it focuses on understanding the relationship between power dynamics and social identities (Carbado et al., 2013). It allows us to analyze how our experiences in different social spheres shape our social identities, which in return influence our professional identities as teachers. Furthermore, it urges us to theorize identity as "the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788). In study 1, intersectionality is used to analyze how my racial identity as a White woman on its own is not sufficient to examine my experiences in social and professional spheres because my ethnicity, nationality, language, and religion, among other components of my identity, all interact with each other and shape how I navigate the social and professional spaces. Similarly, in studies 2 and 3, participants talk about their experiences at the intersections of race, gender, nationality, language, etc. as they try to conceptualize their new teacher identities. Therefore, intersectionality becomes an important lens in the analysis of social and professional identities that are highlighted in this study.

In addition to intersectionality, raciolinguistics also helps form my theoretical framework in examining identity through racialization and racialized experiences. Raciolinguistics explain how certain bodies are racialized and positioned as inferior and their linguistic practices are perceived as deficient, which are lingering effects of colonization (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Racialization can occur in different ways through race, ethnicity, language, nationality, religion, etc. Raciolinguistics support intersectionality as a lens in terms of analyzing identity as a multi-layered phenomenon. These racialized experiences influence how people are perceived and how they navigate the systems of power that give privilege to the dominant racial and linguistic

groups. Furthermore, raciolinguistics establishes a strong connection between race/ethnicity and language. As such, raciolinguistics researchers claim that Whiteness has become an intrinsic element of "standard" or "mainstream" English (Rosa & Flores, 2017) and as a result, "standard" English becomes the norm and what is expected in professional settings. Hence, raciolinguistics, and the concept of racialization within raciolinguistics, has become an important analytical lens through which I was able to analyze the experiences of the participants and connect them to the relevant social and cultural contexts.

All in all, each study conceptualized identity, agency, and teacher identity based on their unique focuses. Intersectionality and raciolinguistics were the prominent concepts forming my analytical lenses, but each study makes use of these concepts from a different point of view and include other relevant concepts to complete the framework.

## Overview of the Project

This research examines the perspectives and stories of educators from non-dominant racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds regarding their experiences in their teacher education programs, first year of teaching, and graduate school programs. In three distinct but interconnected studies, these educators provide their voices as I explore how their identities have shaped their pedagogies, how their schooling experiences contributed to their interest in teaching, and the tensions that have emerged during their journeys from teacher candidates to educators. The first study is an autoethnography of my own experiences as a novice teacher educator coming into terms with my racial identity as a White woman from a Middle Eastern country and an international doctoral student. Using critical incidents, I have analyzed key moments contributing to the formation of this identity over the years. The second study is a

critical dialogue between a novice language teacher who identifies as a biracial woman and me as we examined the role of language in our construction of a professional language teacher identity. Lastly, the third study follows three novice teachers from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and explores how their pedagogies were influenced by their participation in predominantly White monolingual spaces. The final chapter of this project is a synthesis of these three smaller studies and how they contributed to my analysis of teacher education programs and schools, which need to be critically examined in order to make space for voices and perspectives that are often overlooked. My role in this project followed a transition from personal to more distant. While I collected some of the data for the third study before I started any of the chapters, the first study I completed was my autoethnography, which comes first in the order of the studies. This was a study in which I was both the participant and the researcher. The second study was a critical dialogue with a colleague, who is also a former student. With this study, I still remain as a participant, but it is no longer only about me. It's an analysis of common experiences shared by two collaborators. Lastly, in the third study, my main role is as a researcher, although the interviews were conducted as a conversation in which I have shared my personal experiences to help facilitate conversations. The final chapter of the project, the synthesis of three studies, presents information on how each study connects with each other and the understandings I have personally acquired as a researcher and a novice teacher educator.

Although each study has its own specific focus and research questions, the overarching research questions guiding these studies are as follows:

(1) How do the social and cultural contexts in which teaching, and learning occur empower/disempower minoritized identities?

(2) How can the experiences of teacher candidates and novice teachers from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds inform teacher education programs to create spaces that can support them to conceptualize their professional identities as teachers?

Table A below explains how each individual study addresses these questions and demonstrates the specific questions unique to each study that support the overarching guiding questions in more detail.

**Table 1: Research Questions and Individual Studies**

| **Studies/Questions** | (1) How do the social and cultural contexts in which teaching, and learning occur empower/disempower minoritized identities? | (2) How can the experiences of teacher candidates and novice teachers from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds inform teacher education programs to create spaces that can support them to conceptualize their professional identities as teachers? |
|---|---|---|
| **Study 1** | Responds by exploring how racialization contributed to how I sometimes struggled to claim my racial identity as a White woman from a Middle Eastern country because my linguistic and ethnic identities caused people to perceive me as non-White. | Responds by analyzing how concepts such as intersectionality and transnationalism helped me make sense of how my identities were perceived by others and my attempts to gain agency over the ways I presented and claimed my identities, which can be used to create spaces that support minoritized identities in teacher education programs |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Study 2** | Responds by focusing on how our interactions with our students and colleagues, as well as our pedagogies and approaches to language, were influenced by our own experiences being from linguistically minoritized groups | Responds through our conversation regarding how learning about certain concepts and pedagogies (raciolinguistics, AAVE, translingualism etc.) helped us make meaning of our experiences and our conclusion that teacher education programs could benefit from explicitly teaching these concepts |
| **Study 2** | Responds by exploring how the participants negotiated their new identities as teachers through different educational and professional spaces that they occupied, and how they drew from their own experiences as students and teacher candidates when forming their pedagogies and performing interactions with their students and colleagues. | Findings show that teacher candidates of Color had positive experiences in teacher education programs when they were encouraged by faculty to explore diverse voices in the curriculum, had experience working with diverse student populations during fieldwork, and felt as though their lived experiences were resources. |

**Study 1**

This study explores identity through an autoethnographic analysis of whiteness on the borders of an insider-outsider status. It addresses the research questions from the overall project through my own experiences conceptualizing my identity as a doctoral student, international graduate student, and a novice teacher educator. The first question asks: How do the social and cultural contexts in which teaching and learning occurs empower/disempower minoritized identities? This study responds to it by exploring how racialization contributed to how I sometimes struggled to claim my racial identity because my linguistic and ethnic identities caused people to perceive me as non-White. As an immigrant woman from Turkey, having

moved to the United States first as a high school student, then again as an international graduate student in Education, the ways I perceived, claimed, and presented my identities differed in each of these spaces. However, as my interests in my doctoral studies started to shift towards diversity and identity in teacher education, I have started to reflexively analyze my own racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities in order to be able to take space in critical conversations. Focusing on the negotiation of my racial identity and its influences on my doctoral work, this study follows the evolution of my understanding of race through my early schooling, master's program, teaching at a public high school, and lastly my doctoral program. Using one critical incident and two leading up to incidents, I was able to examine the contexts in which I studied and worked, and the dominant ideologies prominent in these contexts that impacted how I was positioned by others.

Autoethnography was best suited for this study because autoethnography's methodological goal is to understand the relationship between the individual and the cultural, and to make the personal political through exploring multidimensional identities, practices, and pedagogies (Yazan et al., 2020). Therefore, I started by reflecting on how race was presented while I grew up in Turkey and my understanding of my racial identity while I lived there. Furthermore, I analyzed the discrepancies in the racial identity that was assigned to me when I moved to the United States and how others actually perceived me. This discrepancy that caused me to feel an in-betweenness was a result of the historically socio-political nature of race in the United States as a construct that has changed over the years.

This study responds to the second research question of the overall project, which inquires about transforming teacher education programs to support teacher candidates, teachers, and emerging teacher educators as they conceptualize their new professional identities, by analyzing how concepts such as intersectionality and transnationalism helped me make sense of how my

identities were perceived by others and my attempts to gain agency over the ways I presented and claimed my identities. Furthermore, this autoethnographic study contributes to the overall project of providing counter-narratives in teacher education because being a novice teacher educator undertaking research in identity and social justice, my experiences of feeling like an outsider to the conversations around racial identity may be shared by others. Considering that universities are increasingly becoming transnational spaces, it is imperative to have critical discussions around identity with all students so that certain groups do not feel intimidated to join the conversation.

**Study 2**

The second study is a critical dialogue that I conducted with Angelina, who is a former student and now a colleague, as we examined the role language played in conceptualization of our teacher identities. Using counter-narratives, this critical dialogue between us provides perspectives from two educators from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds by reflecting on moments when we faced identity tensions while teaching. This study answers the first research question regarding how our social and cultural spaces influence the way we conceptualize our teacher identities by focusing on how our interactions with our students and colleagues, as well as our pedagogies and approaches to language, were influenced by our own experiences being from linguistically minoritized groups.

Our collaboration on this study evolved in several ways. Having first met while I was teaching a course as a doctoral student, our relationship began as that of a student and instructor. Following that course, we worked together again as I was assisting in a seminar for practicum students, in which Angelina was a student. In that space, I was her mentor. Upon her graduation,

I reached out to her asking if she would be willing to be a part of my dissertation. However, at the initial stages of this dissertation, she was only a participant that I interviewed regarding her student teaching experiences at a racially and linguistically diverse school. This study grew out of that researcher/participant work as I believed bringing her in as a collaborator would enrich this study and turning our discussions into a dialogue would better serve the purpose of the overall project. When we started our critical dialogue, we had already talked about our common experiences as language teachers who felt as though we needed to present a specific competent language teacher identity in order to be perceived as legitimate. As we talked more about our stories, found common themes, asked each other questions to uncover our decisions and feelings during those moments, we reflected on the deficit ideologies we internalized.

In addition to the data collection part, my collaborator contributed to this study by reviewing the chapter, changing or elaborating on certain parts, and giving her suggestions to improve teacher education programs. The rest of the chapter, including the analysis part, was completed by me. I used counter-narratives to report our stories of examining our professional identities as language teachers because they serve "as a tool for analyzing and challenging the dominant stories of privilege" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Counter storytelling challenges the "master narrative" which provides narrow depictions of minoritized groups (Montecinos, 1995) and presents their narratives away from a White monolingual point of view. Although our backgrounds are very different, our experiences with coming to terms with our linguistic identities were similar. We used raciolinguistics and translingualism lenses to analyze our experiences as our deficit views of our linguistic identities can be explained by the lingering effects of colonization, which positioned the linguistic practices of non-European groups as linguistically deficient (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Furthermore, raciolinguistics explain that

linguistic identities are perceived to be closely linked to racial identities as Whiteness and "standard English" have become strongly associated (Motha, 2006). We uncovered that the internalized oppression started taking roots in the predominantly White monolingual spaces in which we were educated and started teaching. My collaborator was often the only person of color in these spaces, and I was often the only non-American and/or translingual person. Therefore, we used translingualism to complement raciolinguistics in our analysis of our language teacher identity conceptualization as translingualism gave us a new lens to define our experiences. Translingualism stands for moving away from using language to conform to dominant meanings, conventions, contexts, and social relationships by not treating languages as separate, owned by certain groups, and pure (Canagarajah, 2018). Using both of these analytical frameworks, we deconstructed the competent language teacher identity we both believed in and realized that the deficit lenses we internalized about our own linguistic resources were due to the monolingual, colonial views of language which positions standard American English as neutral and the norm. Hence, this study contributes to the overarching goal of highlighting perspectives and voices in teaching and teacher education that are often overlooked as it provides an insight into how predominantly White monolingual spaces can influence educators' and future educators' perception of who has power, who belongs, and who is more qualified and credible.

**Study 3**

The third study analyzes the journeys of three novice teachers from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. It contributes to the overall project by exploring how the participants negotiated their new identities as teachers through different educational and professional spaces that they occupied, and how they drew from their own experiences as

students and teacher candidates when forming their pedagogies and performing interactions with their students and colleagues.

Their narratives were examined through the lens of intersectionality, which is used to analyze the complex ways that marginalization and privilege operate and account for complexity and diversity within various identities and communities a person becomes a part of (Tefera et al., 2018). Of the three participants in this study, participant one is a Vietnamese American man who grew up, went to school, and is currently teaching in a mid-size urban city in the Midwest. He talked about his experiences growing up and going to school in a lower income school district. The second participant identifies as an African immigrant, who moved to the United States to attend university. She speaks several languages and is currently teaching Math in an urban school district in the Midwest region. Lastly, the third participant is a biracial woman of European, African American, and Lebanese descent. Having grown up with her White family in a predominantly White neighborhood in New England, she started to embrace her African American roots more in the past few years. She currently works with ELs in a mid-size urban district in the New England region. All three participants are currently first year teachers in diverse districts but completed their teacher education programs in predominantly White institutions. Coming from very different backgrounds, they had shared experiences such as being one of the few teachers of color where they are working and using their identities and experiences to connect with their students. However, their journeys and experiences also differ due to their contexts and backgrounds. This is where my analytical lens of intersectionality became significant as their experiences were influenced by a myriad of lived experiences, identities, and their membership to different cultural and social groups.

I have used narrative inquiry as a method because it helps construct stories about those who are studied, and it raises questions about power, authority, and community (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narratives in this study were built by a series of interviews. Following Schuman's (1982) design: "The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience (their focused life history). The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them" (Schuman, 1982 as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 17). First interviews focused on the participants' experiences in school, their communities, their teacher education programs, and their experiences as novice teachers. The second, and in some cases third, interviews helped me analyze some of the anecdotes more in depth, create connections between the larger social and cultural contexts in which they occupied, and discuss how they made sense of these experiences.

All in all, this study is highlighting the voices of teachers of color as experts in their fields by acknowledging and utilizing their backgrounds as resources. Intersectionality is the guiding analytical framework for this chapter as we delve into how their multi-layered identities intersect and contribute to their experiences. They talked about race, ethnicity, language, immigration background, socio-economic status, and their professional identities as teachers and how they were affected by systems of power. This study contributes to the overall project by providing implications for teacher education programs to be re-imagined to be culturally just and inclusive spaces that better prepare future teachers who feel empowered to use their own backgrounds as assets and who can support their future students to be empowered.

## Positionality

As experiential accounts in the production of knowledge have become more prominent, the inclusion of positionality and researcher subjectivity became essential components for qualitative research. Positionality calls for a reflexive analysis of what we carry into our research such as our previous education, experiences, and beliefs (Hopkins et al., 2017). These experiences and values that a researcher brings to their study should be embraced but with a continuous awareness of “what we think we see” in their investigations, rather than “what we see” (Day, 2012, p. 64). Furthermore, acknowledging one’s positionality and conducting reflexive analysis of one’s subjectivity needs to be present at different stages of the research; the beginning, data collection, interpretation, and discussion. In this type of reflexive work, the researcher is fully involved and open to what may appear, and their subjectivity is embraced and incorporated into the research, which is a divergence from positivist methods that situate the researcher as objectivistic and detached (Finlay, 2008).

As identity is a major part of this project, my subjectivity became ingrained in my studies. I acknowledge that my own identities and lived experiences have become a lens through which I evaluate and analyze the narratives of becoming that I presented across three studies in this project. I am a part of the social and political contexts that I study, not just as an observer but also as a participant and as the subject in some of the studies. The first study is an autoethnographic account of my lived experiences as I evaluate my racialized identities while navigating my new role as a teacher educator who has navigated professional and education spaces as an international graduate student. My own experiences and identity tensions are also a part of the conversation in the second study, in which I conducted a critical dialogue with a former student, now a colleague, as we discussed our language teacher identities through our

relation and distance to the "standard" American English. In both of these studies, my experiences and my identities are a part of the data, which positions me both as the researcher and as the subject.

I identify as a translingual and transnational woman and a novice teacher educator. However, as my experiences and perspectives will be thoroughly explored in the first and second studies, readers will understand that I did not have these asset-based lenses in my repertoire when I was living through the experiences I included in my studies. Nevertheless, at this point in my life and as I am completing this dissertation as a doctoral candidate and a new teacher educator, I use the terms translingual and transnational to define myself and my experiences. Translingual identity evokes moving beyond labeled national languages and examining the structures of linguistic inequality and power, whereas transnational refers to the fluidity of spaces we occupy that transcends national borders (Canagarajah, 2018). As an immigrant from Turkey, I have been in the United States in different roles. The first time was when my family and I moved to the greater Washington D.C. area for my father's job in the Turkish embassy. During this temporary three-year period, I have had the chance to experience being a high school student in the U.S. This was a highly affluent public school with a lot of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. My experiences in this highly resourced school were very privileged, especially compared to my public-school experiences in different parts of Turkey. I later returned to the United States after university to attend graduate school. Before becoming a permanent resident, my position in the U.S. during my master's program, public school experience, and the majority of my doctoral program was as an international student. As I was considering my future in this country while working and studying in different positions and roles, I was not viewing my experiences through a translingual or a transnational lens. Instead, I had the misconception that I

needed to look and sound more American and more like a native English speaker in order to claim legitimacy as a teacher and scholar. These identity tensions are explored in the first two studies through my struggles navigating the educational and professional spaces I occupied as someone who felt stuck on the borders of two cultures, and how I make sense of these experiences now that I identify as transnational and translingual, therefore, transcending the binary notions of language and culture. Therefore, the concepts of translingualism and transnationalism, as well as my earlier interpretations of language and national identity through a deficient lens before my doctoral program, influenced the conversations I have conducted with my participants and the data collection on my own experiences. These were the times where I have had to acknowledge my own subjectivities and open myself to seeing beyond what I thought I was seeing. This type of self-reflexivity was also essential because even though I explored my own experiences and the experiences of my participants under the umbrella of "perspectives and voices of educators from minoritized backgrounds," our experiences vastly differ from each other. As a White woman, I have privileges that the participants in my third study or my collaborator in the second study do not. Therefore, I needed to be careful in my assumptions and my positioning as an insider in certain identity groups, while an outsider in others because, otherwise, I would be reproducing positivist divisions between the knowing researcher and unknowing participant, which posits that the knowledge production begins and ends with the researcher (Day, 2012, p. 63).

Throughout this study, I have made stylistic choices in certain parts of the project to use a "we" language. This was due to two different reasons. In the second study and in the final chapter of this dissertation, "we" is used to refer to the participants when talking about the data. As I play the dual role of being a participant and a researcher in certain parts of the studies, "we"

is used to explain and analyze the common themes across our experiences. In the first study, "we" refers to my positionality as a doctoral student and an international graduate student. In study 2, I position myself as a language teacher along with my collaborator. Lastly, in the third study and concluding chapter, the use of "we" occurs due to my positionality as a novice teacher educator. All three of the studies in this dissertation build towards improving teacher education programs in order to transition them into culturally and linguistically just spaces. In these cases, "we" is used to talk about the roles we play and the responsibilities we have to our students.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms and abbreviations are used throughout the dissertation and may not be familiar to the readers:

*ESL:* English as a Second Language

*ELs:* English learners

*ELA:* English Language Arts

*ELT:* English Language Teaching

*AAVE:* African American Vernacular English

*NNEST:* Non-native English speaker Teachers

*TESOL*: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies:* Pedagogy that supports and sustains linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling (Paris & Alim, 2017)

*Racialization:* creation and transformation of racial categories within specific political, social, and economic contexts based on one's cultural identities (Selod, 2015)

*Self-reflexivity:* a form of analysis that involves reflection that goes deeper into the process of examining our values and self-understanding (Tibbitts, 2016)

*Translingualism:* An ideology that considers languages in contact with each other, generating new forms and meanings through interactions, rather than considering languages to be separate and pure (Canagarajah, 2018)

*Transnationalism:* A concept that looks at relationships and social ties outside of the boundaries of nation states, allowing people to be connected to communities beyond their own locality or country (Canagarajah, 2018)

# CHAPTER II: STUDY # 1

## "White, But Not Really:" Conceptualization of Racial Identity as an Emerging Teacher Educator

### Prologue

***It's the Spring of 2021.*** *I am attending one of the biggest conferences in Education for the first time. Due to the pandemic, it is held virtually. I am excited to attend panels and listen to some of the researchers and educators I have been citing in my studies. I am in the fourth year of my doctoral program and have recently defended my dissertation proposal. I have been choosing sessions that are about the experiences of educators from non-dominant backgrounds that would be helpful in my dissertation research. I am also interested in them because I have recently begun to analyze my own experiences as a novice teacher educator who identifies as a translingual and transnational woman in predominantly White spaces. During a session about decentering whiteness in teacher education, the presenters ask us to choose breakout rooms for discussions. There are two options: White educators and educators of color. I feel a moment of panic thinking I need to make a difficult decision in the next few seconds. Thoughts start to race my mind. On one hand, as a Turkish woman, my racial identity, at least on paper, is White. But I do not think White really captures my identity wholly. I always associated whiteness with Europeans and European Americans, so choosing White sometimes makes me feel like a fraud. On the other hand, I do not identify as a person of color. However, I am interested to hear more from them, and I think my experiences of feeling like an outsider in teacher education might be more similar to their experiences. So, I choose the "*educators of color*" breakout room. But I turn off my camera. I feel guilty as if I am invading their space and do not want them to think I don't belong. All they can see is my foreign name and I hide behind that. Listening to them shows*

*me that we do share similar experiences sometimes, but I cannot deny that unlike them being able to claim whiteness affords me some privileges. Though I have a strong ownership of my ethnic identity, I often let others define my racial identity and I follow along. I will take you back to other points in my life where I have done this.*

## Introduction

In this study, I am going to analyze my experiences refraining from taking space in conversations around race and racialized experiences as an international doctoral student and a novice teacher educator using autoethnography as a method. The excerpt above presents a tension during a professional education conference, where I was positioned to face the tensions surrounding my racial identity in order to take part in a conversation that I wanted to be in. However, I found myself stuck in between, aware that neither decision would be the right one. I have chosen autoethnography to explore this tension because autoethnography prompts us to critically reflect on our own life experiences, our identity construction, and our interactions with others within socio-historical contexts (Spry, 2001). Furthermore, autoethnography's methodological goal is to "understand the relationship between the individual and the cultural, and to make the personal political through exploring multicultural identities, practices, and pedagogies" (Yazan et al., 2020, p. 6). Therefore, with this autoethnography, I intend to reflexively analyze how I define my professional, cultural, and linguistic identity and how my identity and the way I present my identity have been impacted by the sociocultural contexts that I became a part of. Hence, in order to make sense of the tensions I felt during that conference regarding my racial identity, we need to explore moments and experiences that built up to that moment. Let us get back to the other critical points, in which I have struggled to claim my racial identity.

***It's August of 2016.*** I have just been hired as an ESL teacher at a racially and ethnically diverse urban high school. During the orientation for new teachers, we are doing an identity activity. We are choosing colored beads (white, black, brown, and yellow) based on who we are, our friend circles, our colleagues etc. I have picked a White bead for my racial identity. Someone says, "but you're not White!" I turn around and see a woman who was sitting at my table when we did introductions. I introduced myself as Turkish to her and the others. I feel a desperate need to justify being White. I tell her that White includes Middle Easterners and North Africans, as well as Europeans. She doesn't look convinced. I continue my efforts to convince her by explaining that the other three colors do not really fit me. I want her to see me as White, but she doesn't. It bothers me that she doesn't. Though I know the answer, I question myself; am I White?

***It's the Fall of 2016.*** I have recently started teaching at a high school and in one of my classes, we are talking about culture. The majority of my students are Latinx and African. At this point, I have told my students very little about myself, mostly because I wanted them to see me as a competent teacher and I was afraid that in their minds, a competent teacher looks like their other teachers in the school, White, American, and a "native" English speaker. A part of me also believes this. So, I have chosen not to disclose my ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to them. I am thinking I will definitely talk about it later, but not yet. But the time comes sooner than expected. One student asks "Miss, where are you from?" I want to say Massachusetts because that's where we are at that moment, but I know if I say that, the question will be followed by "where are you really from?" So, I say "Turkey." I ask them if they know where it is. An Iraqi student explains. She is excited to have a Turkish teacher and starts telling me words in Turkish that she knows. Another student says "oh good! So, you are not White!" I explain that I am

racially White, but my ethnicity is Turkish. She adds "but you're not White White!" I let it go. I am not sure if they know the difference between race and ethnicity but this time, I don't want to try to convince them as I did with that teacher in the orientation because they seem happy that I am not "White White." They are asking me all these questions about my language, my family, and my country. They seem to be more interested in me now that they think I am not White, and I like that. I like the connection we are building. So, I become White but not really White.

***Back to the Spring of 2021.*** I feel a little frustrated with myself while I am listening to the experiences of educators of color. I have been focusing on identity work for the past three years but when I thought of my identity, it had always been about ethnicity, language, nationality, and religion. Race was not a part of it. Yet, in that moment when I was struggling to make a decision, I can't help but think it should be easier to claim my racial identity, especially since I know what it is. I think to myself, if I am interested in identity work in teacher education, race will most likely be a major part of it. What does it mean for my research if I cannot resolve the tensions around my own racial identity? I have often accepted the racial labels people have given me as I told myself "I am an international student. I just don't know enough about race in this country." By convincing myself of that, I realize now that I have been afraid to take space in the conversations surrounding identity.

## Background

For me, a significant step I have had to take as an international doctoral student and a novice teacher educator interested in identity work was facing the reality that race in the United States is a social and a political construct to which I was not accustomed to. White, non-White, a person of color these are categories created in the U.S. context, mostly referring to domestic

diversity. Therefore, coming to this field from outside of the U.S., it is easy to feel excluded from important conversations as we learn about the legal definitions, historical categorizations, and the socio-political construction of race. As a doctoral student preparing to become a teacher educator, higher education institutions need to be spaces where we learn to be a part of these conversations, especially since universities are increasingly becoming more transnational spaces with their highly internationalized student enrolments. International students in these transnational spaces learn to question, affirm, and reconceptualize their cultural identities, sense of belonging, and social relationships (Phelps, 2014). Navigating through these identity related tensions can be an overwhelming process for international students undertaking doctoral level work while they are also figuring out where they fit. These students will likely face the reality that their home country's politics around identity are different from those in the United States and they might find themselves trying to fit into one category or another. This tension becomes more present when our doctoral research focuses on identity as we may not feel qualified to take space in discussions about race, which is an essential part of identity work. Therefore, it can be difficult to navigate through doctoral studies for international students if they also have to question their sense of belonging (Phelps, 2016). Furthermore, their feelings of (dis)empowerment affect their claims to competence as they attempt to gain access to various research fields during their doctoral studies (Choi et al., 2021).

Previous studies on doctoral students, who are foreign-born, as emerging researchers and scholars in their fields show that their established senses of who they are and where they belong can be interrupted as they develop identity affiliation with a sense of the global (Phelps, 2015, p. 3). Furthermore, their identity trajectories are strongly influenced by the academic community that surrounded them and the support they received from this community (Cotterall, 2015). Other

studies emphasized the importance of supervisors who can help facilitate students' access into the various communities in academia, contributing to their developing sense of identities as scholars (Choi et al., 2020). These spaces are where they are conceptualizing their new roles as emerging scholars but at the same time, they are also learning to navigate how their social identities influence their access to academic spaces, conversations, and the way they make meaning of where they belong. They bring their lived and learned experiences into this new space. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways does racialization contribute to the conceptualization of my racial identity in the United States as an international graduate student?

2. How did the concepts of intersectionality and transnationalism help me make sense of how my identities were perceived by others and my attempts to gain agency over the ways I presented and claimed my identities?

## Theoretical Framework

For this study, I draw on raciolinguistics and intersectionality to form my theoretical framework. Intersectionality can be defined as "the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788). An intersectional approach focuses on understanding the relationship between power dynamics and social identities (Carbado et al., 2013). It allows us to analyze how our experiences in different social spheres shape our identities. Therefore, intersectionality helped me in my analysis of the ways I experienced the world based on my understanding, conceptualization, and presentation of my cultural identity during my doctoral program. I have also included transnationalism under the scope of intersectionality as the racial, ethnic, and linguistic experiences I have explored in this

study are closely linked, if not the result of, my national identity as an immigrant and an international student, who have grappled with a feeling of in-betweenness regarding the two nations where I grew up, went to school, and worked. Transnational paradigm rests on the recognition of linguistic and cultural complexity and an awareness that concepts such as language, culture, and nation are historically constructed with their own historical and societal significance in the building of nation states (Risager, 2007). Thus, transnationalism allows one to transcend the restrictive and binary understandings of national borders and claim an identity that embraces their lived experiences wholly. In this sense, transnationalism is connected to intersectionality because people who occupy transnational social spaces and identify as transnational attempt to balance their lack of privilege in one country and privilege and power in another regarding their race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality etc. (Purkayastha, 2012).

In addition to intersectionality, I have relied on raciolinguistics to frame my analysis. Raciolinguistic ideologies render racialized bodies to be associated with linguistic deficiency and they privilege dominant white perspectives on the linguistic practices of racialized communities (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Raciolinguistics explain that race and language are closely linked because ethno-racial identities are styled, performed and constructed through minute features of language (Alim, 2016). Therefore, language often serves as a proxy for race and linguistic identities and practices of multilingual people can be racialized. Racialization occurs through the creating, occupation, and transformation of racial categories within specific political, social, and economic contexts based on one’s cultural identities (Selod, 2015). Raciolinguistics helps my analysis as it frames language as inseparable from race and ethnicity, and in doing so, supports intersectionality in explaining racialized experiences.

## Methodology

In this study, I have used autoethnography to analyze my identity reconceptualization as a novice teacher educator. As a self-narrative method, autoethnography serves various purposes. It draws attention to social injustices and power relations (Yazan et al., 2020), aims to decenter and decolonize ethnographic practices (Gannon, 2006), and allows the researcher to critically analyze personal experiences in order to understand cultural experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography challenges the traditional power imbalances and what constitutes a legitimate contribution to knowledge by providing a space where people speak for themselves using their own narratives, rather than a specific group of researchers who might be considered "gatekeepers" (Sikes, 2021). My own introduction to autoethnography was through its increasing use and legitimacy in the fields of English language teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics. Therefore, when creating this autoethnography I drew from scholars who have undertaken autoethnography in ELT to explore their identities as language teachers and teacher educators who immigrated to the United States from non-English speaking countries.

Canagarajah (2012) conducted autoethnography to challenge who is considered to be a legitimate English speaker through his experiences working in Sri Lanka as an English language teacher. Analyzing a critical moment in which TESOL experts from the United States came to his school to train teachers and criticized the local methods that worked with their students, Canagarajah's use of autoethnography highlights the importance of community practices towards language learning by decentering linguistic hegemony of Western English. Although my own work is slightly different as I focus on the intersections of my racial, linguistic, and national identities instead, Canagarajah's work on translingualism introduced me to this field of translingualism and helped me make meaning of my translinguistic identity. Similarly, Solano-

Campos (2014) used autoethnography to critique the native versus non-native English speaker dichotomy in English language teaching as she explains how this limited and deficient view of languages creates a hierarchy among speakers. Having been recruited from Costa Rica to teach English learners in the United States, she undertakes issues of translingualism and transnationalism by analyzing her experiences feeling like an outsider in the English language teaching community. Her take on this insider-outsider status resonates with my own experiences as I similarly explore how nativeness, linguistically and nationally, is associated with power, credibility, and prestige (Solano-Campos, 2014). Lastly, I drew from Yazan's (2018) work on autoethnography as it brings attention to how autoethnography can be used by teacher educators to conceptualize their pedagogies by claiming agency and ownership of their identities. With this study, I analyze my experiences as a doctoral student and a novice teacher educator who is attempting to take space in conversations around identity and feeling like an outsider. Yazan's use of autoethnography has become my guide in conducting autoethnography as he is also a Turkish scholar teaching in the United States taking on issues such as being positioned as the "cultural other" and using transnationalism to empower international scholars and take agency over his identities (Yazan et al., 2020). Although there are many other valuable works on autoethnography that I drew from, these three scholars inspired and informed this particular autoethnography the most as their use of autoethnography gave me the tools and the language to continue with my own research. Building on these works, my own autoethnography also takes on issues regarding transnationalism and translingualism as my linguistic and immigration backgrounds played an important role in examining my hesitation to take space in discussions. However, in addition to these angles, I have also analyzed how racialization contributed to my

feelings of in-betweenness and how language, ethnicity, nationality, and religion together influenced my racial identity conceptualization and agency.

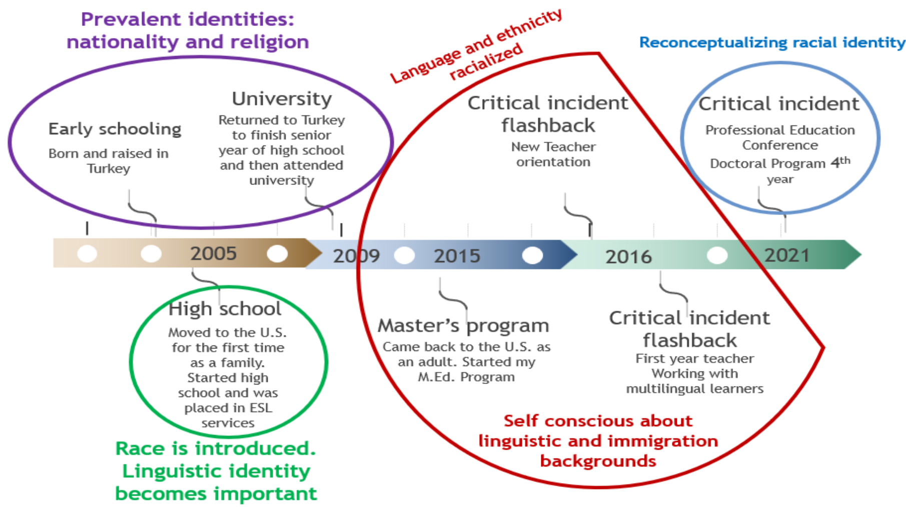
As a novice teacher educator, I have used this autoethnography to reflexively analyze how I am developing my understanding of teacher identity by examining my own socialization into the social, cultural, and political power dynamics in teaching and learning. As my teaching philosophy is developing around preparing teacher candidates who can understand the power relations in place and the role schools play in perpetuating these inequities that benefit dominant groups and disadvantage minoritized groups, I first need to examine myself and reflect on how my own professional, cultural, and linguistic identities were conceptualized and are presented. Therefore, this autoethnography draws on self-study methods for teacher educators, which embodies identity research with teacher education practices, in relation to the larger field and contexts (Peercy & Sharkey, 2020).

I have gathered data for this autoethnography by relying on reflective writing blocks, correspondence with peers and professors, and conversations with a fellow international doctoral student in my department in order to analyze the negotiation and reconceptualizing of my racial identity and my socialization into the dominant narratives. Although the focus of this autoethnography is on the tensions I faced regarding claiming and presenting my racial identity, my experiences around race will be accompanied by and analyzed in conjunction with my other identities such as nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion and how they influenced each other intersectionally. I chose my racial identity as my focus because claiming my other identities has been a fairly easy process, whereas I hadn't taken the time to explore my racial identity and the tensions surrounding it before. The prompt for creating my vignettes was "think about moments after coming to the United States, in which you struggled to claim your racial

identity." Although my first time coming to the United States was during high school and I will briefly visit my experiences at that time further in my analysis, I have decided to focus on my second arrival in the United States as an adult, after I left the country and came back for graduate school. The two tables below represent my intersectional identities and the critical moments I have chosen for my vignettes, respectively. Table 1 is a culture-gram, which is a web-like chart that contains different figures and lines that represent different parts of my cultural and linguistic identities (Chang, 2008). Table 2 is a timeline of my vignettes and the overlay of my identities from Table 1, which were highlighted during these moments.

**Table 1: Identity Chart**

**Table 2: Timeline and Identity Mapping**




## Insights

My identity mapping from the previous section (Table 2) shows that at different points in my life, certain identities affected my experiences more than the others. Growing up in Turkey, nationality and religion were the prominent identities that were highlighted by the social and political climate at the time. Moving to the United States during high school, the biggest addition to these identities were race and ethnicity. All of a sudden, my racial identity became important for the purpose of surveys and forms, however, I considered my ethnic and linguistic identities to be the identities defining my experiences at the time. Coming back to the United States as an adult during my master's program and first year of teaching, I started to become more conscious about my race, ethnicity, and language. I started to pay more attention to how others perceived me. As mentioned in my critical incident flashbacks, I was told by a co-worker and my students that I wasn't really White. Although I did not realize they were racializing my language and ethnicity at the time, these experiences led me to feel as though I needed to justify or explain my

race to people. After I started teaching, my two most prominent identities became my immigration background and language because I thought these two identities set me apart from the other teachers, but not in a positive way. I was looking at my background and experiences through a deficit lens. I wanted them to think I belonged there but I was an ESL teacher whose first language was not English and who was teaching on an international student visa. I wasn't a native speaker or an American citizen or even a permanent resident at the time. My critical incident at the beginning was from the fourth year of my doctoral program. At that point, I had mostly resolved the tensions around my national/immigration and linguistic identities and was feeling empowered to use my own experiences as resources. However, as I started to shift my research interests towards identity work, I was confronted with the tensions I haven't resolved regarding my racial identity. Thus, when I was asked to choose a breakout room representing my race in that conference session, those previous experiences of not being able to claim my racial identity due to how others perceived me came back to my mind. I identify as White but if I had chosen the White breakout room, would people look at me and my foreign name and question why I was there? Would I have to explain to them that White includes the Middle East? Maybe they would not have cared but I still had those questions. Therefore, I had chosen the people of color breakout room, even though I am not a person of color because for that conversation we were about to have, I believed their experiences would be more similar to mine. Nonetheless, I knew I would feel like a fraud there if they saw me. By turning off my camera, I let them assume I belonged there because with my experience, language and ethnicity sometimes served as a proxy for race.

That conference session was a critical moment for me as an emerging teacher educator interested in teaching and researching about teacher identity. I wanted to be a part of the

conversation, but I did not feel as though my lived experiences would really align with either of the categories. Although this study and my critical reflections here did not help me resolve these tensions, they did make me more aware of the fact that everyone navigates through identity related tensions in one form or another. Furthermore, I have started to view social and professional identities in a more unified, intersectional way. I am a teacher, a teacher educator, and a doctoral student but these professional identities are very much influenced by and continue to influence my cultural identities. In the following sections, I will take apart the reasons behind my hesitation, what contributed to my identity tensions today and how I was influenced by the larger social and political issues around me leading up to that moment.

**My Racial Identity**

The first time I learned of my whiteness was when I came to the U.S. for the first time at the age of 14. As I was filling out a form in class, my teacher told me I was White, and I accepted it. When I came back to the U.S. for graduate school, I started to become more aware of the reality that the racial identity I claimed did not always align with how others perceived me. Therefore, when my race came into question at the new teacher orientation and when my students told me they did not really consider me as actually White, I began to realize that whiteness is perceived to be the lack of "otherness." In literature, whiteness is defined as an "invisibilized" social norm against which difference is measured (Daniels & Varghese, 2019) and which is associated with an index of unspoken privileges (Nayak, 2007). It is framed as the lack of race, lack of ethnicity, and lack of culture. I was unsuccessful in my efforts to claim whiteness in some spaces because my Turkish ethnic identity, my accent, and my foreign name all served as markers for "otherness", and this sometimes clashed with people's understanding of whiteness. When I had to choose between White and people of color breakout rooms, I struggled

because my visible ethnic and linguistic otherness may not have fit into the “invisibilized” norm of whiteness in other people’s eyes. In my efforts to claim whiteness, my ethnic identity, my language, and my religion all served, at some point, as proxies for my race. Since coming back to the United States as an international student first in my master’s program, and later in the school where I taught as a teacher, and in my doctoral program, I have either been positioned or have positioned myself as the other. Sometimes I was the only non-American citizen and at other times the only multilingual student in these spaces. This positioning as an outsider also carried on to my understanding of race and led me to question my position in racial groupings because race alone, or language, ethnicity, religion, gender, economic status etc. alone do not paint a complete picture of one’s experiences as we are social, cultural, and political beings.

**Whiteness in Turkey**

Growing up in Turkey, political conversations around identity focused on nationality, ethnicity, and religion, mostly around Turkey’s decades-long efforts to join the European Union. In Turkey’s westernization politics, Europe was seen as the target. People would often talk about how we, as a country, needed to change some of our ways of life and traditions to be more like the Europeans. They would be offended when other countries classified us as a Middle Eastern country even though Turkey is in a unique position to be considered both as an Eastern European and a Middle Eastern country. In the 1990s, the term “White Turks” emerged. Although all Turks would be considered White by formal definitions in the United States, the term “White Turks" was used to highlight class status, rather than skin color. It referred to the bourgeois class, those who would be considered Istanbul elites, portraying them as modern and Western (Arat-Koc, 2007). White Turkishness as an ideology accepted the West as the center and standard for civilization and became a means to distinguish oneself from the others, those who stood in the

way of westernization (Arat-Koc, 2007). Although the political climate of the country has since changed and westernization efforts have dramatically slowed down in favor of Islamic ideologies, I have grown up in the 90s and early 2000s hearing these conversations and internalizing European cultures as superior to the Middle Eastern cultures. Thus, when I first came to the United States as a teen in 2005, I was happy to learn that I could claim White as my racial identity. People who chose White on forms were blonde and blue-eyed peers who looked European. I liked the association. But there were political tensions in the United States that I was not aware of, yet. Going back to my critical incidents where I tried to claim White as my identity but were told by others that I wasn't really White, I first felt offended. Then, as years passed and I was asked to choose a racial identity during that conference, I realized I internalized that positioning of the "White, but not really White."

**Ethnicity and Religion**

Some of the factors contributing to people's perception of me as "not really White," were regarding my ethnic and religious identities. When I first came to the United States during high school, it was just four years after 9/11. This meant that upon learning that I was a Muslim and from a Muslim majority country, people would label me as an "Arab," and at that time, that was a label people did not have positive associations of, both in Turkey and in the United States. Being a Middle Eastern and being Muslim became a de-facto racial classification in the U.S., and religion and ethnicity are used interchangeably in discussions on race and racialization (Selod, 2015). However, having a lighter skin color, not wearing a hijab, and not having an Arabic name were some of the factors that helped me disassociate myself from the stigma that came with being Muslim and coming from a Middle Eastern country during that time. I could just focus on my racial identity, my whiteness. In a way, I was trying to pass as European and non-religious by

using my racial identity as a doorway into mainstream whiteness. Passing happens when a person appears to belong to a social group that is different from the one that is normally assigned (Moynihan, 2010). It can be in the form of visible or invisible, and intentional or internalized. My form of passing at that point in my life during high school was invisible and in the form of not correcting people, rather than actively seeking to appear as if I belonged to different religious or ethnic groups.

Coming back to the United States a decade later, I was more aware of the fact that whiteness as a racial identity is overlooked when other identities such as ethnicity, language, nationality, and religion are different from those of the majority. Hence, when I was struggling to make a decision in that conference session, I knew that neither of the options felt right because race is more than just picking a color; it is political, and its categories have been re-negotiated throughout history. In fact, Whiteness used to be exclusively limited to European immigrants, especially Northwestern Europeans. The National Origins Formula restricted immigration from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 lifted these restrictions (Selod, 2015). With more immigrants entering the U.S. from these regions, whiteness was claimed by non-European groups such as Middle Easterners and North Africans. However, their religions and ethnicities separated them from European Americans and as a result, their whiteness was questioned. When my race was challenged by a teacher candidate in the orientation, it wasn’t due to my skin color, which is White. It was due to my ethnic identity, which distinguished me from White Americans with Western European ancestry. Similarly, when my students did not consider me as a real White person, it was partly because of my ethnicity and immigration background. Therefore, even when I tried to claim my racial identity as White, I was sometimes positioned by others to be on the border, to be in-between.

Khoshneviss (2019) explains that the feeling of in-betweenness has been present for different ethnic and religious groups at different times in history. While Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants were once considered to be neither White nor Black, in the last 20 years, Muslims and Middle Easterners have been feeling this in-betweenness. He further elaborates that even the map of the Middle East has constantly shifted as the relationships of colonies with the colonizers changed in the area and this shifting map sometimes included some African countries by erasure of Asian countries or vice versa (Khoshneviss, 2019). Ethnic and religious groups that feel stuck in between two or more racial groups are also at the intersection of privileged and disadvantaged. My skin color alone grants me social and political privileges. However, the extension of those same privileges may also depend on society's conception of what and who is White (Davis & Moore, 2014). Therefore, when people place me in non-dominant categories in terms of language, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, my whiteness may sometimes be overlooked. Hence, I had ongoing tensions around my racial identity because I was aware that my ethnicity and language could both be racialized, and this caused me to stand back and not take space in their discussions on race because I internalized these tensions and felt like an outsider to both groups.

**Language**

When I joined the educators of color breakout room in the conference session, I felt guilty that they would see my White skin and judge me. As a result, I turned off my camera and hid behind my foreign name. That is because I know language is one of the factors that contribute to people's assumptions about someone's identity. Looking at my name and hearing me speak with a slight accent, they make assumptions about my ethnicity, nationality, and language. Those minoritized identities sometimes serve as a proxy for race because they can be

racialized. Racialization can be defined as a process where new racial meanings are ascribed to bodies (Selod, 2015) and it happens through collective recognition and erasure, affirmation and denial, and association and dissociation of meanings which turns individuals and groups into categories (Khoshneviss, 2019). Racialization can occur through ethnicity, religion, nationality, and language. When I turned off my camera in the session, I allowed people to assume my race based on my language. Similarly, when my students called me "White but not really White" upon questioning my language and my foreign name, my linguistic identity was racialized. Seeing that I had also come to the United States from a non-European, non-English speaking country, they connected my experiences to their own and placed me in the non-White group that they themselves identify with. In a study that analyzes the racialization of the Spanish language, Davis and Moore (2014) explain that languages can become a signifier by which Whites identify people as a racial group. They explain that Latinos are categorized as a racial group regardless of their ethnic differences due to their shared Spanish language. Furthermore, sometimes Latinos can be othered whether or not they speak Spanish because they are associated with the Spanish language. This is because their language is racialized. Based on the raciolinguistic perspective, this happens because "the white gaze is attached both to a speaking subject who engages in the idealized linguistic practices of whiteness and to a listening subject who hears and interprets the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations based on their racial positioning in society" (Flores & Rosa 2015, p. 151). Although my students were non-White and multilingual, they associated my linguistic difference with non-Whiteness, most likely due to their own experiences with their languages being racialized. They may have also internalized the White gaze, but I did not insist on correcting them because it helped me connect with them more. Therefore, when I had that experience in the conference, I was more aware that my foreign name

and slight accent would likely lead people to make assumptions about my racial and ethnic identities. I knew I would stand out in the White educators breakout room as I often do in White monolingual spaces. Likewise, when I chose to enter the educators of color breakout room to hear their experiences, I intentionally used my linguistic background to seem like I belonged there. This was an important realization I had during my doctoral program. In a U.S. context, Whiteness and standardized English are closely linked. Together they form the boundaries around what are legitimate forms of speech and the bodies that can "legitimately " speak and be heard (Daniels & Varghese, 2019).

Before moving to the United States to pursue a graduate degree, I had a clear idea of my cultural identities. Turkey is by no means a homogenous country. There is ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, and with the growing number of African immigrants in the last few decades, there is some racial diversity, as well. However, I was in the dominant group for each of those identities. In the U.S., I have had to re-evaluate my cultural identities. Norton Peirce (1997) explains that identity construction must be understood with respect to larger social processes, marked by relations of power (p. 419). My racialized experiences led me to think about my identity outside of my own definitions and with consideration of how others view me. Sometimes, this caused me to regard my linguistic and national identities in a deficit way by purposefully not revealing them to my students or colleagues, for instance. In such incidents, I have had agency and privilege over how I claimed and presented my identities. However, at other times, certain identities are assigned to me, or my claims are disregarded, such as the incident in the orientation. Therefore, as we are trying to re-conceptualize our identities in the United States as emerging teacher educators and as immigrants, we need to analyze the relationship between privileged and oppressed identities as they intersect. These intersections

both construct identities and complicate them and are significant in conceptualizing identity as fluid and evolving (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 296). Without the space and support to conceptualize these intersectional identities in empowering ways, we will not be able to take space in discussions that are important to us and our research.

## Discussion and Final Thoughts

Although my experiences in my master's program, doctoral program, and K-12 teaching have been mostly positive, these spaces were predominantly White, U.S. American, and monolingual. Although I am no longer an international student, during my time in my two graduate programs and in teaching, that was my status. As an international student, I felt the urge to refrain from identifying as a Turkish-American because I did not think I had the right to claim American as part of my identity. Even though I have recently become a permanent resident, I am still in the process of re-conceptualizing my national identity and my racial identity, which resonates with the discourses of citizenship in regard to status, belonging, and politics (El-Haj, 2009). I am White. I have always known that. But I also now know that racial categories in the U.S. were not designed for people like me. This means that I do benefit from some of the privileges that come with whiteness, but I do not always feel like an insider, and this makes the re-conceptualization process a little difficult. People build their identity as they engage in multiple communities using their histories and experiences (Choi et al., 2021). To understand and analyze my experiences as an international doctoral student and an emergent scholar in the field, I have looked at how my race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, immigration status, profession, and language all influenced each other and were influenced by the larger social contexts. During my doctoral studies, I have been in several spaces talking about diversity. In these spaces I have felt as though I was expected to bring in a non-White perspective because

non-White often becomes a proxy for a non-dominant ethnicity, language, and religion, in addition to race. In these spaces, I feel the need to emphasize that I identify as racially White and that I have White privilege. But I can talk about my ethnic identity, linguistic identity, nationality and how those identities are minoritized. This is why it is important to analyze identity through intersectionality. Only looking at my experiences through a racial lens as a White woman does not account for all my other identities that contribute significantly to how I experience the world and how others see me. Carbado (2013) suggests that we should avoid framing intersectionality as only an intersection of non-whiteness and gender because that erases the racial intersectionality of White people and makes it easier for whiteness to operate as the natural and unmarked racial backdrop for other social positions, rather than as a different representation of them.

Looking back at my critical incidents, I was struggling to claim my racial identity at times because people were racializing my language and ethnicity and I was internalizing their positioning of me as the other. Intersectionality helped me make new meaning of these experiences as it showed me that our various identities influence our experiences collectively but not necessarily equally. Social positionings are not always equally salient in all spaces because sometimes one or more identities may matter more than others in particular contexts (Anthias, 2013). Therefore, my racial identity and my access to it affected my lived experiences in different ways when I was in Turkey versus when I started teaching at a public high school in the U.S., or when I was in my classroom interacting with my fellow doctoral students versus the cultural and professional events in which I participated. Someone who does not know my ethnic background or hear my name and my slight accent might not question my racial identity because they would not have the necessary background information to racialize my identities.

Furthermore, these experiences with racialization and identity conceptualization are the products of the societies that we live in. They are very much connected to the power dynamics in place, which position White, U.S. American, monolingual, and Christian people as the norm. Hence, forms of social distinction and inequality are produced in complex combinations of social, cultural, and political spaces (Anthias, 2013). Analyzing these experiences without paying attention to intersectionality, racialization, and raciolinguistics, would not be able to explain why I hesitated in that conference session when I knew what my racial identity was.

All in all, identity politics in the United States may be unfamiliar territory for foreign born doctoral students as they may not always feel like they belong into the identity categories created from various social, economic, and political influences in the U.S. As a result, when they find themselves in conversations regarding cultural identity in their classrooms, research, social spaces, and academic spaces, they may feel like they are not qualified to take space in these discussions even if these discussions affect them and their research. As they re-conceptualize their cultural identities, it is imperative to take an intersectional perspective and think about how different aspects of their identities influence each other and are influenced by the larger socio-political contexts. It is also crucial to acknowledge that identity is not an either-or concept. It is ever evolving and contextual. Furthermore, how we present our identities may not always align with how other people see them. Nevertheless, we are the experts of our own identities, and we need to take space in conversations by bringing our transnational perspectives into them, especially as emerging teacher educators who need to feel empowered so that we can empower our own students.

Conducting this autobiography was my way of empowering myself by making sense of my racialized experiences and examining my decisions that caused me to present my identities in

one way or another. It was my way of being a reflexive teacher educator because autoethnography activates the foundational, socio-cultural, and political reflexivity of the self, while also representing the other (Spry, 2016). Hence the methodological goal of autoethnography for me was to understand the influences on my conceptualization of novice teacher identity and situate myself as a product of various cultural and political contexts. Thus, bringing the self into my study was a transformative experience for me as a researcher as it brought an awareness to the boundaries between the past, present, and future and my perception of them (Custer, 2014). Another transformative contribution of autobiography was that I was able to theorize my experiences within lenses such as intersectionality, transnationalism, and raciolinguistics. These were theories that became tools for me to analyze my autoethnography but at the same time, it was with autoethnography that I was able to ground these theories and make sense of them. Lastly, autoethnography provoked vulnerability as it urged me to let go of fixed meanings and societal values by prompting me to move out of my comfort zone (Spry, 2001). Self-reflexivity would not be complete without vulnerability, and autoethnography helps one achieve that. All in all, conducting autoethnography was a transformative experience in that it pushed me to position myself as the researcher and the researched and consider my experiences as context-bound and political.

# CHAPTER III: STUDY # 2

## What Makes a "Competent" Teacher?: A Critical Dialogue on Language Teacher Identity Through a Raciolinguistics Lens

Our identities are formed by our experiences. They are constructed, maintained, and negotiated in relation to the cultural, social, and political contexts around us (Varghese et al., 2005). This construction and negotiation of identity is dynamic. In spaces that are dominated by ideologies that give power to certain racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups, re-negotiation of identities from non-dominant backgrounds may occur in the form of silence, assimilation, or loss of connection to cultural backgrounds. Therefore, I argue that the dominant racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities in our social and professional spaces perpetuate a power dynamic which ultimately determines who has who has privilege and who is dis-serviced. This power dynamic is also present in teaching and teacher education. Consequently, the voices and perspectives of educators from underrepresented backgrounds are often left out of the conversations. Exclusion of these voices secures the norm of whiteness and undermines the principles of multicultural education (Montecinos, 2004).

One of the biggest reasons for the underrepresentation of the voices, perspectives, and needs of teachers of color is the whiteness lens that is prevalent in most teacher educator programs. In the phenomenon called whiteness as property, "whiteness operates as a form of property which preservice teachers that possess the experiences, perspectives, knowledge and dispositions aligned with and valued by the dominant White society find reinforcement and success" (Brown, 2014, p. 337). As a result, the voices of teachers of color become othered. This is the same lens that frames teachers of color as role models for students of color, but not

necessarily for all students. However, as Ladson-Billings (2005) argues, a lack of diversity within a predominantly White teacher educator workforce limits the possibilities of "richer and more complex perspectives" that can inform teacher preparation and student learning (cited in Pham, 2018).

It is crucial to include the voices and perspectives of preservice teachers from underrepresented backgrounds and create a curriculum outside of the whiteness lens in order to re-imagine teacher education programs to be culturally and linguistically just spaces. This restructuring should increase opportunities for meaningful participation, recognize and value the experiences and backgrounds of educators from non-dominant racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and be culturally responsive to the communities they serve (Pham, 2018). With this study, we aim to highlight these voices through our experiences navigating the different professional and social spaces within the predominantly White institutions where we work and study. This study aims to answer the following questions:

a) How do predominantly White spaces in education affect the way educators from minoritized backgrounds negotiate and present their teacher identities?

b) How do our identities as language teachers from minoritized backgrounds influence our pedagogies and interactions with our students and colleagues?

c) What can teacher education programs do to encourage and make space for these critical dialogues around identity and power to disrupt the deficit ideologies?

## Theoretical Framework

Concepts forming our theoretical framework are raciolinguistics. Raciolinguistic ideologies explain that racialized bodies are often associated with linguistic deficiency, and they

privilege dominant white perspectives on the linguistic practices of racialized communities (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This happens because race and language are closely linked as ethnic and racial identities are styled, performed and constructed through language (Alim, 2016). Therefore, language often serves as a proxy for racial and linguistic identities. As a result, practices of language users from non-dominant backgrounds can be racialized. Racialization occurs through the creating, occupation, and transformation of racial categories within specific political, social, and economic contexts based on one's cultural identities (Selod, 2015).

In the field of TESOL and language teaching, raciolinguistics and racialization have become concepts that are being incorporated into teacher education curriculum. They provide a lens through which questions about what and whose culture is taught in schools, which knowledge is legitimized and included in language curricula and syllabus planning, and how language education planning is a result of hegemonic processes (Macedo et al., 2016). Other researchers argue that raciolinguistics should be a lens for self-reflexivity of language teachers and teacher educators. The racial identities of educators shape pedagogical practices, language ideologies, language hierarchies such as "White and non-White, settler and colonized, native speaker and nonnative speaker" because language teaching itself is not racially or politically neutral (Von Esch et al., 2020).

As we reflexively analyzed critical moments while teaching language that became turning points for us in both presenting our identities and forming our pedagogies, we used a raciolinguistics lens to make new meanings of these incidents and pivotal moments and to understand our reasonings behind feeling the way we did or making the choices we did during these moments. Raciolinguistics helps us examine our racialized experiences in relation to our minoritized identities as language teachers. Racialization and racism are important topics to

focus on and are strongly needed especially in the field of TESOL, because they influence "identity formation, instructional practices, program development, policy making, research, and beyond" (Kubota & Lin, 2006, 473).

In this study, we used the term "minoritized" to refer to our racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities. For Angelina, this refers to her African American and White biracial identity and her linguistic identity as a speaker of the African American Vernacular English (AAVE). On the other hand, for Sumeyra, minoritized identity refers to her ethnicity as a Turkish and a Middle Eastern immigrant and her linguistic identity as a multilingual speaker. Although Sumeyra's White racial identity is in the dominant racial group and grants her certain privileges, she mainly drew from her ethnic and linguistic identities that were sometimes racialized in order to make sense of how she negotiated her language teacher identity. Thus, raciolinguistics provided us with a lens to understand why we both considered our linguistic practices to be inferior or deficient and attempted to present ourselves differently in order to attain the "competent" language teacher persona that we internalized.

## Methodology

This study creates a dialogic space between two educators from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. We created this critical dialogue through counter-narratives and centered it around language teacher identity. Counter-narratives are used for telling the stories of people whose experiences are often overlooked or silenced. They serve "as a tool for analyzing and challenging the dominant stories of racial privilege" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). They are also a means to document and share how race, ethnicity, and language influence the educational and professional experiences of people from non-dominant backgrounds, whose stories counter the stories of the privileged that are considered normal and neutral (Miller et al.,

2020). Therefore, our critical dialogue was conducted as counter-narratives of our raciolinguistic and ethnolinguistic experiences in White monolingual spaces.

We conducted our counter narratives through a dialogic process as it allowed us to create a discussion, comment on each other's narratives, and analyze our themes together. In a similar dialogue based approach, Banegas and Gerlach (2021) used critical incidents to explore the ways they interacted with their students and addressed their identities in their classes. Although their focus was on gender identity, which is different from our linguistic focus, their dialogic methodology helped them uncover their attitudes and dispositions towards language teaching in relation to their and their students' identities. In another study, Lawrence and Nagashima (2020) used dialogue to examine teacher identity and intersectionality by exploring how their personal identities, namely their races, languages, and genders interacted and intersected with their professional identities as language teachers. Our study is similar to Lawrence's and Nagashima's (2020) study in this regard as my collaborator and I also take up the issue of what a competent language teacher looks and sounds like and how our intersectional racial and linguistic identities play a role in claiming legitimacy. Our work builds on this study by incorporating our interactions with our students and the influence of these interactions on the conceptualization of our teacher identity. Lastly, we drew from Lowe and Kiczkowiak's (2016) dialogic approach as they conduct their dialogue as educators from different linguistic backgrounds, similar to what my collaborator and I did in this study. Having these critical dialogues with those whose membership to different communities influence and form their pedagogies and perspectives is critical as it allows us to question our socialization into the field and uncover the fallacies we internalized. Lowe and Kiczkowiak's (2016) study differs from our critical dialogue as one of them is positioned in the dominant linguistic group whereas in our study, my collaborator and I

are both positioned as linguistically non-privileged even though our backgrounds differ. All in all, the use of dialogic approaches to serve as counter narratives set the premise for this study and we aim to take the conversation further by incorporating our different lived experiences as well as questioning how we both internalized the hierarchical superiority of standard English.

Critical incidents were our starting point of discussion. We started with the question "can you think about a moment while teaching that highlighted some aspect of your identity in relation to power?" We consider them to be critical incidents because these were one of the moments that either became a turning point for us in terms of defining our identities or strongly influenced our pedagogies moving forward. After we both chose and wrote down our critical incidents, we shared them with each other and created discussion points for our dialogue highlighting the similarities and differences between our narratives. We chose to conduct this conversation in a recorded virtual meeting as we wanted the discussion to flow naturally. We started by explaining why we chose those incidents and our states of mind at the time. We used our discussion points to go deeper and look behind the decisions we made regarding our identities. Upon transcribing our meeting, we started to identify our themes. Lastly, using a shared document, we narrowed down our themes and made additional comments to clarify and elaborate on the excerpts we have chosen. As a result, our counter-narratives were created in a storytelling format, and they tell our stories of becoming.

## Background: Who Are We?

Sumeyra is a Turkish woman, who first immigrated to the United States with her family at 14. She was placed in English language services when she started high school. She later returned to Turkey, finished her last year of high school, and received a bachelor's degree in

English. Her first introduction to teaching was through private language schools in Turkey, where she taught English to high school students, college students, and adult learners. She returned to the U.S. for a master's program and received her M.Ed. degree from a small public university in New England. Upon graduation, she started to work as a high school ESL teacher at an urban school, where approximately 80% of the student population was from minoritized racial and ethnic backgrounds. After a year, she started her doctoral program in Education at a medium size public university in New England, during which she visited high schools, taught adult English learners, and worked with pre-service teachers. She now works at a public university in the Midwest. She identifies as a translingual and transnational woman.

Angelina is a biracial woman of African American, White, and Lebanese ancestry, who grew up in a predominantly White town in New England. Her connection to her African American identity was weak growing up since she was raised by her single White mother and she did not have conversations regarding her race with her African American father, who was adopted and raised by a White family. She received her accelerated master's degree in Education with a dual certification in ESL and ELA from a large public university in New England. During this program, she completed her student teaching in two different racially and linguistically diverse schools and worked as a teacher for GEAR UP and Breakthrough, two programs whose missions centered around increasing the number of low-income students' success in postsecondary education. Upon graduation, she started to work as an ESL teacher in an urban district with high populations of Latinx and African American communities. She is now relocating to a mid-size town in the Mid-Atlantic region as a middle school ESL teacher.

Our connection was through a course at a public university in New England. Sumeyra was the instructor of the course as part of her graduate assistantship during her doctoral program

and Angelina was a pre-service teacher taking that course. The following semester, Sumeyra was assisting in the weekly seminars for graduate student teacher interns, in which Angelina was a participant. During these two semesters, our non-dominant racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds at a predominantly White institution and our mutual interests working with multilingual learners drew us together. Angelina was one of the few pre-service teachers interested in an ESL certification and during our time together, she worked on projects and papers that were similar to Sumeyra's dissertation topic. Therefore, after Angelina graduated, Sumeyra asked her to be a part of her study. Initially, our relationship in this study began as an interviewer and a participant. However, Sumeyra, then, invited Angelina to be a collaborator. Instead of a one-sided interview, we decided to turn this chapter into a critical dialogue. Hence, our relationship evolved from being an instructor and a student, to a mentor and a mentee relationship, then to an interviewer and a participant relationship, and finally to two colleagues who collaborated on a study and presented in conferences together.

## Critical Incidents

Sumeyra's critical incident:

> In 2016, I was hired as an ESL teacher at an urban high school in the Northeast region of the United States. I was one of the five ESL teachers in the building. The overwhelming majority of the students in this school was non-White and multilingual. However, most of the teachers were White, U.S. American, and monolingual English speakers. On my first day of teaching, I introduced myself as Ms. G. Although my last name was already very short, I wanted to appear less foreign. I was paying close attention to my accent and had not told my students about my linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, yet. I was teaching an

advanced level class, which meant that most of my students had been in ESL services for many years and some even considered English to be their dominant language. As I was going over the attendance, one of my students asked "*Miss, don't get offended but why are YOU teaching this class?"* I immediately got offended. I responded *"because I like teaching*" but I got frustrated with myself for not being able to handle the question better by asking him to elaborate on what he meant by that. I could have explained to them that I also used to be an English learner in high school and that I could relate to their language learning experiences. Instead, I shut him down with a simple remark and moved on because what if he was right and I was not competent or qualified enough for that position. That question set the tone for how I chose to present myself to my students.

Angelina's critical incident:

Being a biracial, African American young woman growing up and living in predominantly white spaces, I have learned how to dilute my "Blackness" and conform to the socially accepted norms found in the dominant white community. This meant speaking AAVE, or African American Vernacular English, was off the table in the majority of spaces. In 2021 during my time as a student-teacher in an urban school district, I divided my time between two different high schools in the same urban district. I worked and taught ESL and ELA classes. Although the student population between both schools represented over 100 different countries, the staff at both schools was predominantly white. In fact, at one of the schools, I was the only staff member of color. The students I served knew me as Ms. G. One February morning, I was conducting one-on-one writing conferences with my students. I was working with one of my students of

Afro-Latino descent, and we began to talk about his life experiences connected to his writing assignment. One thing led to another, and we ended up both conversing in AAVE. This student of mine turned to me at the end of our conversation and said, "*I feel like I can just kick it back and talk to you about whatever, Ms. G. There ain't a lot of other teachers that understand us or connect with us like you do."* This singular, pivotal moment changed the way I approached teaching and how I connected with my students for the remainder of that school year and the school years to come. I was so worried about not being seen as a "professional," that I did not realize that I had this ability to tap into and connect with my students in a way other teachers were unable to.

**Insights**

Coming from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, we shared experiences that were similar during our first year of teaching/student teaching. There were common threads in our critical incidents such as trying to blend in and creating a competent teacher persona in our minds. The discussions that came out of our critical incidents showed us that we both went through the processes of hiding parts of our identities, then learning to embrace those parts, and lastly using them as assets in our teaching. However, these processes looked different and happened at different times for us. Another similarity from our critical incidents was the demographics of the schools where we taught: student populations were racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse; however, the overwhelming majority of the teachers were White and monolingual. In our critical dialogue, we talked about how these incidents affected the way we presented our identities, then we went deeper into the reasons behind our attempts to blend in

and uncovered that we had preconceived notions of what a competent and a professional teacher looked like. Sumeyra shares:

> I had not initially shared my background with my students. I didn't know how much I should share and what would be professional. I did not tell them that I also used to be an English learner when I was at their age. I tried to present a professional identity and, in my mind, that meant being a native English speaker, someone who has been educated in the US, and an American citizen. Even though I was partially educated in the U.S. and only had a slight accent when speaking English, I felt the urge to hide my linguistic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds, as well as my immigration story from my students and colleagues.

For Sumeyra, the pressure of not fitting in came from her international status. She was questioning her own competency as a language teacher because she was worried that her students wouldn't want to be taught by someone who was not an American citizen or a "native" English speaker. This evokes the native speaker fallacy, which is the notion that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of that language as defined by Phillipson (1992) and it stems from Noam Chomsky's linguistic concept that established the native speaker as the authority on the language and the ideal informant (Canagarajah, 1999). This notion gives an advantage to the native speaker as the expert of the target language. By doing so, it also creates a hierarchy among languages and dialects while positioning "non-native" speakers as outsiders. This was the ideology Sumeyra had internalized at the time. Therefore, during her first week of teaching, when a student questioned why she was teaching that class, Sumeyra did not feel comfortable sharing her linguistic and educational journey, even though it could help other students connect with her more. This was due to her not feeling as though she had a claim to English because ownership of English is often contested and one's English legitimacy is continuously affected by factors like race and accent (Motha & Lin, 2014). As a result, Sumeyra was attempting a form of linguistic passing in order to present herself as someone who has a legitimate claim to standard American English.

This hierarchy of languages can also exist within the same language. As a biracial American woman, Angelina used AAVE in some of her social circles. But she was hesitant to use it in school as she was worried that it would not be regarded as professional. Angelina shares:

> It wasn't up until college that I even knew there was a name for African American Vernacular English. I remember feeling so cheated, clueless, and frankly, upset that I wasn't aware about this integral part of my identity. The way I would see myself professionally or how I wanted others to see me was somebody who speaks "proper English", not somebody who is speaking in "slang", because people tend to look down upon people who speak AAVE and not recognize it as a legitimate dialect. So, I was really kind of diluting it and just pushing it to the side so I could conform.

Angelina's attempts to blend in were also fueled by years of trying to highlight her White identity over her African American roots in the predominantly White schools that she attended. Although she always considered herself to be a biracial woman, she was not aware that her AAVE linguistic resources were an asset. In raciolinguistics, this is explained by the lingering effects of colonization, which positioned non-European populations as inferior and perceived these groups as linguistically deficient (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Furthermore, linguistic identities are perceived to be closely linked to racial identities and whiteness becomes an intrinsic element of "standard" or "mainstream" English (Motha, 2006). Thus, Angelina, as a biracial woman, has grown up not recognizing AAVE as a legitimate dialect because it was often looked down upon both by the dominant community and the African American community, who internalized this positioning. As a consequence, Angelina believed passing as someone who only spoke in "standard" American English would give her more legitimacy as a language teacher. However, since Angelina's linguistic identity is closely tied to her racial identity as a biracial person, her linguistic passing was also causing her to pass as only White by making her feel as though she

needed to distance herself from her African American identity in order to look and sound like the "norm."

As a result of our positioning as the linguistic other, we tried to pass as speakers of "standard" American English during our first years of teaching. However, passing looked different for both of us as our tensions around identity differed due to our different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and immigration backgrounds. For Angelina, blending in meant being cautious about who hears her talking in AAVE. This is a result of AAVE often being reduced to slang, which affects people's perceptions of racial identity. AAVE is positioned as inferior compared to the "standard" English, which is defined by "social norms, prejudices, attitudes, and expectations and often decided upon by social groups in power" (Haddix, 2016, p. 4). Angelina explains:

> As I mentioned in my critical incident, I was just conversing with one of my students and I remember when I decided to speak AAVE back with him. I was quieter and more unsure of myself. It was almost like I didn't want my cooperating teacher or my students to hear the conversation. I thought they would think differently of me or think that I wasn't competent enough to teach them. I didn't want them to think "you're teaching us about grammar and then here you are over here speaking this AAVE slang." And, honestly, I don't know if I would have had the ability to really fully explain myself back then and get into that conversation of AAVE being a whole dialect with grammar systems.

These prejudices towards AAVE cause educators of color to question their professional identities. Haddix (2016) explains that being the only teacher of color and constantly feeling the need to monitor her language made her feel like she did not have a right to teach English when she was non-native to mainstream American English. Similar feelings were shared by us. That is because whiteness and standardized English are closely linked. Together they define what are legitimate forms of speech and the bodies that can "legitimately" speak and be heard (Daniels & Varghese, 2020). The strong influence of whiteness and standard English on one's identity and positioning as the insider versus outsider may cause people from non-White and/or non-standard

English-speaking backgrounds to try to hide or change parts of their identities. This was the case for both of us. Sumeyra attempted this by trying to sound less foreign and Angelina felt more comfortable presenting her White identity over her African American one.

One of the other ways we attempted to fit into the whiteness and standard English frames was through our names. We both referred to ourselves as Ms. G. in school, but for different reasons. Angelina was grappling with the fact that her foreign looking last name coupled with her racially and ethnically ambiguous appearance caused her students to question her identity as an American. Therefore, she wanted to clarify the confusion by making it easier for her students. On the other hand, Sumeyra's reasoning for choosing Ms. G. was connected to her attempts to hide her "foreignness." Sumeyra shares:

> I called myself Ms. G even though my last name is only three letters long. That was a decision I made before going into teaching. It was a small yet significant attempt to seem less foreign. For the same reason, I introduced myself as Sue during my master's program when I first came back to the U.S. as an adult because I thought it was on me to make it easier for others. I think names are a good indication of how we feel about our identities. Now I definitely teach people how to pronounce it, even if it takes time.

Talking about our experiences of changing our names and being mindful about who is listening made us realize that we were putting on a façade. These façades stemmed from internalized messages about what it meant to be a legitimate speaker of English, and consequently, to be a competent teacher. When having this conversation, we both agreed that having that façade was exhausting and keeping it up required a lot of effort. Over time, we learned how to be vulnerable with our students and share about our own backgrounds. This vulnerability helped us form stronger connections with our students, and in turn, helped us embrace our identities. Angelina shares:

> Students were very welcoming, and our connections became more meaningful. Students began to open up more to me about their personal lives and felt like I could really embrace myself authentically. So, in a way the students actually gave me the permission

> to open up to them more. Through our conversations, I heard from my students that there were not a lot of teachers they could connect to like they connected with me. My cooperating teacher at the time, who was White, told me once "*these kids tell you things they never have and never would never share with me in my over twenty years of teaching. I've never seen this type of connection before. They see you and they see themselves and they hear you and they hear themselves. That is everything.*" It really changed my approach to teaching and connecting with students. It was the ultimate turning point for me.

Similarly, Sumeyra was able to open up to her students more after she saw how enthusiastic some of her students were to know more about her background. Recognizing now the significance of connecting with students and embracing our identities as assets in our teaching, we questioned our internalized oppression and feelings of disempowerment. Internalized oppression occurs when we internalize constant messages that we and our group are inferior to the dominant group such as believing that the dominant group members are more qualified for their positions or behaving in ways that please the dominant group (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). We uncovered that the internalized oppression started taking roots in the predominantly White monolingual spaces in which we were educated and started teaching. Angelina was often the only person of color in these spaces and Sumeyra was often the only non-American and/or multilingual person. We both agreed that having spaces or communities consisting of people from similar backgrounds as ours would have helped us embrace our identities sooner. Although Sumeyra consciously sought communities of support during her doctoral program, she did not find those spaces during her master's program or her first year of teaching. She explains:

> There was only one person of color in my master's program and no multilingual teacher candidates or international students. So even if they didn't explicitly say it, I got the message that a teacher looks and talks a certain way. And then, you go into teaching and again the demographics are similar. So, you find yourself trying to work hard to look like them and behave like them.

This brings forth the issue of how teacher education programs as predominantly White monolingual spaces implicitly support the dominant notions of power and legitimacy when it comes to teacher identity. Angelina suggested that creating spaces for teacher candidates and teachers from non-dominant backgrounds is essential because:

> We need safe spaces where we can let that facade down, just actually really be us and have those critical conversations with other people and know that we are not alone. The feelings of isolation and incompetency we tend to feel are draining. We need a space of empowerment and empathy and understanding. Isn't that what we are striving to provide for our underrepresented students?

This idea of safe spaces was visited by several educators from non-dominant backgrounds and were developed in various ways. In their collaborative autoethnography, Jackson et al. (2017) argue that having safe spaces for teacher candidates of color gives them the room to develop strategies to consciously interrupt oppressive ideologies and process their experiences. These safe spaces also allow room for teacher candidates from non-dominant backgrounds to embrace their identities sooner and unlearn some of the internalized messages they may be holding onto. Furthermore, these spaces are also critical in professional spaces to build communities of support.

## Discussion

Going back to our critical incidents, we both shared moments in which there were interactions with our students. Although our self-journeys and our interactions with our colleagues are equally important when learning to negotiate the tensions surrounding our identities, our biggest concerns were regarding our students; how they would perceive us and how we could best work with them. We internalized misconceptions about what a competent and a professional teacher looks like. We also believed that our students would have the same misconceptions having been educated in schools where the overwhelming majority of teachers

were White American, and monolingual. Our critical dialogue helped us think about how we could have implicitly supported those misconceptions by not showing who we really were and not working towards helping them unlearn these biases. Angelina shares:

> I would want my students to know I'm a professional. I have my master's degree as a first-generation college graduate. I'm here teaching you guys. And as you can see, I'm perfectly capable of doing so. Don't let anybody tell you that the language or the dialect you speak at home with your families is lesser than. That represents the people you love and who you are. I know there are going to be a lot of people that look down on those who are speaking AAVE. I know that that message is out there, and it can cause a lot of damage. In my work as an educator, I am also working to shine light on the falsehood of this message.

Sumeyra adds that;

> When I refrained from sharing my journey learning English or my immigration story with my students, I was doing it to look like a competent teacher but the message it sent to students was that my background is not important. What is important is that I'm here in the US teaching English and I think that message is really harmful. It's saying that our only target is for you to learn English and sound more American. And look at me trying my best to blend it and sound like a native English speaker.

These negative messages are out there and can be internalized by students. We had also internalized some of these messages ourselves and had to work to unlearn them. One of those messages told us that our professional and social identities had to be different, therefore, we felt hesitant to use our linguistic, racial, and ethnic resources in our professional spaces. However, our social and pedagogical identities are inseparable even though we are often forced to conceptualize them as apart (Peercy et al., 2019).

We both went through different processes in terms of unlearning these internalized oppressive ideologies and breaking through the deficit lenses through which we were seeing ourselves. For Sumeyra, it was not until halfway into her doctoral program that she started to view her linguistic identity as a resource, rather than looking at it through a deficient lens. This change, albeit slowly, was prompted by her introduction to the field of translingualism and to the

autoethnographies of numerous translingual and transnational language teachers and teacher educators, who have navigated through similar tensions in their conceptualization of language teacher identities (Canagarajah, 2012; Yazan, 2019; Solano-Campos, 2014; Jain, 2021). Translingualism challenges the monolingual ideology, which defines linguistic difference as a problem and a characteristic of those who are "different" and outside of the "norm" (Lu & Horner, 2013). Therefore, translingualism helped Sumeyra view her linguistic resources through an asset-based lens, which was further reinforced after her research interests shifted towards raciolinguistics. Looking back at her critical incident where she felt the urge to hide her accent, ethnic and linguistic background, and even her foreign name, Sumeyra is able to see how she internalized ideologies that favored Whiteness and mainstream English over the language practices of minoritized group and this had a strong influence on how she viewed and presented her identities.

On the other hand, what contributed to how Angelina reconceptualized her identities through a more asset-based lens was a mixture of influences, including some of the college courses she participated in that helped her tap into the words and experiences of her African American ancestors, the students she served and connected with during her student teaching at a racially and linguistically diverse district, and the political climate at the time. The year of 2020 was a pivotal moment for her. She remembers being triggered by the violent death of Ahmaud Arbery, so much so that she began to use her voice on social media and speaking in front of others at a BLM rally, even using AAVE in her speech. She felt pulled to use her voice and defend the African American community, which she felt like she could finally claim as *her* community. Her journey from rejecting her African American roots and only presenting herself as White, to feeling as part of the African American community and embracing her linguistic

resources to support them. Raciolinguistics also helped her re-evaluate her experiences as a student that caused her to blend in for the sake of abandoning a part of her identity. As a teacher, she wants to challenge the ideologies that silence AAVE and uphold the assumption that standard English is racially neutral (Motha, 2006).

These deficit ideologies that we both internalized at some point were results of what was perceived as "normal" and "the standard." Motha and Lin (2014) frame this phenomenon as the concept of desire, which explains that our desires are shaped by our social, historical, political, and economic contexts, and they can be individual or coming from the larger society. In our cases, our desires to sound less foreign or less African American were both collective desires coming from the larger society and individual desires that allowed us to be insiders in those professional settings.

Another significant outcome of our conversation was regarding how the tensions around identity are not fully resolved. They continue in some shape and form, meaning that we are still negotiating spaces and trying to figure out the directions we go from here. For Angelina, embracing her racial and linguistic backgrounds also came with the realization that she would like to educate her students about AAVE, however, this brought up other tensions. She shares:

> As a biracial woman attempting to confront and untangle my identity, I continuously felt pressured to ask myself the question: "Am I even Black enough to speak AAVE, let alone educate my students about it?"

Similarly, Sumeyra's negotiation of her linguistic identity has evolved. Though she learned to embrace her linguistic resources as an asset, she started to question her ethno-racial identity:

> Getting into this field of raciolinguistics and identity work made me realize that I still feel that in-betweenness but in a different context. We talked about how whiteness and standard English were intrinsically connected and how linguistic practices of minoritized

> populations were racialized. I identify neither as a person of color nor as a white American who speaks standard English. I find myself in the dominant racial category, but I feel as though I don't belong there due to my ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

These tensions around identity have taught us that we are still learning to negotiate and re-conceptualize our identities, but we have come a long way. Motha (2006) explains that race or linguistic minority statuses are not clear-cut categories and their meanings are both subjective and negotiable. Therefore, as we are reflexively looking back on our experiences, we are learning to renegotiate our positionings and the meanings we make of our identities and experiences. We have started to do that "by claiming and leveraging our identities to empower ourselves" (Peercy et al., 2019) and as educators, we would like to support our multilingual, multicultural students in doing the same.

## Conclusion

Our pedagogies have evolved after we learned more about culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) and we found social and professional spaces to have these critical dialogues. CSP advocates for helping students understand that their cultural and linguistic practices are valued and contribute to their academic success (Paris & Alim, 2014). In order to do that, we needed to start with ourselves and reflect on how we came to embrace our identities, used them as assets in our pedagogies, and continue to negotiate and re-conceptualize our intersectional identities in our social and professional spaces. Conducting this critical dialogue helped us dive deeper into our experiences and think about what we internalized about what it means to be a competent teacher and our conscious and unconscious choices to blend in. During this critical dialogue, we have found that we have shared similar experiences even though we come from very different backgrounds and our concerns had different focuses. For Sumeyra, tensions around identity were centered on her linguistic background and her sense of belonging due to her

immigration status/nationality, whereas for Angelina, they were about embracing her racial identity as a biracial woman and her dialect as a linguistic asset. However, despite experiencing different tensions, we agreed that when studying and working in predominantly White monolingual spaces, it becomes crucial to find spaces that are not centered on whiteness and monolingualism to connect with others who are going through similar journeys.

In a field where it is of utmost importance to be reflective practitioners, it is imperative that we focus on highlighting voices that are overlooked or silenced in our educational spaces. The disproportionate racial/ethnic/linguistic representation found in the majority of U.S. schools and teacher education programs is alarming. We must think about what kind of message these spaces are sending to our students of color and educators from non-dominant ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds, who, like us, may form distorted conceptions of what it means to be professional or competent. These spaces allow White monolingual people to claim a raceless, cultureless, and languageless identity while positioning racially and linguistically diverse people as the opposite or the other (Haddix, 2016). One common misconception we both had about being a professional and a competent teacher was regarding language. We associated standard American English with a professional identity, and we did not want to stand out. Sumeyra was immediately positioned as the linguistic other due to her accent and linguistic background, which made her self-conscious about teaching English when she wasn't "native" to it herself. Angelina did have access to the "standard" American English as she grew up in a White community with her White family members. However, she had a whole other linguistic resource (AAVE) she could tap into but initially had trouble associating this linguistic resource with her professional identity. These struggles are not new, and they go back to the colonial mentality, which "positioned colonized populations as inferior to idealized European populations" and still

continues to “shape the world order in the postcolonial era by framing racialized subjects’ language practices as inadequate” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 627).

In regard to our linguistic identities, we have both adopted a translingualism lens, which provides us with the attitudes, pedagogies, and mindset to challenge the monolingual ideologies that are associated with hegemonic whiteness. This is mainly because we both shuttle between communities and/or nations which influence our linguistic practices and dispositions, and translingualism helps us claim more power and agency over our linguistic identities that go beyond bounded, static, and territorialized constructs (Canagarajah, 2018). Translingualism is also a pedagogy we adopt as it advocates for developing more linguistically just classrooms while also making their students aware of the dominant language ideologies they will face (Flores & Aneja, 2017).

If we want to make teacher education programs and schools safe places for educators from diverse backgrounds, we need to start by re-examining these spaces and question the implications of allowing the dominant groups to claim raceless, cultureless, and languageless identities. Our critical dialogue raised questions that can help guide teacher candidates, teachers, and teacher educators: How can our racial/ethnic/linguistic backgrounds as educators be used as assets in a classroom setting? Can opening up about our social identities help our students be open about theirs? Can this be a source of empowerment for students? Can we begin to dismantle dominant and harmful assumptions related to race/ethnicity/language when it comes to power? How are we able to/what can we do to rewrite the “professional educator” narrative? And how do our intersectional identities as educators depower/empower us?

# CHAPTER IV: STUDY # 3

## Narratives of Becoming: Developing Teacher Identities as Novice Teachers of Color

Teacher identity is negotiated and constructed by people's experiences as they take part in different social and professional spaces within education. These experiences include, but are not limited to, their early school experiences, interactions with family and friends, teacher education programs, student teaching experiences, and their workplaces. All of these experiences influence their conceptualization of teacher identities and form their pedagogies. Teachers' interactions in these different spaces and communities also teach them an awareness of how they are expected to present their identities and how they are perceived (Beauchamp & Tomas, 2011). Identity, therefore, is an ongoing negotiation shaped in response to the contexts in which it occurs (Faircloth, 2012). This negotiation might prove to be more difficult for new teachers from minoritized backgrounds as their participation in spaces predominantly occupied by the members of the dominant groups could marginalize their identities and experiences. For instance, students of color who attend primarily White affluent schools often deal with racial microaggressions. Kohli et al. (2017) call this "new racism" and explain it as a system of institutionalized power and domination that is usually invisible and manifests at an interpersonal level. Thus, novice teachers and teacher candidates of color draw from these racialized K-12 experiences as they conceptualize their teacher identities.

Another space that significantly contributes to the conceptualization of one's teacher identity is teacher education programs. This is where teacher candidates develop their identities as learners in university classrooms and as teachers in their practicum by learning to negotiate the boundaries between the two (Beauchamp & Tomas, 2011). From the courses they take to the professors and peers they interact with and classroom environments where they student teach,

pre-service teachers are exploring how their identities influence their pedagogies and how their positionings by others influence their conceptualizations of their professional identities as emerging teachers. Hence, they will not feel empowered in their identities as teachers if they are being taught by teacher educators that are uncomfortable with or lack the knowledge of cultural diversity, unwilling to center culturally responsive pedagogies in their teaching, and not creating opportunities for all students to feel valued and appreciated (Jackson, 2015). Teachers from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds carry these experiences to their teaching. They form their pedagogies and conceptualize their teacher identities in response to their interactions with others and their positioning against power dynamics within the social, political, and educational spaces of schools and universities.

Research on the experiences of teachers of color shows that although novice teachers of color may feel devalued in schools, they may not be comfortable sharing these experiences with their leaders, especially if they are White (Bettini et al., 2021). This is partly due to their sense of disempowerment. A study conducted by the Teacher of Color Collective in collaboration with Souto-Manning (2022) reported that teachers of color had been schooled to value and protect dominant interests that are centered on whiteness, and the conceptualization of teaching in this way continues into their teacher education and professional development during teaching. Thus, there is more research being done where teachers of color use self-reflexivity to uncover these internalized dominant ideologies. Souto-Manning's (2022) contribution to the field with this work is valuable as it is written by teachers of Color to talk about their own experiences in teacher education programs and it is directed to teacher educators. I also drew from Kohli's (2009) work as she brings forward the narratives of teachers of color and point out that teachers of color are constantly seeking tools to challenge racism in their classrooms because the racism

they faced while they were in school influences their perceptions of the experiences of their students of color (Kohli, 2009). Similar to Kohli's findings, Bettini et al. (2021) examined the ethnoracial experiences of teachers of Color and used the term “double binds” to talk about occurrences when personal commitments of teachers of Color conflicted with professional expectations in institutions that norm Whiteness. What influenced my work from this study is its focus on how teachers of Color navigate different identity tensions while also conceptualizing their professional identities as teachers. I also drew from scholars who examined the experiences of pre-service teachers of Color (Haddix, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Brown, 2014; Pham, 2019; Montecinos, 2004), this chapter focused on the identity conceptualization of first year in-service teacher by analyzing their experiences in different contexts such as their early schooling, teacher education programs, and current workplaces in order to understand how teacher education programs can better support teacher candidates from these backgrounds.

## Theoretical framework

Teacher identity and intersectionality are the two concepts forming the theoretical framework of this study. Teacher identity is the anchor that ties the experiences of three novice teachers as they are conceptualizing their new teacher identities. Teacher identity is the shift to becoming a teacher and teacher candidates develop their teacher identities as they discover “within themselves the characteristics they share with ‘good’ or expert teachers” (Marble, 2012). It is important to note that this conceptualization of teacher identity is ongoing; it is “not bound, static, atemporal, and decontextualized” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Consequently, the participants’ negotiation of their teacher identities is framed as their narratives of becoming. Webb (2013) argues that teacher identity is constantly in the process of becoming and teachers cannot achieve a presumed, fixed state of identity. Therefore, as I analyze their conceptualization

of teacher identity through their experiences in different spaces, I am only considering their newly emerging identities as teachers and how they have come to form these identities, being fully aware that their conceptualization will continue to evolve. Moreover, in order to explore their processes of identity negotiation, we have to consider the contextual nature of teacher identity because teacher identity is very much affected by the social, cultural, and political contexts where teachers work and live, and their multiple and complex identities also play a role in shaping the many facets of teacher identity in the different contexts they interact with others (Jenlink, 2021).

Intersectionality completes my theoretical framework because teacher identity is not separate from one's other identities and it is contextual. It is conceptualized through our experiences both in social and professional spaces. Intersectionality tackles the issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, language etc. by interrogating the ways social structures produce power and marginalization (Carbado et al., 2013). Therefore, the social justice nature of intersectionality helps us move from one-dimensional labels or categorizations of identity and urges us to analyze people's lived experiences within the social and political spaces that they are a part of. Furthermore, it "opens up spaces to identify the gaps and silences of single category analyses and approaches" (Tefera et al., 2018 p. 8). Intersectionality, as part of my theoretical framework, helped me make sense of how their participation in different spaces within the social, cultural, economic, and political constructs defined their lived experiences. Hence, in order to understand how they are conceptualizing their teacher identities, I looked at how identities such as race, ethnicity, nationality, language, gender, and socioeconomic status caused them to feel silenced and marginalized at different times and in different spaces, and how this reflected on the ways they developed their pedagogies around empowerment.

Their pedagogies are important indicators of their understanding of identity and empowerment because pedagogy represents their philosophies, their interactions with their students and colleagues, and their own definitions of education. Pedagogy shapes ideas and identities, and is itself shaped by the larger contexts and communities (Motha et al., 2011). Therefore, their pedagogies serve as an important indicator of their identity conceptualization as novice teachers.

## Methodology

In this study, a narrative inquiry approach was used. As an analytical method, narrative inquiry focuses on "attending to personal experience over time, in social contexts, and in place(s), particularly the experiences of people and communities whose experiences are most often invisible, silent, composed, and lived on the margins" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 236). For this narrative inquiry, I interviewed three novice teachers of color from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Teacher identity is the anchor as we delve into their experiences in their early schooling and personal spaces, in their teacher education programs, and in their workplaces. Just like any other identity, becoming an educator is also a process and it is continuously composed and recomposed in relation with the lives of the people and communities with whom we engage (Huber et al., 2013). Therefore, their experiences in these different spaces will help me frame their narratives of becoming as they continue to conceptualize their teacher identities.

In order to form their narratives, I have conducted 2-4 interviews with my participants. The first set of interviews helped build background about who they are, and the following interviews focused on their identities and pedagogies. The data, then, was coded thematically. These themes will be presented contextually. I have divided these spaces into three: their social

spaces and early schooling, their university and teacher education programs, and their professional settings where they teach. Though their participation in these spaces occurred linearly, I do not necessarily believe their conceptualization of their identities was summative. Identity conceptualization is ongoing and dynamic, and their lived experiences influence their past, present, and future. Nevertheless, organizing their narratives within these spaces helps me understand how their experiences have influenced their pedagogies today.

Overall, this narrative inquiry gives an insight into the perspectives and identities of three new teachers whose racialized experiences counter the dominant narratives in teaching and teacher education. Research questions guiding this study are:

1. How does their participation in different educational and professional spaces affect the way they negotiate and construct their teacher identities?

2. How are they drawing on their intersectional identities when forming their pedagogies and performing interactions with peers, students, student families, instructors, and colleagues?

## Findings

The three participants in this study, Aaliyah, Jim, and Carmilla (pseudonyms), are conceptualizing their new roles as first year teachers. They come from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds but they all identify as a member of one or more minoritized groups. They are all navigating their new professional identities in different ways based on their own life experiences as students, teachers in preparation, and novice educators. Table 1 below gives a summary of the unique backgrounds and experiences they bring to this study.

**Table 1: Backgrounds of the Participants**

| Participants | Race and ethnicity | Gender | Content area | Education | Other identities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Aaliyah** | African American, White, Lebanese | female | ESL, secondary First year in teaching | B.A. and M.A.T. in Education with dual certification (ESL and ELA) | First generation college student. Grew up with her White single mother |
| **Carmilla** | African immigrant | female | Math, secondary First year in teaching | B.A. in Math, M.Ed. in Math Education | Moved to the U.S. during college. Speaks 4 languages. Mother of 2. |
| **Jim** | U.S. born Vietnamese American | male | Math, secondary First year in teaching | B.A. in Math, M.Ed. in Math Education | Grew up in a low socio-economic household |

Aaliyah identifies as a biracial woman of African American, White, and Lebanese ancestry. She talked about her experiences growing up with her White single mother, being educated in predominantly White schools, and rejecting her African American identity to better fit in when she was young. Her journey towards conceptualizing her teacher identity was through embracing her roots during her teacher education program, especially during her student teaching experience in a racially and linguistically diverse school district. Carmilla, on the other hand, brings an international perspective. Being an immigrant and a person of color, she felt hesitant to go into teaching at first due to her lack of confidence in her English language skills. Her teacher identity is influenced by her resilience to overcome her fears and working to assert her voice

more, especially in White dominant spaces. Lastly, Jim brings the perspective of a second-generation immigrant (Asian American) who has grappled with feeling like a foreigner in the United States, even though he is American. Moreover, his experiences with poverty have influenced his pedagogy as a novice teacher. Although their lived experiences are considerably different from each other, their conceptualization of their teacher identities was affected by their backgrounds. More specifically, their racial, ethnic, gender, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds altogether played a role in how they constructed and claimed their social identities and these identities, in turn, affected how they experienced early schooling and social contexts, their teacher education programs, and their workplaces. It is through these contexts that they have conceptualized and continue to reconceptualize their new identities as teachers. Analyzing their experiences contextually will provide a richer and more in-depth narrative because it is within these spaces, they are navigating their identities and these contexts are not neutral places. They are "socially constructed with institutionally endorsed perspectives" regarding the expected and accepted types of values and behaviors (Faircloth, 2012, p. 187).

**Social Spaces and Early Schooling**

Aaliyah, Jim, and Carmilla have all reflected on their schooling and families growing up and those early experiences shaped their pedagogies and attitudes towards teaching and learning today. Carmilla emphasized several times that she came from a hardworking family. She grew up speaking two local languages, but schooling was all in French in Cameroon. English was introduced later on. There were different ethnic groups where she grew up, but she considered herself to be in the majority group. Whenever she struggled to adjust to her new life in the United States as a member of a minoritized racial and ethnic group, she went back to her

philosophy of hard work and reiterated that she is working to keep a positive mindset at all times and just focus on her work.

For Jim and Aaliyah, their early schooling experiences had a stronger influence on their pedagogies. Jim now works at a school where he attended for a year in high school but then left as he did not feel like he fit in. Parks (pseudonym) is a choice school specializing in advanced placement programs. Jim believes that there are teacher biases creating obstacles for students even before one chooses to go to that school or even has the necessary information about it:

> Teachers would definitely push for students that they would see as the prime candidate that fits into the demographic to go to Parks. They would choose students and then give information to those specific students about the school, basically.

It is not uncommon for teachers to be biased when referring students to advanced programs. When identifying students for advanced or gifted programs, teachers are more likely to choose White students who do not receive free/reduced price lunch and are not ELs (Siegle et al., 2016). This means that students who are not White, are on free/reduced lunch, and English learners have fewer opportunities to be in advanced programs. Jim believes that was the case for him. However, Asian or Asian American students differ from other non-White groups statistically because the majority of Asian students take at least one AP course in high school, and they are more likely to be placed in advanced placement programs (American council on education). Looking at Jim's experiences through an intersectional lens, we can understand that there were other contributing factors other than his race such as his socio-economic status, differences between Asian countries in terms of what is often included in the statistics, and his positioning as between two different cultures. All of these issues will be taken up in more detail throughout this study. Jim explains:

> I didn't feel like I fit in. Parks has a very long history of ethnic or diverse students eventually leaving because it just didn't feel right for them. There are a lot of different reasons for it, whether it be academically or just the culture of Parks. You could tell the teachers and students all had assumptions about students coming from diverse backgrounds.

As a result of his negative experiences in that school, Jim went back to his old school after a year. However, when he finished his teacher education program, Parks was one of the first schools he applied to teach. Now, he wants to make sure his students from lower income households and racially diverse backgrounds feel welcome, at least in his classes.

Similarly, Aaliyah's upbringing and schooling influenced not just her pedagogy but her identity growing up. She was raised by her White single mother and went to predominantly White schools. Furthermore, she used her racially and ethnically ambiguous appearance to hide her African American roots and used to present herself as only White. She elaborates:

> I remember when I was little and just filling out documents, I would never fill out Black or African American, it was just White. I remember having a conversation and getting into a fight with somebody because they said, "you're not half Black technically, because like your dad is like 75% black," it was some crazy discussion like that, where we were trying to pinpoint percentages of what I can say. And I was really emotional after that because here's somebody who's White, who's trying to make sense of me. And I can't even make sense of my own self.

When I asked her why she wanted to hide a part of herself, she responded:

> When I was younger, nobody around me looked like me. I never even saw any African American, multi-racial teachers before. I think about my high school, and I never had the opportunity to really learn anything positive about African American history. And I feel like anything we learned about African Americans was either related to like slavery or the civil rights movement and it ends there.

Aaliyah did not have a community where she could share similar experiences with people who looked like her, both in and out of school. First and foremost, she did not want to be singled

out or feel different from the other students. Secondly, she lacked any role models from the African American community both in her real life and within the curriculum. Therefore, she did not want to be associated with that community. She only began to embrace this part of her identity after student teaching in racially and ethnically diverse schools during her teacher education program. When she didn't feel like an outsider, she learned to explore and cherish her diverse backgrounds.

Overall, all three participants grew up and went to school in places that were demographically very different from each other. Carmilla was in the majority ethnic group growing up but then moved to the United States where she was minoritized. Jim was in a racially and ethnically mixed district but when he tried to go to a predominantly White and upper middle-class school, he felt like he did not fit in. Aaliyah, on the other hand, went to a predominantly White school and presented herself as only White by not disclosing her African American identity. In the following sections, when we look at their experiences in college, and then, in their workplaces, we can see the influences of their early schooling experiences.

**University Programs**

Jim, Aaliyah, and Carmilla all completed their master's degrees in Education. However, their teacher education programs differed. Aaliyah completed a five-year accelerated master's degree in Education with dual certification in ESL and ELA based in New England, whereas Jim and Carmilla's teacher education programs were during their one-year master's programs in the Midwest. Jim completed this program online, whereas Carmilla was in person. They both completed their bachelor's degrees in Math, not in Education. When talking about their teacher education programs, I asked the participants to reflect on incidents or people that encouraged them or helped them support their identities as emerging teachers from racially and ethnically

diverse backgrounds. Carmilla talked about two different professors one from her undergraduate institute and one from her master's program who both supported her:

> My Algebra teacher in my undergraduate program, seeing her, the fact that her accent was different and the fact that she was really knowledgeable, and it did not stop her to be where she was, that really encouraged me. And then, I had an Asian professor in my master's program, she motivated me again. I think she also motivated me to change my mindset. Seeing people like me, who were speaking English with an accent helped me believe in myself.

Carmilla always wanted to be a teacher, but she was always hesitant because she believed her English language skills would be a barrier for her. Therefore, instead of going directly into teaching, she completed a math degree and then started to work as a substitute teacher. She believed this job would help her understand if she would be a good fit. She also talked about being the only person of color in her undergraduate Math program and the lack of representation in STEM fields. Her master's program in Education, however, had a little more diversity and this was encouraging for her. The two professors she mentioned helped her directly by encouraging her but also indirectly as role models who shared similar experiences with her regarding immigration and language learning history.

Jim was even more reserved to share his experiences in his programs. When asked about an influential person or a class during his undergraduate or graduate education, he shared:

> I don't think anybody went completely out of their way. I also don't think I generally put myself in positions where I required a lot more support or focus or anything like that. I figured out everything myself. I do have a distinct memory during college as I was going through graduate school. I did get kicked out of my home and I had one of the professors talk to me during that experience and say we can see if there might be any grants or anything that can get you through things. So, I had that conversation that was nice to have but it was never followed up on really.

As a Vietnamese American who was born and raised in the United States, Jim always focused on his experiences with poverty when telling his story, rather than his racial and linguistic experiences because he felt that his economic status influenced his experiences the most. He found it difficult for people from low-income households to go into teaching considering the cost of education, low teacher salaries, and lack of role models. Throughout our discussions of teacher education programs, he reiterated that he did not seek safe spaces or communities and that he preferred to figure out things on his own. This could also be a result of completing his program virtually. It is likely that he felt disconnected from everyone, although his student teaching was partially in person.

Unlike Carmilla and Jim, Aaliyah considered her university program to be a turning point in conceptualizing her identities. Being a first-generation college student, she did not know what to expect but she had some positive experiences that helped her explore a part of her identity that she had preferred to hide for so long. When asked to reflect on her courses and instructors, she talked about an assignment that really moved her:

> There was one professor in particular, an English professor, and we were doing a poetry assignment. It was based on a picture we picked. In my picture, there was a brown girl and all you could see was curls, curls like mine. And so, I wrote this 12-page paper on just Black women's hair and it was such a cool assignment. And my professor just gave me so much encouragement and I felt safe that I ended up writing that poem. And I shared out that poem. And then it was because of that poem that she had nominated me for an award.

The encouragement she received from that professor was just a first step in helping her explore her African American roots. Another course that was an eye-opener for her was a Sociolinguistics course where she learned about the African American Vernacular English.

> It was an emotional class for me because I never even really knew that I could tap into this other dialect like this. Ebonics is something that when I'm with certain people, my

> circle or certain family that actually speak it. And there's actually real grammar behind it. And I never knew that.

Aaliyah always viewed the "standard" American English as the norm and the appropriate dialect to be used in professional settings. This can be explained by the lingering effects of colonization, which positioned non-European populations as inferior and perceived these groups as linguistically deficient (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Therefore, when she learned about the roots of this dialect and how it had its own system and grammar made her feel as though she was misled this whole time. Thus, these two courses helped her see African American history under a more positive light, which then helped her embrace her own roots. Around this time, she also started to show interest in working with students from diverse backgrounds. When doing an observation at a small-town school, she was hearing all these negative stereotypes about kids from a nearby urban district, Bristol (pseudonym). She explained:

> It was my first day and there was a teacher or somebody that worked in the school. They told me that "kids are good here. You know, they're not like some of those kids in Bristol."

For someone who was still questioning their background, these negative stereotypes could further cause alienation from their own community. However, despite these stereotypes, Aaliyah chose to do her student teaching in Bristol and her experiences there ended up shaping her pedagogy into what it is today.

When talking to the participants about their experiences in their teacher education programs, I wanted to focus on the positive experiences they have had to help us understand what worked for them. For Carmilla, it was the presence of two professors from racially and linguistically minoritized backgrounds that really encouraged her to continue on this path. For Aaliyah, it was the courses she took that portrayed African American history through an asset-

based lens and her student teaching experience at a racially and linguistically diverse school district. Though Jim talked about struggling with eviction and not being able to remember anyone who made a big difference, he talked about how his experiences could have been different if he did have that support. In the discussions section, I will talk about the implications of creating meaningful connections and the importance of an inclusive curriculum and student teaching opportunities that expose students to diverse experiences.

**Workplaces/Teaching**

The last space we have talked about was their workplaces. At the time of their interviews, Jim and Carmilla were in their first years of teaching. However, Aaliyah was completing her student teaching and had an inquiry project where she was mentoring first year Education students. Although we had follow-up interviews during her first year of teaching, the majority of her experiences below are from her student teaching. In this section, I asked them about their relationships with their colleagues and students. All three of them are working in racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse schools and they talked about always wanting to work with diverse student populations. Carmilla elaborated on this decision by explaining:

> I actually had a position in a rural school, which I ended up not taking, Because I had a feeling like am I going to survive? I had a lot of stuff going on in my head and because I was subbing in an urban school, I was already comfortable working in a diverse environment. I rejected that offer because the majority of the people there were White middle class and I looked on the website, there were no Black, no people of color and I asked myself “are parents going to accept me?” And things like that.

Carmilla found it intimidating to work in a predominantly White small rural town because she did not want to feel like an outsider. This is partially due to the expectations put on teachers of color as role models for K-12 students of color, but not necessarily for all students.

Therefore, teachers of color are enclosed in a frame that puts them in a position to resolve the opportunity gaps for students of color simply based on their shared racial and cultural backgrounds with their students (Brown, 2014). As a result, Carmilla questioned whether she would be accepted by the parents in this predominantly White school because she internalized the expectations of other educators and parents as a teacher who would be a better fit to work with students from racially minoritized populations. Therefore, she ended up taking a job in an urban district where the student population is racially and linguistically diverse because she felt more comfortable working there. Her main struggle working in this school is communication with the other teachers. She said she was mostly silent during meetings, and she would rather listen than talk. She explains:

> I find myself listening more than participating because I don't know how another person will react. In my mind, I think that maybe they know better than I do. I think it's just a block that I put in my mind. I need to share my opinions and if they take it cool, if they don't, that's fine. So, I need to advocate for myself, too. Maybe it's because I am the only Black person in those meetings but what I want to see is to push my ideas further and say, "let's try it this way and see." I think the cultural part is still a barrier.

Carmilla's doubts about herself and her ideas are partly due to being a new teacher in a room with teachers who have more experience. However, towards the end of that discussion, she owned up to her "mental block" and said she needed to advocate for herself more because she has good ideas, too. Feeling like an outsider, a newcomer is not a new phenomenon for teachers of color regardless of their years in teaching. Teachers of color are often positioned as newcomers in predominantly White spaces where they are expected to rely on the expertise of a White teaching and teacher educator profession (Pham, 2018). In Carmilla's case, she is not yet fully aware of the insights she brings to the profession even if she is a novice teacher.

Jim, on the other hand, had very different experiences as there was very little collaboration among teachers. He said they mostly left him to his own devices, and he was content with that. When I pushed him to think about his relationships with other teachers, he talked about his teacher persona.

> When I am just with other teachers or with other people from my community, there is a difference in how I speak. My accent will change a little. I know that people in my family or community will speak a sort of mixed phonetic version of English and Vietnamese. So, I code switch when I am at school. I also learned to express myself in certain ways as these are the ways that I can get through without feeling like I am going to cause any issues or anything.

Although he was reluctant to elaborate on what he meant by "certain ways" and which parts of himself he chose to hide in professional settings, it was clear that he created a persona that he put on when he was at school. The way he spoke and presented his intersectional identities differed in social and professional settings, which means that he is conceptualizing his teacher identity as a separate sphere from his social identities. For instance, when he is having conversations with his students or introducing topics around identity, he shares his socio-economic struggles growing up and the way he feels like a foreigner in this country. Therefore, he is using his personal experiences to help his students feel comfortable and to create room for these conversations. However, in his interactions with his colleagues, he presents a more distant facade, one that is less personal and more of a professional role.

Aaliyah's experiences were different from those of Jim and Carmilla's because she felt less restricted internally to share her perspectives, however, she has also had reservations about how she would be perceived by others. While she was student teaching, she worked with cooperating teachers who encouraged her and supported her. But she wasn't as comfortable

when she was in spaces with other teachers mostly due to her being the only person of color in those spaces. She talked about the pressure this had put on her:

> We were doing an anti-racist training and I was the only person of color, other than the host. She was an outside host, and she was a black woman. In that space, there's been some conversations that have actually turned pretty heated. And I would feel this pressure because I don't even know what to say. And I feel like everybody's going to expect me to have the perfect thing to say but I don't, because I just kind of go blank.

Being the only person of color in these spaces, she felt like she was put under the spotlight where she was expected to give a perspective representing other people of color. Therefore, she wasn’t comfortable sharing her opinions in these spaces. She also constantly questioned what her students thought of her. As she was pursuing dual certification, she was student-teaching in two different schools. Her EL students were all students of color and from diverse racial and linguistic backgrounds. But her ELA students were mostly White, and she felt more hesitant to share certain experiences with them.

> So, with my students of color, all of us in some shape or form have had to deal with systemic racism, whether it's really a small scale or a large scale. But when I'm with students who are mostly White, I worry about, are these White students going to perceive me as like this BLM crazy biracial lady?

Aaliyah more openly talked about her experiences and the issues surrounding identity with her students of color as she could relate to some of their experiences. However, she felt as though she needed to be more careful around her White students and White colleagues and this was mostly due to how others positioned her as a representative, a token, for her race and cultural groups. Not having the perfect insight to give on topics related to race and racialized experiences in meetings caused her to be silent because she knew her ideas would not necessarily be taken as her individual opinions but could be attributed to a whole culture. Similarly, she was

aware that some of her White students and parents had preconceived assumptions about teachers of color as pushing a social justice agenda and this caused her to question how much she can share and which topics she can introduce in her classroom.

All in all, the three participants were navigating their identities as new teachers in different ways. Carmilla was working on sharing her ideas and opinions in meetings without the fear of being turned down or not being taken seriously. Jim created a persona in school by separating his professional and social identities around other teachers. And lastly, Aaliyah was testing what she is comfortable sharing when she was in White dominated spaces.

## Discussion

Their experiences in these different spaces, namely early schooling, teacher education programs, and workplaces, shaped their pedagogies in one way or another. In developing and shaping their pedagogies, they have also continued to conceptualize their identities as novice teachers. First of all, these spaces are mirrors to the larger social and political dynamics of the societies where they live and work. For instance, Jim and Aaliyah both went to university and started to teach in the same states where they were both born and raised. Moreover, they were both racially minoritized during their early schooling, university programs, and teaching or student teaching. Aaliyah completely lacked the community element for her African American identity, which caused her to disassociate herself from that part of herself. Jim, on the other hand, did grow up with a small Vietnamese community but they frequently moved around due to financial struggles and that has been his main worry. Carmilla's geographic spaces were more shifting. Growing up in Cameroon with the values and experiences she shared with the majority in that country was a completely different scene than the spaces she became a part of when she

moved to the U.S. First in the Northeast region of the U.S. and then the Midwest region, she was surrounded by different communities, where she was often in the minoritized racial group. These spaces and the participants' positionings within them also contributed to how they claimed and presented their identities.

Though all three participants identify as people of color and their races have influenced and continue to influence a significant portion of their experiences, race alone does not give us a full picture as we analyze their narratives of becoming. It is also imperative to look at their identities intersectionally to be able to understand how they navigate their new professional roles. Intersectionality urges us to analyze identity as multiple, complex, and sometimes marginalized instead of one-dimensional single identity markers and to consider how these identities are situated and interacting within the larger society (Pugach et al., 2019). Therefore, analyzing the narratives of these teachers of color only through race would be incomplete. In the following sections, we will delve into their identities and experiences through an intersectional lens.

**Jim**

One of the most significant parts of my conversations with Jim was his economic challenges growing up. His economic struggles, feeling out of place when he attended a well-known "choice school" in high school and then leaving it, and being evicted from his house during graduate school were all experiences that contributed to how he conceptualized his identities today, as well as to his pedagogy as a novice teacher. Teaching in the same school where he felt out of place, Jim is more aware of the needs of his students beyond academics. He noticed that students from minoritized and low-income backgrounds were rarely encouraged to attend this advanced placement choice school and when they chose to attend anyway, there

would be little support for them. This stems from the deficit ideology schools have regarding students from low socio-economic and racially minoritized backgrounds. The deficit ideology is used to justify the struggles of these disadvantaged groups and ignores the structural barriers resulting from the unequal distribution of educational opportunities (Gorski, 2018). Jim's experience correlates with the deficit ideology because he observed that teachers chose certain students and only informed them about this choice school and referred them there. Furthermore, when he did eventually manage to attend this school, being one of the very few students coming from racially and economically disadvantaged communities, as well as not feeling supported by his teachers to succeed and adapt to this new school deterred him from continuing his attendance. He felt the presence of stereotypes about economically disadvantaged communities of color when he was around his peers and his teachers. These stereotypes portray these communities as intellectually inferior to their wealthier White peers (Gorski, 2018). Hence, when Jim was hired to teach in that school, his main motivation was to disrupt this harmful narrative. In addition to being cognizant of implicit and systemic biases and sharing his own experiences economically struggling, Jim also has conversations about identity and belonging with his students. He shares:

> One of the early things that I brought up in our class conversations was the concept of the perpetual foreigner. Because a lot of my students were born here but they feel like if they went back to their origins, they would seem too Western, but then they don't feel fully accepted in the west, either.

This notion of perpetual foreignness occurs when members of ethnic minority groups are denied the American identity and treated as if they are foreigners because being American is often equated to being White (Huynh et al., 2011). This was a phenomenon Jim was dealing with and he saw the value of having this discussion with his students who might be sharing the same experiences as him. Feeling like a perpetual foreigner is also associated with the feeling of in-

betweenness. As Jim mentioned, he and his students did not feel completely accepted as an American, but they also did not feel completely connected to their origins. Immigrant families and children of immigrants often experience “the choices and struggles of culture and identity within the East/West or immigrant/nonimmigrant binaries creating an in-betweenness” (Ngo, 2008, p. 8). This was an experience Jim closely related to. Despite having been born in the US and speaking English as his dominant language, his American identity would always come into question. Furthermore, having lost fluency in Vietnamese and not growing up around a lot of other Vietnamese families contributed to his feeling in-between those East and West or immigrant and nonimmigrant dichotomies. Jim finds these conversations he is having with his students incredibly valuable and shared that having that kind of support while he was a student probably would have affected his experiences significantly, especially in Parks where he felt out of place. Therefore, we can observe that Jim’s conceptualization of his teacher identity was heavily influenced by his own experiences as a student and his lived experiences such as being an Asian American man, a child of immigrants, a translingual and transnational person, as well as growing up in a low socio-economic household. All of these experiences also helped form his pedagogy.

**Carmilla**

Carmilla’s identity tensions revolved around her national and linguistic identities. Although she identifies as a person of color, race was not an identity she had thought about much when she grew up in Cameroon. However, after immigrating to the United States, her race became an identity with which she was identified by others. Therefore, providing her narrative only through her racial identity would be incomplete and skewed because her journey towards conceptualizing her teacher identity was heavily influenced by her experiences as an immigrant.

In fact, it was due to her national origin and linguistic background that she did not see herself becoming a teacher at first. These identities did not align with the teacher identity she created in her mind until she found the encouragement she needed. She constantly referred to "mental blocks" when talking about her struggles and often emphasized the importance of hard work in coping with adversity. Looking at her story of becoming, she still doubts herself in certain situations. A "cultural barrier" as she calls it is still present when she is around her colleagues. She feels hesitant to share her ideas or push for her ideas further. I see two factors contributing to her hesitancy. The first one has to do with her identity as a novice teacher. She senses a hierarchy and equates experience only to the number of years someone has worked in the field. Her experiences being a substitute teacher for a few years, student teaching, being a student herself both in her home country and in the United States, as well as her lived experiences outside of school do not seem as valuable to her as the experiences of her colleagues. The second reason has to do with her identity as a person of color and an immigrant. What she calls a cultural barrier is actually her attempts to fit into the normative White monolingual culture but not completely succeeding. When she made the comment "maybe it's because I am the only person of color in the room," there is an indication that she is aware of how women of color are not always taken seriously in professional settings. As Hernandez et al. (2015) explain in their collaborative autoethnography, immigrant women of color in education are navigating various challenges such as adjusting to their new racialized identities, especially after coming from countries where they were in the majority ethnic and racial groups, as well as dealing with the "triple threat" of being foreign-born, non-White, and female. As Carmilla tried to take her place among the other educators in her school and as she struggled to assert her voice and sometimes doubted herself, she was learning to navigate this new space where she was a foreigner, an

outsider. This may also be why she feels hesitant to talk about race with her students because her identity as an immigrant makes her belonging to the “people of color” or “African American” racial groups more difficult. While she seeks and claims authority on her immigrant and linguistic identities, she doesn’t feel that authority when it comes to race. Sharing her stance on having difficult conversation regarding race in her classroom, she says:

> You have to be really prepared and then you also have to know how to answer questions so that you don't hurt the feelings of some students. So, I usually don't really like to get into it deeply. I listen more than give my input. I feel I need to learn because it is a huge topic.

Carmilla shows an understanding of the fact that race in the United States is a political issue and she feels as though she needs to educate herself on the history and politics of race in order to have that conversation with her students. This could also mean that she is reluctant to provide her own input because she is aware that her opinions might be taken as representative of her whole race, especially since her experiences growing up as a Black woman have been very different than those who lived in the United States whole or most of their lives. Therefore, her conceptualization of her own teacher identity through an intersectional perspective is influenced not only by her racial identity as an African American person, but also as a woman, an immigrant, a multilingual person, and a mother among other things.

**Aaliyah**

Unlike Jim and Carmilla, Aaliyah’s racial identity is not easily perceived. As a White presenting biracial woman, the process of conceptualizing her identity as a teacher of color was not straightforward. Growing up in predominantly White spaces, she tried to pass as only White by disassociating herself from her African American identity. Aaliyah believed this was partially due to not having any conversations surrounding race both when she was growing up with her White mother and when she was visiting her African American father who was raised by a White

family. This is not an uncommon occurrence in multiracial families. Parents might choose not to discuss race-related issues or to let their children who might be perceived as White to identify as White for a variety of reasons such as protecting them from microaggressions and racism, and for easier socialization into mainstream society (Csizmadia et al., 2014). Therefore, biracial children's ethnic and racial socialization can be influenced by how their families decide to take on race related discussions, how their peers perceive them, and their experiences in predominantly White spaces. This ethnic and racial socialization, in turn, helps them define their own racial identification, which may be different than their racial identity. Also contributing to her decision to pass as White were factors such as not wanting to stand out and not seeing the African American community through a positive lens. She began to embrace her blackness, as she framed it, after student teaching in a racially diverse community and having had the chance to explore African American history more in depth. Thus, community belonging was an essential part of her identity conceptualization and as a teacher. As a result, her pedagogy is heavily centered on exposing her students to diverse voices. When talking about the poems and books she is reading in class with her students, she shares:

> These are just things that I was never really exposed to. And I know that because the curriculum was definitely a lot more whitewashed, and this is something that I could have benefited from growing up.

Being educated with a "whitewashed" curriculum meant for Aaliyah that the histories and cultures of African American groups were mostly absent unless they were framed in a deficit lens or talked about in regard to slavery. Au et al. (2016) explain that the absence of diverse voices in the curriculum occurs in two ways: visible and invisible. The invisible aspect has to do with the absence of ideas, theories, and cultures that were relevant to the construction of curriculum in the United States, such as when certain ideas and theories were privileged over

others. On the contrary, the visible aspect occurs when the contributions of non-White communities are included in an additive nature as separate entities or outside of the common debates. Thus, in both ways, there is a clear indication of whose cultures, ideas, and histories are superior. In their analysis of California's standardized curriculum for English and History classes, Sleeter and Stillman (2005) found that the curriculum in both disciplines centers on historically dominant groups' perspectives, language, and ways of seeing the world. Aaliyah began to explore the richness of African American history and literature when she was in college. She described this process as eye-opening but also emotional as she felt cheated and misled before then. The master narrative or the "whitewashed curriculum" she was exposed to growing up significantly contributed to how she saw herself and how she wanted others to see her. Curriculum has that power because it defines "whose knowledge has most legitimacy, and how the next generation should think about the social order and their place within it" (Sleeter & Stillman, 2015, p. 27). Therefore, as a novice teacher from a biracial background, Aaliyah is more aware of the importance of valuing students' backgrounds and exposing them to voices and narratives that are underrepresented in curriculum. Her own experiences helped her conceptualize her teacher identity through empowerment. What she was lacking growing up became an important element of her teaching.

All in all, my three participants, Aaliyah, Carmilla, and Jim, had different journeys in the conceptualization of their identities as teachers. This conceptualization process is influenced by a myriad of experiences from navigating American K-12 public schools as a member of one or more minoritized groups to learning to adjust to the American education system as an immigrant. Furthermore, their experiences are not disconnected from the larger systems of power. Their access or distance to power lies at the intersections of their identities because it is dependent on

which forms of knowledge are accepted as legitimate and who is included or excluded. Normalization, discrimination, and affirmation are extended to them in the different social and professional spaces that they have been a part of (Levine-Rasky, 2011). As a result, their pedagogies and their relationships with their students, as well as their own identity conceptualizations are all a result of their lived experiences with their multiple intersectional identities and within the systems of power. Choosing to work in diverse school districts, talking about the importance of culturally just education, and using their own experiences to empower their students are some of the common elements of their teaching philosophies. Looking at their narratives, we can see that they formed their pedagogies based on their own experiences both positive and negative. Oftentimes, teachers of color already have a sense of awareness of social and school inequities even before they start their teacher education programs (Brown, 2014), and a result, they strive to improve the educational opportunities of their students, especially their students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and multilingual students (Achinstein et al., 2010). Although it is not fair to put the pressure of improving the educational quality and opportunities of students of color on the shoulders of teachers from minoritized backgrounds, it is important to acknowledge that they bring a perspective to teaching and learning that White middle-class monolingual teachers do not.

## Implications for Teacher Education

This study was a narrative inquiry into the journeys of becoming a teacher of three novice teachers from different backgrounds and their experiences were analyzed in three different spaces: their early schooling, teacher education programs, and their workplaces. Although there needs to be more research to improve the experiences of students, teacher candidates, and

teachers of color in all of these three spaces, I would like to focus on the implications of this study on improving teacher education programs as these are the spaces that attract and educate future teachers. So, how can we make teacher education programs safe and inclusive spaces for teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds so that they can conceptualize their new identities as emerging teachers with more support?

**1. Representation Matters**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2018, 75 percent were White. Although these percentages differ from one institution to another, it is important to recognize that it becomes more difficult to attract teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds into teaching when these candidates do not see educators and teacher educators who look and talk like them. Of the three participants in this study, Carmilla was the one who benefitted from representation the most. Having had two professors who were immigrants and multilingual speakers with accents encouraged her and helped her believe in herself. Carmilla also talked about how there were very few Black teachers and teacher candidates in STEM. This lack of representation could easily be discouraging to those thinking about teaching STEM. Therefore, it is invaluable to recruit and retain faculty of color in teacher education in order to support teacher candidates of color who see their identities affirmed and recognized (Jackson et al., 2017).

**2. Culturally and Linguistically Just Curriculum**

Another invaluable commitment teacher education programs should make in order to support and retain teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds is to empower them and prepare them to empower their students. Looking back at Aaliyah's narratives, we see the

importance of culturally and linguistically just curriculum in teacher education. She talked about two courses that made a difference in her life. One was a Sociolinguistics course where she learned about the richness and history of the African American Vernacular English and the other one was a literature course where she wrote a poem on African American hair. In both courses, she felt that her identity was affirmed, and the histories and literature of the African American community were represented with the valuable contributions they made. These courses, along with other positive experiences in the program, helped her embrace and cherish her biracial identity.

All three participants talked about the importance of having difficult conversations around identity with their students to some degree. Jim made it clear that he wanted his students to leave his classroom having learned more than just Math and he reiterated multiple times how important it was for him to have these conversations with his students. Aaliyah also recognized the importance of these conversations. She included diverse voices in her curriculum and wanted to expose her students to narratives that are often silenced or overlooked. However, while she was more comfortable having difficult conversations around race and identity with her students of color, she sometimes felt hesitant around her White students. Lastly, in Carmilla's classrooms, language was a topic that frequently came up. However, she did not feel comfortable talking about race with her students as she did not want to upset anyone. Thus, in order to prepare teachers to address issues regarding power, identity, race, and poverty, teacher educators need to engage their preservice teachers in critical dialogues because these future teachers will most likely be confronted with these topics in their own classrooms (Jenlink, 2019). Furthermore, having these critical conversations could empower all teacher candidates regardless of their racial backgrounds to have the necessary skills to confront systems that influence teaching and

learning. Teacher education programs should address the role of teachers in perpetuating racism and other inequities in schools and the role of implicit biases on teachers' expectations and relationships with their students (Hughes & Bullock, 2019).

### 3. Safe Spaces

Another important consideration for teacher education programs is creating safe spaces for students from minoritized backgrounds. There are factors beyond academics that are affecting the experiences of teacher candidates. For Jim, being evicted and not having a support system in his program as he was going through it could have easily caused him to leave his program. He shared that it was already difficult for people from lower income statuses to pursue teaching due to tuition costs and other fees. In addition to having someone directing him to the right resources, he could have also benefited from a safe space where students who are facing similar challenges could support each other. Similarly, Carmilla often talked about having a cultural barrier in her relationships with her classmates and then later with her colleagues. Being an immigrant and a person of color, it was more difficult for her to form relationships with the other students in her program. Having safe spaces would provide teacher candidates who feel overwhelmed and excluded to have networks that include mentoring and relationship building (Hancock et al., 2020). Especially in predominantly White institutions, it is also important to have safe spaces for students of color to process their experiences, have opportunities to ask questions they may have been overlooked by their White peers or instructors, and safely talk about the importance of their roles in education (Jackson et al., 2017).

## Limitations

This study is limited to three participants as the goal was to analyze the narratives of these three novice teachers in depth and provide voices from their unique perspectives. There are

many other experiences that need to be highlighted such as ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, ability/disability, age, religion, immigration status etc. in relation to teacher identity. Furthermore, race, socio-economic status, nationality, and language were highlighted, however, these identities were only analyzed through the experiences of these three participants. Overall, teacher identity is complex and multilayered. It is conceptualized through our experiences in different social and professional spaces; therefore, it is unique and personal.

Another limitation is the scope of implications. I have focused primarily on the implications of this study on teacher education programs. However, I analyzed the experiences of my participants in their participation in K-12 schools, social settings, and workplaces, in addition to their teacher education programs. These spaces also need to be analyzed more in depth to better understand how to attract and retain teachers from minoritized backgrounds.

# CHAPTER V: SYNTHESIS OF THE STUDIES

The three smaller studies in this dissertation all contribute to the overall perspective of narratives of becoming through different methods. They make use of narratives and personal experiences to explore (1) how our professional identities as educators, teacher educators, and teacher candidates are influenced by our intersectional racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities, (2) how the way we negotiate, construct, and present our identities can empower or disempower us in the predominantly White spaces where we teach and are educated, and (3) how the experiences of teacher candidates, novice teachers, and novice teacher educators from minoritized backgrounds can be used to inform teacher education programs to move towards being more culturally and linguistically just spaces. All three studies were narratives of participants from different backgrounds who were in the process of conceptualizing their identities as teachers, students, and teacher educators, and they all navigated through tensions that emerged during their journeys. I started this project with the self, thus, the first study is an autoethnography. Then, with the second study, I shifted towards a critical dialogue which I have conducted with a previous student and mentee, and currently a colleague. Lastly, I positioned myself mainly as a researcher for the third study as I interviewed three participants who are first year teachers. Although the progression of the studies in this order was not intentional, it gave me a unique chance to observe how the way I have interpreted some of the concepts have evolved and how positionality has shifted from personal to the borders of an insider-outsider role. Although each individual study had its specific research questions, the overarching questions that tie all three studies were:

(1) How do the social and cultural contexts in which teaching and learning occurs empower/disempower minoritized identities?

(2) How can the experiences of teacher candidates and novice teachers from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds inform teacher education programs to create spaces that can support them to conceptualize their professional identities as teachers?

The following themes discuss in detail how these three studies respond to the first question regarding the influences of social and cultural contexts on teacher identity development through the narratives of participants throughout the studies. The second question will be explored in the following section titled implications of teacher education.

## Themes

Several themes have emerged across these three studies in their portrayal of becoming a teacher from the perspectives of several educators as they navigate different identity tensions formed by their own lived experiences with their minoritized racial, ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, and/or immigrant identities. Hereafter, I will be including myself when I use the term participants as my voice has been included as data in some parts of the study. The most prominent themes in my analysis of three distinct studies were: in-betweenness, feeling like an outsider, taking space, agency (and lack thereof) over one's identities, and empowerment. These themes depict how the educational, social, cultural, and political contexts the participants have occupied influenced the way they conceptualized their social and professional identities.

**In-Betweenness**

In-betweenness emerged in one shape or form for all the participants in this overall project. For some of us, in-betweenness occurred on the borders of two nations as immigrants or children of immigrants. In the first study, I analyzed how I navigated the professional and educational spaces that I had been a part of as an international student and how my race, ethnicity, language, religion, and immigration background all contributed to the identity tensions I have faced while trying to conceptualize my emergent teacher educator identity. Similarly, in the second study, I conducted a critical dialogue with another language teacher where we both reflected on our experiences as a first-year language teacher. In both studies, discussing and analyzing my teacher, teacher educator, scholar, and a researcher role, I have felt the presence of in-betweenness mostly in relation to my international student status. As a first-year teacher, I was grappling with a competent teacher identity I thought I needed to attain, which portrayed the ideal English language teacher as a U.S. American and a native English speaker. Coming from Turkey and being here on a student visa were experiences I was reluctant to disclose as I believed they would make my students and colleagues perceive me as non-worthy for the position I had. Similarly, when I explored my hesitancy to take space in race related conversations as a doctoral student during a professional conference, it was due to my foreignness and newcomer status to the concepts and politics of race in this country. These sentiments were shared by Carmilla, who was a participant in the third study. Having immigrated from Cameroon, she talked about remaining silent in meetings and avoiding topics around race in her classroom because she did not see herself in a position to be an expert or give valuable opinions on the subject as someone who had not grown up in the U.S.

For others, in-betweenness was about being positioned between two racial communities. Jim from the third study was a second-generation immigrant whose parents came to the U.S. from Vietnam. He talked about feeling like a perpetual foreigner, a topic he brought up to his students in his classroom believing they could relate to his experiences. A perpetual foreigner is someone who feels like a foreigner in his own country (Huynh et al., 2011). In his case, he was not perceived by society as an American, he was perceived as Asian first. In the same study, another participant, Aaliyah, talked about how growing up as a biracial woman, she faced problems trying to blend in by passing as White. She tried to present herself as only White in the predominantly White spaces that she grew up in but she felt as though she was an outsider to both racial groups. This feeling of in-betweenness emerged due to dichotomous understandings of cultures as East/West, White/Black, American/foreigner etc. These understandings that emerged out of the social, cultural, and political spaces and climates that we became a part of ended up influencing our pedagogies and our interactions with our students, as well. For some of the participants, it was in the form of having critical conversations with their students to bring awareness to these feelings, but for others, it meant hiding or denying certain parts of themselves to feel as though they belong to a group. In most cases, this was the dominant racial or linguistic group.

**Taking Space**

Another significant theme that emerged across three studies was taking space in White monolingual spaces. Carmilla, from the third study, talked about remaining silent in department meetings because she was often the only person of color, an immigrant, and a multilingual person in those places. Aaliyah also shared a similar experience when she talked about an antiracist teaching workshop during which she felt anxious about being asked her opinion. They

were both intimidated because the expectation to give the right perspective was overwhelming and they did not want to represent the perspectives of their whole cultures or races. Another participant, Jim from the third study, coped with this issue by mostly working alone or following the leads of others. I have also taken up this issue in the first study as part of my autoethnography. When I was asked to choose a breakout room (White versus people of color) to talk about race and identity in education, I felt as though I would be out of place in either of those rooms and my experiences would not align with theirs as someone who is racially White but is sometimes linguistically and ethnically racialized. Therefore, I also chose to remain silent and turned off my camera. By staying silent, participants were protecting themselves because the competent teacher identity they internalized did not designate them as experts in their fields. Two main factors contributing to this misconception is racialization and the internalization of deficit ideologies. Racialization designates the dominant groups such as White, monolingual, middle-class, Christian, U.S. American etc. as the norm and positions everyone else as the other (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Oftentimes, these positionings are internalized by people from minoritized groups and they also start to view their identities through a deficit lens.

**Agency and Empowerment**

Lastly, agency and empowerment were among the recurring themes. All the participants throughout the studies were seeking agency and authority over their identities but their processes looked very different. In the second study, my collaborator talked about how she came to embrace her biracial identity and her linguistic resources as a speaker of AAVE after being exposed to literature and the rich history of the African American community, as well as during her experience working with students from diverse backgrounds. As a child, she chose to present herself as only White because she wanted to fit in. Now, she feels empowered to be a part of two

racial communities. In a poem she wrote for a course during her teacher education program, she said "I am not half of anything, I am complete." Although she still had agency when she claimed only her White racial identity, that was a decision implicitly influenced by systems of power, which positioned whiteness as the norm. Now, she is more aware of these power dynamics but claims agency over her identities as a way to empower herself and belong to a community.

Claiming agency emerged in a different way in the third study when Carmilla was asked about her racial identity. In Cameroon, she was a part of the dominant racial and ethnic group. However, moving to the United States meant that her racial identity as a Black woman was highlighted and often was the first thing people noticed about her. However, during our conversations, she refrained from framing her experiences as a person of color. Instead, she focused on her linguistic experiences and immigration background. She also mentioned she did not like to have conversations around race with her students because she was aware that race was political, and she claimed she did not have enough experience or knowledge to give her opinion on the issue. Therefore, during this study, she was seeking authority and agency over her identities by decentering race from the conversation and emphasizing identities that she feels are the most important in understanding her experiences. Some of the participants were still negotiating ways to resolve their identity tensions, claim agency over certain identities, and work towards empowerment but they all talked about ways to support their students' empowerment even if their own were still in progress. Furthermore, their agencies changed from one space to another, and depending on their interactions with their students and colleagues. Their claims and agency over their identities at the given moment influenced how they viewed themselves and how much power they felt they had, and this is usually a common feeling among teacher

candidates and novice teachers who are still negotiating their professional identities as teachers and agents of change (Moore, 2008).

All in all, participants across three studies are coming from very different backgrounds, are at different points in their careers, and their lived experiences and identities differ from each other's. However, their pedagogies are similarly informed by their own experiences. Participants in the third study all talked about providing support to their students in ways that they themselves would have benefitted from. For Jim, this was the academic and psychological support he needed as a racially and economically minoritized student in an advanced placement school whose population is predominantly White and upper middle class. On the other hand, for Aaliyah, it was the exposure to diverse voices she was missing growing up in predominantly White schools. In the second study, my collaborator and I discussed how our own linguistic experiences dictated our interactions with our students and our approach to language learning. It was only after we learned to view and use our linguistic resources as assets that we were really able to build meaningful connections with our students. Lastly, in the first study, my own process of making meaning of my racialized experiences helped me in my teaching as a novice teacher educator. Now I work with mostly White, monolingual, middle class pre-service teachers and I always provide my own lived experiences in our conversations around identity. The narratives of becoming across these three distinct but interrelated studies show how a myriad of factors can contribute to a novice teacher's identity conceptualization such as representation in the curriculum, diversity in teacher/faculty demographics, and feeling supported by peers and colleagues.

## Revisiting Positionality

In the introduction chapter, I stated my positionality as both the participant and the researcher depending on the individual studies. Being the subject of my own work helped me think about the different roles I played in education as a student, teacher candidate, teacher, graduate student, and a teacher educator. During each of those roles, I was at different points in regard to embracing my own identities and my perception of the norm, the ideal, when it came to conceptualizing what makes a competent teacher, teacher educator, scholar etc. In study 1, I reflected on my socialization as a student in Turkey and how it was ingrained in me that the Western ideals and cultures would make someone more modern, more sophisticated. In the same study, I also explore how I presented and tried to claim my racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities when I came to the United States, first as a high school student, then as an international graduate student. It was during these times, I started to experience the racialization of my ethnic and linguistic identities and believed it was important for me to be able to claim my whiteness in order to fit in better. In study 2, the critical dialogue I had with my collaborator helped me examine the ways I was negotiating my professional identity as a language teacher and how this professional identity clashed with my cultural identities at times due to the internalized misconceptions about what it means to be a legitimate speaker of English. Going back to study 1, I was able to compare all those prior experiences aforementioned with my recent experiences during my doctoral program. During this period in my life, I assumed new roles as an international doctoral student, a researcher, and a novice teacher educator. I continued to navigate different identity tensions in these new roles as I started to become interested in identity work and social justice. As a result, I was joining conversations around race, politics, and identity, all of which still seemed complicated and disconnected from my own experiences as an

immigrant who identified as White but was not always successful in claiming whiteness. However, identifying as a translingual and a transnational woman now helps me make new meaning of those earlier experiences when I was trying to fit into dichotomous identity categories and facing an in-betweenness of cultures and languages. Those dichotomous still exist and are prevalent in most spaces that I take part in. However, I find myself better equipped to navigate through them, and as a result, better equipped to help my students, future teachers, feel empowered about their own experiences.

Studies 1 and 2 were critical reflexivity opportunities for me as a teacher educator. In study 3, I was positioned as the observer and the researcher. The three participants in this study came from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, yet they shared similar experiences working and being educated in predominantly White monolingual spaces. I have also shared similar experiences with each one of them based on different parts of our identities. However, they provided unique perspectives to this study as people of color that I did not have. I have a claim to whiteness. This claim comes with privileges, and I have some agency over how I presented my identities. Sometimes I concealed my foreignness by adopting a nickname and working on my accent, and at other times, I had to do a little explanation of what “White” includes. The participants in my third study were immediately positioned as non-White, even though they had agency over other aspects of their identities. Therefore, it was within this study that my understanding of intersectionality expanded the most. Intersectionality was an analytical lens that I used throughout this dissertation in all three studies. However, the third study proved that my analyses of the experiences and perspectives of my participants would be inadequate, incomplete, and superficial if I had only focused on their identities as teachers of color. Their narratives show that their experiences were shaped and continue to be shaped by all their

identities such as race, ethnicity, immigration, language, socio-economic status, being a first-generation college student, and being in between two or more cultures. Although my participants did not focus on gender, sexual identity, disabilities, and religion, these are also identities and backgrounds that influenced how they viewed and experienced the social and political spaces they occupied. Hence, my understanding of intersectionality developed with each study and the complexities and nuances of identity became more evident.

## Implications for Teacher Education

All three studies in this dissertation provided implications for teacher education based on their distinct focus. One implication that came out of all three studies was the need to create safe spaces in order to highlight the voices and perspectives of future teachers from minoritized backgrounds. Although this could occur in a variety of ways and includes many different spaces within teacher education, as a novice teacher educator, I would like to start with classroom practices. The participants in my studies were all eager to have critical conversations with their students around identity and identity politics, however, there were two concerns that were raised: (1) participants felt underprepared to have these conversations especially with or around their White students, and (2) they were navigating through their own identity tensions, which contributed to their hesitancy to bring up difficult topics in their classrooms at times. Both of these concerns point to the significance of having these conversations for their own self-reflection and practicing having them with others before they start teaching. One way to do this is through the methodology I have used in study 1, which is autoethnography. Autoethnography gives them opportunities to reflect on their own identity tensions and provide them with the tools to connect students' lived experiences to the larger social, cultural, and political contexts. It

promotes an awareness of their positionality, how their values and biases are created in relation to their interactions with others, and as a result, autoethnography helps those who feel silenced to reclaim the value of their stories and challenge the dominant narratives (Barr, 2019).

Using autoethnography in the classroom needs to be a multi-step process in order to ease students into feeling confident and empowered to explore and analyze their own narratives. Warm-up exercises such as identity wheels, readings on identity and autobiographical writing, asking students to keep journals and make observations could be first steps to prepare students for autoethnographic writing (Tombro, 2016). Introducing these practices early in the semester would allow students to build on their drafts and keep revisiting them as they read and discuss more in class. It is also crucial to explain why they are engaging in self-reflexivity. Noting that as teachers, they will always be in the state of becoming, rather than in a static state or arrival, they will need to bring new understandings to their teaching and develop new assertions regarding teaching and learning (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014). Having students understand that using autoethnography in the classroom provides an opportunity for them to think about their identities in relation to the communities they belong to and the social and political climates that may influence how they make meaning of their lived experiences. This critical understanding is important in developing culturally sustaining and just pedagogies for their future students. Autoethnography also highlights the importance of incorporating student experiences and backgrounds into teaching and learning. Accordingly, it contributes to transforming teacher education into a culturally and linguistically just space where the contents teacher candidates learn are not framed as a static body of knowledge disconnected from teacher candidates' identities and histories (Motha et al., 2011).

Another significant implication that came out of the studies within this dissertation was exposure: exposure to diverse voices in the curriculum and exposure to diverse student populations within student teaching. In a study conducted by men of Color, Camangian et al. (2021) reflect on their own schooling experiences and conclude that many of their teachers did not affirm their identities, and instead, they experienced schooling that was Eurocentric and impersonal by teachers who were culturally non-responsive. Similar conclusions came up in my third study when my participants talked about their own negative experiences in schools. Aaliyah came to the conclusion that she would have been able to embrace her biracial identity sooner if the curriculum was not "whitewashed," as she framed it. She hadn't learned to view the histories and cultures of African American groups through a positive lens because they were missing from the curriculum. Similarly, Jim felt alienated in a choice school for the academically advanced students because his experiences were not valued, and he was discouraged by teachers who did not support culturally minoritized and economically disadvantaged students.

Considering that White U.S. American teacher educators make up the overwhelming majority of all teacher education faculty (Milner & Howard, 2013), it is, then, also crucial for White teacher educators to examine their own practices and biases in order to transform teacher education programs. Using self-study and critical friends, they can engage in self-reflexivity to examine their pedagogies, interactions with students, and their own racial positionings in order to address issues of equity, challenge their own complicity in issues of race and power, and prepare teacher candidates to work with a diverse student population (Peercy & Sharkey, forthcoming). Similarly, these critical conversations can be held with the inclusion of teacher educators from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Some of the studies that center on these critical conversations show that White teacher educators sometimes found themselves privileging

the comfort of White students, and their own comfort, over interrupting racism in the class, and using being nice as a currency that they traded to take the place of doing critical work (Galman et al., 2010). Another self-study conducted by teacher educators concluded that engaging in self-reflexivity and having critical conversations shed a light on how the expectations they received from their institutions, professional circles, and state and national discourses, as well as their own identities and backgrounds, influenced their pedagogies and interactions with their students (Peercy et al., 2019). Thus, having these dialogues with White teacher educators, as well as teacher educators of color, could inform teacher education practices and push White teacher educators to examine their biases and dispositions as they become involved in identifying gaps in their thinking, supporting and denying assertions about the ideologies they adopt and explore the role of their identity as teachers in their identity as teacher educators (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014).

Although not mentioned here, there are many other ways through which teacher education programs can be transformed into safer and more inclusive spaces for teacher candidates from minoritized backgrounds. In some studies, creation of specific spaces just for students of color was suggested (Jackson et al., 2017; Varghese et al., 2019). These spaces gave opportunities to students who feel othered in their classrooms to discuss their experiences and connect with those who may share similar backgrounds with them. Other studies emphasize the importance of hiring faculty from minoritized racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds (Haddix, 2016; Jackson, 2015) as they can empower teacher candidates from non-dominant backgrounds to see and use their backgrounds through a resource-based lens and can be role models for all teacher candidates. All of these options need to be explored further in order to re-examine institutional policies and pedagogical practices that will better equip teacher candidates from

non-dominant backgrounds to work with all students (Gist, 2017). Thus, teacher education programs should transform their curriculum, the spaces they provide, and the ways in which they prepare teacher candidates to have critical conversations with their future students and learn to empower them. For that reason, it is essential to make space for constructive conversations around power and identity so that novice teachers do not leave their teacher education programs with distorted and Eurocentric understandings of equity (Endo, 2015).

All of these suggestions are just small steps in improving teacher education programs in order to attract and retain more teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds. As teacher education programs play a gatekeeping role from accreditation to professionalization and their curriculum (Morgan, 2016), it is critical to re-examine these spaces by listening to and highlighting the experiences of teacher candidates from minoritized racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. This study contributes to the field of culturally and linguistically inclusive teacher education by providing perspectives from educators from minoritized backgrounds as their narratives of becoming tell their stories of isolation, disempowerment and empowerment, and resilience. In the three studies that constitute this study, teacher education was the most significant space that contributed to participants' conceptualization of their intersectional social and professional identities. These perspectives can be used to inform teacher education programs to make them more inclusive spaces. Although there are many initiatives such as GYO programs, similar alternative pathways to teaching, and school-community partnerships, simply recruiting teacher candidates and teachers of Color is not sufficient; teacher education programs must be able to retain them and sufficiently prepare them for the realities of K-12 classrooms. This means valuing their cultural knowledge as assets and incorporating their experiences in curriculum and

practice, rather than expecting them to excel in Whiteness centered curriculum and teaching metrics in order to be identified as a competent teacher (Haddix, 2017).

## Recommendation for Further Research

The qualitative nature of this project helped me explore the lived experiences, perspectives, and voices of a few participants, including myself, more in depth in regard to their identity conceptualization. However, narratives and experiences of more participants from a variety of backgrounds need to be added to the literature as they all provide unique perspectives. Furthermore, studies in this dissertation mainly focused on racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities but there are many other angles that need to be explored such as gender, sexual identity, ability/disability, religion, other immigrant groups etc. Further research could also include data on veteran teachers and veteran teacher educators, community members, and current pre-service teachers. Lastly, a more longitudinal study could be very useful as it would allow researchers to observe and follow the progression and evolution of teacher identity and agency starting from teacher education programs and continuing to the first few years of teaching. A study with a longitudinal focus would give us an insight into the efficacy of the teacher education programs and groups created for student teachers from minoritized backgrounds, classroom practices for self-reflection, and exposure to diversity. Lastly, teacher candidates' identity conceptualization is based on many different experiences within different spaces. Studies in this dissertation mainly focused on classrooms, fieldwork, and a professional conference. However, the importance of community organizations, social and cultural groups within universities, student organizations and professional groups cannot be overlooked and need to be examined further. These are spaces that provide social and professional interactions and can serve as safe spaces for students. Furthermore, students may have more agency over their identities in such spaces and/or present

and claim their identities in different ways compared to their teacher education courses or fieldwork. As a result, these spaces need to be examined in order to provide a deeper analysis of teacher identity conceptualization, and identity conceptualization in teacher education programs in general.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS

**Part 1: Background Building**

1. Tell me about yourself. How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and linguistic identity?
2. Where did you grow up and go to school?
3. How were your educational experiences as a multiracial/multicultural student? Have you had peers and teachers from similar backgrounds? How did this influence your educational experiences?
4. Why did you decide to choose Education as your major?
5. How did your interest in teaching start? Was there a specific course, event, or an experience that influenced your decision?
6. What are your plans for your career? Where would you like to teach and why?

**Part 2: Teacher education programs**

1. Tell me about the course you took in your teacher education program. Which ones particularly stood out to you? What would you have liked to explore more?
2. How about your internship experiences? What have been your challenges? What are the most rewarding parts? Your biggest takeaways?
3. How is your relationship with the students from underrepresented backgrounds?
4. How is your relationship with your fellow pre-service teachers, professors, and mentoring teachers?
5. What kind of spaces and opportunities would be beneficial for pre-service teachers from diverse backgrounds to feel valued and supported in teacher education programs?

**Part 3: Prior coursework and assignments**

1. Have you taken courses related to diversity, identity, and multicultural education? Can you tell me about some of the assignments and projects you worked on that you have found particularly helpful for your teaching?
2. Looking at your earliest and latest work in the program, do you see any change in your pedagogy or philosophy? How so?
3. How would you define your pedagogy?

# APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL UNH

University *of* New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

04-Mar-2021

Gok, Sumeyra
Education, Morrill Hall
62 College Rd
Durham, NH 03824

**IRB #:** 8474
**Study:** Diversifying The Teacher Workforce
**Approval Date:** 04-Mar-2021

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 104(d). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

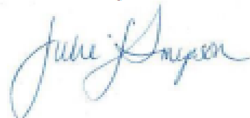
Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Note: IRB approval is separate from UNH Purchasing approval of any proposed methods of paying study participants. Before making any payments to study participants, researchers should consult with their BSC or UNH Purchasing to ensure they are complying with institutional requirements. If such institutional requirements are not consistent with the confidentiality or anonymity assurances in the IRB-approved protocol and consent documents, the researcher may need to request a modification from the IRB.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact Melissa McGee at 603-862-2005 or melissa.mcgee@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Director
cc: File
Sharkey, Judith

## APPENDIX C: IRB AGREEMENT BETWEEN UNH AND ISU

*Version Date: 08/23/2021*

**University of New Hampshire -** Iowa State University
**Institutional Review Board (IRB) Authorization Agreement**

**Name of Institution Providing IRB Review**: University of New Hampshire (UNH), on behalf of the University of New Hampshire IRB
IRB Registration #: IRB00000359 Federalwide Assurance (FWA): FWA00003431

**Name of Institution Relying on the Designated IRB:** Iowa State University
IRB Registration #: IRB00000473 Federalwide Assurance (FWA): FWA00002678

The Officials signing below agree that ISU may rely on UNH for review and continuing oversight of the human subjects research described below:

> **Title of Research Project**: *Diversifying the Teacher Workforce*
> **Name of UNH Investigator**: Sumeyra Gok Gulmezoglu
> **UNH IRB #:** IRB-FY2022-207 (ISU ID: 22-025)
> **Name of** ISU **Investigator**: Ji-Yeong I
> **Sponsor or Funding Agency**: n/a

The review and continuing review performed by UNH will meet the human subject protection requirements of the ISU OHRP-approved FWA. UNH will follow written procedures for reporting its findings and actions to appropriate officials at ISU . Relevant minutes of UNH's meetings will be made available to ISU upon request. ISU remains responsible for ensuring compliance with the IRB's determinations and with the Terms of its OHRP-approved FWA. ISU and UNH mutually agree to inform the other Institution in the event of any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others, or suspensions or terminations of this protocol, as well as any serious or continuing non-compliance or misconduct on the part of the Investigator. This document must be kept on file by both parties and provided to OHRP upon request.

Signature of Signatory Official on behalf of Iowa State University :

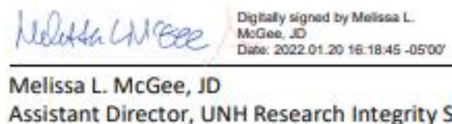
DocuSigned by:
Kerry Agnitsch
84E204617C71483...

Date: 1/21/2022 | 9:32 AM CST

Kerry A. Agnitsch — Print Full Name

Asst. Director, Office of Research Ethics — Institutional Title

Signature of Signatory Official on behalf of the University of New Hampshire:




Date:

Melissa L. McGee, JD
Assistant Director, UNH Research Integrity Services

# APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of New Hampshire

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**RESEARCHER AND TITLE OF STUDY**

I, Sumeyra Gok Gulmezoglu, am a doctoral candidate at the University of New Hampshire and a lecturer at the Iowa State University. I am interested in learning more about the experiences of pre-service teachers or novice in-service teachers from underrepresented backgrounds in teacher education programs and in the teaching profession. Relatedly, I am proposing a study: Diversifying the Teacher Demographics. I hope to interview you regarding your experiences as a pre-service or a novice in-service teacher of color.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?**

This consent form describes the research study and helps you to decide if you want to participate. It provides important information about what you will be asked to do in the study, about the risks and benefits of participating in the study, and about your rights as a research participant. You should;

- read the information in this document carefully, and ask me or the research personnel any questions, if you do not understand something,
- not agree to participate until all your questions have been answered, or until you are sure that you want to,
- understand that your participation in this study involves you to be interviewed up to five times over the course of 4 months,
- understand that the potential risks of participating in this study are possible breach of confidentiality but the risk is minimal.

I plan to work with approximately 4 participants in this study. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study and either a) be in the student teaching stage of your teacher education program or b) have completed your teacher education program in the last 2 years.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this research is to understand how pre-service teachers of color navigate coursework and fieldwork at a primarily White teacher education program and how their educational and cultural backgrounds influence their pedagogy. Anticipated number of participants is 3-4 and each participant must be at least 18 years old.

**WHAT DOES YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY INVOLVE?**

If you agree to participate in this study after reading this document, you will be asked to participate in 4-5 semi-structured interviews. Interviews will include topics such as your cultural and educational backgrounds, your introduction to teaching, your experiences in the teacher

education program and in the school, you are doing your internship, and your interactions with your students. Each interview should take about 30-40 minutes and will be concluded no later than March 30th, 2022. You can also choose to bring in assignments regarding your identities or teaching philosophy to discuss in our interviews. You have the choice to accept or refuse the use of your prior assignments for this study. Interviews will be over zoom and they will be recorded.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

A potential risk of participating in this study is breach of confidentiality. In order to minimize this risk, all identifying information will be removed and we will store all electronic data on the UNH approved cloud storage of the researcher. Since Dr. Sharkey has access to this data, the questions and discussions for this study will not affect your future work with her and will not put you in a position which will hurt your academic and career goals. You will not be asked questions that will ask you to assess or comment on the effectiveness of the program, the courses you took, or any other topics they may affect your relationship with the professor or the program. The focus of this study is your personal experiences. Therefore, the risk associated with this study is no greater than minimal.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

Although there are no direct benefits to the participants in this study, you might gain an increased insight about teacher education. Moreover, there are anticipated benefits of the knowledge to be gained through the study. It will give an insight to meet the needs of preservice teachers from underrepresented backgrounds and how their experiences can help us encourage more students into this field.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

Participants will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate, you may refuse to answer any question. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits in any way.

**CAN YOU WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?**

If you agree to participate in this study and you then change your mind, you may stop participating at any time. Any data collected as part of your participation will remain part of the study records. If you decide to stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you would otherwise qualify.

**HOW WILL THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF YOUR RECORDS BE PROTECTED?**

I plan to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. There are, however, rare instances when I may be required to share individually

identifiable information with the officials at the University of New Hampshire and regulatory and oversight government agencies.

I also may be required by law to report certain information:

- To government and/or law enforcement officials (for example, child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, or hazing). If I believe that such a report is required, I will follow the guidance of the UNH Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (and of the University's General Counsel) in making any such report, in order to provide as much protection for your privacy as possible while still complying with the law.
- To appropriate UNH authorities (e.g., disclosures involving Sexual Violence - which includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, relationship abuse, stalking [including cyber-stalking] and dating violence - must be reported to the UNH Title IX Coordinator or UNH Police).

- To appropriate Iowa State University authorities as some of the participants will be recruited from ISU and I, as the researcher, am employed at ISU.

Further, any communication via the internet poses minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality.

To help protect the confidentiality of your information,

- Your name and other identifying information will be removed when reporting, and the data will be stored on the UNH approved cloud storagebox of the researcher,
- People who will have access to the data are; Sumeyra Gok Gulmezoglu (researcher), Prof. Judy Sharkey (adviser)
- Your identifiable information will not be shared with a third-party data processor
- This data may be used in a future study
- All audio and/or video recordings will be stored in a password protected computer and be destroyed after the researcher transcribes them.

The results may be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

**WHOM TO CONTACT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY**

If you have any questions pertaining to the research, you can contact Sumeyra Gok Gulmezoglu at sg1149@wildcats.unh.edu to discuss them.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you can contact Melissa McGee in UNH Research Integrity Services, 603/862-2005 or melissa.mcgee@unh.edu to discuss them.

Yes, I, ____________________________consent/agree to participate in this research project.

No, I, ____________________________do not consent/agree to participate in this research project.

______________________________ ____________________

**Signature** **Date**

Yes, I, ___________________________consent/agree to the use of my course assignment in the research study.

No, I, ___________________________do not consent/agree to the use of my course assignment in the research study.

___________________________ ___________________

**Signature** **Date**